

# meco | international

MAGAZINE ISSUE 2, 2016



## JOINING HANDS

**Includes:** Announcement ■ The story behind the story ■ History repeats itself

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

### A long awaited announcement about the future of MECO International was made on March 16th:

SIM and MECO International are joining hands in a determined effort to drive the gospel forward as we work with churches and other agencies in the Middle East. The region offers one of the biggest gospel opportunities of our generation and this new initiative will seek to put more workers into Middle East countries. Both SIM and MECO leadership teams believe that together they are far better able to take the good news of Jesus to where he is least known than either could have done individually.

#### Mike Parker, MECO International Director, said:

"This is a historic moment for both our groups. We're reaffirming our shared commitment to proclaim Christ and make disciples where he is least known, to live out the love of Christ, and to partner with churches to strengthen Christian witness across the Middle East."

#### Joshua Bogunjoko, SIM International Director, said:

"In the midst of all the turmoil of the Middle East, the Lord is doing remarkable things. We pray the Lord will use our joining to further his Kingdom and draw many into the light of Christ."

We intend to create a new ministry structure, based in the Middle East, assisting SIM to make a formal entry into the Middle East, while MECO's long-held desire to see more workers mobilised for service in the region will be realized.

📧 **If you would like to receive MECO's monthly prayer guide please email: [info@aboutmec.org](mailto:info@aboutmec.org)**

COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS? EMAIL: [INFO@ABOUTMECO.ORG](mailto: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](http://www.mecoglobal.org)

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## The view from here

Forty years ago, three Middle East missions came together to form Middle East Christian Outreach.



*Forty years on, we're celebrating that anniversary by joining hands again, as MECO moves forward with SIM (Serving in Mission).*

We've made an international commitment, and are now working out what it means in the countries we come from and the region. In the coming months we'll continue to build relationships and agree on frameworks to receive and support people called to come. We'll work on practical arrangements, especially in the UK & Ireland, Australia, the US and South Africa. Meanwhile, MECO Canada will work independently and MECO New Zealand is handing over to another agency.

*The present regional turmoil has caused many people in the Middle East to question their inherited faith. It brings massive opportunities to reach out to them, and is a very significant moment to encourage regional Christians in their witness. Together, SIM and MECO will create a new Middle East entity to share in prayer, mobilisation and support and bring new people into the region.*

When I took on the role of international director in 2013, we knew it was time for change. It was time to recognise our struggles to recruit, our declining numbers, and ageing profile. It was time for us to embrace the realities of 21st Century mission, and find ways to engage with people coming from everywhere to everywhere. It was time to respond to the growing confidence and boldness Middle East churches and leaders are showing under pressure.

I'm delighted we can now share this story with you. We invite you to join in this journey as you hear more from us, pray and support people working in the region. As you read our perspectives in these pages, continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in and from the Middle East.

### Changes

This will be the last edition of our magazine in this format. We're working on a new format for the next edition as we continue to tell the stories of God's work in the Middle East.

It's also the last magazine our present editorial team will produce. It comes with our warmest thanks to graphic designer Eugene Pawczuk, who has a superb eye for colour and layout and has made such a good impression; to Chris Grantham in New Zealand, with his eagerness to grab your attention and sharp eye for detail; and Linda Haist in Canada, with her patient and gentle insistence that we tell the stories as well as we can. Chris is retiring after eight years with us, and Linda moves on with MECO Canada after twelve years.

**Thanks be to God for all three of them!**

**Mike Parker**

International Director





# COMING TOGETHER

## THE BEHIND THE SCENES STORY

Last year, a Joint Working Group was commissioned by Mike Parker and Joshua Bogunjoko, to explore how MECO and SIM might come together to see the advance of the gospel in the Middle East.

### MECO was represented by:

- Anthony Harris, Chair of the Board of MECO International and MECO UK
- Stuart Plowman, Director of Development
- Neil Lawrence, Finance Manager

By late September the group was in the midst of carrying out due diligence that would lead them to make their recommendation to the respective international boards. The questions they sought answers to included:

- Are SIM ministries, particularly those in the Middle East, ones with which MECO will be happy to be associated?
- Are MECO ministries ones that SIM will be happy to be associated with?
- What are each organisation's direction and goals?

