

meco | international

MAGAZINE

Issue 3, 2013

LOOKING UP



Includes: Farewell from John Carrick ■ Redeeming garbage ■ Trips that change lives

MECO MAGAZINE

LOOKING UP

The stories in this issue of our magazine accentuate the positive.

You'll read about a young woman who dreams of turning a garbage dump into an oasis and you'll read about a tiny church that has made a huge difference in the lives of Syrian refugees. You'll also read some amazing stories of how God has intervened in the lives of people we know.

We hope the stories will inspire you and that they will encourage you to pray for God's work in the Middle East and for the individuals who carry out that work.

Please note that in some cases pseudonyms or initials have been used for security reasons.

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 mission 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.

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The view from here

“One hour of life, crowded to the full with glorious action and filled with noble risks, is worth whole years of those mean observances of paltry decorum...”

So wrote Scottish author: Sir Walter Scott.

In the last fifteen years I have been privileged to experience many hours of “glorious action,” as I have seen God at work in the lives of people in the Middle East. It has been an honour to meet them and tell their stories across the world. It has also been an honour in my different capacities to touch the lives of our workers; to learn from them and to see the evidence of their work for God. I trust I have at points encouraged them, all of whom have made big sacrifices in response to God’s call on their lives for “glorious action.”

What about “noble risks?” I’m not sure if travelling under armed guard on a preaching trip in Upper Egypt, qualifies, or being on a coach on Yemeni mountains, when stopped by gunmen and questioned, before another passenger intervened. Interestingly, our ‘saviour’ turned out to be a doctor, who had seen a colleague and me being dropped at the coach station by another doctor, whose surgical methods he had been studying. We were indeed indebted to both men.

These and more exciting stories I can recite. But I am mindful that shortly after leaving Upper Egypt, men repairing the fence of another church, very near to where I had preached, were arrested, handcuffed, blindfolded and herded into a vehicle that minutes later plunged into a river, drowning all of them. It was claimed to be an accident. I am also aware that on a similar road I travelled in Yemen, other western workers were kidnapped and some, who were taken captive further north, are still missing.

The Middle East today, like many other places, illustrates a chapter in the Bible: Hebrews 11. It’s all about faith in God and starts with examples of him doing exciting things in response to people’s faith.

The chapter ends on the same theme: same God; same faith, but with a startling difference. Although commended for their faith, some were stoned; sawn in two and put to death by the sword. No miracles. No rescue. But as the author says, their focus was Heaven, where their Lord waited to greet and reward them.

Faith today among believers in the Middle East is often great and so is the cost. But there are many opportunities for this faith to be a light to guide needy souls. As Syria collapses under the weight of war, many are open to considering the Christian message. As the promises of the Arab Spring evaporate there is a desire for truth. Young people from Turkey eastward ask the big questions and Middle East churches, ready to answer, seek partnership help from Christians in the West.

Egypt is of particular concern as I write this. With more than 17 million demonstrators protesting all over the country in July, the army’s response was swift in taking power from the elected President. The world’s press has analysed the reasons, but what is the answer? One national Christian leader has written, “Pray that the unity expressed between Egyptians who reject the forceful imposition of political Islam will result in a new Egypt where people with different persuasions can live alongside one another in harmony.”

Please answer that call to pray.

I know that many will be praying for Mike Parker as he takes over the leadership reins of MECO International; praying that God will encourage and strengthen him for the task ahead.

I wish to thank all, who have prayed for me also. Although I am retiring from MECO on September 1, I hope to continue preaching and am eager to keep telling the stories of today’s Middle East faith heroes: stories of glorious action filled with noble risk for God.

John Carrick

Interim International Director



“Garbage: a treasure trove for woman with a vision”

A garbage dump at the back of a Christian retreat centre located in Egypt may soon be transformed into a creative space that can be explored and enjoyed by children and adults alike.

The visionary for taking the trash, which includes tyres, broken machinery and left-over building materials, and using it to create a “garbage wonderland” is a young woman named Sophie. She hopes the area will become a showcase demonstrating that nothing is wasted and all can be redeemed.

In a country where working with garbage is considered shameful, her vision is extraordinary. But it will take creative, open-minded people like Sophie to make her vision a reality; people willing to head out to Egypt for a few weeks, months or even a year.

“If building structures from doors or washing machines, creating tables from wooden drums, making mosaics from stones and broken glass gets you excited, this project is for you,” she says. Her

plans include constructing a number of buildings from the trash to house a children’s play area, a place to drink tea, an art gallery that will include large garbage sculptures.

