



Annual gathering in March

Plans are well underway for the 2008 MCC Great Lakes annual gathering coming up on March 7-8. The gathering will be held at Arthur Mennonite Church in Arthur, Illinois.

Everyone is encouraged to attend this time of celebration for the past year and looking forward to the future of MCC. There will be worship sessions, dynamic speakers and interactive workshops throughout the two-day event.

The event will kick off on Friday evening with a dinner and worship service, and will continue all day Saturday, culminating in a dinner that will serve as the end of the annual gathering and the kick-off for the Arthur relief sale.

Make plans to join MCC Great Lakes in this event. See the registration form on the brochure enclosed in this newsletter, or go to mcc.org/greatlakes. Please register by February 15 so that we can plan accordingly. ☺



Anna Davis-Zehr helps assemble health kits at last year's annual gathering in Shipshewana, Indiana.



Register Now!
March 7-8 in Arthur, Illinois

What the church is saying

With immigration at the forefront of the news and tensions high around the issue, Mennonite Central Committee recently conducted an immigration listening project. MCC staff organized 36 listening sessions across the United States to listen to perceptions and concerns about new immigrants, and to learn what new immigrants experience as they settle in different communities. A number of these listening sessions took place here in the Great Lakes region.

The findings from these sessions have been analyzed and compiled into a report titled "MCC Immigration Listening Project: What the Church is Saying."

The purpose of this project was to assess attitudes about immigration across MCC's Anabaptist constituency.

Findings from the report were summarized into six statements:

- New immigrants are finding hope in new immigrant churches.
- Most believe that economic hardship is a strong motive for immigrants coming to the United States.
- The church opposes unjust treatment for immigrants, but is ambivalent about undocumented immigrants.
- Attitudes towards U.S. laws are split.
- Faith strongly motivates churches that relate to immigrants.
- Churches relating to immigrants want help and support from denominations and church agencies.

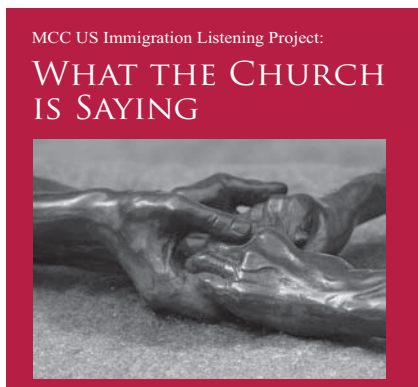
The report addresses two significant areas in a call of response.

- We need to open avenues to listen to churches of color.
- We need to publicly act and commit to love all our neighbors, even undocumented ones.

The report is available online at mcc.org/greatlakes, or call the Goshen office to request a copy at (574) 534-4133. ☺

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A year of service around the world

Mncedisi Vilakati, from Swaziland, is spending a year in Goshen, Indiana, as part of MCC's International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP).

In Swaziland, Vilakati worked with Faith Bible School, an MCC-sponsored organization, where he has served as an HIV/AIDS peer educator since 2004. Along with his team, he visited schools and churches, presenting dramas and leading discussions about AIDS prevention.

Through IVEP, Vilakati is participating in a vocational and cultural exchange. He lives with a host family in Goshen, and in his service assignment, he works in three different areas for MCC.

Two days a week, he works in the MCC Great Lakes Office, where he helps with mailings, answers phones or does other office tasks. Other days he works in the Switchyard and Whistle Stop – the MCC thrift stores – where he sorts donated items, helps pickup and deliver items and counts money. Or he works at the material resource center, packing kits, baling clothes or helping with other tasks.

"It's a good adventure to experience another culture from another country," he said. "It's a good opportunity to feel the presence of Christ, even while not worshipping in the same way that I'm used to."

Vilakati has quickly made friends and gotten involved in a variety of activities in Goshen, including playing on soccer teams and singing in the Voices-n-Harmony gospel choir. He's also taken trips to Ohio and Pennsylvania to visit friends.

Although he admits it was hard at first, he said, "I've begun to make connections with peers and friends and feel more at home."

