

MECO NEWS

CANADA



Syrian refugees coming
to Canada need help

News in Brief

The Cost of War

According to the BBC, more than 250,000 Syrians have lost their lives since civil war erupted in 2011. The conflict originally began with anti-government protests during the Arab Spring. It is estimated that more than 11 million people have been displaced. Of those, more than 4.5 million have fled the country.

The United Nations estimates that it will need \$13.3 billion this year to meet the humanitarian needs of 13.5 million people living in Syria. Six million of those requiring UN aid are children.

Prayer for pastors

The Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon, is seeking prayer support for pastors who have been imprisoned in Sudan for a number of months. Some of them are ABTS graduates.

Growing church

Considered to be one of the most anti-Christian countries in the world, Iran also has the fastest growing evangelical Christian population in the world, according to Operation World.

Prayer Guides for Ramadan

Ramadan is the holiest month in the Islamic calendar; a time of day-long fasting for Muslims. Many Christians pray for Muslims during Ramadan. If you would like to join them, Fellowship of Faith to Muslims, a Christian organization, can provide you with a 30 Day Prayer Guide. The cost is \$2. For more information contact: ffm.toronto@sympatico.ca

MECO Canada launches website

MECO Canada has launched a new website designed by Board Member Joe Choueiri. Posted on the site are resources that may be helpful to you, including a book list. Go to: www.mecocanada.ca

Mark the date

The Canadian Network of Ministries to Muslims will hold its bi-annual conference November 3-5 in Toronto. Among the guest speakers will be Dr. David Garrison, author of *A Wind in the House of Islam*. For conference details go to: www.cnmm.ca

Moving forward

Welcome to the first edition of MECO Canada News!

We hope the stories you read will inspire you and encourage you to pray for God's work among Middle Eastern people.

On behalf of the Board of Middle East Christian Outreach (Canada), I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting the decision we made to follow God's direction and bring our Joint Ministry Agreement with MECO International to an end. Some of you have taken time to write or phone our office and we are grateful for your encouragement and your prayers.

As you know, MECO Canada's mandate has been to assist churches and ministries in the Middle East by providing prayer and personnel support. We have now expanded our mandate to include serving and equipping churches and ministries in Canada as they reach out to people from the Middle East.

Little did we know that God would use MECO Canada this winter as a catalyst for helping English and Arabic congregations in the Greater Toronto area work together to help Syrian refugees! When you turn this page, you will read how that happened. The serendipitous way in which this new work has unfolded is a clear reminder to us that God is directing what we do.

Another exciting development is the creation and launch of our new website. One of our board members, Joe Choueiri, built the site, which clearly communicates who we are, what we do and

why we do it. The address is: www.mecocanada.org May I encourage you to take the time and visit the website?

Our next step is to explore using other social media tools so we can effectively communicate with people interested in serving either in the Middle East or in Canada. In the meantime, there are three young men and women interested in serving with us. I would welcome your prayers for them and for our four colleagues serving now in Egypt and Lebanon.

The Board has also taken a major step of faith and created what we call a "Hallelujah Budget" – a budget for a list of things we would like to do if God provides the funds. High on that list is to be able to attend Missionfests in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Halifax, as well as mission conferences at Bible colleges in Western Canada. These are places where we can connect with men and women interested in mission – people willing to pray for God's work and people willing to join us in that work. They are also places where we can learn from others.

We look forward to seeing if what we hope to do lines up with what God wants us to do. As Jesus said He is the Vine, we are the branches. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

In closing, I would welcome your prayers for our board and our staff as we continue to move forward on our knees.

Jeremy Thommy
Chair



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OUR PRIORITY:

To mobilize and equip people and prayer for God's work among Middle Eastern people in the Middle East and in Canada.

For more information go to:
www.mecocanada.ca

MECO Canada catalyst for helping Syrian refugees

"CAN YOU HELP US?"

Those words were the trigger for MECO Canada assisting churches and individuals in the Greater Toronto Area who are reaching out to Syrian refugees temporarily housed in the Toronto Plaza Hotel in North York, Ontario.

