

meco | international

MAGAZINE

Issue 3, 2012

In times of trouble



Includes: Maids in crisis ■ Loving the unlovable ■ When the going is tough

MECO MAGAZINE

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

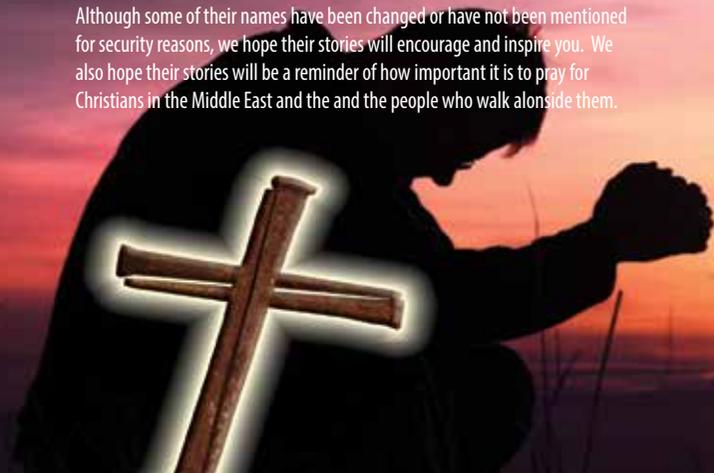
Being a Christian is no guarantee that life will be easy. Jesus challenges His followers to take up their crosses daily and follow Him.

“Daily” is a key word. Dramatic upheaval can come in a single day. A promising job becomes a nightmare. A chronic illness turns life - threatening. A government falls and chaos reigns.

In this issue you will read about people who have faced such difficulties and proved the truth of the Psalmist’s words:

“Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him for God is our refuge.” Psalm 62:8

Although some of their names have been changed or have not been mentioned for security reasons, we hope their stories will encourage and inspire you. We also hope their stories will be a reminder of how important it is to pray for Christians in the Middle East and the and the people who walk alongside them.



COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS? EMAIL: INFO@ABOUTMECO.ORG

MECO International is an interdenominational fellowship of Christians. The vision of MECO International is to see the love of Jesus Christ lived and proclaimed in the Middle East.

The goal of MECO International is to support Middle East Christians in sharing the love of Jesus Christ. This support includes prayer, example, service, partnering with churches, training and development and encouraging church planting.

MECO International Magazine is published four times a year and can be read online at www.aboutmeco.org

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Scan with a smart phone to go to our webpage

The view from here

ST. PAUL WROTE TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH: IN THIS LIFE WE ONLY SEE THINGS DIMLY. HOW RIGHT HE WAS.

Oh to see the full picture. It certainly would help as we observe the pain of Syria and the growing attacks on churches and Christian believers across the Middle East. Many ask, “Why does God allow this?” There is no answer, but there is evidence God is at work in the midst of it.

This year, on the third Sunday of Lent, the Metropolitan of Aleppo: Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim had preached his sermon in St. Ephrem, the Orthodox Cathedral. His large Syrian congregation had spilled into the street, when suddenly a bomb exploded killing and wounding many and propelling the Archbishop’s car into the air as he was driving away. He blacked out. When he regained consciousness, saw the dead and heard the cries of the injured, he prayed, “God have mercy!” Moving among his people he whispered words of comfort, while appealing, “Let us not rush to judgement.” What a testimony to Christ’s love in action.

The stories of suffering across Syria are heart-breaking. Thousands of people have been displaced. One of our workers tells of a Syrian family who were fleeing to Jordan at night. At the border, they emerged from the darkness into the crossing lights and were fired on by Syrian soldiers. The father, carrying his small son, dashed to safety but looking back could not see his wife and young daughters. She and her daughters had drawn back into the darkness and were arrested by the Syrian soldiers and imprisoned. Three days later, rebels overran the prison and released them. The mother and her daughters returned to the border where, amazingly, they were reunited with the father and son.

MECO has opened a Crisis Refugee Appeal and we currently distribute aid to Syrians through churches in Lebanon and Jordan. I appeal to you to visit our website at www.aboutmeco.org for details of how you can help.



More good news of God at work comes from Egypt. The Egyptian Bible Society distributed 2,571,997 units of Scripture in 2011, including studies for churches on the following:

- ➔ **How to face persecution**
- ➔ **How to forgive & love your enemies**
- ➔ **How to pray and wait on God**

The Orthodox Church in Mokattam, the garbage collectors’ village outside Cairo, has also been holding interdenominational prayer vigils for the nation in the cave churches. As many as 70,000 people have attended.

