

# aCommon Place



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008



**In the light of learning**

In Egypt, literacy classes open new horizons for families.

**A Common Place** (USPS 013-937) is a bimonthly publication that introduces the people, programs and vision of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) — a relief, community development and peace organization with some 1,000 workers serving in 53 countries. MCC is sponsored by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in Canada and the United States.

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## New Wine/New Wineskins

By Arli Klassen  
MCC Executive Director

In a passage repeated in three of the Gospels, Jesus talked about the importance of putting new wine into new wineskins, as a response to a question about why his disciples were not fasting like John's disciples were.

MCC has embarked on a revisioning and restructuring process called "New Wine/New Wineskins: Reshaping MCC for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

I imagine that few people today make their own wine, much less store wine in leather bags, and so we don't feel the full impact of this image — old leather wineskins splitting open and spilling out all your hard work!

MCC carries out quality programming and maintains strong relationships with partners around the world, including in Canada and the United States. However, like all organizations, we need to periodically take stock of where we have been and where we are going. Questions are being asked — about complicated decision-making processes through 12 MCC boards; about whether our Anabaptist church owners (internationally and domestically) have an adequate voice in setting MCC's priorities; and about who gets to define MCC's vision, values and priorities, and how to keep MCC's different parts unified.

New Wine/New Wineskins is a broad consultation process engaging churches, partners, staff and boards in discerning God's direction for MCC regarding vision and structure. It holds the potential to unify MCC and to increase our capacity for meaningful impact around the world. Summits in the Philippines and Winnipeg have already brought together large groups for mutual discernment. Meetings in every region where MCC works are being organized over a six-month period. A leadership group will synthesize all the results and present a recommendation on vision, values, priorities and structure to a final summit in June 2009.

MCC workers are creative and adaptable people, always seeking new ways to work for change, in partnership with local church and community leaders. It is time for MCC as a whole system to seek new ways to understand our vision and structure, in consultation with churches and partners. Please pray for all of us, that we may be open to the Spirit's leading and to each other. Learn more online: [mcc.org/newwineskins](http://mcc.org/newwineskins). ■

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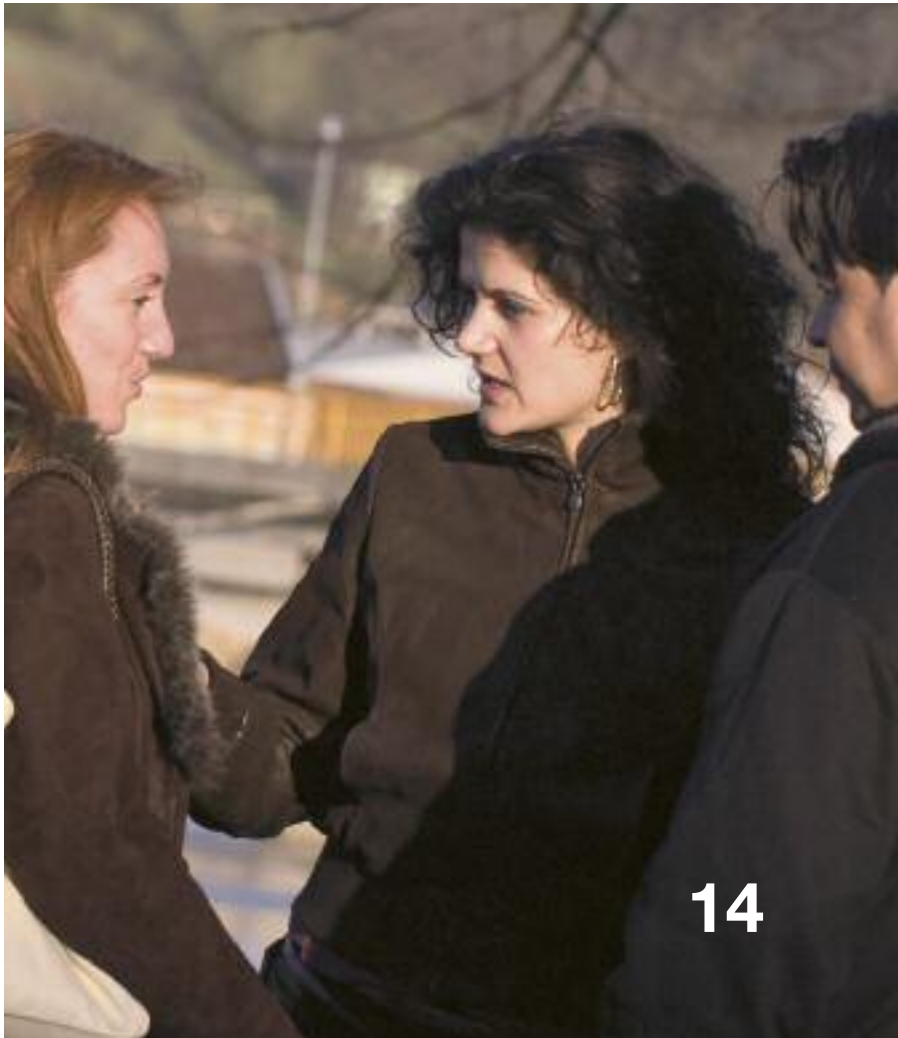
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ON THE COVER: In Egypt, Hanan Abanoub reads with her sons Abu Noub Sabour, 13, right, Girgis Sabour, 8, and daughter Niveen Sabour, 7. *Photo by Melissa Engle.*