In February, MECO's President, Linda Haist, went to a joint meeting of representatives from Middle East Baptist Church in Mississauga and Church of Hope in Brampton to ask for their help. "We want to encourage Canadian churches to reach out to their Muslim neighbours and we thought these churches could help us do that," she explains. "But when we met it was apparent theirs was the greater need. They had been going to the hotel to offer assistance to the refugees and were overwhelmed by the needs of the people they met. Refugees being housed at the hotel are sponsored by the Canadian government and so don't have the one-on-one support that privately sponsored refugees receive. There is no one to help them get to appointments, fill out forms, set up their homes once housing has been found for them, or help them adjust to life in Canada. Helping them obtain things they need to buy is another hurdle. As I was told: 'Imagine if you could get to a store, trying to buy something when you don't know English and you don't understand Canadian currency.'"

The day after the meeting, Linda sent out emails to her contacts – individuals, churches and organizations - sharing what she had been told about the plight of the refugees and asking for help. One of the first churches to respond to her email was The Peoples Church in Toronto.

"Two of their lead volunteers, Rob Perry and Laura Dobrowski, had visited the hotel and witnessed the need I was describing. By Thursday of that week they had arranged a meeting with all those who had been going to the hotel – people I knew and people they knew – to discuss how

we could work together to help the refugees," she explains. "In the meantime, Carol Gouveia, Administrative Assistant for the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, alerted churches in that denomination of the need. Nizar Shaheen, host of Light for All Nations, a Christian program which broadcasts in Arabic throughout the Middle East, North Africa and North America, also called a meeting of Arabic speaking pastors in the Greater Toronto Area."

According to Linda, the Arabic pastors, or their representatives, came from a wide range of denominations and from as far away as Barrie. "By the end of the meeting they had divided themselves into geographical locations and committed to help care for refugees within those locations and to assist Canadian congregations wanting to help the refugees. They also recognized the need for a monthly prayer meeting by conference call."

Since those early meetings, Linda says ongoing needs of the refugees have been identified. These include:

- Transportation to and from appointments
- Regular visitation because many of the refugees are lonely
- Information sessions because many of the refugees have concerns and questions about life in Canada
- Ongoing programs for children, youth and families
- Counselling
- Employment



YOU CAN HELP!

Please pray for refugees and the volunteers who are helping them.

If you live in the Greater Toronto Area you can help by:

- Volunteering to be part of a visitation team – people who meet with the refugees at the hotel or in their new homes
- Preparing Welcome Packs given to refugees when they move from the hotels to housing found for them
- Donating items for the Welcome Packs
- Assisting at events planned for children, families and young adults
- Providing employment opportunities for refugees

For more information contact MECO Canada's office at:
(905) 335-7329
mecan@on.aibn.com

"It has been wonderful to watch how individuals and churches are co-operating for the benefit of the refugees," says Linda. "In February, the TIM Centre at Toronto's Tyndale University and The Peoples Church held an information night for churches and individuals interested in sponsoring refugees. More than 120 people attended, to the amazement of an immigration lawyer, who was one of the speakers."

Linda notes that some churches are sharing their premises so that others can plan events for children, families and young adults. "People are offering their services free of charge, whether it is for counselling or creating a database for volunteers to use. Then there are those who are giving up their free time to visit the refugees not only at the hotel but when they move to permanent housing. Their commitment to helping the Syrians is long-term."

Although many of the refugees cannot speak English, Arabic-speaking volunteers have said they are very eager to meet Canadians. "There is a real opportunity for churches in the GTA to join hands with their Middle Eastern brothers and sisters to share the love of Christ with the refugees," says Linda. "The door of welcome is open and this could be the beginning of meaningful friendships for everyone."



Despite challenges, an Egyptian school is giving African refugee children a chance to learn



Since 1998, the African Hope Learning Centre (AHLC) has been educating refugee children from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya and Burundi. Established by the International Church in Cairo, AHLC is one of the only schools for refugees offering a Christian based education in English.

Currently, 450 students between the ages of five and 22 are enrolled in the school. For many of the older students it is their first opportunity to go to school. As a result the grades they are in do not reflect their ages.

According to AHLC's administrative assistant, RB*, it costs approximately \$175,000 USD to keep the school running. A major part of that cost is for rent - \$3,500 per month - and salaries for 23 teachers, many of whom are not professionals. Teachers earn \$100 - \$150 a month.

"Because salaries are so low, it is difficult to keep teachers," explains RB. "We invest in professional development for them but as they gain experience they tend to look for better paying jobs." She adds that student fees cover only 30 per cent of the running costs of the school. "We try to keep the fees at a minimum to encourage the poorest of the poor to attend the school!"

