

English

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Transmission 2023

Migrations

Study Guide

Video stories of faith in action

Historias en vídeo de la fe en acción

Histoires vidéo de la foi en action

Video-Geschichten über den Glauben in Aktion

The Transmission series

Meet your global family

Commemorating the 500 years of the Anabaptist movement, this series of five short videos offers glimpses into how Anabaptists in various parts of the world are living out their faith. You will meet dedicated individuals and communities who face specific challenges and yet find their own unique ways of practicing an active faith as Jesus' disciples.

Young Anabaptist hosts guide you to over a dozen countries and help you understand the shared identity of the Anabaptists around the world. Hearing these stories, you will be inspired for your own Christian journey, in your own setting.

Transmission 2020 Ethiopia

Members of the Meserete Kristos Church, an Anabaptist faith community of over 500,000 members, share about their struggles with persecution, the involvement of youth in the church, cultivating spiritual maturity, and the importance of music and prayer. (Video length 10:16 minutes)

Transmission 2021 Indonesia

Two young adults talk about the cooperation and dialogue between Mennonites and Muslims as part of a peaceful witness. A small group in the Netherlands explores the realities of interfaith dialogue in their setting. (Video length 10:44 minutes)

Transmission 2022 Latin America

Inspirational stories from Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Honduras focus on how people of faith are living out, in practical ways, their commitment to care for God's creation. (Video length 11:14 minutes)

Transmission 2023 Migration

The video looks at the realities of refugees and other displaced persons in United States, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Greece, and it highlights how Christians are offering them love and practical help. (Video length 10:26 minutes)

Transmission 2024 Peace and Justice

Anabaptist young adults live out their commitment to peace amidst conflict and injustice in Ukraine, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Canada. (Video length 15:53 minutes)

Videos and study guides

The five videos inform, inspire, and invite discussion in various settings such as Sunday school classes, youth meetings, worship services, Anabaptist schools, small home groups, and more. Individual study guides provide background information and include questions for discussion and study.

The videos and study guides are available in various languages spoken by members of the Anabaptist/Mennonite family around the world. You can access them, for free, at these websites. (Search for Transmission.)



Mennonite World Conference
mwc-cmm.org



CommonWord
commonword.ca



Affox AG
affox.ch



Mennonite
World Conference

Congreso
Mundial Menonita

Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale

affox
production of film,
television, multimedia

For leaders

Planning the sessions

Preview: To understand the entire series, you might want to watch all five videos before leading any sessions. Notice the different themes that emerge and the geographical areas that are covered. Ideally, you should plan for enough sessions to show and discuss all five videos with your group. But if that is not possible, pick the videos that will best fit with your group's interests and the time available.

Adapt: The videos in this series can be used in a variety of ways. As a leader, you will decide what will work the best with your group, so feel free to adapt the ideas here to suit your setting and the length of the sessions. For example, you might show only part of a video, if the time is short. Or break up each video into smaller segments to be viewed at various points in one session.

Dig deeper: As you plan, see the "Background information" section of this guide (p. 10) for additional information, such as historical background, maps, statistics and more.

Sharing the guide: Consider whether you want to download and print the discussion pages from the study guide to share with group members. This is not essential, but paper copies would provide a space for participants to take notes and would make the discussion questions available for everyone.

Leading a session

1. Begin today's session with a brief welcome and an opening prayer.
2. If your group has viewed a video in a previous session, do a brief recap on what was viewed then. You might ask group members about a story, idea, or question that stuck out for them from that previous session.
3. If you copied pages ahead of time for the participants, hand them out now. Invite group members to take notes as they watch, or to identify discussion questions they would like to talk about later.
4. View today's video together. You can watch the entire video, or you could break it up into smaller segments, interspersed with conversation.
5. Invite responses from the group members to what they have watched. To lead toward deeper conversation, you can offer a discussion question, a quotation, or a Bible passage to guide the conversation. These are suggested for each video segment.
6. In your conversations, make sure to guide the group's thinking toward your own setting and community. Did the video present any ideas that inspire your group to do something right where you are? What might be a next step for your actions?



Democratic Republic of Congo

Concluding a session

As you come to the end of each session, feel free to pick one of the prayers or blessings below.

1. To close, invite group members into a short time of silent reflection. Then, as a parting blessing, a participant could offer a spontaneous prayer, or you could do together one of the suggested prayer and blessings. Another option is to end the session by singing a song together.
2. Remembering all the stories you witnessed in this video, what new understandings have you gained about the global family of Anabaptists? How do these stories encourage or challenge you? Take time as a group to pray for your siblings around the world—people like you who are partners with God in spreading peace and justice far and near.
3. Scripture has many reminders that the Creator is a God of peace and justice. Ponder together the words of Psalm 85:9–10: “God’s salvation is very close to those who honor him so that his glory can live in our land. Faithful love and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed.” Offer words of thanksgiving for the witnesses of God’s peace in this video.
4. For a closing prayer, invite the group to pray together the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13). Tying it with the stories you have just witnessed, you might highlight verse 10: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it in heaven.”
5. Offer a simple sending blessing: “The Lord lift up his face to you and grant you peace” (Numbers 6:26).
6. Explore other prayers and blessings from the Anabaptist family in North America:
 - Anabaptist Worship Network www.anabaptistworship.net
 - Together in Worship www.togetherinworship.net/Home
 - Leading in Worship www.leadinginworship.com

Invitation to respond

After the session, you might want to give feedback to the producers of this series. Feel free to send your comments to info@affox.ch.

