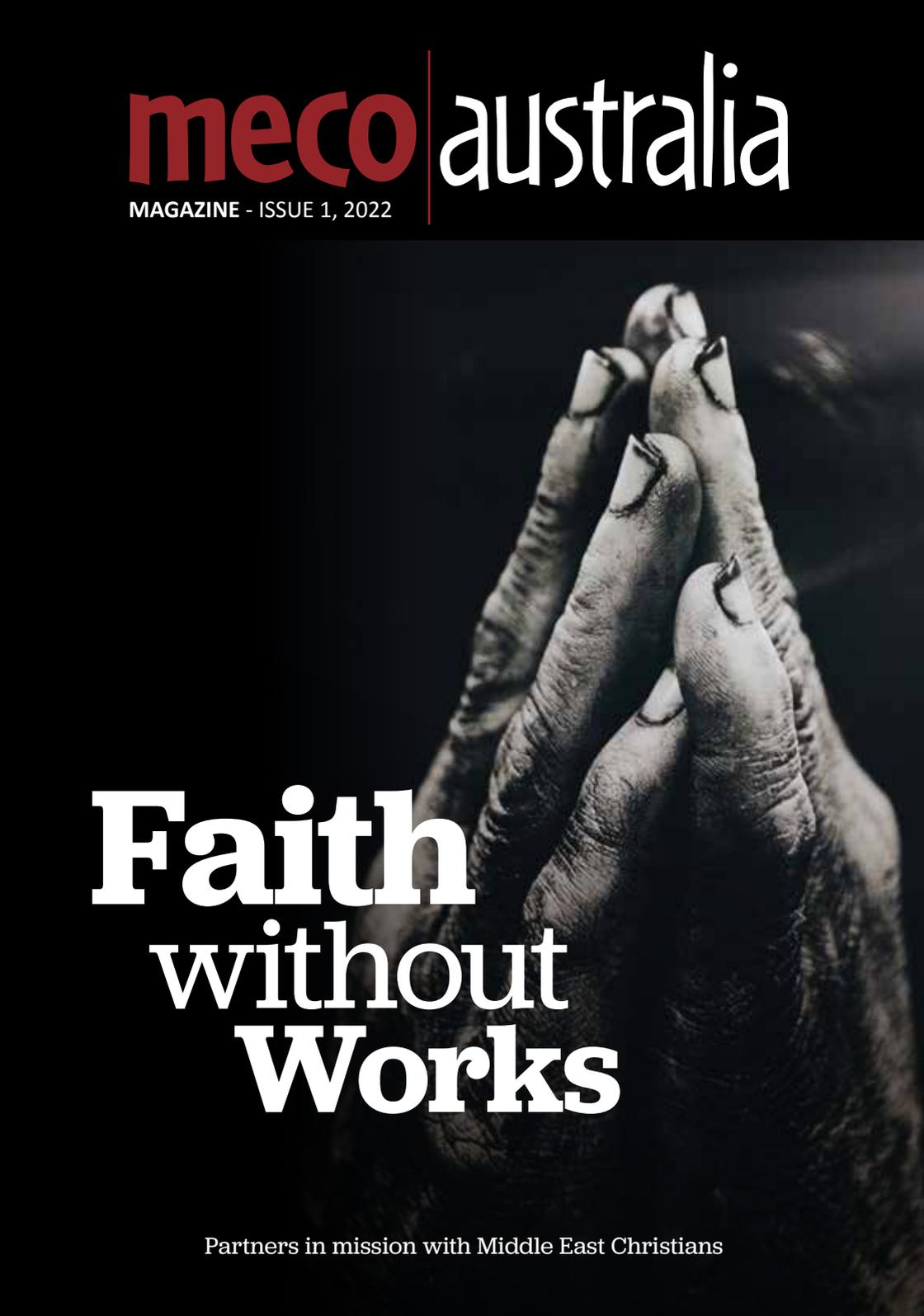


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MAGAZINE - ISSUE 1, 2022



Faith without Works

Partners in mission with Middle East Christians



Rev Richard Coombs

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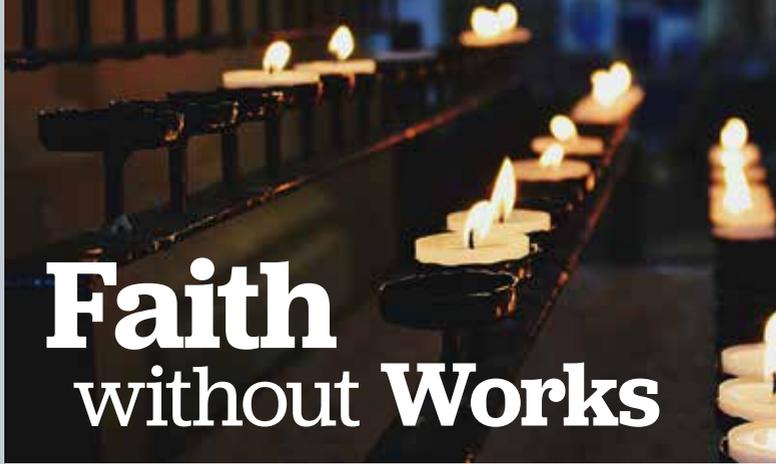
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MECO is an interdenominational, evangelical, Protestant mission agency founded in 1860.

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Faith without Works

For 162 years MECO has been ministering and seeking to bring the good news of Jesus to the people of the Middle East. Much has changed across these years. MECO, itself, was born in 1974 by the merger of three small mission agencies serving in the region.

In 2016 most of the national MECO agencies merged with SIM (Serving in Mission). Unfortunately, this merger did not take place in Australia, and we have continued partnering with national church leaders and organisations as well as SIM Middle East. This has served us well and our support of workers and friends in the Middle East has not been hindered.

One of the leaders in the early church in Jerusalem reminded his readers how important it was for both faith and works to be evident to be in their lives. James wrote - *Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. Just as the body*

is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works. (James 2:22,26.)

Recently, the MECO Australia Board was able to forward funds to a variety of ministries that we have long supported in a variety of countries. These range from training pastors and leaders through to encouraging local pastors and believers, to supporting refugees and the distribution of Bibles to students.

Expressions of great appreciation from these people and organisations have been received. What a privilege it is to be able to encourage our brothers and sisters in these places. Isn't this part of what it means to belong to the body of Christ where we are able to share each other's burdens and bless others in the name of our Lord Jesus.