Sophie has drawn in a talented Egyptian artist and teacher to oversee the project. The artist believes the project will educate children and inspire them to see garbage in a new way – as a treasure trove. She plans to replicate the project in her own village in Upper Egypt.

Sophie has also made contact with two other Egyptian artists who will help her bring together a pool of local talent including architects to help with the plotting and planning phase before the hands-on work begins.

Once the planning phase has been completed, Sophie hopes that single people, couples and teams will be drawn to work at the site as word of what she is doing spreads through MECO’s offices around the world. Experience working with garbage won’t be necessary. What’s needed is imagination and creativity.

Sophie admits that although she has always been fascinated with garbage, actually working with it is a first even for her. She has a fine arts degree specializing in print making and spent 17 years working in the world of advertising. It was while visiting the retreat centre, one of her favourite places, and listening to the dreams and aspirations of those responsible for the centre, that she became involved in transforming their garbage dump.

“I thought I would put one of the ideas on paper to see what it would look like,” she says. After emailing a few artist friends, it began to take shape and the rest as they say is history.

✚ For Sophie as she continues to make plans for the garbage site

✚ For people to catch Sophie’s vision and join her in the work

PLEASE PRAY
✚

Sophie knows that God has enabled her to tackle this project. In 2010 she was asked to organize an art exhibition for a major Christian conference. “I had never organized an art exhibition in my life and I only had three months to fill a three-floor area with no dedicated exhibition space. I can truly testify that our Lord had it all planned. He just needed a vessel to pour through. So I see this project in a similar light.”

Interested in becoming involved in Sophie’s project?

Contact your MECO office.





Great is His faithfulness

“God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform” are the opening words to a hymn William Cowper wrote in 1774.

Cowper wrote from personal experience and his lyrics often come to mind when our people share stories of how God has intervened in their lives or the lives of people they know. The following are two such stories:

Just before South Sudan gained its independence on July 1, 2011, the border that separated it from Northern Sudan was closed. The closure resulted in much hardship for those living just south of the border, including a MECO couple.

They explain that with the closure of the border Arab traders from the north had no choice but to close down their businesses and return to North Sudan. Since there were no roads from South Sudan to the region, the departure of the traders left local markets without access to food or fuel. The cost for any supplies that were still available jumped dramatically. Fuel that had been selling for 330 Sudanese pounds a barrel, now sold for 3,300 pounds.

“All through this time we experienced God’s faithfulness and provision in the most amazing ways,” says the couple. “It was during that time that our garden was starting to produce an abundance of pumpkins and other vegetables. Leaves from Moringa trees we had planted were also available and supplied us with a very good source of vitamins and minerals.”

In the meantime, there was a constant flow of visitors to the couple’s worksite; people from various agencies and ministries who were passing through to the refugee camps located nearby.

“Many times we had to feed them because there was so little food in the local market. We often wondered if we could provide for everyone. We also wondered when our supplies would run out. We walked by faith not by sight and amazingly the food never ran out,” they say. “The only explanation for it is God at work. Basic supplies like rice, seasonings, even pumpkins never ran out. There was always something to serve. Even when the last of our flour was gone, a boat appeared in port (on the Nile) carrying flour and we were able to purchase a 25 kg sack, which we shared with others.”

It wasn’t just food that was stretched by the Lord but their dish soap, toothpaste and shampoo. “You couldn’t buy these things. We would think we’d have enough to last a week and it would still be full at the end of the week. Something that would normally last a month would last six months. We’d never seen that happen before. We would share things and we would still have plenty for ourselves and others. We felt like the widow in 2 Kings 4: 1-7, who kept filling up the jars.”

They also witnessed God’s perfect timing with regards to their need for electricity. At the time the batteries for their solar panels, which generated power for their computer and their lights, were running low. In addition they had almost depleted the last of the gas cylinders which ran their refrigerator and stove.

“A local oil company began to supply a nearby town with electricity and we were able to tap into that electrical source for our home and office,” they explain. “It was an awesome privilege to see how the Lord provides when we can’t do anything. He promises to take care of us and He does!”

Karen is part of an international community church in Beirut, Lebanon that is attended by several domestic workers. Some of these workers (mostly women) are treated respectfully and justly by the families they serve, but others suffer from imprisonment, abuse, long hours of work or lack of payment. To make matters worse, there is very little that foreign domestic workers can do to protect themselves when employers fail to fulfill a contract.

During a recent church service, Hannah, a domestic worker who doesn’t normally attend Karen’s church, stood up during the service and asked for prayer.

She explained that her employer was nine months in arrears in paying her salary. This was particularly worrisome for the worker because she was due to return to her home country in a few months. How could she return empty-handed?