Although we see things dimly, God’s grace and mercy at work encourages faith and hope. I believe God is going to use the church in the Middle East to strengthen the church in the West, as it faces increased opposition.

Seeing “dimly” is something we in MECO have experienced recently. For the last two years I have tried to fill the leadership gap while we have been praying about the shape of leadership needed for the future. We are now in discussion with someone to serve as the International Director and we would welcome your prayers for the interview process. Watch this space for more news.

In the meantime, our fantastic team of workers on the ground press on with sharing the love of God in the Middle East. You’ll read some of their stories in this edition. I hope you will be challenged by the articles. They have been written by our new editorial team, lead by Editor Linda Haist, MECO Canada’s Director.

John Carrick
Interim International Director

Church prevails despite threats to security

PLEASE PRAY THAT PEACE AND JUSTICE WILL BE ESTABLISHED THROUGHOUT THE REGION, PRAY THAT CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD STAND STRONG IN THEIR FAITH, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF PRESSURE, AND THAT THEY WOULD NOT WITHDRAW BUT RATHER TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE WITHIN THEIR SOCIETIES, HOLDING OUT THE LOVE, HOPE AND INNER PEACE OF JESUS.



Issues of security and persecution are presenting huge challenges for the church in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, according to JF, a MECO worker who travels widely in the Middle East.

"Within Syria the sizeable Christian population continues to suffer along with all other Syrians in the ongoing political and security crisis," he says. "Although there has generally been little targeting of Christians for religious reasons, there are worrying signs that may be changing as extremist elements within the disparate opposition movement grow in influence."

In Iraq, JF says Christians are still suffering because of the security vacuum. "They are a minority, often despised and seen as weak because they don't have the support of a militia. As a result they are the easy victims of crimi-

nal activity including kidnappings for ransom." As for Egypt, he says as the country continues its journey of political transition, many congregations and individual Christians feel more vulnerable to sectarian attack. There is a climate of impunity for perpetrators of attacks.

According to JF, pastors in all three countries face particular pressures, both because of their status within their communities as leaders and because of the pastoral responsibility they have for their congregations. He says Egyptian church leaders can be vulnerable as they respond to sectarian threats or violence by engaging with perpetrators or with police and the justice system. In Syria and Iraq several pastors have had the option of fleeing the violence in their countries but have chosen to stay in order to minis-

IN IRAQ, JF SAYS CHRISTIANS ARE STILL SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE SECURITY VACUUM.

PLEASE PRAY



✝ That the freedom of Christians and other minorities would be protected in the Middle East

✝ That Christians will not be quick to leave the region but will remain as beacons of Christ's

hope, playing an active role in shaping and impacting their communities

✝ For those Christians, many from Muslim backgrounds, who have fled from dangerous situations

✝ For those who are in the long and uncertain wait for refugee or asylum decisions

✝ Pray for reconciliation where there has been persecution

ter and provide practical assistance not only to their church members but the wider community.

Although there is continuing uncertainty about the pace and direction of political change in the three countries, JF says many Christians are increasingly convinced that the establishment of more strongly Islamic regimes will lead to greater restrictions for Christians and other minorities. Even in Lebanon and Jordan, where there is little immediate danger for Christian communities, many are nervous about the growing influence of Hezbollah, in Lebanon, and the Muslim Brotherhood, in Jordan.

"While these fears do seem justified the need for Christians to remain as salt and light is more urgent than ever," he says. "As political and legal structures continue to take shape it is vital that Christians seek to influence those processes. And as many people around them are hurting and confused, it is vital that they are there to hold out the love and hope of the Lord Jesus.

He adds that it is a huge encouragement to Christians in the Middle East to know that during these days of upheaval and uncertainty, the worldwide church is standing alongside them in prayer.



GETTING INVOLVED

→ MECO works in partnership with Middle East Concern (MEC), an association that advocates for and supports Christians facing persecution in the region. Middle East Concern does this by assisting individual victims (by mobilizing prayer, initiating political advocacy, providing practical advice) challenging laws and policies that restrict religious freedom and by training and equipping Christians to prepare for and respond appropriately to persecution.

For more information and to receive prayer requests from Middle East Concern, please visit www.meconcern.org





Some of the least of these....



“SHE WAS RAPED BY THE MAN OF THE HOUSE WHERE SHE WAS A MAID,” SAID JULIA. “I TOOK HER TO THE DOCTOR AND I AM NOW INVESTIGATING CHILDCARE OPTIONS FOR HER ONCE THE BABY ARRIVES.”

The life of migrant maids in the country where Julia serves can be similar to that of a slave. Forced to live with their employers, many have no set working hours and often have pay withheld. Eighty-five per cent say they have no day off and in some cases maids are not permitted to leave the houses where they work. Those who can leave are often restricted from meeting with other maids. Verbal and sexual abuse is rife.

