

meco | international

MAGAZINE | Issue 3, 2015



Building
relationships

Includes: Neighbour to neighbour

■ Sweet introduction

■ In their own words

KEEPING YOU UP-TO-DATE AND AFFIRMING THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR ROLE IN THE MINISTRY OF MECO



Building Relationships

In this issue of the magazine you will discover that relationships can begin with candy in a bookshop, mothers watching their children play or God moving a family outside their ministry comfort zone.

You'll also discover what can prevent relationships from developing.

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

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

If you would like to receive MECO's monthly prayer guide please email: info@aboutmec.org

COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS? EMAIL: INFO@ABOUTMECO.ORG



MECO International is an interdenominational fellowship of evangelical Christians.

Our vision is to see the love of Jesus Christ lived and proclaimed in the Middle East.

Our mission is to support Middle East Christians in sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

This includes prayer, example, service, partnering with churches, training and development, and encouraging church planting.

Our strategy is to work in fellowship with Christians, churches and agencies in the Middle East, and we come as servants of God's Church in the Middle East.

Our priority is to mobilise and equip people and prayer for the Middle East. *MECO International Magazine is published four times a year and can be read online at www.mecoglobal.org and www.mecoglobal.com*

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The view from here



Ministry in the Middle East is all about relationship.

Above all, it's relationship that Father God seeks with people who put their trust in Christ. His overall purpose is to build a new community that can transform the situation in the Middle East as it does elsewhere in the world.

It's relationship that drives local churches in the Middle East to overcome suspicion and reach out to waves of displaced people in their neighbourhoods and countries.

It's relationship that builds bridges for Muslims to come to faith in Christ. I heard of one in a discovery Bible study group: "I didn't come for the Bible; I was studying the person leading." On the basis of relationship, this person became a follower of Christ.

It's relationship that people who have changed community are desperately seeking. Losing one identity means they need to discover a new one, and find out where they belong now.

It's relationship that draws our MECO colleagues to live in uncertain settings and come alongside local believers. Learning to live in cross-cultural relationship stretches us, as it's very different from the Western values we've grown up with. We're valued because of our language learning, cultural understanding and commitment to staying as long as possible.

Over the years, our relationships have changed. Once, we came to the region, saw what

needed to be done, and got on with doing it. Now Middle East leaders lead us, as they think out their faith for themselves. They are witnessing boldly about Christ and overcoming obstacles to reach out to neighbours and refugees alike. They are writing their own music, praying in their own ways, experiencing the insights of God's word, and the powerful presence of his Spirit, in their own settings.

Our main contribution is our presence, as we take opportunities to serve alongside them and assure them that they are not alone. We continue to point them to the Lord, who is sufficient for all their needs and who unlike us will never fail them or disappoint them.

The most important thing we can do is to pray for and with our friends. This time last year, I sat with a group from my own church who had come together to pray about the violence they'd been seeing on their TV screens. They didn't know what to do in the face of the news. We realised that what we'd just done would never make any news bulletin – but it was the most significant thing we could do. We came because of the relationship God has opened up with us through Christ, and by His Spirit we were able to play our part.

As you read this edition, may you be encouraged to pray. And may your relationship with the Lord and with His people in the Middle East be strengthened

Mike Parker
International Director

Neighbour to neighbour

“He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.” Acts 17:26-27

With so many Middle Eastern people moving to the West, do we grasp the opportunities which God provides for us to befriend them in a way that honours Him? In this article one of our colleagues shares some of her experiences. “We are where we are,” she says, “to share Jesus.”

Our daughter, now heading to university, was a toddler growing up in North Iraq when Mahmoud and his family moved next door. They had three girls at the time and he liked to joke that our daughter was his fourth. We shared much, including hot summer nights under the stars on adjacent roof tops. Although he and his family eventually moved a few streets away we remained close.

Then in 2010, while on home assignment, we decided to move. We had wondered how and when would be the best time to integrate our daughter into our home country and yet we were aware that my husband’s work in the Middle East was not complete. When my father was seriously sick in hospital it became clear that it was a season for me to live closer to him. So began a season of commuting for my husband.

We moved into our house in a city centre area, a house that over the years has been home for short-termers reaching out to the Middle Eastern community in our area. In the early 1980s, the local Arabic speaking community was already well-established. Since the 1990s hundreds of Kurds have also settled in the area.

We had stayed in our home for short periods in previous years and were able to reach out to our neighbours, as we did in the Middle East. One time our daughter attended the local primary school for a couple of months and I had met other mothers in the playground. I looked out for Arabic and Kurdish speaking women and so I met Ranya. We talked as our eight year old daughters played and we discovered that her first cousin had worked with us on a carpentry project in Iraq.