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**Coming in January/February 2009:**

Cover story: Immigration to the United States.

Cover story

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In Egypt, women and men are learning to read and write through classes offered by the Coptic Orthodox Church, with support from MCC.

# In the light of learning





In the village of Mayana, chatter fills the room during a literacy class. Classes are meant to build community as well as introduce new skills.

## Literacy classes open doors for students in Egypt — and provide a way to reinforce peace and solidarity between Christians and Muslims.



By Tim Shenk  
Photographs by Melissa Engle

**M**ariam Gherbaway used to be afraid to venture beyond the corn and wheat fields of her village, Eshneen El-Nasara, in rural, upper Egypt. She would become disoriented when she visited nearby towns because she could not read street signs.

“In the past, I ignored the street names,” the 17-year-old says. “I got lost when I decided to go somewhere, and it made me feel helpless.”

Illiteracy is a daily burden for many Egyptians. Nearly one in three adults cannot read, often because they were unable to go to elementary school. While school enrollment has risen in recent years, people who grew up without a basic education say that illiteracy affects nearly every aspect of their lives, from running errands to raising a family.

However, thousands of adults and teens, including Gherbaway, are learning to read every year through the work of an MCC partner organization, Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services (BLESS). BLESS, an agency of Egypt’s Coptic Orthodox Church, offers free literacy classes for Christians and Muslims in hundreds of locations throughout Egypt. MCC provides financial support to BLESS.

Learning to read can be a profoundly life-changing experience. Students describe how, for the first time, they could help their children with their homework, read the expiration date on a bottle of medication or study the Bible for themselves. Some speak about literacy in spiritual terms, as moving from darkness to light.

“It’s like a dark room and you open a window,” says Saod Sobhy, a former literacy student in Egypt’s capital, Cairo.

In late 2007, Mariam Gherbaway and her 16-year-old sister Manel started attending a BLESS literacy class four evenings per week at their family’s Coptic Orthodox church. Their teacher, an Orthodox nun, gives reading lessons and leads discussions on topics such as personal health.

The Gherbaway sisters never attended school when they were younger, in part because their father, a tenant farmer, did not believe that education was necessary for girls.



Mariam Gherbaway (left) and her sister Manel Gherbaway, students in the literacy classes, work on homework at a low table in their home.



موضوع الفروض

الامتحانات

المهم غير يا ربي

الامتحانات تظهر على الانتاج والانتاج

الامتحانات تظهر ونسبة كبيرة

مطابع دار الشعب

عمل الدراسس الاول

عمل القسمة على 2

عمل القسمة على 3

عمل القسمة على 4

عمل القسمة على 5

عمل القسمة على 6

عمل القسمة على 7

عمل القسمة على 8

عمل القسمة على 9





**Gherbaway Azer helps his daughter Nura with her homework as his niece Sandy watches. He participated in the literacy classes, as do his daughters Mariam and Manel Gherbaway.**

“Girls were going to be married and there was no need to be educated,” says their father, Gherbaway Azer. “In the past, we weren’t aware of the importance of education, but now we are aware.”

Azer says he dropped out of sixth grade to work as a farmer, and he did not learn to read and write well. He could sign his name but he could not always read the agricultural leases he was signing.

Five years ago, Azer completed a BLESS literacy class and passed a test to earn a literacy certificate from the Egyptian government. He says his teacher emphasized the importance of educating girls and raising their social status.