“Our church prayed that God would change the heart of Hannah’s employer,” says Karen. “Last week Hannah returned to church with a beaming smile. The day we prayed for her she returned to her employer’s home. As soon as she walked in the door, her employer said, ‘Come here, even before you put your things away. There is something I need to say to you. Tomorrow I will take you to the bank and pay you six months salary. Next month I will pay you the rest that I owe you.’”

The employer was as good as her word.

“Hannah has been quick to point out how efficiently God answered our prayers on her behalf, says Karen. “She is looking forward to going home soon, pleased that she will be able to help her family and grateful to the Lord who hears the cry of the poor and who was able to change her employer’s heart.”

Changing lives one trip at a time

In 2000 a young woman decided to sign-up for one of MECO's short-term trips for 18-35 year olds. It was a life-changing experience. Now, 13 years later, she leads others on similar trips, hoping that the experience will change their lives as well.

Your first involvement with an Encounter Team was as a participant. How did that happen?

I was sitting at the back of a church where a MECO representative was speaking. He was talking about the wonderful things that were happening in the Middle East and that there were many opportunities for God's kingdom work there. I was sitting there thinking, "That's wonderful. I hope someone responds". Then I heard a voice speak to my spirit, "Why don't you respond?" I thought, "Lord is that you?" So to be a steward of the opportunity I went and spoke to the rep and then followed up with an application for a three months short-term ministry. As part of the process, I joined the Encounter Team (then called MEET) in July 2000.

Now that you organize and lead the teams what is your objective for the participants; what do you hope will be accomplished?

There are a few things I hope for the participants:

- ▶ That they will get an insight into what the Lord is doing through His church in the Middle East
- ▶ That they will nurture a love for the people of the Middle East as they serve them and serve alongside them
- ▶ That they will give space to hear whether the Lord might be calling them to a longer term of service.

When you are reviewing applications for the Encounter Team what are you looking for?

Primarily I am looking for young people who are open to serving others and willing to give of themselves.

How do you help people of different ages, who are also from different countries and cultures, become a team?

For most of the teams, the whole experience and environment is so foreign it puts them all on an equal footing. We start an Encounter Team with 2-3 days of ice breakers (to help us get to know one another better), developing team rules & expectations, orientation in both cultural awareness and the immediate area we are staying and training for teaching. I think gathering for a common cause is also helpful (for a team). We also have a daily team debrief which allows the team to ask questions or note anything that is out of the ordinary for them. Daily devotions add to our experience of living in community. If conflict arises we deal with it immediately.

What makes a good team?

A mixture of:

- ▶ People coming with a heart to serve and love the people here as well as each other
- ▶ A good blend of skills and personalities
- ▶ Expectancy to see God move
- ▶ A lot of grace

How do you help team members adjust to the Middle East?

Once they have been accepted one of the first things I do is to send the teamers an orientation document, along with recommended readings. Then leading up to their departure for the ME, I indicate what sort of social behaviours and dress are appropriate for the region. Upon arrival the teamers receive cultural orientation around the do's and don'ts of basic daily living and public behaviour. Also, as part of the orientation we will walk around our neighbourhood noting for them not only places of interest and landmarks but also noting/observing how local folk behave and it should read folk behave and dress).

What exactly will the team do this year? Will they be doing anything that teams haven't done before?

The main service we will be doing is helping a local church in a poorer area run their three week summer school. The summer school has three components: English grammar, English and Arabic Bible and activities, including crafts, games, dance and songs. The summer school has wide appeal with locals; some families send their children from across town to attend. We may also run English conversational classes for youth. I had hoped that we could assist with refugee efforts, which would have been a new component of the programme, but this needs to be developed further and hopefully can be done next year.

Some people criticize short-term trips saying the money spent on them would be better used to help locals carry out ministry. What do you think?

There is definitely a need for more financial resources to make its way out to the Middle East, but there is also a need for us to come and be physically present. I know it's a huge encouragement for the church here that we come and stand with them in their ministry. Also, each one who comes is able to take back their personal story of their experience of the Middle East, which in turn can encourage others to either pray, send resources or come and serve in the Middle East. I know my coming on this trip has given our church a new catalyst to focus on both overseas ministry and the Middle East and this is exciting. The Middle East needs both - more finances and more people to come and encourage them in the ministry here.

People often think of the Middle East as a dangerous place to serve. Is it?