Other IVEPers in the Great Lakes region are Alejandra Perdomo, from Hondruas, working at Goshen College in Indiana; Khamla Phomsavath, from Laos, working at the Save & Serve Thrift Shop in Millersburg, Ohio; and Verónica Curo, from Argentina, working at Central Christian Early Learning Center in Kidron, Ohio.

While these four individuals have come to the Great Lakes region for a year, fifteen other young people from the Great Lakes region

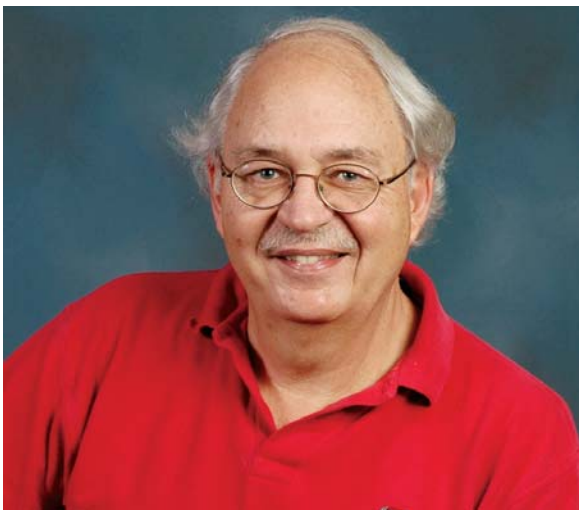


Mncedisi Vilakati packs school kits in boxes at the Material Resource Center in Goshen, where he is working with MCC Great Lakes as an IVEPer.

are also having year-long cross cultural experiences with the Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program in places like Indonesia and Nicaragua.

In fact, it was his interaction with SALT workers in Swaziland that prompted Vilakati to apply for IVEP. "I was touched that people who just completed college would want to come to Swaziland, instead of getting a job right away like many people," he said. "I saw their heart." 🔄

Meet your new MCC regional associate



Marlin Yoder is the new MCC Great Lakes regional associate for central and eastern Ohio, northwest Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Constituents in central and eastern Ohio, northwest Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Kentucky have a new regional associate.

Marlin Yoder replaced Bruce Glick in this position in August, and has been working at building relationships with congregations and individuals in his territory.

This isn't Yoder's first position with MCC, in fact he spent 13 years with MCC in Bolivia and Mexico. "During adolescence, my heroes were MCCers returning from their assignments," said Yoder. "After hearing their stories, I knew I wanted to serve someday with MCC internationally. My journey with MCC has indeed been a journey of personal growth, while being taught by those especially favored by God."

Now working for MCC in his home state of Ohio, Yoder has high hopes for connecting with congregations as a regional associate. "I hope to promote local, national and international service opportunities for all ages, but particularly for younger persons who may want to express their Christian faith by volunteering in their nearest thrift shop or in any of the 51 countries where MCC is serving alongside partner groups," he said.

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Pieces of hope, one stitch at a time

Liz and Martin Dyrst, along with their sons Isaiah and Micah, are MCC workers from Chicago Community Mennonite Church.

Greetings from Olinala, Guerrero, Mexico. Our family has been here for one year and we are living into our assignment with gusto. We recently received funding for a water project that we call "Plan 500." The water project consists of building and installing three basic technologies: water cisterns to collect and store rainwater, dry latrines which use no water and drip irrigation systems for family gardens. Our goal is to build 200 cisterns, 200 dry latrines and install 100 family gardens in the next three years. Needless to say, the bulk of our work is focused on building and implementing these three technologies in rural communities in the dry mountainous region of Guerrero. So why title this article "Pieces of hope, one stitch at a time?"

In Zacango, a town of approximately 450 people (900 if everyone who has migrated north in search of work came home), 10 women have formed a sewing group with the hope of generating enough income to unify their families and make a living in their community. They call themselves Grupo de Costura - La Esperanza "The Sewing Group - The Hope."

After a recent meeting with the group, I headed home anxious about how to support this struggling group. But as I drove home, the surrounding mountains reminded me of when Jesus told the dis-

people offering marketing ideas. Oh, and did I mention, a donation to repair the sewing room and buy some sewing and lighting supplies also came in recently? Soon after that, my sister-in-law, Marie, a professional quilter, volunteered to come and give two weeks of sewing lessons to help improve the quality and variety of the sewing products. WOW! Once again, I am seeing the hand of God at work.