Since then, the family’s simple, three-room house has become a place of learning. Mariam and Manel Gherbaway and their younger sister Nura read piles of books and store them under their parents’ bed. Nura is in fourth grade, and her father often helps her with her math homework.

Azer’s wife, Nadia Ishak, says she does not have time to learn to read but speaks admiringly of her daughters.

“I see them reading the Bible all the time and other materials,” she says.

Coptic Orthodox Christians like Azer and his family make up about 10 percent of Egypt’s 80 million people and constitute the largest Christian denomination in the Middle East.

**A Coptic Orthodox church, Cairo, Egypt.**



*“I don’t want this only for the Christians. I want this for Muslims and Christians so they can learn together, study together and live together.”*

The Coptic Orthodox Church is an ancient church that has coexisted with Muslims ever since Islam arrived in Egypt more than 1,300 years ago. Yet tensions between Christians and Muslims have clouded Egypt’s recent history. Clashes erupted in a number of rural towns in southern Egypt in the 1990s, with bitterness lasting for years afterward. In the past year, distrust between Christians and Muslims sparked sporadic clashes in several villages.

Part of the mission of BLESS is to build better relationships between Christians and Muslims.

The literacy classes — like English classes and other interreligious activities BLESS offers — provide a forum where students can build friendships and break down mistrust between religions. A Coptic Orthodox priest, Father Youssef Andrawas, points to the relationships fostered by BLESS programs as one factor that has helped encourage peace. (Read more about Andrawas on p. 12 and more about MCC English teachers in Egypt on p. 23.)

While Muslims make up only about 5 percent of the

literacy students in Maghagha district, which includes Eshneen El-Nasara, Muslim students such as 18-year-old Reda Mohamed Abd El Hamid say the classes are changing their outlook toward Christians.

“I am Muslim, and before I came to the literacy classes, I hated all Christians,” the teenager says. “After I joined the literacy class, I formed relationships with them, and I love them.”

Literacy teachers often lead discussions on health topics, such as vaccination campaigns, AIDS and expired medications. They also encourage students to participate in community decisions by registering to vote and advocating for better government services, including public schools, garbage disposal and running water.

These discussions often go hand in hand with reading lessons, as students are encouraged to write about issues important to them.

“If we educate people, we will solve a lot of our problems,” says Bishop Agathon, who leads the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Maghagha. “I don’t want this only



**Left:** Soheir Samir, a literacy student, holds her baby, Michael Magdy, while reading with her 8-year-old daughter, Marina. Many adult students say they want to be able to read so they can help their children learn.

**Right:** Students participate in a BLESS literacy class in the village of Eshneen El-Nasara near the town of Maghagha.



Bishop Agathon leads the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Maghagha. See an online photo gallery from Egypt at [mcc.org/egypt](http://mcc.org/egypt).

for the Christians. I want this for Muslims and Christians so they can learn together, study together and live together.”

For Mariam Gherbaway, learning to read is a milestone en route to further personal goals. She plans to obtain a literacy certificate and go on to complete high school. She hopes to marry an educated man and raise a family in which learning is prized.

For now, however, she is enjoying a newfound sense of self-assurance as a teenager who can navigate the world

around her. For the first time, she says, she can shop for clothes with ease and run errands for her parents in unfamiliar places.

“I feel freedom,” she says. “I go anywhere without fear. I can read the signs.” ■

*Tim Shenk is an MCC writer. Melissa Engle is an MCC photographer.*



First person:

# Father Youssef Andrawas

(as told to Keith Miller)

I was born in Maghaha, a town 180 kilometers south of Cairo, to a middle-class family. Like most Coptic Orthodox children, I went with my parents to the church once or twice a week.

I studied education and became a primary school teacher. But after I had taught for two years, a sermon by a priest in a Cairo church moved me deeply, and I felt something new in my heart. I was very happy, though I didn't understand at the time what was stirring inside me.

I began to spend more time praying and reading the

Bible more carefully. I became active as a volunteer in our church. Then one night I wrote a letter to my parents telling them I was going to dedicate my life to God and left without talking to anybody.

I went to Beni Suef, where I told the bishop of my new commitment, and he welcomed me. After spending two weeks of contemplation in a monastery, I returned to my home and talked to my family. They were supportive of my decision. In Beni Suef, I became a deacon, which in the Orthodox church means a full-time clergy worker,



## A Coptic Orthodox priest talks about his calling to the church and to help build relationships between Christians and Muslims.