Sadly, the school building cannot accommodate all the children who want to go to school. The school is housed in a villa, once home to a family of eight. Although the word villa may conjure up images of grandeur, the building is anything but that. Due to a lack of space, classes are held in two shifts – 7:30 a.m. until noon for grades 1 to 3 and 1:30 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. for grades 4 to 11. There is no playground and no heating or cooling system so classrooms are hot in the summer and very cold in the winter, especially when temperatures plunge to seven degrees celsius .

In addition to providing the children with an education, the school also provides a lunch program for students and staff. For some it is the only meal they have all day. This year, breakfast sandwiches are being provided

for grade 1 pupils because RB says many of the little ones were experiencing stomach aches due to hunger. It is hoped that fundraising efforts will enable the school to provide sandwiches for the grades 2 and 3.

Health care, provided by volunteer nurses, is also available through the school and includes health education. Counselling is provided for students who have experienced trauma. Some have been victims of civil war, others come from abusive homes. All are victims of prejudice and bullying, so much so that the school has had to hire police to protect the children as they walk over a bridge on their way to and from school.

Although many of the students hope that one day they will be resettled in the West, RB says there is little evidence that will be a reality. However, four of AHLC's graduates have found their calling. Two are teachers at the school and two are working in the school's finance department. "They have a hope for the future and are investing in the lives of our current students," says RB.

HELP WANTED:

The African Hope Learning Centre needs:

- Qualified teachers, all grades
- Qualified teachers to provide professional development for the school's teachers
- A full-time nurse to work at the centre
- A professional writer/fund raiser

Contact MECO Canada at: (905) 335-7320 or email: mecan@on.aibn.com

PLEASE PRAY:

- For wisdom for the school's administrator and office staff
- For staff and teachers to be godly models for the students
- For students to find their hope in Jesus Christ
- For God to provide for the financial needs of the school
- For God to provide the staff the school needs
- Praise: For God's faithful provision year by year

The Last Word

Mission lessons from a jigsaw puzzle

Heritage College's mission conference was held in February, and one of the features of the event students look forward to is the "bazaar".

The college, located in Cambridge, Ontario, decorates its common area to look like a marketplace and agency reps bring in food and souvenirs from around the world for students to sample and see.

I like to take things for them to do. Last year, I set up an "internet café" so students could send emails to our colleagues in the Middle East. This year I took a jigsaw puzzle of the world. Little did I realize how significant the puzzle would be; how clearly it would express the story of missions.

Ironically, I had been given one end of a ping pong table for my bazaar booth. It was located very near the entrance to the common area and was the perfect space for spreading out **1,000 tiny puzzle pieces**. I purposely hid the puzzle box from view so that no one would know what the puzzle was. Figuring out where the pieces went was a step by step process for those working on the jigsaw – just as it is for people when they feel called to serve God but don't know when, where or how.

The puzzle was completed in 1 ½ days but doing it in that time required a concerted effort on the part of students, professors, staff, and mission reps. The co-operation they exhibited was a reflection of the co-operative effort needed to carry the Gospel to the world.

Not everyone participated in putting the jigsaw together. **Some stood by and watched.** Some stood by and encouraged. Others passed by and took little notice of what was happening. It was a reminder that not everyone is directly involved or interested in mission work.

Like mission agencies, the puzzle drew together extroverts and introverts, young and old, male and female alike.

Just as different people do different jobs in mission organizations, and just as those organizations work in different areas of the world, the people putting the puzzle together worked in similar ways. **Groups of people focused on specific parts of the puzzle**, drawn to those areas because they needed to be worked on. Some individuals were experienced at putting jigsaws together and were very gifted at understanding which pieces would fit where. Others had never worked on a puzzle before and were content to gather together similar looking puzzle pieces so others could put them into place.

Although work on the puzzle was continuous, people rotated in and out according to their schedules. Some worked for long periods of time, others for only a few minutes. That too was a reflection of what happens in mission. Some people go out short-term, others long-term. And when people leave their work, for whatever reason, others take their place.

As the puzzle came together people soon realized they were working on a map of the world. **Suddenly the jigsaw wasn't just about MECO Canada** but representative of all the organizations in the room.

When work on the puzzle began there was a question in everyone's mind: Can it be finished? With the placement of the last puzzle piece there was a sense of amazement. What had been questioned, and yet hoped for, had been accomplished.

It was also very evident that no one person could take credit for completing the puzzle. I trust the same will be true when the mission of God is finally completed!

Linda Haist
President

Feeling called to serve Middle Eastern people, either in the Middle East or here in Canada? We'd love to journey with you as you determine God's plan for your life.
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