Maids come from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Nepal, as well as African nations. They come to better themselves and provide for their families back home but are at the mercy of their employers. As migrant workers, they are considered second class citizens. Sadly, this attitude is reflected even in churches. Julia says it is the Catholic Church that is most active on their behalf, providing financial aid and safe housing.

A couple of local non-government agencies are also active in the care and advocacy of the maids. They have been known to hold vigils outside houses where maids have

committed suicide. However, they are very limited in what they can do because of the absence of laws protecting migrant workers.

The maids’ own embassies, for various reasons, provide little help. Julia says their hands are tied by the lack of legal protection in the host country and they are overwhelmed by the needs. One video did the rounds on YouTube showing an Ethiopian being forced into the car of her employer right outside the embassy. No one intervened. She committed suicide a week later.

Julia’s friend is in hiding, after receiving help to escape her virtual prison. She cannot have her employer charged with rape without running the risk of losing her child. If the father claims the sex was consensual, in a patriarchal society he is automatically granted custody after the child reaches a certain age. Another maid who dared to bring a case against her employer was unsuccessful.

Ideally, Julia’s friend would like to remain and work in her host country for two more years. In that time she may be able to save enough money to provide for herself and her child when she returns home.

In her explorations of day care options, for her friend’s expected child, Julia has discovered there are two kinds of facilities: high-priced or prison-like. “A well-run, affordable

day care centre is the greatest need I’ve been able to identify within the migrant community. I’d love to find volunteers who could help establish and

work in a centre. It would be a huge blessing to the migrant mothers. We’d need start-up funding and some support for running costs to subsidise what the mothers can afford.”

Aside from helping her friend, Julia is helping migrant workers in any way she can. At the moment she is assisting a woman pastoring 400 maids. “I act as a taxi for her congregation of maids - those who need to go to hospital, clinics, lawyers...and I take her out for a day off once in a while,” she says.

She adds that the pastor estimates that 70% of the maids she works with suffer some form of abuse. She says 20% suffer sexual abuse.

SHE CANNOT HAVE HER EMPLOYER CHARGED WITH RAPE WITHOUT RUNNING THE RISK OF LOSING HER CHILD.

Julia is also involved in copying and distributing the Jesus Film in DVD format for migrant workers. The DVDs have multiple language

options and are distributed through local ethnic churches and at money transfer centres and phone centres. The movie is particularly important for illiterate maids, many of whom are Bangladeshi. While 20,000 DVDs have been given away in the last 18 months, it is estimated that there are 400,000 maids in the country.

Reflecting on her work, Julia says, “I’m glad I’m able to help someone who has suffered abuse, even though what I offer feels like a drop in the bucket. I think Jesus would be involved in helping these women.”

He is, through the likes of Julia.

JULIA’S PRAYER REQUESTS



† Justice for the maids and a change in the legal system so that migrant workers are covered under labour laws

† For a sea-change in people’s attitudes towards the foreigner in their midst

† For the JESUS DVDs to have an impact on the various migrant communities

† For Julia as she explores establishing a day care centre

→ If you would like to join Julia in this ministry, please contact your MECO office.

Loving the unlovable

Two MECO workers know from experience that these words of Jesus are easy to read but not easy to practice.

In 2007, Colin and Brenda set out to assist people in an impoverished country. Part of their work included capacity building - teaching people how to develop their communities and improve their standard of living.

Although they worked in a region that was hostile to Christianity, the couple was accepted because of their professional expertise. At openings of official meetings they were often asked to read from the Bible, after passages from the Qur'an had been

"YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY BE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN."
MATT: 5: 43-45

read. Despite that acceptance they were not allowed to proselytize and were carefully watched - by one man in particular.

Moh had been hired as property manager of the site where Colin and Brenda lived and worked. "He was very anti-Christian and from day one he didn't like us," says Brenda. "He did everything he could to make life difficult for us. On several occasions he broke into our home to search for Christian material that could be used for proselytizing. And he used to tell our staff they didn't have to listen to me because I was 'just a woman.'"



"He was being cared for at the guest house and when I saw him he looked hopeless and my heart broke for him," says Brenda. "I had this overwhelming sense to pray for him. I asked if I could pray and he said, 'Yes.'"

I was praying very intensively. I was crying.

He was crying. I sensed I was praying not only for him but for all those from his region who were suffering and in pain; people forced from their homes, people whose churches have been burned, people who have been beaten, people whose loved ones have been killed. I also knew that God had given me His love for Moh."

