



Peace: A woven thread through MCC's Ministry Story by Emily Loewen

When you look at a tapestry or a beautifully woven rug, the first things you are likely to notice are the intricate patterns, rich colors or plush fibers. But underneath lies an important structure. Tightly strung threads, called the weft, run throughout to provide structure during the weaving process and long after the finished piece is taken from the loom.

Like those strong threads, peace is a foundation to all that MCC does. On the surface you see emergency food provided after a disaster. Under the surface is a plan to do the distribution with local partners in a way that reduces conflict. Or at first glance you might see trainings and supplies to help farmers increase their income. What you don't see is that in a region marked by armed groups and conflict, that project is only possible because of the nonviolent witness of a local church partner.

From disaster relief to education to agricultural development, that dedication to peacebuilding, rooted in the Anabaptist vision of MCC and Christ's way of peace, is woven throughout MCC's work. You can see that commitment to peace in an agriculture program in the Chocó region of Colombia. For many communities living along the banks of the San Juan River, the river is the only way in or out. Yet between the government and illegal armed groups, transportation on the rivers is heavily controlled. It's not always possible or safe for farmers to bring their harvests to market.

Fifteen years ago, armed groups expanded into the region, along with illicit activities. As the Mennonite Brethren church saw their communities struggle, they imagined a future where people had a dignified way of making a living. For the church, this is a part of their work for peace — a peace that isn't just an absence of war and conflict, but a world where everyone has what they need for a good life.

Church leaders founded Fundación Agropecuaria Tejiendo Esperanza (FAGROTES or Weaving Hope Agricultural Foundation) and set out to make that vision a reality. They began with building a rice processing plant and committing to purchasing farmers' harvests. Since 2010, MCC has supported the project, including in some years through the U.S.-based Growing Hope Globally (formerly Foods Resource Bank).

Then they taught farmers to grow cacao, the plant that produces the base for chocolate. And now, despite a pandemic that has cut off their region from the rest of Colombia and led to increased violence, they have taken the next step and opened their own chocolate factory so farmers like Luis Norberto Mosquera can grow the cacao and produce chocolate to sell. Doing this meant shipping machinery across multiple mountain ranges, functioning in areas where armed groups are active, moving trainings with agronomists onto Zoom despite unreliable internet connections and securing the only potable water certification in the entire region for their factory.

Around the world, MCC relies on local partners who know their contexts and can work in ways that minimize conflict. Relying on close relationships with the communities they serve and remaining fiercely independent are key.

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In Chocó, for instance, the Mennonite Brethren maintain autonomy from both government agencies and armed groups. They get the required government permission to transport things like fertilizer (which can also be used in cocaine production) into the region. But they refuse all military escorts, relying instead on direct communication with community leaders to know when it's safe for them to travel. This insistence on being seen as a neutral, pacifist group serves as a form of protection. "By consistently presenting a peace witness and abstaining from affiliations with armed groups and the military, the Mennonite Brethren can adeptly serve their communities and work towards their vision of increased economic opportunities in this challenging context," says Elizabeth Miller, an MCC representative in Colombia.

The importance of local partners' knowledge and commitment to building cohesion in communities is critical to MCC's responses to disasters and emergencies as well, says Bruce Guenther, MCC's director of disaster response. "These local partners know the best way to reduce potential for conflict in distributions, and how to build relationships across groups for a peaceful future."

For example, in Syria in the fall of 2013, only a few years into the conflict, an armed group attacked the city of Deir Attieh in the Qalamoun region. The militants went through the city, taking control of vehicles, buildings and churches.

Then, when they tried to enter the sanctuary of a Syrian Orthodox Church, they found a resolute group of Muslims who weren't willing to see the church of their Christian brothers and sisters destroyed. "If you wish to defile this church and harm these people," they stated, "you will have to kill us first!"

This kind of interreligious solidarity is not a given in the middle of a civil war. But Christians and Muslims had coexisted peacefully in Syria before the conflict, so when planning emergency food distributions, MCC's local partner Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD) intentionally worked with both religious groups to build a trust that could hold fast in the midst of violence.

The purposeful inclusion of both Christian and Muslim partners in this process allowed not only the successful distribution of assistance to displaced families, says the Rev. Riad Jarjour, FDCD president. It also helped to establish trust and cooperation between different faith groups.

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This project provides monthly packages of food for 6,000 families throughout Syria. The local volunteers and relief committees who distribute supplies and select recipients come from both religious groups. This creates relationships between the volunteers while also showing the wider community that Christians and Muslims can work together.