Stuart Plowman, who led the MECO delegation, reflects on the discussions that were held:

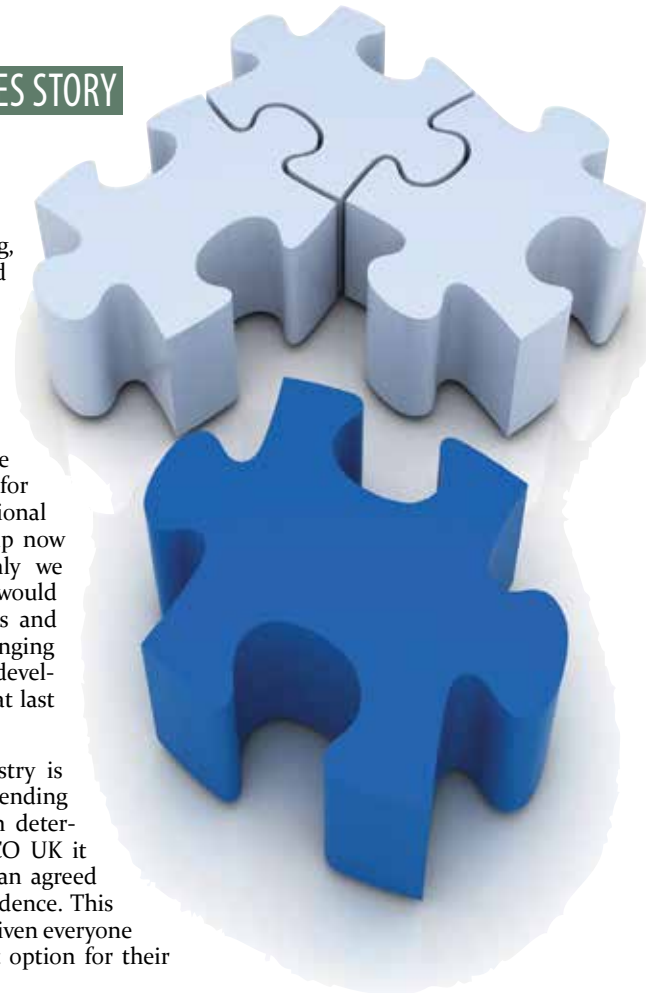
When I was asked to lead MECO's side in the working group discussions, I thought we would face a lot of administrative and organisational issues relating to our national offices. I was not mistaken – but that was quickly overtaken when as a group we agreed to start in the Middle East and work back to the national situations. What a relief that was. Rather than focusing on administrative issues, we could concentrate on the gospel; the expansion of ministry, not just

in the places MECO is working, but into new countries and locations. This expansion was possible because the capacity issues we faced would, in the longer term, be overcome, as new and expanded teams of people recruited by both groups would continue the work MECO has been doing for so many years. The organisational aspects of a future partnership now had a gospel focus. Suddenly we were making decisions that would enhance our current activities and produce new and challenging opportunities for ministry development. It felt as if we could at last move forward.

Concentrating first on ministry is an unusual approach. It gave sending countries greater flexibility in determining their future. For MECO UK it is to be a merger, for others an agreed partnership and even independence. This flexibility of approach has given everyone the ability to choose the best option for their situation.

As we move into the future, we trust our teams in the region will grow and there will be greater opportunities for ministry. Teams will come under SIM leadership and they have already appointed a new Regional Director. In due course, many of our colleagues will become members of SIM, while others will be seconded to SIM/MECO Middle East. As for me, I will be retiring in a few months time.

Without question, the future looks very positive. Seeing a structure created to enable ministry to grow and develop is our priority. I pray that with the Lord's help and blessing we will see much fruit for the Kingdom.



“As the previous International Director of SIM I am delighted to learn of the joining of hands in ministry of MECO and SIM. I see this as a unique partnership. MECO will bring its wealth of ministry experience in the Middle East to SIM. SIM, in turn, will bring a wider global reach to MECO in order to draw in more resources of prayer, personnel and practical support to this strategic part of the world. May the Lord prosper this bold initiative for the sake of the Gospel in the Middle East.”

**Malcolm McGregor,**  
SIM International Director 2003 - 2013

“I warmly commend the new partnership between MECO and SIM. MECO's long-established service to the church in the Middle East is highly valued by Arab church leaders, who refer to MECO's work as avant-garde, through publishing, gospel film-making, Christian education, always in partnership with local churches. But times change and I am sure the blend of MECO's experience and SIM's wider expertise will prove fruitful in helping the church respond to the challenge of the hour.”