Share the stories

Ranging from 10 to 16 minutes, the five videos inform, inspire, and invite discussion in various settings:

- Sunday school classes
- Youth meetings
- Worship services
- Anabaptist schools
- Small home groups

Individual study guides provide background information and include questions for discussion and study.



Indonesia



Netherlands

Transmission 2023: Migrations



Camp Mavrovouni, Greece

Transmission is a series of five video productions leading up to the year 2025 and the five-hundredth anniversary of the Anabaptist movement.

This video is the fourth in the Transmission series. It explores migration and displacement in five regions of the world: the Mexico–United States border, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, and Greece. This video shows a few examples of how modern-day followers of Jesus seek to love their displaced neighbors.

The host of the video is Sebastian Alsdorf, a German Mennonite currently serving as a board member with Mennonitisches Hilfswerk in Ludwigshafen, Germany.

The video runs 10:30 minutes, with five distinct segments. Information and discussion questions on the individual segments are on the following pages. To find background information for each segment, go to p. 10.



*Sebastian Alsdorf
Mennonitisches Hilfswerk
relief organization*

USA: Migrations through the USA–Mexico border

Facing the reality of migrants and refugees entering the United States through the Mexican border, spouses Christopher Harnish-Nisly and Elizabeth Harnish-Nisly have a sense of calling to help care for them.

To ponder and discuss

1. Sebastian remarks that Mennonite history includes stories of violence, displacement and migration. Does your family history include stories of flight or migration? If so, share that story briefly with others in the group. How do you think your life has been affected by those stories of moving?
2. As a group, explore a copy of *Martyrs Mirror* together; look at some illustrations and maybe read a story of an early Anabaptist. Imagine what it might have been like to be a member of that persecuted group in the early days of the Anabaptist movement. What might your group have done to protect yourselves as a community and as individuals?
3. See page 11 for an explanation of the categories of fleeing people: refugees, displaced people, and asylum seekers. What facts do you know about their presence in your own country? In your own community? What challenges do they face where you live? Can you name some of the local organizations that are working to help these newcomers?
4. Read Leviticus 19:33–37 together. These are instructions that God gave to Moses while the people of Israel were living in the desert. What does this passage say about justice and immigrants? About rules and regulations? According to this passage, why should immigrants be treated fairly?
5. Christopher says that his commitment to work with displaced people and migrants grows out of what he learned growing up in his church. How does your church inspire and equip congregants to help others? What is your church doing to address the worldwide problem of people without a home?
6. In Jeremiah 7: 3–7 the prophet offers harsh words and encouragement to the Israelites. What are the sins the people are told to avoid? How does this passage relate to today's realities in your country and around the world? What is your response to God's promise in this passage?

"I feel like we're called to help others, and there's many ways to do this, but this was one of the ways I could help. I think it's definitely related to the teachings that I grew up with being at a Mennonite church. I think that I was instilled with certain ideas of duty or that it's important to help others."

Christopher Harnish-Nisly – immigration legal aide



"During the days of the Reformation, in the early 1500s, the Anabaptists were perceived as a threat to society. That fear led to their displacement resulting from persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations."

Sebastian Alsdorf – MH Mennonite relief organization, Germany



"We need people like Christopher and Elizabeth to walk with displaced people. Last year more than three million people crossed the US–Mexico border, often back and forth, with the hope of finding a new and better life."

Sebastian Alsdorf – MH Mennonite relief organization, Germany

"The Martyrs Mirror documents nearly 1,200 martyrdoms, starting with accounts starting with New Testament accounts up to and throughout the 16th and early 17th centuries. The Anabaptists' refusal to respond to violence with violence led to displacement and migration."—

Sebastian Alsdorf – MH Mennonite relief organization, Germany

Colombia: Immigrants from Venezuela

More than six million people have fled Venezuela in the recent past, leading to the largest external migration crisis in Latin America's history. Colombia is the largest recipient of this migration and has welcomed over two million people across its borders.