In this magazine you will hear the stories and responses of our friends ministering on the ground to others.

We do appreciate your continued interest in the ministries that MECO Australia supports and very much value your prayer and financial support.

Article

The Bible in Braille

How beautiful and wonderful is the Word of God. We must thank God for the written Word, so easily available for you and I to read and study every day through various means, printed and digital. We become so accustomed that we often forget to thank God for this great blessing.



For many years, the great challenge facing the Bible Society of Egypt has been how to provide the Word of God to the blind and visually impaired, due to the high cost of printing in Braille, and pricey audio devices. We were so extremely grateful when

a friend of the Bible Society gifted us with a specialised Braille printer. In 2021, our team was able to review and revise the Biblical text in Braille and start printing the complete Bible. It takes 16 large volumes to contain the Old Testament, and 5 volumes for the New Testament.

Magdy, one of the volunteers reviewing and packaging the Braille Scriptures, reminds us that *“Making the Bible available in Braille actually serves the whole family, as the visually impaired person is often the only literate person in the family and able to read the Bible to their illiterate household.”*

The cost is still a big challenge as a single Bible costs more than 3,500 Egyptian pounds (\$225). We sell the Bibles for less than 100 pounds (\$6).

During 2021, we imported 12,000 MegaVoice units. This audio device is straightforward

and easy to use, with clear sound quality, and specially designed for the visually impaired and for those who cannot read.