**Rev John Carrick,**  
MECO International Director 2012 - 2013

### Pray for us

### As we move into the future we would welcome your prayer support!

#### Give thanks with us:

- That our overall direction is now clear, and our news is being received well by partners in the Middle East
- That new people are already expressing interest in coming to the region as a result
- For faithful colleagues in sending offices as they continue our work while the transition takes place
- For our colleagues in the Middle

East as they continue their work and witness alongside national Christians

#### Pray with us:

- As we create a new joint Middle East team to serve our colleagues, we will be looking for people to work on personnel, finance and communication
- As we create a new joint Middle East Council with local Christian

leaders who will advise us as we develop our work together

- For people considering coming to learn language and explore work possibilities in the region
- For our colleagues in Middle East countries preparing to welcome and receive new people
- For colleagues in our national offices adapting to our new shape and its implications for them

# SIM journey leads to MECO

By Joshua Bogunjoko

**In Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches**, Peter Greer and Chris Horst have this to say: "A dangerous canoe trip taught us to never underestimate currents and winds... You ignore them at your peril." Mission true organizations "proactively protect their mission", and distinguish between guarding the mission and guarding the means. Their conclusion? "Only when we understand why our organizations exist – who we are – can we begin to safeguard ourselves from mission drift. And then we can begin to differentiate between change and drift."

In 2014 SIM embarked on a journey to clarify our reason for existence (our Purpose), and regain a sense of what we are called to do (our Mission). We looked at Scripture, reviewed why our founders went out, and watched the changes in the world around us. We reshaped our founding commitment as follows:

**Convinced that no one** should live and die without hearing God's good news, we believe that He has called us to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in communities where He is least known.

**Therefore, compelled by God's great love and empowered by the Holy Spirit...**

- We cross barriers to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ, expressing His love and compassion among those who live and die without Him

- We make disciples who will trust and obey Jesus, and become part of Christ-centred churches

- We work together with churches to fulfil God's mission across cultures locally and globally

- We facilitate the participation in cross-cultural ministry of those whom God is calling

**Our clarified purpose** soon took us into new priorities and territories. "That first priority, to cross barriers with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to communities where he is least known, is our "navigating north star". It turned out to be at the heart of an unexpected but God-timed, God-honouring, gospel-focused relationship between SIM and MECO, a new direction for both.

**SIM's international board** and leadership team recognize God is calling us to step out into the waters of a challenging context. This strategic partner-



ship takes us into a renewed commitment to Middle East communities where Christ is least known, to work with churches and other organizations. This was a most unexpected opportunity, a natural outcome of a clear purpose and understanding of the reason for our existence. It was just what SIM needed, a gospel-focused collaborative relationship centred in our purpose, enabling us to regain our founding mission and stay true to our calling.

*Joshua Bogunjoko is the International Director of SIM – the first African to lead the organization. A doctor and surgeon, he served as SIM's Deputy International Director for West Africa and Europe from 2006 to 2013. He previously directed Galmi Hospital in Niger, West Africa. He was a leader in the Nigerian Fellowship of Evangelical Students and national president of the evangelical movement of young Christian graduates doing national service in Nigeria.*

# Agreement opens way for SIM's re-entry to Middle East

By Keith Walker

**G**od's tapestry skills are amazing. He weaves in threads of different colours to create story lines which, as they emerge, cause us to catch our breath with surprise.

**It was like** that as we in SIM began to piece together the story of our engagement in the Middle East. In 1945 SIM workers first established a ministry base in Aden, now part of Yemen. Warren & Dorothy Modricker worked with both Somali people and Arabs. They were later joined by Jack and Peggy Maxson and Bud and Dorothy Acord, who became heavily involved in Arabic language broadcasting. The SIM radio station, based in Liberia, began Arabic programming in 1956 using programmes produced by one of Jack Maxson's Arab Christian friends. Khalil Ma'ruf produced the Arabic Talking Bible in his home, an audio version of the New Testament. By 1958 programming was being directed towards Sudan, North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula.