As a region it is quite volatile right now but where we are running the team is relatively safe. Some countries in the region are definitely far more dangerous than others - for example right now the border into Syria is closed. Today I heard a safety warning for foreigners not to travel into Egypt at this time. Here though, there is peace. One friend transiting from Cairo recently told me how locals stopped her in the street and thanked her for remaining in their country. They took great encouragement that she was willing to remain in their country during this turbulent time. Although I would never be irresponsible about my safety, I do know that the safest place for any of us is in the centre of God's will - wherever that may be.

If a political crisis should arise what protection would the team have; what emergency plan would you activate?

When the team arrives if they have not yet registered their presence with their respective consulates and embassies, we will do so. If a crisis were to break out we would follow the established crisis response plan. Depending on the advice the local leaders give, I would help evacuate the teamers at the earliest possible opportunity.

What have been some of the highlights of previous trips you've lead?

- ▶ Hearing of children who want to have a relationship with Jesus because of our program, especially those who have never heard the story of salvation before
- ▶ The great sense of community and appreciation the teamers feel after being part of a church community for three weeks
- ▶ Teamers who hear a call to this way of life - six people have returned to do subsequent teams, two have done longer term placements and three are currently serving in the region long term

You take 18 - 35 year olds on the Encounter Team. Have you every thought about creating a team for older people?

Yes indeed. I have had requests to develop a team for mothers to come and serve and this is something that I am thinking of pursuing. At sometime it would also be good to run something for early retirees - those 55+.

Compassion for Syrian refugees brings dramatic change

As the Syrian civil war rages on, churches in the Middle East continue to reach out to those fleeing the conflict.



One of those churches is located in Lebanon, near the Syrian border. When Syrians started to stream over that border, the tiny Lebanese church decided to reach beyond its comfort zone and help the refugees regardless of their religion.

As winter set in the congregation began providing food to displaced families, as well as blankets, mattresses and small stoves. In doing so they shared about the God who loved them and made Christian literature available to those they spoke to. In addition, they developed special programmes for the refugee children and helped families and individuals with medical emergencies.

Today, the little congregation is providing food to six hundred families and non-food items to over 400 families. It is also looking at the possibility of starting a school for more than 100 Syrian children and is looking for Syrian teachers among the refugees to teach in the school.

Since it began its outreach, the church has almost tripled in size as families from diverse backgrounds sit in the same room and worship the Living Saviour. The church's mid week prayer time, which used to attract 15 people, has more than 70 people attending regularly. There are also two Sunday morning services now and both are full.

Many of the people who come to the services and prayer meetings do not receive any assistance from the church but attend because they are seeking the reality of God in their lives. Most say that because of the love and concern that the church has shown the refugees they have come to realize that God is not distant but is deeply concerned about people and they want to know Him.

There have also been cases of miraculous healings among the non-Christians attending the church, which happened after they were prayed for. In each of these cases doctors had seen the patients before and after the healings and openly stated they could not account for what happened. Other people have had dreams of Jesus appearing to them.

The following information is from a recent Open Doors International report on the vulnerability of Syrian Christians. **The report states:**

- ▶ There are comparatively more refugees and internally displaced people amongst the Christian population than amongst any other religious or ethnic group
- ▶ Christian refugees are comparatively more disadvantaged than other refugees and suffer great hostilities in refugee camps (at the hands of extremists)
- ▶ Christians are deliberately being targeted by Islamist groups

To assist churches carrying out relief work among Syrian refugees, MECO has established a Syrian Refugee Crisis Appeal. Regular updates about this appeal can be read on MECO's website: www.about-meco.org or on MECO's Facebook page.

Donations to the appeal can be made through MECO's website or through MECO offices.

Where have all the workers gone?

Recruiting people to go overseas has never been more difficult, according to MECO's U.S. Director, Keith Bateman. In the following article, he explains why and gives a biblical solution to the problem.

It goes without saying that every agency like MECO ultimately stands or falls by its recruitment policy. We can have all the best intentions and financial resources in the world and it won't matter. Without the infusion of new people we shall be ineffective.

The reality is that, like many other Christian agencies, MECO is experiencing a dry spell in recruitment. Why this dearth of candidates? Here are six reasons:

1 The number of hard places is increasing: Whereas in the past it was primarily disease and lack of amenities that made a place "hard," today it is more likely to be the threat of terrorism. Added to this many of the difficult places also happen to have difficult languages to learn and inhospitable climates.

2 The number of workers willing to go to difficult places is decreasing: I have been to mission conferences at Christian colleges and have had fewer than eight students stop at our exhibit let alone engage in a meaningful conversation about the possibility of serving in a place like the Middle East.