The power of that unity was on display when the church was invaded. Jarjour notes that it is reasonable to assume that the consequences of the Battle for Qalamoun would have been far greater than the mere destruction of property without the network of inter-community and interfaith partnerships facilitated through the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

Of course, sometimes peace is a more visible part of the tapestry of MCC's work.

For example, in Zambia MCC supported the formation of peace clubs, which brought students together to learn peacebuilding skills. The program is so successful that it has expanded around the world. More than 21,500 people took part in MCC-supported peace clubs last year.

Now a new project is establishing peace clubs in 65 correctional facilities throughout Zambia and working to restore relationships. Through the program, people like Luka Phiri, a mechanic who was caught with stolen car parts, have been able to reconcile with victims of their crimes. By teaching peacebuilding and restorative justice skills, the program hopes to reduce conflict inside the prisons and help people better integrate into their communities once they are released.

The threads of MCC's commitment to peace may not always be as visible as clubs and workshops dedicated to the skills of peacebuilding.

But the way that the core value of peace is woven into all MCC projects serves to make the whole of MCC's work stronger, whether in disaster response, education, agriculture or other areas, says Ann Graber Hershberger, MCC U.S. executive director.

"Over decades of work in communities around the world, we've seen that when people from different backgrounds find new ways to work together and long-standing conflicts are resolved, all of our efforts bear more fruit, moving people closer to the abundant life that Christ has promised."

Emily Loewen is the marketing and communications manager for MCC Canada.

Grateful for our Goodly Heritage



60 years ago: 1961

August 13 - The Aquila Stoltzfus family from Grayson, North Carolina, will give a program of song and a message on Saturday at 7:45 P.M. The Stoltzfus's have given regular radio programs and have made four long play records. You will want to hear them.

August 20 - Rollin Brenneman who has completed his 2 yrs. of V.S. at Badger, California, is now living with his brother, Raymond and family at Middlebury, Indiana. Trucking is his job.

50 years ago: 1971

August 15 - We extend congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Yoder who were married yesterday.

August 22 - In the next month our children and young people return to school. Let's use this month to show them love and interest, and pray that the Lord will show us new ways to foster rewarding relationships.

40 years ago: 1981

August 2 - The Chris and Barbara Yoder family wants to thank the anonymous persons who gave money for the Gideon Bibles that were presented as a living memorial to them.

August 9 - Doug and Pam Stoltzfus are the parents of a daughter, Jill Renae, born August 6.



30 years ago: 1991

August 4 - IMS is extremely grateful for the many persons who spent time and energy in making the booth in Amana successful! Though not as many meals were served as had been planned, approximately \$10,000 was realized in profit for IMS, which will go toward several projects at the school. Thank you again for supporting IMS in this manner. We are fortunate to have such a community!

20 years ago: 2001

August 19 - Congratulations to Emily (Miller) and Frank Higden on the birth of a daughter, Madison Nowell, born Thurs., Aug. 16. Madison weighed 8 lbs., 10 oz and has lots of hair and all her fingers and toes. Congratulations also to grandparents Dennis and Sally.