**In 1965** terrorist activity in Aden grew to the point that ministry could not continue. SIM withdrew its workers from Aden. Withdrawal from

Aden did not mean leaving the Middle East. The Acords transferred to Beirut. There Bud took over leadership of SIM's Arabic language programme production unit. It had been established in 1963 and continued until 1970 when once again civil war spelt another evacuation for the Acord family and the end of SIM's engagement in the Middle East.

**Meantime, workers** with the International Christian Fellowship (ICF) (which became part of SIM through a merger in 1989) had entered Iran in 1969. Keith Jones had settled in Tehran and began to help a Bible school there. ICF had workers in Tehran, Kermanshah and other locations, until all workers were forced out as a result of the 1979 revolution which toppled the Shah.

**As we reviewed** this history as part of our conversation with MECO International, we realised with surprise that the Lord had woven the ICF strand with SIM's to tell a story of unbroken engagement in the Middle East from 1945 to 1979.

**Early in 2014**, the Lord began to thread another strand into this story. Mike Parker and I had known each other in the context of student ministry in

the 1990s. We met for coffee in London as old friends both involved in mission leadership. Mike wanted to talk about what MECO could do to continue serving churches in the Middle East and to reach the majority community for Christ. For me, the question was whether SIM could or should be considering the Middle East as a sphere of ministry. A conversation about reaching those who live and die without hearing of Christ soon became leadership level talks as we introduced Mike to Dr. Joshua Bogunjoko, SIM's International Director.

**With the full approval** of the international leadership of our two organizations, a joint working group was established to consider whether and how we might collaborate for the sake of the gospel in the Middle East. Seeing that the Middle East represents a key strategic opportunity for gospel work, reports to the SIM International Board demonstrated that this is indeed the right time for us to join hands with MECO and to re-enter ministry in the Middle East after a gap of 37 years. We do so with joy, trusting that the Lord will continue to weave His story.

*Keith Walker is the International Strategic Development Director for SIM.*

# HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

## Merger is not a new experience for MECO.

The mission came into existence in 1976 when three agencies amalgamated:

- The Lebanon Evangelical Mission (LEM), founded in 1860 by Elizabeth Bowen Thompson
- The Middle East General Mission (MEGM), founded in 1897 by seven men from Belfast who were challenged by Annie Van Sommer
- The Arabic Literature Mission (ALM), founded in 1902 by Annie Van Sommer

**Sir Norman Anderson**, Chairman of MEGM's Board, oversaw the merger. At the time, each agency had overseas branches in Australia (founded 1924), New Zealand (1924), South Africa (1928), Canada (1938) and the United States (1947). Each was re-established under the new name Middle East Christian Outreach.

The vision of the new organization was to see churches and mission agencies working together to take the gospel from key Christian centres in the Middle East to those areas of the Arab world where there were no churches. The image of a stone creating a rippling effect when thrown into a pond was how they imagined the spread of the gospel.

**David Bentley-Taylor**, the first General Secretary of MECO, said, "In all the changes, we need help from God for our desire is to continue obediently to serve Him and to arrange our work in the most efficient and economical way."

Civil wars, internationalization of the missionary force, partnership with the growing Arab churches and shifting patterns of financial support presented new challenges and required new ways of working. But work continued in Christian schools, churches, medical and rehabilitation centres, orphanages, children's homes, Bible Colleges and in the publishing and distribution of Christian literature in Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages. The work also expanded to include production of evangelistic videos in Arabic.

As MECO enters a new era of service in a volatile area of the world, changes and challenges will be inevitable but the vision to see the gospel proclaimed in the Middle East will remain the same.

*"With thanks to Phil Bourne, former MECO Research Officer, and David & Margaret Judson, former International Services Director."*

### Leading the way

The following individuals had various roles in MECO leadership through the years:



David Bentley Taylor	1976-1977
Douglas Anderson	1977-1991
Paul Shepherd	1977-1990
Pat Thurman	1991-1994
Graham Rowe	1987-1994
David Judson	1992-2006
Violet McCombe	1992-2001
Stuart Plowman	2006-2012
John Carrick	2012-2013
Mike Parker	2013



## The future in sight

Beirut, Lebanon

Lebanon was the first MECO field, which grew out of the work Elizabeth Bowen Thompson and friends began in the 1860. While much has changed in 156 years, some challenges remain the same.