Not long after that meeting, Moh was moved to a major city for medical treatment. When Colin and Brenda contacted him to ask if he needed anything he told them, "Just your blessings and prayers."

More than a year later Moh is still struggling with health issues and still trying to reunite with his family. "God is strategically placing him with Christians to love and help him. It is very special that he wants to keep in touch with us. That is a huge milestone," says Brenda.

Will Moh become a follower of Jesus? "We may never know," say the couple, "but we are certain that our awesome God is pursuing Moh and loves him and died to save him."

Colin and Brenda add that working with Moh has been a reminder that they need to pray more for those who are difficult to love. "Prayers are powerful and they can change us, soften us, and help us to see people as God sees them. They are hurting people, hopeless without Jesus. They need a Saviour but how will they know if no one comes to tell them about Him?"

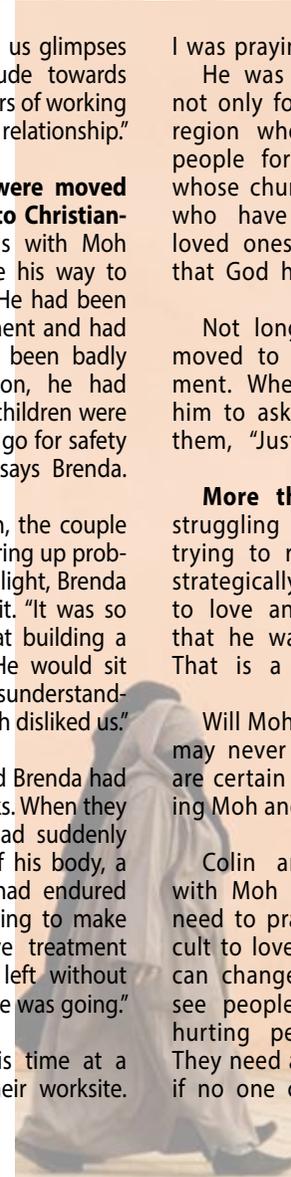
Despite Moh's attitude, the couple committed to pray together for him and his family. They also made a point of visiting him at home. "The wonderful thing about prayer," they say, "is that it often changes us. When we ask the Lord for help to see people through His eyes He gives us glimpses which help us soften our attitude towards them. However, even after four years of working with Moh it was still a very rocky relationship."

In 2010, Colin and Brenda were moved to another region that is open to Christianity. They thought their problems with Moh were over but last year he made his way to their new worksite as a fugitive. "He had been involved in opposing his government and had been arrested. Although he had been badly beaten and was facing execution, he had managed to escape. His wife and children were in hiding. The only place he could go for safety was our area and we hid him," says Brenda.

Despite their kindness to him, the couple soon discovered that Moh was stirring up problems for them. When this came to light, Brenda says she was almost ready to quit. "It was so stressful but Colin worked hard at building a positive relationship with Moh. He would sit with him to try and clear up any misunderstandings and get to the root of why Moh disliked us."

As God would have it, Colin and Brenda had to leave the country for three weeks. When they returned they found that Moh had suddenly become paralyzed on one side of his body, a direct result of the beating he had endured prior to his escape. "We were trying to make arrangements for him to receive treatment when he just disappeared. He left without telling us he was going or where he was going."

They would meet again. This time at a guest house located far from their worksite.



PLEASE PRAY



† For Moh

† For Colin and Brenda and the work they do among a very needy people

† For Colin and Brenda to have more opportunities to share Jesus with Moh

† Pray for more people to join Colin and Brenda in their work

INSPIRING STORIES
ABOUND OF WELL-KNOWN
CHRISTIANS WHO, BY THE
GRACE OF GOD, CONTINUED
THEIR WORK DESPITE
SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES.
LAST YEAR, ONE OF OUR
PEOPLE WAS TOLD HE WOULD
DIE WITHIN TWO YEARS
WITHOUT A LIVER TRANS-
PLANT. **THIS IS HIS STORY:**



When the going gets tough...

When you were diagnosed you could have retired. Why didn't you?

→Retirement never entered my head. The frustration was we would have to return to the UK, in order to be within 1 ½ hours of the hospital, and spend an unknown length of time waiting for a donor organ. There is a limit to what can be achieved away from your desk. However, I was becoming increasingly unable to sustain a full day's work and travel was taking a huge toll. Looking back, I had been going slowly down hill for perhaps three years. I had not recognised the decline or the impact it was having.

It couldn't have been easy to hear that you needed a liver transplant. How did you cope?

