



EXTENDING BEYOND

Love is a verb

Colin Miller and Tessa Waidelich, of Central Mennonite Church in Archbold, Ohio, help rid Camp Ithiel of weeds during a servant project at the Orlando Convention in July 2017.

A message from Stanley W. Green



The Mennonite Church USA Convention that recently met in Orlando, Florida, had as its theme “Love is a verb.” Some New Testament verses that capture well the sentiment expressed in that theme are found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” (NRSV)

In this text Paul suggests that the mark of the authenticity of our witness is to be found in

our willingness to love and to serve the other, a readiness to give of ourselves to elevate the other. I believe that this is what our Mennonite Church USA vision means when it invites us to be “instruments” of healing and hope. Our vision suggests that the goal of our witness in the world is to restore to joy, health, and fullness of life those who have been broken, hurt and damaged by personal sin or systemic evil. Based on this understanding, an important criterion by which we measure fit for those who serve with Mennonite Mission Network is whether a candidate for service is willing to love and serve in the Spirit of Jesus.

Without a commitment to emulate the Spirit of Jesus’ unselfish love and service, all our endeavors are vain self-promotion or misguided self-absorption. Paul suggests that devoid of this commitment, spectacular feats like speaking in tongues are “nothing.” Indeed, the word that Paul uses for love, *agape*, is love based on actions rather than emotions. It is a love that translates

“And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

1 Corinthians 13:2

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Syrian and Iraqi refugees reach the coastal waters of Lesbos in Greece, after having crossed from Turkey.

Giving yourself, through knowledge and love

Lithuania: Responding to the refugee crisis

Across most European countries, and on every news channel, are the faces of newly arrived refugees. This refugee crisis in Europe is the largest in modern history. While many agencies worked to give refugees food, clean water, and tents, many Iraqi and Syrian students had nowhere to continue their education. But even before the flood of refugees to Europe, LCC International University planned a response to the Middle East crisis.

“I have been moved by the plight of war-affected people and I realized that I can’t simply stay here and do nothing,” said Robin Gingerich, an instructor who teaches at LCC International University in Lithuania and is a mission associate of Mennonite Mission Network.

“I wanted to be a part of something to help,” Gingerich said.

In spring 2016, LCC International University launched a satellite campus in Tbilisi, Georgia (in close proximity to Syria and Iraq). The goal was to teach English to assist students affected by war to learn English so that they could continue their university education elsewhere, in Lithuania, in Europe, or North America. For two years, LCC staff had been contacting potential students through nongovernmental organizations in the Middle East while also exploring pathways for Syrians to enter Georgia. LCC secured a location, remodeled classrooms, and recruited teachers. In May, Gingerich moved to Georgia to serve as academic director. However, due to unsettled political situations, embassies were unwilling to offer visas likely due to perceived national security risks. In December 2016, LCC relocated the program from Georgia to LCC’s main campus in Lithuania.

English learning leads to healing

Currently, 14 students from Syria and Iraq are studying at LCC. A majority of them are studying in the intensive English program; others are taking university courses, while two are enrolled in master's programs.

If this weren't challenge enough, the Middle Eastern students who study at LCC also deal with the trauma of fleeing their homes in Syria and Iraq. Each of these students know personally the horrific abuses of war at the hands of ISIS. "They know the prisons in Iraq are pretty hellish, and some of their family members are in prison there," Gingerich said. Their homes and neighborhoods are completely demolished, and for two years they lived in refugee camps.

In addition to teaching reading skills and grammar, Gingerich uses a new book called *Resilience*, by Michael Medley, a professor at Eastern Mennonite University. Medley developed the book from STAR (Strategies for Trauma, Awareness and Resilience) training to help displaced students heal their emotional wounds and learn English at the same time. *Resilience* combines English-language exercises with true stories of people affected by trauma around the world. The students are learning helpful ways to deal with their own trauma. Gingerich says it helps



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Robin Gingerich, instructor at LCC International University in Lithuania, and a mission associate with Mennonite Mission Network.

the students realize they are not the only ones who have fled their homes because of war. "It builds their confidence and ... opens the door for more conversations."

Investing in knowledge to spread God's love

Although their challenges are immense, the Middle Eastern students that Gingerich teaches rise to the challenge. The students were invited to study at LCC because "they were already helping their people in the camps or they had a wish to be of service to others," said Gingerich. Some were already assisting medics in the refugee camps, while others were involved in distributing humanitarian aid.

"They are outstanding people," said Gingerich. "They work so hard.

They've learned English. They are keeping in touch with their families. We hope they are on their way to a better future." ■



LCC International University is the only university in the region to offer a Christian liberal arts education. In a university where 40 percent of the students are

Lithuanian, and the others are international students, English becomes the unifying language.

Rebuilding what has been destroyed



Jahmir* is a Yazidi student (from Iraq) who was raised by his mother after his father died in the Iraq-Kuwait war. He began his university studies in regional planning in Duhok (a city in northern Iraq). When ISIS attacked Sinjar in August 2014, Jahmir and his relatives fled and are now living in refugee camps. He knows the horror of war, rape, and human trafficking. In 2015, he began volunteering at the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution at the University of Dohuk, an organization

that sponsors workshops and symposiums on peace-building and interreligious dialogue in cooperation with the University of New York, UNICEF, and Mennonite Central Committee. When Jahmir heard about LCC, he applied and was granted a visa. He dreams of getting a master's degree in regional planning, and returning to Sinjar to "rebuild what ISIS has destroyed." ■

**A pseudonym is used to ensure safety for the student and his family.*

Love is a verb

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words and intent into deeds that reinforce the value and dignity of the person loved.