**Two of our colleagues work in theological education, with wider ministries enabling them to set current trends in the Middle East in wider contexts. Here's their view of Lebanon in 2016:**

"All around the world people are in movement. In few regions is this more evident than the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – and in particular Lebanon. Approximately a quarter of the people currently living here are refugees, and this does not include hundreds of thousands of migrant workers. Many of these are in transition, with local embassies and UN offices inundated with applications for emigration. These massive movements profoundly

impact local churches, many of which are reaching out to serve these migratory communities. As you consider the MENA region please pray for the leaders of churches seeking to serve in this complex time and place."

Elie Haddad, President of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, reflects on the shape of partnership in the twenty-first century:

*"The role of Missionaries to the Middle East has changed. There was a time when we needed foreigners to come and to do the work for us. No longer! I think the role of foreigners is more to come alongside us, help equip and empower and enable locals to do the work."*

### THANK GOD THAT:

- In spite of violence, instability, and tragedy, the Lord is drawing people to himself in the Middle East and North Africa
- Local trainers have opportunities to form quality Christian leaders and provide a clear Christian voice in the region

### PLEASE PRAY:

- For peace and stability in the region
- For wisdom for regional Christians who are developing leaders for the growing communities of Syrian refugee believers and preparing them for their return to Syria





# In their own words

One of the larger churches in the Middle East brought together its leadership team and global partners to celebrate twenty-five years of outreach activity. Mike Parker reflects on that gathering

**N**orth American evangelical leader Henry Blackaby said, “Watch to see where God is working and join Him in His work.” God is at work in the Middle East, and it’s our privilege to be part of the picture.

Three days of rejoicing took us through 25 years of highlights and crises, progress and setbacks. We understood the power of being “together” (Acts 1:14 & 2) and that we have a great God, who brings about His miracle as people from every background come together around Christ. We also knew that as we witness together, the world will believe the Father has sent His Son to save it.

**As Jesus came** into the Roman world, so He comes into ours - a world where politics, economics and demography affect spiritual realities. Egypt has experienced five long years of economic loss and the effects of emigration, yet the Kingdom of God is growing.

People are beginning to think: “What do we believe, and what

does it mean?” It is estimated that up to 12% of the Egyptian population now declare themselves atheists. Others are hearing about Christ and responding to Him as never before. Authorities are targeting extremists from all backgrounds, including new Christians.

**One speaker** compared the situation to Judges 14. Out of the lion’s death came sweetness and life as the beehive gave Samson honey. Another pointed to Elijah’s friends in 2 Kings 6:1-2, who realised they needed more space. Bigger changes are coming, and together we will see Christ build His Kingdom.

“Churches cancelled their prayer meetings... to pray together”

**A third speaker took us to Ezekiel 22:23-31**, another time of social, moral, political and spiritual corruption. God calls His people to ‘stand in the gap’, and reports from across the region led us into intercession. We were told of churches coming together in many cities,

cancelling their individual prayer meetings to pray and reach out together.

**While the conference rejoiced in unity**, we understood it’s time for global churches to play their part in what’s happening in the Middle East. While increasing numbers of people are turning to follow Christ, they face many challenges and need to know they are not alone. Next year’s conference will be followed by days of prayer as people from all over the world come together to ask for significant change to come.

I’ve been attending this gathering for ten years, and have always come away deeply moved. Partners give people, prayer and finance, but I was struck again how much we are the receivers here. Our friends are living boldly, engaging their societies with God’s love and grace, and embracing the current tough times as times of gospel opportunity. One partner summed up the impact on us as she gave thanks: “You have such a message for our churches in the West.”

## Book Review

# Addressing the challenges of religious identity

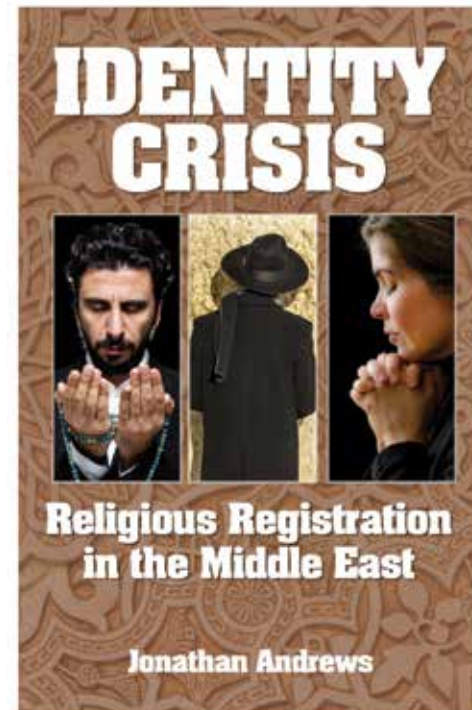
How can the Middle East function for the benefit of all its peoples, Muslims and Christians alike? So many people crave the opportunity to flourish in societies which afford good governance and equal opportunities for all. Can this be achieved? Is there a way through?