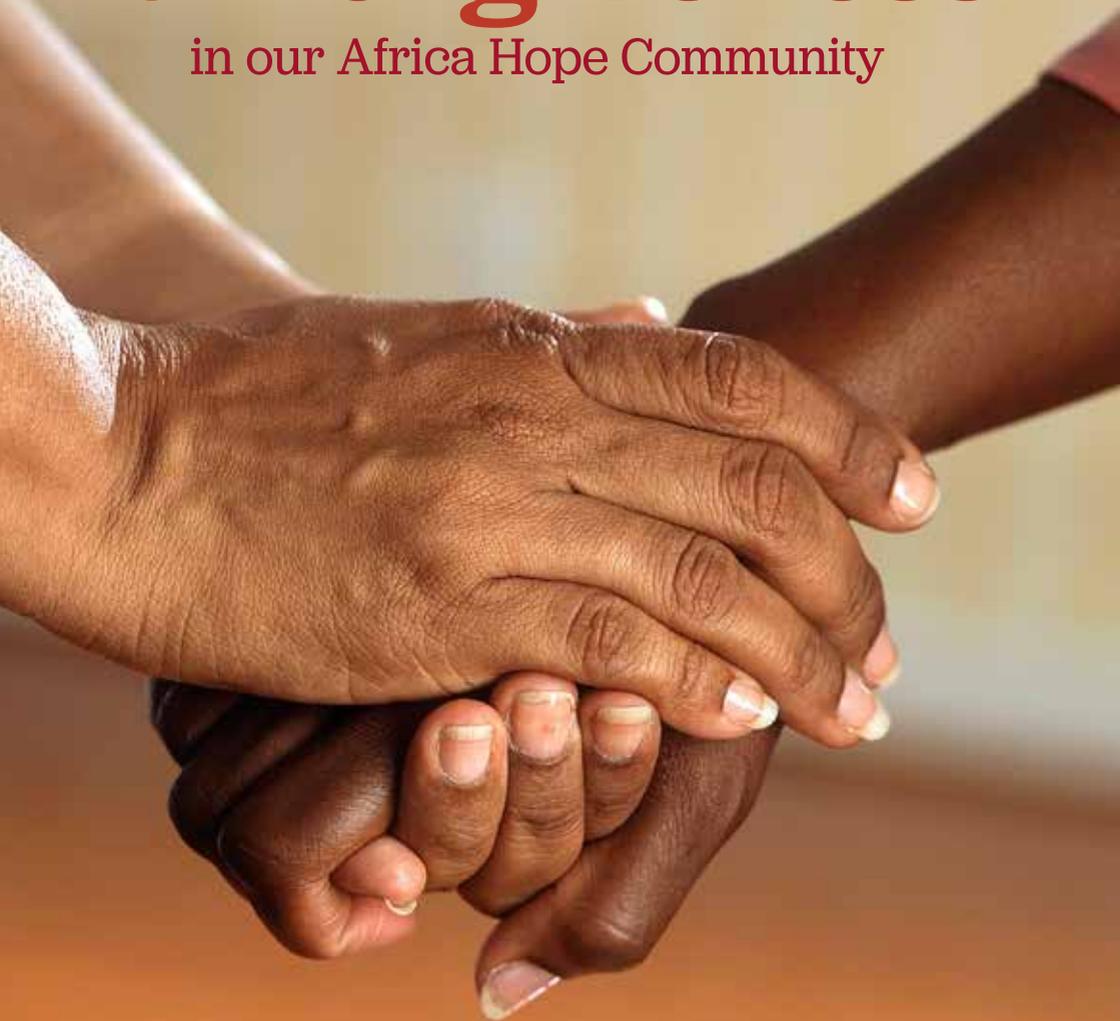


One of the recipients says: *“Having this device in my hand means the presence of God in my house. I always feel that God is with me and speaks to me all the time while I hear His Word. I do not hear God’s Word alone, but many times my family listens with me. Sometimes my neighbours join to listen with us as well. For me, this device is a treasure, as Psalm 119:162 says, ‘I rejoice at Your Word, as one who finds great treasure.’”*

Bible Society of Egypt

The Power of Forgiveness

in our Africa Hope Community



Scripture reminds us that the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. But, we can be confident in this - God continues to work out His good purposes.

For our Christmas celebration, many students were involved in an audience participatory presentation of the Christmas story, acted out for the student body. We had students from Grade 2-4 singing songs throughout the performance, with all ages of students acting various parts of the story, including Joseph, Mary, the wise men, and sheep (played by KG students). The Good News was presented in such a powerful and creative way that it held the interest of all the children and staff.

Of course, that's where the enemy comes and tries to steal the show. Between shows there was a teacher and a volunteer who got into a very heated fight. Sadly, it was in front of a few teachers and afternoon shift students who were waiting to come see the second showing of the Christmas drama.