Not only are professed ability and mere intent insufficient evidence of our love and sincerity, they are also a scathing indictment of our failure to translate capacity and desire into authentic action. For almost two decades in Lithuania, Robin Gingerich has incarnated this approach of Christ-shaped service that finds its wellspring in seeking to lift up the other—in actions that liberate and equip the other to realize the fullness of their human potential.

This disposition is given expression in a report from Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer, who are serving with Mennonite Mission Network in the Ecuadorian rain forest. Jane and Jerrell wrote about asking an indigenous pastor with whom they serve, “What do indigenous communities require of missionaries who come to work alongside them?” Pastor Clever Mashiant, to whom the question was posed, responded with these words, “You must sit down, so we can stand up.” In other words, Pastor Clever seemed to suggest, in the Christian companionship of Western mission workers with indigenous Christians in Latin America, the

posture of those from the West must not be about their agenda or ambitions or, even yet, their sense of what they feel called to do. Their posture must instead be shaped by the kind of Christ-like love that looks beyond their own personal needs, and the coveted self-actualizations of their sense of purpose, to actions that ensure the fullness of life and enhancement of the dignity and freedom of those among whom they serve.

Serving in partnership with our sisters and brothers in our global Christian family is a privilege. Wherever this happens, we aim to point people to God’s good news incarnate in Jesus. We pray that our witness might emulate the spirit of love and unselfish service that Jesus modeled for us. We praise God for those like Robin Gingerich and the Ross Richer family who seek to imitate the model of Christ.

Finally, I thank you for your sharing, which makes it possible for us to send mission workers like these, and so many others, to be instruments of God’s healing and hope around the world. ■



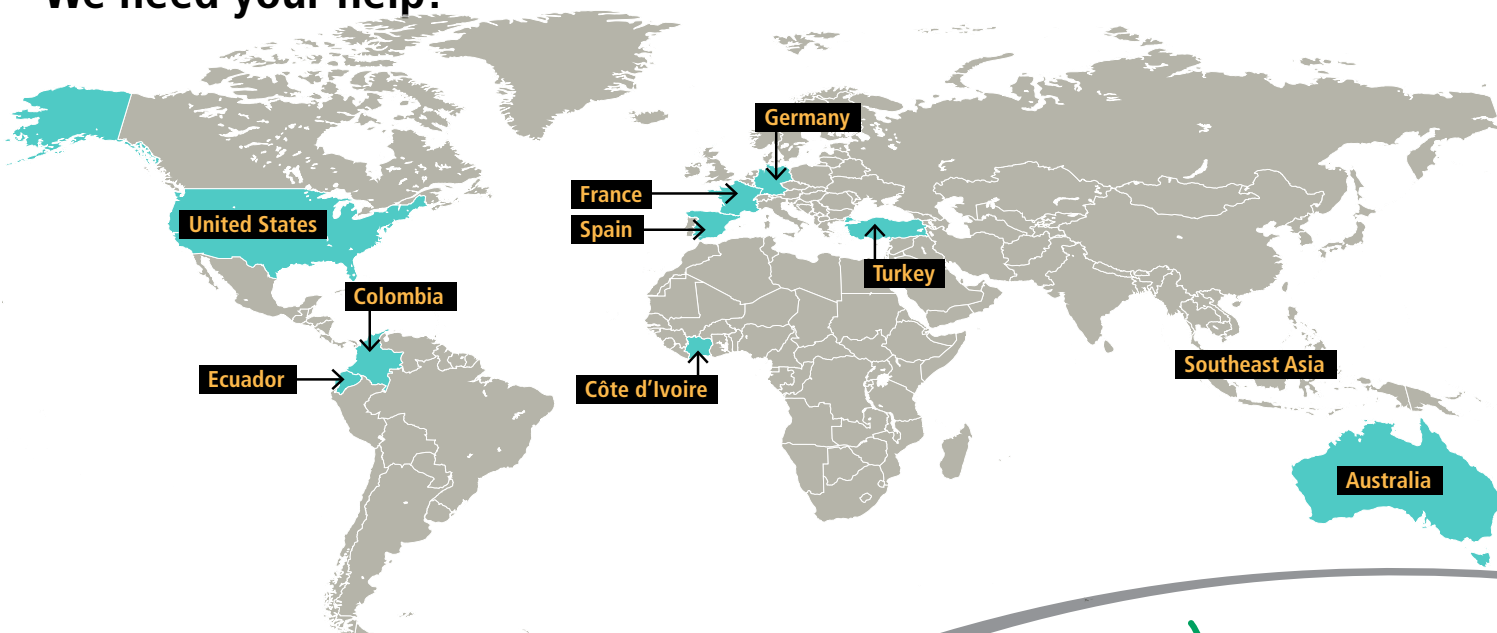
Stanley W. Green
Executive Director

REFUGEE WORK AROUND THE WORLD

Did you know that Mennonite Mission Network works with refugees in the regions below?

But we can’t do it alone.

We need your help!



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www.MennoniteMission.net
Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872

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