*“I felt God was calling me to make connections between the two groups.”*

and began working with young people throughout the diocese. At this time I also began reading the writings of the desert fathers—early Christian monks who lived in secluded monasteries—and the Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda.

With the encouragement of Bishop Athanasius, the late Bishop of Beni Suef Diocese, I decided to learn English. An MCC worker was providing English lessons in Beni Suef at that time, and I took classes with him and with the two MCC English teachers who replaced him. Bishop Athanasius then encouraged me to go to England to study. At first I was reluctant to leave my work in Beni Suef, but I decided to go. I studied church education in Birmingham, and this experience gave me a new interest in education.

In 1993, I became director of Deir al-Bayyad, a retreat center across the Nile from Beni Suef. During this time I felt God was calling me to be a priest. In our tradition, priests must be married, so I prayed for God’s guidance in this matter. He led me to Enas, a volunteer at Deir al-Bayyad, who was committed to God’s purpose. In 1997, at age 37, I was made a priest, overseeing the newly created parish of al-Medina. I got married and the next day, as is our tradition, I was consecrated and left for 40 days of meditation and fasting in a desert monastery. My wife and I have one daughter, Verena, who is 10 years old.

In the early 1990s, following a number of incidents of political violence throughout the country, MCC decided to place workers only in Cairo. I was sad about this and wished the English classes in Beni Suef could start again. By God’s grace, while I was attending a conflict-mediation

seminar in Cyprus in 2001, I met an MCC worker who was serving in South Africa. He put me in contact with the MCC administrators for the Middle East, and they agreed to send a family to Beni Suef to start the English courses again.

The courses have been going on for more than five years now. They provide the people of Beni Suef with the English skills they need to get high-level jobs, but, equally important, they allow Christians and Muslims to come together in a nonthreatening setting. I am always impressed by MCC workers because they offer their skills in the name of Jesus Christ as a service, and not as a job. This encourages our people.

In our city, there is a lot of distrust between Muslims and Christians. I felt God was calling me to make connections between the two groups, so I have started holding meetings to which both groups are invited. Usually a speaker from each religious community shares, and we have a time for discussion. Members of these interreligious meetings are also receiving training in trauma counseling and conflict mediation. In the future, we hope to do community service, such as planting trees or cleaning up a street, as a way of showing the people of Beni Suef our commitment to working together. ■

*Father Youssef Andrawas, a Coptic Orthodox priest in Beni Suef, Egypt, oversees a program that offers evening English classes to adults. Keith Miller is an MCC worker teaching English in Beni Suef. Read more about Miller and his wife Sofia Samatar and their work on p. 23.*



Vahidin Omanovic

# Confronting a painful



## In Bosnia and Herzegovina, communities work to move beyond a legacy of war.



By Gladys Terichow  
Photographs by Melissa Engle

**R**olling farmland, woods and distant mountains frame the cemetery at the entrance to Hrustovo, a village in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. A white fence sparkles against the green of the landscape, and neat rows of identical marble monuments line a brick walkway.

From up close, though, the scene is a grim reflection of a village torn by war.

The birth dates, as in any cemetery, vary from monument to monument. But the year of death on every marker is the same—1992.

“These are my neighbors, my relatives, my cousins, my best friends—I know them all,” says Vahidin Omanovic, an imam, or Muslim religious leader, who is at the center of a movement to build peace in a region torn by war.

For many centuries Bosnian Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox Christians lived together in a country where children grew up listening to the ringing of church bells and the Muslim call to prayer from the minarets of nearby mosques.

From 1992 to 1995, though, lives were shattered by bitter armed conflict that divided the country along ethnic and religious lines. By the time the war ended, about 110,000 people had been killed and close to 2 million people had been driven from their homes.

In Hrustovo, the youngest victim of massacres in May and June 1992 was 2 weeks old and the eldest was 90 years old. More than 200 people are buried in this graveyard—wooden markers identify the recent burials of bodies found in mass graves. The fate of more than 100 villagers is still unknown.

# history

“We can’t forget the war—we have to learn how to live with it,” says Omanovic, noting that the painful work of moving from anger and revenge to love and forgiveness is only beginning in Bosnia and Herzegovina. “If we don’t talk about our experiences, reconciliation can’t happen.”

Today, with MCC’s support, the Center for Peacebuilding that Omanovic helped to found provides opportunities, including weeklong summer peace camps, for people of various religions and ethnicities to speak candidly with each other about the pain of their past and their hopes for the future.