The fight was very serious and led to management sending the teacher home with a severe warning letter, and a mandate for her to read

through some key passages of scripture and report back to the office before she would be allowed to resume her duties in the New Year. She needed time to pray about what she did and seek the Spirit's leading as to how to resolve the situation. On the second day back at school after the holidays, the volunteer came to school ready to fight but was restrained.

There are 10 different nations represented in this school - tribalism, negative cultural norms, revenge and payback are things expected (and encouraged) in their culture, but this is not something we can accept as Christians.

What place does forgiveness have in the life of a believer? Staff trainings have an important place in our school, where the goal is to build up staff, so they know their God given calling and purpose for being at this school, in order to reflect the love of Jesus Christ to the students. They are the ones living the journey of a refugee here. Who better than the teachers to help students navigate through their life challenges and find HOPE that only Jesus can offer each one in this hurting world?

Our teacher is a relatively new Christian, while the volunteer is not a believer yet. While

studying the scriptures the Lord worked on this teacher's heart - she came back humbly apologetic, willing to do whatever it takes to make the situation right. She knew she caused quite an upset in the school community and was truly repentant. She stood in front of the entire staff and student body during the afternoon parade and asked forgiveness from everyone, especially asking forgiveness from the volunteer she had engaged in fighting with.

Before she came to apologize there was an excellent teaching moment, where several from the management team were able to share with the students about the human heart and that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We all need to seek God's forgiveness and know that Jesus died for our sins and will forgive us. This one act of obedience brought healing in the relationship and a very powerful life lesson for all the students and staff. All Glory to our Awesome God!



Good News for

We are so thankful that the reprinting of the Sorani Kurdish New Testament was completed in Beirut in late 2021, and in less than a month, after a journey by ship through the Suez Canal to Basra, then by truck up the length of the country, 9,000 copies arrived here safely.

We rejoice that the shelves in the store are no longer lacking Sorani Kurdish New



Testaments and that local believers are delighted to see such a beautifully produced edition, as the quality and presentation of the book is so important in this culture. Thank you so much for your prayers and support that have made this possible.

Books arriving - 2021

A Kurdish pastor from another city came to the office and went away with a box of books, the ‘words of life’,

the pearl of great price, the Good News of Jesus. It is exactly that type of partnership that we have rejoiced in over the years. The New Testaments are now stored on shelves in our new location.

S* is in the region and is discussing with local churches and believers how to set up a local NGO that will provide the best way forward for Kurdish people to engage with the scriptures for many years to come. Please pray, that like yeast, the words of Jesus will slowly but surely work their way into the weary lives of many, for they are not just idle words – they are our life. (Deut. 32:47)

This same Kurdish pastor had been at the weekly meeting of a local Arabic church in the city. The church has a vision for sharing Good News with the wider community and we rejoiced when the pastor of the Arabic speaking church invited his Kurdish brother to share from the front and pray in Kurdish.

North Iraq

One afternoon a Kurdish believer, from another church, called at our home wanting us to meet two of his friends. One had a dream years ago of Jesus calling him to 'Follow' and the other had been impressed by the honesty of Christians. Both had an appetite to know Jesus, connected with the church's website and are now meeting in Kurdish.

Another group of believers run a radio station that broadcasts in various languages including Sorani Kurdish. They have just ordered 350 copies of the New Testament to send out to listeners who request a copy. We are so thankful for Iraqi believers who remain as faithful witnesses. Some of them we first met in the early '90s when we sat in homes reading the Bible in Arabic; at

that time for many of them study had been limited to Monte Carlo radio broadcasts.

It is good to hear these stories of faithful witness. It is good to remember the words of Isaiah when he describes the 'Servant of the Lord' - *'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.'* (Isa 42:3-4)

As we look around and listen in Iraq there is much to discourage – so many are thinking to leave or trying to leave. In recent months some have started out on a what is now a well-trodden but uncertain smuggler's route to the West via Belarus. So many

feel bruised or broken by injustice, corruption, nepotism or the brutality of life in places of conflict. And some are broken through sickness and injury. All are in need of hope.

Time and again we have been able to see the faithful application of Matthew 5:14-16, *'You are the light of the world ... in the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven'* and Ephesians 5:8-10, *'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.'*

S – one of our workers in North Iraq*

My Story: Geylan from Syria

Geylan is studying theology at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), so she can better share God's word with her people. This is her testimony of how she came to faith.