Whenever we returned from the Middle East, Ranya and I would reconnect. She helped me with Kurdish and together we studied stories from the Old Testament. Over the years I’ve been able to help her children with school work and her daughter Naz joined some of our church youth group events.

Our conversations have gone far and wide.

“How can I help my children make wise and safe decisions?” she once asked. It was natural to share how living in gratitude to Jesus and in a way honouring to Him, is the very best way to live.

“But we don’t have anyone like Jesus,” was her reply.

Recently, her Quranic verses have come down from the walls and she now has a Kurdish New Testament.

Leila is another of my Kurdish friends who lives in our neighbourhood and is the niece of Mahmoud, our neighbour in Iraq. We first met Leila very briefly in Iraq years ago. In 2010, we discovered she’d married, moved to the U.K. and moved into our neighbourhood. I love to drop by Leila’s home. She makes the very best ‘dolma’ using the vine leaves from our backyard and her grandmother’s recipe. They taste just like the ones we’d enjoy at Mahmoud’s house back in Iraq.

Leila wants to practise her English and we talk of many things, maybe more freely than she can with people from her own community and family. As we have followed the recent



news in the Middle East she has told me what she hasn’t shared with her husband, that she no longer follows the faith of her fathers.

When Mahmoud died of a heart attack, Leila phoned me immediately and I phoned my husband at his office in Iraq. He was able to visit the grieving family, on that first, all so important, day of mourning.

There are boundaries and times, known only to our Heavenly Father.

One Sunday morning an Arabic-speaking mother, wearing a hijab, arrived at our church with her three little children. A vision the night before sent Mimi, who has many needs and scars, to seek out a church. Since then she has been coming each week to the Tuesday drop-in where one member of the church stays with her children,

releasing her to study the Bible. The group has grown as other Arabic speaking women seek fellowship. The leaders of the drop-in may not know Arabic but they are serving and praying for these women. Recently another church started a daytime English class and Mimi is there each week learning English and experiencing their love and prayers. She is now following Jesus and sharing Him with others.

One member of our church connected with a Kurdish family through a bike clinic for neighbourhood children, which he ran from his home. He built a friendship with the family at a time when the father was seriously unwell and unable to work.

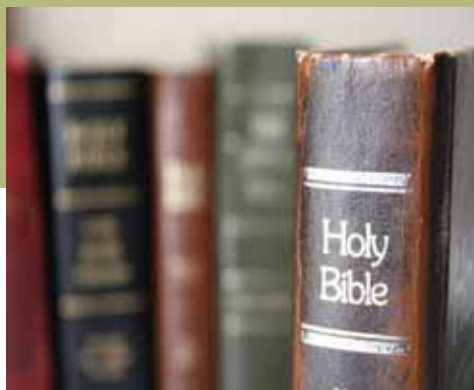
With so many Middle Eastern people moving to the West, may we grasp the

opportunities God is providing to befriend and help them! You don’t need to be a specialist to be part of what God is doing. In God’s sovereignty, we are where we are to share Jesus.

The following are some resources I’ve found helpful:

- **Friendship First** (a book DVD course produced by Steve Bell and Tim Green) www.friendshipfirst.org
- **Woman to Woman – Sharing Jesus with a Muslim Friend** by Joy Loewen
- **Dear Abdullah – Eight questions Muslim people ask about Christianity** by Robert Scott
- **Engaging with Muslims – Understanding their world; Sharing Good News** by John Klassen

Sharing more than candies and books



Would you accept candy from a stranger? Most of us were taught not to. Yet candy is exactly what they offer at the Lighthouse – a Christian book-and-gift store.

“Whenever anyone enters, we offer them a candy and then try and help them with whatever they are looking for,” explains Greg*, a teacher who is a half a world away from home.

Greg’s long had a heart to engage in life and ministry in the Middle East. Working for a pharmaceutical company back home wasn’t his chosen route; the addition of a teaching diploma and three years’ teaching – interspersed with several short-sharp look-see visits to Lebanon – and Greg was ready for long term service.

Arriving in the Middle East last year, Greg began his Arabic study at a language school, and then switched to a private tutor. He gets to practise his language skills on the streets, in a Saturday kids’ programme, and at the bookstore.

Back to the candy (which people will-ingly accept) – it’s just a taster. The Lighthouse “keepers” also offer a free Bible, and Greg finds this a great discussion starter.