3 More options: There are other, less challenging, options for service than the Middle East and, understandably, many people are choosing them. Earlier this year, I attended an "agency fair" in our relatively small hometown of Bradenton, Florida. One hundred agencies were represented! The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability in the U.S. now lists close to 3,000 member/associate members; which, in turn, represent only a fraction of the organizations out there. As a result recruitment has become a competi-

tion rather than a co-operative effort. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of one and two week trips being offered, many of them organized by local churches rather than agencies.

4 Stricter entry requirements: There was a time when expatriate workers were welcomed with open arms by most developing world countries. This is no longer the case. Not only do resident visas tend to be more difficult to obtain in places like the Middle East but many countries in the region now require at least two years' post degree experience which can delay or derail an individual's availability for service.

5 The economic crunch: Not only are many potential candidates saddled with massive educational debt but potential donors are also experiencing economic difficulties. As a result, it can take longer for candidates to go to the field. Indeed, some never make it at all, or have had to come home due to lack of funds.

6 A dearth of viable opportunities: Many of today's university graduates hold degrees in fields of study that do not always fit the needs in the Middle East. What opportunities for service can be offered to graduates with degrees in architecture, gender studies, humanities, natural resources, recreational science, visual and performing arts? Although it is slowly changing, agencies like ours tend to be geared more toward generalists than specialists.

So what to do? Wring our hands in dismay?

As always, Jesus gave us the answer. He said, "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers." Ultimately recruitment is not our job. But prayer is. If every person who receives this publication were to make prayer to the Lord of the Harvest a priority, I am convinced that we would receive the recruits we need. Please make that prayer a priority.

PLEASE PRAY



- ✚ For more churches and individuals to reach out to Syrian refugees (thank God for those who do)
- ✚ For wisdom for those working among refugees
- ✚ That churches and individuals will receive the resources they need to help refugees



Opportunities to Serve

“Not called!” did you say? ‘Not heard the call,’ I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear Him bid you go ...” William Booth

The ministry opportunities listed on this page are just a sample of the ways in which people can serve the Church in the Middle East. If you sense God calling you to that region of the world you can be sure He has work for you to do. Although opportunities for service in the Middle East usually require professional qualifications, we are as concerned about God’s call on people’s lives as their professional abilities.

Staff for a Christian Academy

Secondary Principal
Two mathematics teachers for Middle School/High School
One science teacher for High School
Qualifications: Recognized degrees
Minimum service: 1 year (2013-2014)
Language: English
Location: Jordan

Physiotherapists, Speech, Language and Occupational Therapists

Qualifications: Experience preferred
Minimum service: 1 year
Language: English and willingness to learn Arabic
Location: Various countries

Day care Worker/Trainer

Helping to start a day care centre for children of migrant workers
Qualifications: Any qualification in pre-school care
Minimum service: 3 months to 1 year
Language needed: English
Location: Lebanon

Rehabilitation Worker

Qualifications: Appropriate degree/diploma
Minimum service: 2 years
Language: English and willingness to learn Sorani Kurdish
Location: Iraqi Kurdistan

Theological Trainer

Qualifications: Post-graduate degrees in Theology
Minimum service: 3 years
Language needed: English. Arabic required if tutoring
Location: Jordan

Religious Freedom Advocacy Worker

Providing support for persecuted Christians
Qualifications: International law, human rights, public policy
Minimum service: 4 years minimum
Language: English, Arabic
Location: Middle East

Teacher

Teaching English, computer awareness and any subjects useful in a developing country
Qualifications: TEFL
Minimum service: 1 year
Language needed: English and basic Arabic
Location: Remote area

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

Numerous Christian schools throughout the Middle East need teachers for full-time positions, as well as part-time positions for extra-curricular programmes in July and August.
Qualifications: Internationally recognized with experience
Minimum service: 1 – 2 years (full-time), 1-2 months July and August
Language: English, willingness to learn Arabic

Doctors, Nurses, Midwives – for hospitals, clinics

Qualifications: Internationally recognized with experience
Minimum service: 1-2 years
Language: English, willingness to learn Arabic
Location: Various countries

English Teacher for Adults

Qualifications: TOEFL or CELTA and willingness to learn Arabic
Minimum service: 1 year
Location: Egypt

Short-Term Trip – Team Players Needed

Encounter Team 2014 will be looking for 18-35 year olds who want to move beyond their comfort zone to experience a completely different culture and way of life. **This is a one month opportunity to serve the Church in the Middle East.** Start now by praying about whether the Lord would have you join next year’s team. **More details in the next issue of the MECO magazine.**



For more information about the above opportunities call your local MECO Office or visit: www.aboutmeco.org/opportunities
Please note that MECO volunteers raise their support in order to serve.