MCC’s emphasis throughout the region is on peace, from trauma healing projects to peace training with schoolchildren. As MCC, a Christian organization, supports peace initiatives such as these that include Muslims, it’s a tangible message of hope and the will to breach divisions between religions and ethnicities.

Any efforts toward reconciliation, though, are made in a land still marked by war. Despite the 13 years that have passed since the war’s end, many families have not returned to their former homes.

Those who have are forced to confront the painful events and rebuild relationships severed by the conflict.

“We often hear on TV—forgive, forgive. It doesn’t happen like that. It is a process,” says 27-year-old Mevludin Rahmanovic, who lost 17 members on his father’s side of the family in the conflict. “That is what Vahidin has taught me and that is what I want to teach others.”

As a leader and organizer of the center’s summer peace camps, Rahmanovic shares that he came to believe in the healing power of forgiveness only after living with anger and the longing for revenge.

Now, he says, “I don’t want to bear the consequences of what my grandparents did. I want to live life in peace and harmony with others.”

As peace camp participants hear each other’s stories, they are often struck by the war’s costs for all.

Take Ermina Boskovic, who attended peace camps in 2007 and 2008. As a Muslim married to a man from the Roma group, an ethnic group commonly referred to as gypsies, she was keenly aware of prejudices toward her family.

In April 1997, the Boskovics were among the first refugees from Germany to return to their city of Sanski Most. A Croatian family had moved into the Boskovics’ two-story concrete house during the war, a common occurrence. In addition to needing to reclaim their own home, they faced intense animosity and distrust from

Jasmina Ramic, left, and Edina Suvalic participate in an exercise class at the Center for Peacebuilding in Sanski Most.



Mevludin Rahmanovic, his wife Edina and their 2-year-old son Edib live in Carakovo Village, not far from the town of Sanski Most. Rahmanovic is an imam in the village and organizes summer camps for the Center for Peacebuilding in Sanski Most.

*“We often hear on TV — forgive, forgive. It doesn’t happen like that. It is a process...”*



*“What is my right to judge someone just because they are Serb or Orthodox? ... she is a mother and I’m a mother too.”*

neighbors who had also come to the area during the war.

“My husband was the first Roma to return to Sanski Most. They wanted to make it as difficult as possible for us to return because they said if one Roma returned they would all return,” she says. “Even before the war there was lack of tolerance between Roma and others.”

But as she took part in peace camp sessions, she was struck by her own reluctance to extend tolerance.

“When a woman, an Orthodox Serb, got up to speak at the peace camp, I said to myself, ‘What is she doing here—what does she want?’” recalls Boskovic.

As she listened, she was surprised to learn that the woman had been married to a Catholic Croat and that she was a grieving widow and mother whose husband and two sons were killed during the war.

“She kept on asking, ‘Who took away my husband and my sons?’ I felt pressure in my chest—what is my right to judge someone just because they are Serb or Orthodox? In this situation, she is a mother and I’m a mother too. What right do I have to judge her?”

People in Bosnia, she says, often refer to the war as “a Croat killed a Serb or a Serb killed a Bosniak (a term for Bosnians of Muslim descent)

**Ermina Boskovic, left, and her daughter Leila stand among new blooms at their home in Sanski Most, Bosnia and Herzegovina.**



**Ermina Boskovic teaches peace-building exercises to a fifth-grade class at Hasan Kikic school in Sanski Most.**





## From anger to hope

Vahidin Omanovic, a founder of the Center for Peacebuilding, was a 16-year-old student at an Islamic high school in Sarajevo in 1992.

He had returned to his village, Hrustovo, just before Sarajevo was attacked. Fearing that the village was also no longer safe, Omanovic, his mother and sister fled, eventually coming to a crowded refugee camp in Slovenia.

Omanovic's father stayed behind to look after the livestock and garden. Learning of the 1992 massacre in Hrustovo, the family believed he had been killed and held a memorial service for him. Eight months later, they were astounded to hear from him. He was one of the few survivors of the massacre and was reunited with his family in Slovenia.

Omanovic spent his teenage years in the refugee camp, eventually becoming an imam, a Muslim religious leader.

Yet he recalls that his heart remained filled with hate and anger. "I became a very angry person — I couldn't trust adults. I was blaming everyone for the conditions I had to live in. I was angry at God — I was really praying that I would find a way to God again — that I could feel loved by God again."