“I’m very keen to share the Gospel,” he says. “When it’s a bit slow in the store, I sit outside, talk with the neighbours, or visit neighbouring stores and engage with the people there. I’ve built up a few solid friendships this way that have led to several very good conversations. I begin my day in the store praying about what the day will bring and God inevitably surprises me. Just today I spoke with a homeless woman who was outside the store. I went out and asked how I could help her, and sat and chatted with her. She was obviously extremely intelligent. Equally obviously, she had significant mental health issues. One of my colleagues from the store came out with some food and drink for her.

“Other opportunities have arisen with people who have come in ‘by accident’ and I’ve been able to share the gospel with them. Several have come and while I have seen no commitment to Christ, they are on a journey. And they come back! So I

PLEASE PRAY

- That Greg will know how to turn an ordinary conversation into something spiritual
- That God will give him wisdom – especially when those in need ask for his help
- That the Holy Spirit will convince the people who visit the Lighthouse of the truth about Jesus and grant them the gift of eternal life

The Lighthouse is always looking for more volunteers. For more information contact your MECO office.

continue to talk with them on matters of life and faith.”

Greg has also spoken with Syrians who have fled the war, leaving everything behind. “One of my regulars was studying law but had to quit, and he is now in Lebanon with the rest of his family still in Syria. Anyone from Syria, Iraq or Iran has a bad story. Sadly these stories are all too common.”

Greg and his co-workers also pray with people. “My colleagues are very good at speaking to people who come in to buy a gift for someone in the nearby hospital. I know several good friendships and significant conversations have taken place, with an offer to pray for the person in the hospital.”

He adds that there are a number of regulars at the store. “They drop in routinely and have heard the Gospel so many times, but still have not trusted in Christ. I long for God to do a work in them.”

Partnering leads to new centre for children

In 2012, two colleagues stepped out of their comfort zone in an established ministry. Three years later, they share the journey they have been on.

We are grateful that God forced us to do something new.

We had been used to being part of a wider ministry. Suddenly we had a blank canvas in front of us, and an acute awareness of our lack of artistic ability. So we sought to apply the same principles that had led us to our previous ministry:

- We want to serve where the need is greatest and effectively put to use the gifting, training and experience that God has given us

- We want to partner with local churches and share a vision with them

- We want to seek the godly wisdom of others who have gone before us or who currently support us

In addition to these, we had always felt that being part of a team was a priority. Now we were encouraged to build a team.

Having identified an area where churches welcomed our partnership we began building relationships of trust. Early on there was a need for constant readjustment of expectations on both sides. Some in the churches like the idea of a Westerner coming with money, a big project and a ready-made ministry. We had to resist the temptation to want to live up to



these expectations. While projects can be challenging, they usually have a beginning and an end and a clearly defined idea of success. Projects may help the ministry of the Church but the basic building blocks of the Church are the people and their relationships with Christ and each other. We knew the ‘success’ of any project God was leading us towards was bound up with our relationships.

In one sense, it was exciting to see God make things happen so fast. The churches embraced us remarkably quickly and put their trust in us from an early stage. We approached the churches with the vision of establishing a school. They

were enthusiastic about setting up an orphanage, something we had a heart to do. However, once we moved to the area, we realised that the greatest need was for education for refugee children.

Founding a local charity formed by the churches went through the government procedures in record time. Funding for every need has come in ahead of time making me wonder if we are dragging our heels.

The charity started a small education centre for nine refugee children last year and this year gave a basic education to 27 children. We have now rented new rooms enabling us to take more than 40 children in the next academic year.

We have deliberately divided our time in half, making sure we give the same time to the education centre for refugees as we give to partnering and serving the local churches. We know if we gave our full time and energy to the centre, it could expand much more rapidly and we could help many more children. However the centre would be ‘our’ project and we would be *paying lip-service only* to our partnership with the churches.

We are very aware that some of this justifies our cautious approach and allows us to go at a pace we feel comfortable with. We do, however, hope that in God’s grace, there will come a time when the time invested in relationships and partnership will mean that although the education ministry may be smaller it will be more mature and will more genuinely belong to the local Church.

A Wind in the House of Islam

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY



According to David Garrison, it's often not what Christians do when sharing Jesus with Muslims but what they stop doing that leads to kingdom breakthroughs. In the second of our highlights from David's book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, he writes about the five barriers that can prevent people turning to Christ.