10 years ago: 2011

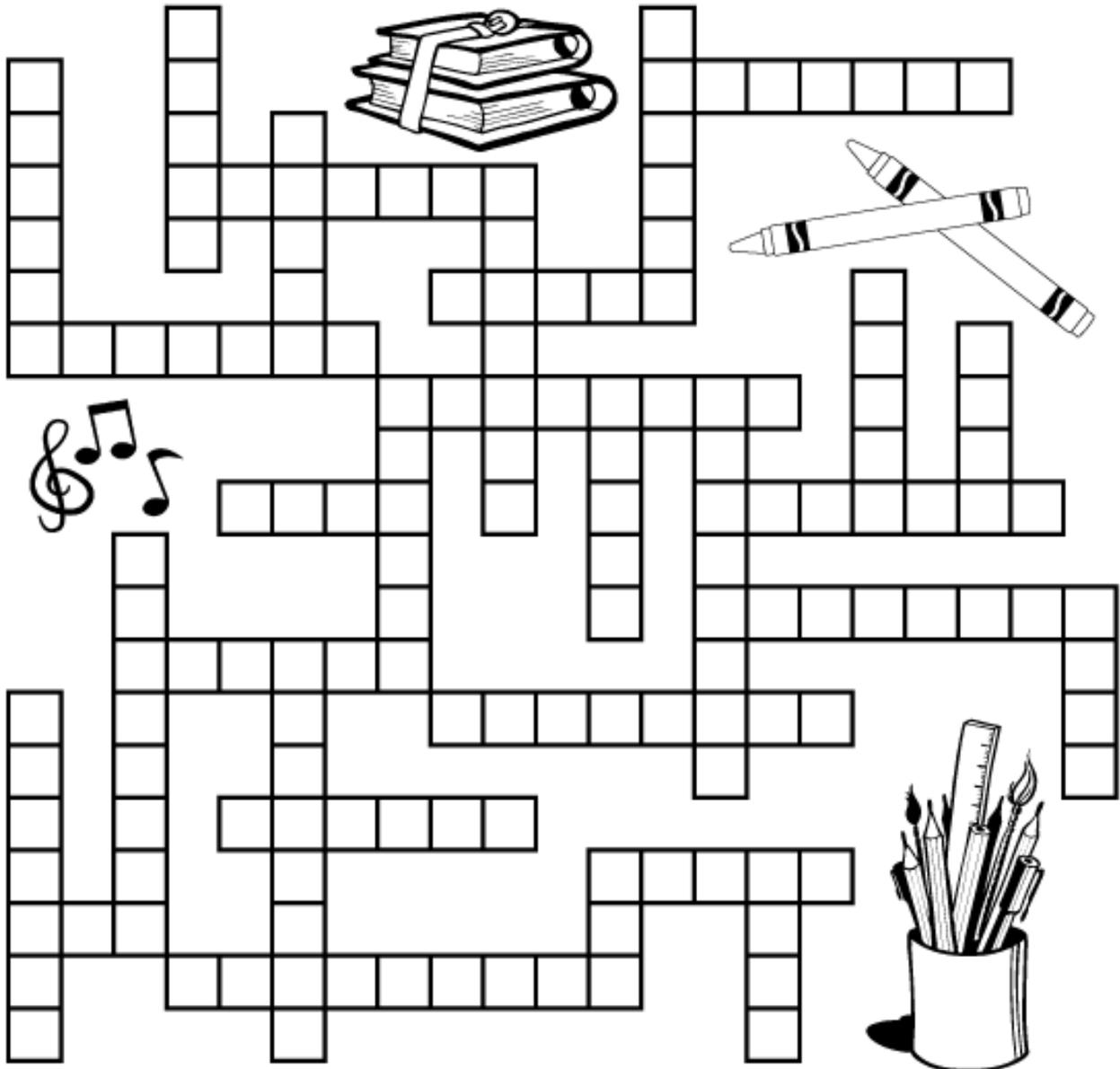
August 21 - There will be a shower for Liz Beachy on Wed., Aug. 23 at 7pm at the church. Liz is registered at Yotty's, Younkers, & Target. Or in place of a traditional gift you can donate to a furniture fund, garden grant, or a travel treasury.

do your best to present yourself to god as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

~ 2 TIMOTHY 2:15 ~



BACK TO SCHOOL



3 letter words

Art
Gym

4 letter words

desk
glue
kids
Math

5 letter words

learn
lunch
Music
paper
ruler
grade

6 letter words

eraser
lesson
pencil
recess
school

9 letter word

classroom

7 letter words

crayons
library
numbers
reading
student
teacher

8 letter words

alphabet
backpack
calendar
notebook
scissors
spelling

Tree Valley Academy



AUGUST 2021



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 <i>Morning Worship</i> George Miller	2 James Erb	3 Mennonite Women Meeting Gabriel Krabill	4 Paul Miller	5 Max Yoder Doug & Jill Moberly '00	6 Vacation Bible School 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM Nelson Miller Jill Hemachandra Jeff & Carol Boller '94	7
8 <i>Morning Worship</i> Church Potluck	9 Jada Dachtler	10 Jerry Miller Steven Rhodes Frank & Yvonne Nixon '91	11	12	13 Matthew & Tamar Rhodes '05	14 Marvin Slabaugh
15 <i>Morning Worship</i> Steve & Kara Groenewold '98	16 Madison Higdon Libby Miller	17 Marlin Brenneman Landon Slabaugh Ingrid Detweiler	18 Wanda Yoder Denny & Becky Yoder '73	19	20	21
22 <i>Morning Worship</i> Estelle denBleyker	23 Lola Faye Erb-Yoder Bob Moberly	24	25 Jill Hartsock Bob & Dorothea Moberly '62	26 Loren & Elvesta Hochstedler '72 Sheldon & Letha Yoder '72	27 Brian & Lynn Yoder '88	28
29 <i>Morning Worship</i>	30 Wilma Copeland Jacob Moberly	31 Larry Detweiler Jeff Swartzendruber				