He found a path to the solace he was seeking at a peace-building seminar in 1996. A facilitator told participants if they didn't deal with the complex issues that led to the 1992–1995 conflict, their children would have to.

It was a turning point, Omanovic says, motivating him to confront the anger and hatred in his life. "Those of us who lived through the war experience the gratitude of surviving — our children only carry the burden of war," he said.

Today he devotes his life to sharing the tools that brought him peace and encouraging others to do the same.

[mcc.org/bosnia](http://mcc.org/bosnia)

or a Bosniak killed a Serb." Listening to people share their stories during the peace camp helped her realize that "human beings had killed human beings during the war."

Boskovic is among the 56 people who, after finishing two years of peace camp, are committing to peace work in their own communities.

She carves out time from a busy schedule of raising teenage children and helping in the family's bicycle repair shop to volunteer at the Center for Peacebuilding for eight hours each week. She teaches a course developed by the center that gives students in local schools the skills to communicate with each other in an open, trusting and receptive way.

Last spring, she planted a garden — her first since returning in 1997 to Sanski Most. "It is time to live life like you should live it, to organize life like it should be organized," she says, explaining why she chose this year to begin nurturing lettuce, onions, garlic, corn, carrots, cabbage and tomatoes.

Her calling, though, is in nurturing the people of Bosnia — helping her own children and other children reduce prejudice and discrimination. "We are never perfect. Nobody is without prejudices. But if we are aware of it, then we can dismantle it," she says.

She sees her hopes taking root in her 16-year-old daughter, Leila, who embraces the mix of cultures embodied in her family and across Bosnia. "People call me a gypsy but I look at them as human beings," Leila says. "I'm richer because I have more than one culture."

And as schoolmates talk of leaving Bosnia, saying they can build a better life elsewhere, Leila holds to a dream more parallel to her mother's — building a harmonious land through her work, maybe as a school psychologist.

"I dream of helping life to get better here," the teen says. ■

*Gladys Terichow is an MCC writer. Melissa Engle is an MCC photographer.*

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### LEARN MORE

View an audio slideshow at [mcc.org/bosnia](http://mcc.org/bosnia).

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### GIVE A GIFT – BOSNIA – PEACE

Help people of Bosnia and Herzegovina build a more peaceful future.

**\$50 helps produce documentary films to improve awareness and protection of human rights and to encourage peace.**

Send your contribution in the envelope enclosed or donate online at [mcc.org/donate](http://mcc.org/donate).



## FOOD FOR ALL

MCC is providing \$1.5 million in emergency food assistance for people facing hunger in Ethiopia and other countries because of drought and high global food prices. In Ethiopia, MCC is working with the Meserete Kristos Church Relief and Development Association (RDA) to distribute corn, wheat and cooking oil to about 81,000 people and also supplementary food to almost 16,300 infants in the Boricha and Awassa Zuria districts. Late rains led to meager harvests, and food prices are skyrocketing. “People are suffer-

## GIVE A GIFT – FOOD FOR ALL

Millions of people don't have enough to eat, and the numbers are rapidly growing. Your gift will help MCC respond where the needs are greatest.

**In Ethiopia:**  
**\$42 will feed a family of six for one month.**

**\$210 will cover the cost of feeding a family for five months.**

Send your contribution in the envelope enclosed or donate online at [mcc.org/donate](http://mcc.org/donate).

ing,” said Zemedkun Baykeda, shown above, left, in Ethiopia's Boricha district. Baykeda, a former executive director of RDA, is spending several months in the United States and Canada to provide expertise in MCC's response to the global food crisis. Read more at [mcc.org/food](http://mcc.org/food).

## ZAMBIA

### Keeping newborns safe

In Zambia, pregnant women who test positive for HIV face a tragic dilemma: if they continue nursing their babies more than a few months, there is a likelihood that the child will become HIV positive. If they do not nurse, babies face severe risks of becoming malnourished or even perishing from diarrhea and dehydration due to unclean drinking water or a lack of formula. In Zambia mothers are encouraged to nurse infants younger than 6 months old, then to give formula to older infants. MCC supports a program of the Zambian Brethren in Christ Church to provide food to these mothers, improving their diets as they nurse, and to provide formula to weaned infants. Each month mothers—and in some cases grandmothers raising orphaned infants—meet at a church for Bible

study, sharing and prayer. A nurse monitors women's and children's health, and each family receives a portion of food and formula. In honor of World AIDS Day on Dec. 1, MCC invites you to pray for these women and children as well as the millions of people across the globe who are living with HIV. Read more at [mcc.org/aids](http://mcc.org/aids).