Liz Dyrst (middle), her son Micah and Cristiana, a local volunteer, help paint the sewing room for the newly formed La Esperanza sewing group.



Valentina and Cleofas, two members of La Esperanza sewing group, use their treadle machines until the sewing room has electricity for them to use the new machines.

ciples that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move mountains.

The next morning, our co-worker Enrique received a call from a local government organization asking if we knew of a sewing group that could use funding because they had enough money to fund one more group. He quickly went to Zacango, talked with the women (who were thrilled!), turned in the necessary documents, and by 8 p.m. that evening we received word that the group was awarded a \$30,000MX grant for five new sewing machines!

And then I checked my email, and there were three emails from

Marie came, and each day we focused on something different, including Christmas tree ornaments using scraps of materials, Christmas wreaths, three different cloth bag designs and a variety of apron designs. Between sewing lessons, we gathered and assembled shelving, light fixtures and tested the new electric sewing machines. As the translator, I found that many times no translation was needed as the knowledge and love of sewing between people transcended the language barrier. And once again, the openness and generosity of the people shone brightly through it all.

Now what? La Esperanza has new sewing machines, a new workshop and new design ideas. They are bonding as a group, making decisions and establishing guidelines for their group, and setting work hours. The long-term goal is to sell enough products to generate some income, so that they can stay in Zacango and not migrate North in search of work. But who will buy their products for a FAIR PRICE? How does this group of women in the mountainous region of Guerrero, Mexico "compete" in the global economy? Do they have enough time and resources to improve the quality of their products now, with the hope that in a few years, all the work will pay off and they will find a sustainable niche in the market place? Once again, it seems that the best thing to do is simply put our trust in God, keep praying, and keep moving ahead one step at a time. ☺

- Liz Dyrst

Prayer Requests from the Dyrsts: For patience, faith and humility as we work and accompany the people of Zacango. For wisdom for the women of La Esperanza as they take on this challenge.



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**
Great Lakes

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Goshen, IN 46528
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Winter 2007-08

Service Opportunities with MCC

SWAP location coordinator - Harlan, KY
Promoter/Technician for water resources and
appropriate technology - Tanzania and Mexico
Peace resource person - Laos
Food security development consultant - Chad

Contact Mary Ann Weber
574-534-4133
mweber@mcc.org

mcc.org/serve

Address Service Requested

REGIONAL ASSOCIATE - continued from page 2

Yoder will also make it a priority to be accessible to congregational representatives and form cluster groups to strengthen faith and practice.

With his long-time MCC experience, he hopes to find ways to encourage participation in MCC projects. "Living now in this affluent country, I hope to offer rewarding opportunities where many people, both young and old, can share financially for relief, development and peacemaking efforts."

Prior to becoming a regional associate, Yoder served as the program director for the Latin American Community Center in Dover, Ohio, which welcomes and orients new Hispanic immigrants.

Yoder is married to Sara King, who is volunteering in the Great Lakes Kidron office, and they have two grown daughters who are working in Argentina and Costa Rica. "I enjoy reading, riding my road bicycle, practicing Pennsylvania Dutch, visiting my Hispanic friends and living in a Christian Land Trust," said Yoder.

Yoder's passion for the work of MCC is clearly evident. "God's love is revealed to me when people are actively seeking ways to express their faith in action," he said. "I am energized when people come together and organize in order to promote justice and peace." ☺

Check out the new MCC Great Lakes website!



mcc.org/greatlakes

MCC Sharing with Appalachian People Consider applying for summer staff at SWAP!

Use your God-given talents to walk with people experiencing poverty in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia.

SWAP needs these summer staff positions:

- Construction Volunteer Coordinator
- Meals Coordinator
- Materials Coordinator
- Site Coordinator

For more information:
mcc.org/swap
(606) 633-5065
appalach2@mcc.org



TAMING HUNGER

This new DVD provides a glimpse into the process of providing food to hungry people around the world. Learn about how meat is canned in the U.S. and Canada, and hear stories of people in Burundi who are using canned meat to stop hunger in their communities.

Borrow at mcc.org/catalog