→Because I have genetic haemochromatosis there was always the potential for problems, so at one level, there was a sense of expectation, but it hits home when you are told you have two years to live. The lesser risk is not finding a suitable donor in time. Personally, I found an amazing acceptance of that. I had no fear of death and whatever the Lord willed was okay by me. My concern was for those close to me and for a short while my mind went into overdrive as I worked through the "what ifs".

How important were the prayers of your supporters and colleagues?

→Without doubt the prayers of so many people around the world brought a sense of hope and certainty that the Lord had things in hand. While lying in bed after the transplant I did count up the numbers who I knew were praying. I stopped when I reached 1400. Even now I meet people who tell me they were praying, people I had no knowledge of. Also, the sense of rejoicing as people heard of the successful transplant was an enormous lift for me. Messages came

from as far away as Thailand and Venezuela, not forgetting those from my Middle Eastern friends, all giving praise to our great God. As I was receiving these messages I heard someone hum that old hymn, "This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Saviour all the day long."

Were there times when you saw God's intervention?

→One big issue was the need for accommodation close enough to the hospital, but also close to our family in London and our sending church. It seemed as if we would never find a place. But just days before we were due to fly to London we were offered a house in surprising circumstances. The house belonged to one of our prayer supporters who had recently died. His funeral was the day we landed in London. As we moved in, we saw he had a picture of us on his refrigerator.

Was there a moment when you lost hope?

→Praise God, I never had the chance. We arrived in London on the 13th December, saw the doctors on the 20th and had the transplant on the 23rd. Six months earlier, when first diagnosed I was given a prophetic word that my wait would be short. I did know a certainty in that, but never expected it to be just a few days. According to the hospital staff it was the shortest wait they had ever known and one of the fastest recoveries.

What did you learn from the journey?

→For me it has been a reinforcement of all the things you know about the Christian life and the love of God. Simple things like prayer really does change things, that God is in control regardless of our situation, that praise and thanksgiving should be as high, if

not higher on our agenda, than prayers and petition. I think also there was a confirmation that there is still ministry for me to do.

How is your health now?

→To quote the doctors at my last check-up, "the new liver is in pristine condition" but the anti-rejection medication is having some minor side effects. Praise God I have so much more energy than 11 months ago, however I will be a "patient for life" with on-going hospital visits and checks.

What advice do you have for people who may be facing difficulties in their lives?

→I think I can sum this up in a few words: Dwell on the Lord and not on the difficulty.



“.. work is a grain of sand, the work untouched is a pyramid...”

Face it. Look and listen, alone with God.

Then go, let go, help go.” Amy Carmichael

Obstetricians and Gynecologists – Urgently Needed

A maternity hospital, which is highly regarded because of the excellent medical care it provides, has an urgent need for an Obstetrician and Gynecologist.

Qualifications: Degree in Obstetrics/ Gynecology with practical experience at the specialist level

Minimum service: 6 months

Language: English. Arabic language is desirable but not essential

Midwives – Urgently Needed

Midwives are urgently needed at a maternity hospital, which is highly regarded because of the excellent medical care it provides

Qualifications: Diploma in Midwifery (minimum 18 months), following RN qualifications or a degree in midwifery.

Two years experience

Minimum service: 6 months

Language: Arabic is desirable but not essential.

Short-Term Trip – Team Players Needed

Encounter Team 2013 is looking for 18-35 year olds who like working with children and want to move beyond their comfort zone to experience a completely different culture and way of life.

When: July 4-31

Where: Jordan.

Theological Trainer

Qualifications: MA or PhD in theology.

Minimum service: 3 years

Language needed: English.

Arabic required if tutoring

Location: Jordan

English Teacher for Adults

Qualifications: TOEFL or CELTA and willingness to learn Arabic

Minimum service: 1 year

Location: Egypt

Physiotherapists, Speech, Language and Occupational Therapists

Qualifications: Experience preferred

Minimum Service: 1 year

Language: English and willingness to learn Arabic

Location: Various countries

Pre-school Worker for Disabled Children

Qualifications: Appropriate degree/ diploma

Minimum service: 2 years

Language: English and willingness to learn Sorani Kurdish

Location: Iraqi Kurdistan

Teachers – All Grades and for Special Education (Blind & Deaf)

Numerous Christian schools throughout the Middle East need teachers for full-time position as well as for extra-curricular programs in July and August.

Qualifications: Teachers College Certificate

Minimum service: 1 – 2 years (full-time)

Language: English, willingness to learn Arabic

Nurses – for hospitals, clinics and schools

Qualifications: Internationally recognized designations

Minimum service: 1-2 years

Language: English, willingness to learn Arabic

Location: Various countries

Find out more by visiting www.aboutmeco.org/opportunities or by emailing your MECO office