## NEW WINE/NEW WINESKINS

### A leap for farmers

It's been more than a quarter of a century, but Derek D'Silva still remembers the new agricultural gains that Bangladeshi MCC staff and MCC volunteers from Canada and the United States began to make in Bangladesh in the 1980s. Young Canadian or U.S. volunteers brought new ideas, questioning the common wisdom that crops don't grow in salty soil. Experienced Bangladeshi agriculturalists including D'Silva used their knowledge of the region and soil to develop innovative experiments in irrigation and crop methods. Results of the partnership were striking—some farm families were able, for the first time, to afford two meals a day. D'Silva shared his story as part of “New Wine/New Wineskins:

Reshaping MCC for the 21st Century.” He was among some 50 participants from 25 countries who gathered in the Philippines in July to discuss examples of MCC at its best and people’s visions for MCC’s future. Learn more at [mcc.org/newwineskins](http://mcc.org/newwineskins).

## LEND A HAND

### Relief kits

MCC needs relief kits. These kits provide critical supplies to families forced from their homes by war or natural disaster — with recent shipments reaching people affected by violence in Iraq.

#### CONTENTS (NEW items only)

##### 4 bars of bath soap

(110–140g/4–5oz; leave in wrapping)

##### 1 plastic bottle shampoo

(380–710ml/13–24oz; place bottle in a resealable plastic bag)

##### 10 cups powdered laundry detergent

(double bag in 4-liter/1-gallon resealable plastic bags)

**1 squeeze-tube of toothpaste** (minimum 130ml/6oz; leave in box)

##### 4 adult-size toothbrushes

(leave in packaging)

##### 4 new bath towels

(medium weight, dark color)

##### 1 hairbrush

(remove packaging)

##### 1 comb

(20cm/8in)

##### 1 fingernail clipper

##### 1 box adhesive bandages

(minimum 40, assorted)

##### 1 package sanitary pads

(18–24 thin maxi or ultra thin)

Place contents in a box or bag and deliver to one of the drop-off locations in Canada or the U.S. The kit will be repacked in a new 5-gallon plastic pail with lid.

**IMPORTANT:** Please follow directions carefully. Limit your generosity to the contents listed.

For more information, contact any MCC office (page 2) or go to [mcc.org/kits](http://mcc.org/kits).



## HAITI

### Hurricane response

In Haiti, this year’s hurricane season has left hundreds of people dead and hundreds of thousands without food, clean water and shelter. MCC worked through a partner organization to provide water, food, medicines and temporary housing for people in Haiti affected by hurricanes including Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike. Haiti is unusually vulnerable to damage from storms because so many trees have been chopped down to be used for fuel, allowing rainwa-

ter to easily wash down its mountains and cause massive flooding. MCC also supports ongoing work in reforestation and environmental education in Haiti. Learn more at [mcc.org/haiti](http://mcc.org/haiti).

## PARAGUAY

### Water for life

In the Chaco region of Paraguay, MCC is providing \$52,000 to build 24 cisterns in dry areas so that rainwater can be collected from the roofs of community buildings such as schools or churches. The project, expected to reach 12 rural indigenous communities and some 6,000 people, is through ASCIM, the Mennonite Association for Services and Indigenous Cooperation, which includes Low German-speaking Mennonite colonies and indigenous and Low German-speaking Mennonite churches in Paraguay.

## STORY UPDATE

### Cyclone recovery in Myanmar (Burma)

**MCC is providing more than \$1.1 million in aid over three years in Myanmar, also known as Burma, in response to the devastation of Cyclone Nargis.**

**The September/October issue of A Common Place reported on MCC’s initial response to the May cyclone, the worst natural disaster in the nation’s history, and on efforts to provide tillers and seed to help farmers replant their fields.**

**Now, MCC has begun supporting longer-term trauma healing and recovery efforts, including workshops by the Myanmar Institute of Theology to train volunteers in trauma awareness and sensitivity. Through a five-day training, 46 participants will gain skills to use in cyclone-affected areas.**

**MCC is also funding an initiative of Christian Musician Fellowship, another Myanmar partner organization, to conduct music therapy sessions in rural areas hit by the cyclone. (See photo.)**

**Additional projects will address other areas of need, including agriculture and income generation efforts to help families support themselves.**





Photo by Marc Hershberger

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

# Gifts for family and the world

By Cathryn Clinton

“Who needs anything more?” Ethel Miller said. Last year, with Christmas coming, she and her husband Henry decided to give gifts to their children that also give to others.