In his book *Identity Crisis*, Jonathan Andrews admits that there are no easy answers but he offers credible alternatives to the current situation as he explores the roots of the religious registration system in the Middle East and exposes the profound effects on culture and faith. *Identity Crisis* is a thorough and informative introduction to the realities of life for followers of Christ in all the countries of the region. It tackles the most pressing issue for increasing numbers of people.

**In reviewing this book, Brother Andrew the founder of Open Doors has said:**

“Sometimes the persecutor is a person, sometimes a system. This book not only shows the brutal side of persecution, but how subtle and how fierce are the myriad pressures on Christians from a Muslim Background in the Middle East today. ‘Set my people free’ is what Moses thundered to the Egyptian overlords. Jonathan Andrews delivers the same call, with precision and love. This sane analysis and overview is greatly needed for all God’s people to flourish in the Middle East today.”

Until last year, Jonathan was on staff with Middle East Concern, an agency that is an advocate for persecuted Christians. His book is based on his many years of experience connecting and assisting believers in the Middle East and North Africa.



## Identity Crisis - Religious Registration in the Middle East

By Jonathan Andrews  
Gilead Books, January 2016



## THE LAST WORD - from the Back Page!

*For four decades I've been stuck here, right at the back. As it's the final time you will see me, in my present format, I've asked for the chance to say a few words of my own. The editors have graciously acceded to my request, bless them.*

Visually, I've borne images of people variously hopeful, pondering and posed, globes and sand, archaeological antiquities, hands clasped in prayer. Physically, sometimes I'm actually the first bit seen when strategically parked in the envelope (instead of my flaunting cousin the Cover giving first impressions). That has made me proud, because I've played a part in getting a fair crowd off their comfortable couches in the west into the seething souks of the Middle East. And getting others to turn off their TV and actually pray. I've aimed at both – the go-ers, the pray-ers.

Regularly I've conveyed the importance of language learning. Though I confess I never communicated with you in anything but English, I know that MECO types always did well to spend a couple of years on language. Practising language among neighbours was key in making new friends, tuning into culture. Some, with a good base of language, have stayed more than 30 years.

I'm pleased to say, as one who is actually quite good with words (being literally covered with them), that I've been able to invite teachers to, well, teach. And teach all sorts of things, from core subjects to kids who may otherwise not get to school, to creative Bible teaching which engages with kids in class, in chapel, in assembly. I've also promoted theological education, because I like seeing people well-equipped to read much more than a mere Back Page. I recruited others to train pastors and Bible teachers for their work of communicating the Gospel. One exciting memory is when I was ripped off and posted (minus pages 1-10!) to a friend's friend, and I revolutionised her life. As I speak she is advocating for the human rights of the Christian communities in the Middle East. Cool eh!

Then there are all those who have gone and cared and shared with refugees because they have read me – a vital ministry that has been going on since way, way back.

Over the years, I've been in homes and offices, on planes, trains and automobiles. I've stared at seat-back tray tables, dining tables, office desks, coffee tables – and up at the ceiling. From my vantage point I have seen the insides of suitcases carrying me into the Middle East where I can be hand-delivered to MECO members. I've looked up at the eyes of airport customs officials who've found me there, uncomprehending my content but cursorily glancing over the images portrayed by me and my page-siblings. And I've even spent time in bathrooms as handy reading matter...

You, dear Reader, have kept me going.

*Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamations of thanks to God. Each exclamation is a trigger to prayer. I find myself praying for you with a glad heart. I am so pleased that you have continued on in this with us, believing and proclaiming God's Message, from the day you heard it right up to the present. (Philippians 1:3-5, the Message).*

There. I've had the last word. (As always.)