My husband, kids and I used to live in Aleppo. When the war broke out in 2011, we left Aleppo and took refuge in Afrin. In 2018, when the Turkish forces raided Afrin, and the war broke out there, my daughter started having epileptic seizures at the loud sounds of explosions. We had to flee Afrin and, once more, return to Aleppo. When my husband was about to be taken into mandatory military conscription, we fled to Lebanon.

In Lebanon, we came across a Kurdish speaking church service led by ABTS graduate Nabou Abbas. I was a non-Christian, but my husband

had already begun attending the church. "You will feel so peaceful if you go," he would tell me.

It was a struggle for me since I grew up believing that Christ did not die and rise again. After discussing the matter with my husband, we agreed that we would seek God together. We didn't just want the truth revealed in a dream. We asked God to reveal it to us in a tangible way. The next day, my husband called me from work and asked me to go outside. It was around 3pm at that time, and yet, the sky was so dark!

We had seen how darkness fell upon the earth as Jesus died on the cross in a film about Jesus, so we both believed that this was a sign from God. We began to attend Bible studies at church, and as the pastor spoke about Jesus' divinity, I could not accept his words. I didn't share my



concerns with my husband; I prayed alone. I was sure that God would reveal the truth to me.

As I prayed, I asked God why He had allowed us to go through wars and lose our home. I asked Him if Jesus was really God. Then, as I slept, I saw my spirit leave my body and ascend high up.

As I watched my body from above, I saw a white object glimmering brightly. To my



right, I saw a cross, and before me, I saw a tree. The names of the prophets were written on that tree. Then, I heard a voice say, "This is the cross on which my Son gave Himself for you. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Follow Him."

One Sunday, there was a celebration at a church that a non-Christian religious leader attended. After the meeting, the pastor honoured the religious leader and gave him a Bible. While giving his thank you speech, he said that he didn't fully understand the Kurdish language, but that he was happy to take the Bible and that all the nations of the earth should know the way of Jesus. Being a non-Christian myself, his words held much significance. All people should know Jesus, even the religious leader who uttered those words.

During one meeting, I asked my friend to pray that God

shows me the meaning of the dream. She held my hand and as she said, "we are the salt of the earth", that same vision flashed before me as I closed my eyes in prayer.

When we opened our eyes, I was smiling from ear to ear. "Were you laughing at me?" my friend asked, but I explained that God was showing me new things about what the dream meant. Whenever they prayed for me at church, the Lord showed me something new about the dream, and they told me that I was accepting the work of the Holy Spirit.

As I was at church listening to songs of praise, Jesus erased my fears. As I closed my eyes, I saw Him approach me. He held my hand and helped me rise up. He placed a crown on my head, but I couldn't see His face because it shined brightly. My clothes were so white, and I saw that my husband had

a crown too and also wore white. Joy filled my heart. I knelt down at His feet, but He asked me to rise up.

This year, both my husband and I got baptised. Ever since coming to the faith in April 2019, my husband and I have come to love and understand one another better. I used to hold grudges towards others.

I am currently part of Resurrection Church Beirut and attend their Kurdish Church. I used to serve kids, then I began to lead two home groups, and currently, I am leading six home groups. I decided to study theology at ABTS so I could better share God's word with my people. Studying theology has improved my ministry to children and home groups. It improved my understanding of Scripture and helped me serve more effectively

God at Work in spite of Covid

One of our workers in Cairo, Egypt was asked ‘What is God doing in Egypt during the Covid pandemic?’

He asked the same question to a well-known believer in Cairo, who responded ‘that for the most part, except for a few months during 2020, it has been business as usual.’

During 2020 large in-person gatherings suffered, but for churches with the technical capabilities attendance grew dramatically online. Loyalty to churches decreased as people tuned into services at certain churches, but when restrictions were removed most people returned to their original churches, and today there is little lasting affect from Covid on attendance.

B* asked him why this is the case when in many other countries attendance at

churches is still significantly down, and he (our friend) believes it is because most people in Egypt are not nearly as concerned about Covid as in many other countries.

Unrelated to Covid, the Egyptian society is very slowly moving away from opposition to Christianity. This is partially related to some increased freedoms and positive positions taken by the President toward Christianity, but as a movement in society in general it began prior to the current political administration. Bear in mind that change is still very slow, and there is still significant opposition to Christianity from numerous groups and people that are very powerful in society.