1 Contentious Christians

With thousands of denominations today, Christianity is irreparably fragmented, but that doesn't mean it has to be contentious. As an irenic Christian once said, "We don't have to see eye-to-eye to walk side-by-side..." From the 7th century, Muslim armies took advantage of internal divisions within Christian-

ity to advance the cause of Islam. When the Arab General Amr ibn al-'As led a band of 4,000 warriors into Egypt in 640, he faced overwhelming armies and massive fortresses that should have been more than adequate to defeat his desert fighters. Instead, he discovered a Christian nation that was hopelessly divided over matters of doctrine elevated to irresolvable levels.

Long oppressed by their Byzantine co-religionists, many non-Chalcedonian Coptic Christians of Egypt preferred the promise of benevolent Muslim rule to the reality of Byzantine discrimination.

2 Fear and Hatred
The still raw wounds of 9/11, coupled with terrorist bombings in Boston, London, Spain and elsewhere, seem to demand a response in kind. From a rational point of view, how could one not fear the advance of Islam in the West? But Muslims are neither a religion nor an ideology; they are individuals in need of a Savior, individuals for whom Christ died.

Jesus' instructions to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, to pray for those who despise you, and forgive those who have offended you remain non-negotiables for Christ's faithful disciples today. Following Christ is never easy, and may land one on the cross for the sake of his enemies, but there is an assured triumph and resurrection that follows.

3 Imitating Islam
Islam was born in a hostile environment, surrounded by enemies who threatened its very existence. Christianity began with a different impulse.

Christians set out on an adventure of obedience to a living Christ who promised to be with them always, even to the end of the age. When we find ourselves threatened we are tempted to follow the path that Muhammad charted: legalistic

answers for every aspect of life and violent reactions to those we perceive to be our enemies. When we succumb to those tendencies, we may become more like the Muslims we fear than like the Christ who promised us his power and presence.

It is no coincidence that the growing tide of Muslim movements to Christ has come, not at a time of Western hegemony in the Muslim world, but at a time of retreat from colonial and military dominance in the world. In a time when we have little in the way of incentives to offer Muslims, apart from the eternal blessing of salvation in Christ, Muslims are choosing to come – not to us or "our side" – but to our Lord.

4 Ignored Injustice
When Christians disregard injustice and dismiss those who are the victims of injustice, we open the door to Islam. This should be one of the greatest lessons taken from the history of Muslim-Christian interaction. Injustices perpetrated or simply tolerated by Christians persist today, and Muslims are not slow to identify these while offering Islam as the solution.

When Christians are proactive and move to combat social injustice, both at home and abroad, we inoculate our

communities against Islamic incursions. And more importantly, we honour the cause of Christ. In the same way, many of the Muslim movements to Christ we are witnessing today have occurred because of unaddressed injustices that have been ignored within the House of Islam, prompting Muslims to find refuge and justice in the person of Christ.

5 Ignorance and Apathy
Most Christians admit to knowing little about Islam or the ways God is at work in their world to reach Muslims. Still others simply don't care.

There is so much to learn from the ways God is at work in the Muslim world; so much, in fact, that we have only begun to introduce the subject. Discover for yourself what God is doing and how he is doing it. Then ask yourself: How can I be a part of what God is doing? What is my role? How can I contribute?

The truth is God has not ignored nor ever ceased to care about Muslims. His Spirit has been blowing steadily through the House of Islam, and the wind is building. It is time for us to shake off our slumber, ignorance and apathy, and catch up with him.

In their own words

Mike Parker reflects on the Bible readings given at a recent Middle East consultation on identity and belonging. As people turn to Christ from non-Christian backgrounds, where do they find their place? They have moved away from their families, faith and culture, and finding a new community is a huge challenge.

Each day of this consultation was framed by Bible readings given by a local minister whose church is involved in ministry to displaced people. He addressed motivation, from 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, and then, from Romans 14: 1-12, how Middle Eastern churches might look in the future.

He said ministering in diversity means being in union with Christ and one another. As the gospel brings us freedom, it challenges us to use that freedom within the bounds set by God's love. He said Paul literally says, "Free I am, and I belong to no-one..." Only the Lord controls him, and he chooses to win everyone he can.

With this intention clear, the minister said Paul identifies with communities around him, starting with *the Jews*. Although he is a Jew he sees his own background in a new light. He's released from confidence in law for salvation, and uses his freedom to engage with his root community and others.

He added when Paul prays, he's not under cultural obligation or fear of criticism. His background makes him a strong character: a Jew, a Pharisee, a lawyer, blameless in the eyes of religious law. How does he see all this? In Philippians 3, he says he's found something much more precious in Christ. The minister paused for effect, and everyone joined in: it's all garbage, compared to knowing Christ.