Through MCC’s Christmas Giving booklet, the Millers, a couple from Wellman, Iowa, made contributions in the names of their five children to help MCC answer urgent needs in times of disaster and war, alleviate poverty and build peace.

The Christmas Giving booklet is available from MCC offices and online at [mcc.org/christmas](http://mcc.org/christmas) and as a supplement to the September/October edition of *A Common Place*. It offers the opportunity to give a donation in someone’s name to a variety of categories, including “where needed most.” This option, which the Millers chose, helps give MCC the flexibility to respond quickly in the name of Christ to needs across the globe and to provide ongoing assistance to build stronger communities and work for peace.

Other donors choose to give alternative Christmas gifts toward categories such as food, water and shelter, educational sponsorships and gifts that encourage care

for creation or reach out to children whose lives are affected by HIV and AIDS.

Henry Miller, now retired, taught elementary and special education in the Keota public school system in Iowa. Ethel is a homemaker. Together they raised five children, who live in several different states. “This made gift giving easier,” Ethel said with a laugh.

The couple’s ties to MCC are deep. Henry served with MCC from 1951 to 1953 in Espelkamp, Germany, where displaced war victims were being resettled following World War II. Numerous other family members have also served with MCC.

For the Millers’ daughter, June Hershberger, this approach to Christmas gifts was a reflection of the values of service and giving her parents have embodied over the years.

“My dad and mom are both generous. They’ve never had a big income, not at all, but they give a lot of money away,” Hershberger said. “It just fits with what we’ve heard all our lives, about not spending all our money on ourselves but giving to people who need it.”

*Cathryn Clinton is an MCC writer.*

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### GET INVOLVED

Learn more about opportunities for Christmas Giving. Go to [mcc.org/christmas](http://mcc.org/christmas) or contact your nearest MCC office. (See p. 2.)



ON ASSIGNMENT

# English teachers in Egypt

**Names:** Keith Miller and Sofia Samatar

**Hometowns:** Nairobi, Kenya (Keith); South Orange, New Jersey (Sofia)

**Assignment:** We teach adult English courses through the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Beni Suef. The program aims to bring Christians and Muslims together in a nonthreatening setting. During the past year, interreligious violence erupted in towns north, west and south of us. The supervisor of the courses, Father Youssef Andrawas, feels that the relationships fostered by our program have helped keep Beni Suef relatively calm, so our work here feels useful. (Read more on p. 12.)

**Typical day:** On teaching days, we spend a lot of time preparing handouts and activities. Our lessons last one and a half to three hours, and it takes variety to keep the class lively, especially when the weather is hot. The focus of our day is the evening courses, some of which last until 10:30! We take turns running Isabel, 5, and Dominic, 3, to and from school and day care. Social interaction is a major part of life in Egypt. Most free evenings are spent visiting or receiving visitors, though we try to keep one evening a week for our family.

**Joys:** Our students are wonderful—dedicated and appreciative—and we’ve made many good friends through our teaching. The town is laid-back and small enough that it’s common to run into friends while doing the shopping. The Nile is two blocks from our apartment and bordered by a string of parks where we can have tea, relax by the water and watch boats go by.

**Challenges:** Temperatures can rise over 43 degrees Celsius, 110 Fahrenheit. If the electricity goes off, which is not uncommon, it can get pretty uncomfortable. But then, you don’t have to suffer alone, as everyone groans from July to October.



**“We’re surrounded by amazingly friendly, helpful and hospitable people 24 hours a day.”**

FIND YOUR PLACE

MCC needs teachers. Educators serve in a variety of settings, offering their skills and ideas to support goals set by local communities. Many young adults serve as teachers through Serving and Learning Together (SALT), an 11-month MCC program for young people ages 18 to 27.

MCC offers many other opportunities to serve at home and in international settings. See [mcc.org/serve](http://mcc.org/serve).

MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to Christian faith, active church membership and biblical peacemaking.



# Mwabuga buti?

How did you wake up today?

(A traditional Tonga greeting, a part of each morning in Zambia)

<<< Wake up to a new world. Serve with SALT, an MCC program for 18- to 27-year-olds. [mcc.org/salt](http://mcc.org/salt)



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