B - one of our workers in Cairo*



Australian Workers



We are aware that the Conavirus is having a very great impact on all countries around the world. At the time of printing our workers are all well and involved in their ministries as much as possible. We continue to pray God's peace and protection upon them.

Our congratulations to **Darren** who recently became engaged to **Stephanie**, a teacher at the 'Constant Lighthouse'. She speaks three languages and is, apparently, 'very good for' Darren! Darren asks for prayer for their marriage plans but also for the people and land of Lebanon during extremely difficult days.

Ivy has recently returned to Jordan to connect with workers and friends. She is a real encouragement to other Asian workers in the region. This will probably be Ivy's last few weeks in Jordan, and she anticipates ministering from her church base in Taipei and encouraging and equipping Asian friends for service in the Middle East.

John and **Magda Ackad** have opportunities for ministry in Sydney among people from the Middle East. Folk can help with their support by forwarding gifts to our office.

Perry and **Karen** continue their association with MECO Australia as Associate Members. Perry is fulfilling writing commitments and has been doing a lot of his consultancy work with overseas theological colleges by remote communications. He is soon to do more travel where he can help Bible and theological colleges face-to-face. Karen is having ministry in the local community.

Rebecca has returned to Beirut and the 'College of the Constant Lighthouse' to begin another term of teaching. She is teaching younger children who can be quite demanding. Pray for patience for Rebecca and her ministry among the families of children in her class.

Noel and **Ros Uebergang** have opportunities for ministry in Perth among people from the Middle East. Folk can help with their support by forwarding gifts to our office.

For 30 years, 30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World has been helping Christians all over the world to pray for Muslims with love and insight during the month of Ramadan. These last three decades have seen more churches planted in Muslim communities than in the three centuries before!

The 30th anniversary edition of 30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World focuses on Muslim people groups who remain most in need of the gospel. Learn, pray, and be involved in the movement that is effectively calling on the Holy Spirit to reveal the love of Christ to Muslims around the world.

The 2022 event begins April 2, 2022. The prayer guide can be ordered from worldprayer.au@om.org

Donations and Support

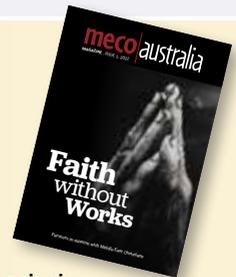
We have a variety of ways in which our work and ministries can be supported.



On-line – donors can use Visa and Mastercard www.meco.org.au
Donations by Credit Card can also be made direct to the office by calling 03 9898 0077



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If you wish to receive notification of the next issue by email let us know. Send request for notification to office@meco.org.au

Ancient Kingdoms

Egypt and Israel – October 2022

A tour is being planned for October to visit the biblical countries of Egypt and Israel.

Highlights in **Egypt** will include:

- Old City in Cairo (St Mark's)
- Cave churches (Mokattam)
- Pyramids and Sphinx
- Nile cruise to Luxor and Abu Simbel

Highlights in **Israel** will include:

- Old City (Jerusalem)
- Shiloh (Tabernacle)
- Qumran (Dead Sea scrolls) and Masada
- Bethlehem and Nazareth

What We Do

This will be a fully guided experience. We have carefully curated the best historical and biblical sites so that you can experience the lands, people and culture of these Ancient Kingdoms.

Approximate cost

AUD \$6500.00 - \$7,000.00*

*Costs still to be finalised.

More information and tour itinerary will be available in due course. You can register your interest at hello@pbt.com.au or **1300 567 772**.

Tour leader will be **Rev Richard Coombs** (MECO Australia Director) and Teaching Pastor at Wattle Park Chapel, Melbourne.

- **Prayer Points** – monthly Prayer Points for the Middle East are distributed by email and print. We would be delighted to add your name to our list – please forward an email to: office@meco.org.au requesting the Prayer Points and specify how you would like to receive them (email or print).
- **Prayer for the Persecuted Church** through our partnership with Middle East Concern (MEC) we get regular updated prayer requests for people in the Middle East who are in difficulty with the authorities. If you wish to be part of this prayer ministry, please request to be placed on the email list – office@meco.org.au