In the bitter Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, the minister noted that the Syrians were the strong, occupying Lebanon for long periods. Now, as their country collapses, Lebanon is stronger and churches in Lebanon are using their strength to reach out and rescue displaced and disillusioned Syrians, he said.

The speaker's application was clear: freedom in Christ is the key to responding to different groups. We're called to reach out, get involved, and engage so the Gospel can be understood and received.

So, as more and more people from non-Christian backgrounds come to Christ, what will Church in the Middle East look like? he asked.

What about fasting, washing before prayer, men and women sitting separately, wearing veils?

Through the Romans passage, the minister explained how Paul shapes believers' behaviour toward one another. Those from Gentile backgrounds trust God accepts them without religious conditions. The gospel transcends religious ways, and they take their support from Jesus who said, "The Son of Man is Lord of Sabbath" - in other words, they make a new start, and don't take the old and attach the new to it.

However, the believers from a Jewish background see Christianity as a Jewish movement, and for them Sabbath and food laws are really important. How can the two groups live together?

Four priorities emerged as the minister showed how Paul dealt with these tensions:

1. The strong are not to despise the weak.

The weak believe they're faithful to God's word. Criticising their eating habits or cancelling Sabbath is like shaking their foundations and leads to an identity crisis. Their Identity Card is in Christ. The strong have to learn to give them space to be different. So...

2. Don't judge, because God has accepted them (v3).

They are Christ's servants (v4), and their freedom gives them opportunity to thank God. We should welcome that (v6).

3. Both groups need to unite around the goal (v6).

Our aim is to glorify God together in his new community of people from all backgrounds.

4. Paul reminds both groups that Jesus is Lord of all (v9).

Together we live the present in the light of the future (v10), when we'll all give account for ourselves.

According to the minister, churches in the future will be communities where we accept one another and give each other space; where we won't spend time issuing judgements; where we'll not put each other under pressure to reach certain convictions. In that way, he said, we can face hard questions together, like: "If I get baptised, I will be divorced; what shall I do?" "Who shall I marry?" "Where will I be buried?"

Jesus, he said, calls us to grow together, and is able to lead us all into maturity in Christ so we can support one another to make godly decisions. Together we submit to the Lord, faithful to God.

OPPORTUNITIES

If you sense God calling you to the Middle East, you can be sure there is work for you to do. Opportunities to serve in the region usually require professional qualifications and the ability to speak or willingness to learn Arabic or Kurdish.

This page gives sample of how people can serve churches and ministries in the Middle East. Some are specific, some are indicative as situations change frequently. Please note that in most cases these are volunteer positions and raising support to serve in the Middle East is required



Teachers

Qualifications: Teacher-training completed and at least two years' experience

Minimum Service: A full academic year, September to June

Language: English for secondary levels
Location: Lebanon and Egypt

Elementary Teachers

Two small schools require an English and a math teacher

Location: Lebanon

Qualification: Teachers' College Certificate, teaching experience

Language: English, Arabic for math instruction

Minimum Service: September to June

Language Learning

Investing two or three years learning Arabic or Kurdish builds a vital platform for a lifetime of ministry in the region. You can study in universities or in recognized language schools. While studying, you will have opportunity to make friends with fellow-students, teachers and language helpers.

Africa Hope Learning Centre in Cairo

The centre is looking for a new principal, who will provide leadership, supervision and administrative oversight to promote the educational development of every student.

Physiotherapists, Speech Language and Occupational Therapists

Qualifications: Experience preferred

Minimum Service: 1 year

Language: English and willingness to learn Arabic

Location: Various countries

Orphanage Youth Worker

Providing leadership and imparting life skills and assistance to street children and orphans

Qualifications: Teacher or youth worker qualification plus TEFL, TESL or CELTA

Language: English, with a commitment to learn Arabic

Minimum service: One academic year

Church worker/General Assistant

Helping with practical matters relating to various church ministries, as well as teaching Syrian refugee children, aged four to 14, English and mathematics

Qualifications: Teaching and administration experience

Language: Some knowledge of Arabic

Minimum Service: Short or long term

Research manager Sat-7 international

Location: cyprus

Minimum service: 3 years

For more details:

www.Sat7.Org/en/get_involved/positions

Human resources director Sat-7 international

Location: cyprus

Minimum service: 3 years

For more details:

www.Sat7.Org/en/get_involved/positions

Rehabilitation Worker

Qualifications: Appropriate degree/diploma

Minimum service: 2 years

Language: English and willingness to learn Sorani Kurdish

Location: Iraqi Kurdistan



For more information about these opportunities call your MECO office or visit: www.mecoglobal.org