To ponder and discuss

1. Ricardo Torres, the children's and youth program coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee, explains that the agency aims to address both people's emergency needs and to help them build for the long term. Consider the story of Leddi Carolina González Rosales and her husband, who are developing a business to sustain their family and others. What are some things displaced people need to have stability and quality of life in the long term?
2. "Who is my neighbor?" a legal expert once asked Jesus. Read the story in Luke 10:25-37 together. What does the story suggest about living as a good neighbor? Consider together the needs of your neighbors, in your community. Who is offering practical help to them?
3. Brainstorm together about stories in the Bible that show people moving, migrating, being displaced, and integrating into a new place. What does the Bible say about nations, citizenship, and migration?
4. In James 2:14-17, followers of Christ are reminded that simply having faith is not enough if they don't respond with compassion to people in need. What is your reaction to the strong admonition in these verses? What actions are you taking to make sure you aren't living a "dead faith?"
5. In Colombia members of the Mennonite Brethren churches work with Mennonite Central Committee in addressing refugee needs. Something important can happen when congregations partner with service agencies to help people in need. Is that kind of cooperation happening in your community? If so, list some examples. If that cooperation is not happening, brainstorm about how your church could connect with a service agency's work in your area.

"In terms of achievements, we can consider the involvement of the church in response to such a strong migratory phenomenon as an improving quality of life for many migrants."

**Francisco Mosquera –
MCC program coordinator**



"The most difficult thing for me was getting to Cali. It took me nine days because I had to walk to get here from Cúcuta. I had no food or water, and I struggled with depression. My family did not know where I was during that time. They thought I had gone missing."

**Alexander Garcia –
immigrant from Venezuela**



"Our hope is for the program to be long term and not just an emergency program. In other words, so that our focus can be more on participant sustainability in Columbia."

**Ricardo Torres – MCC children's
and youth program coordinator**



Democratic Republic of Congo: internally displaced persons

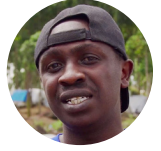
The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been the scene of suffering and misery for years. The eastern part of the country struggles with numerous social, political and security problems. In June 2022, clashes in the province of North Kivu led to a crisis affecting more than one million people, most of them in and around Goma.

To ponder and discuss

1. As you watch this video segment, what signs of hope do you see among the displaced people in Congo?
2. Read the quotation by Florence Mihigo, who mentions one reason she volunteers. What other motivations might volunteers have to serve people who are refugees?
3. Consider the importance of clean, easily available water for the well-being of displaced people. Read the quotations of Germaine Kambundi and Antoine Kimbila. How might access to water help people both materially and spiritually?
4. In Matthew 25:31–45 Jesus tells a story about how people will be judged “when the Son of Man comes in his majesty” and sits on his throne. What are the actions the king praises? How does this story relate to this video about migrations? How do you respond to the harsh words the king directs to those on his left?
5. This video segment shows lots of children. In addition to water, food, and shelter, what are some unique needs these children might have as they live in unstable situations? What positive contributions might the children make to those settings?
6. Consider together: What Bible verses might be important to people who are fleeing danger? In particular, look in the book of Psalms for prayers and laments about people in difficult circumstances. Can you also find there (and elsewhere in the Bible) words that offer comfort to people who are suffering? After you have explored the passages, use some of those biblical phrases to pray as a group for the people in the DRC.

“There are marginalized children who are stigmatized, confused, and traumatized.”

**Christian Salumo – HROC
volunteer in Goma, MCC partner**



“One minute is all it takes now for me to get water. When we came, life was very hard. The school for our children, the clinic. We are getting water without problems. Life has really changed.”

**Germaine Kambundi – displaced
person from the Kasai region**



“I signed as a volunteer to be in solidarity with refugees because life calls us to share.”

**Florence Mihigo –
HROC volunteer in Goma**



The drilling project is important because water is life. God takes care of us not just spiritually, but physically as well.”

**Antoine Kimbila –
general secretary,
Mennonite Brethren Church**



Lebanon: Refugees in the Middle East

Currently Lebanon has the highest proportion of refugees per capita in the Middle East: about one in five people in Lebanon is a refugee. Staff serving with Mennonite Central Committee highlight the reality of refugees there.

To ponder and discuss

1. Discuss as a group: Based on what you have seen so far, do you see any difference between people who are migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers? (See the background material on page 14, for some definitions.) Consider together reasons why people leave one area and need to live under difficult circumstances elsewhere.
2. Psalm 10 seems like it could have been written by displaced people fleeing intense danger. Study the psalm together and see if you can identify some of the difficult feelings expressed there: complaint, lament, accusations, and a sense of abandonment. Look also for the affirmations about who God is and who God cares about. Pray together using phrases from the psalm.
3. Read the quotation of Riad Jarjour. What role do you think trust plays in places where displaced people are living together in difficult circumstances? What rules might they need to establish so that they can live well together?
4. What role does the gospel (the good news of Jesus) play in a country overwhelmed by human needs? What could be the contribution of local churches and Christians? How might Christians in other parts of the world contribute as well?
5. If you were a service worker in the country of Lebanon—or in the other places shown in this video—how would you sustain your own strength and hope in the situation where you're serving? What gifts would you ask God to give you for this challenging task?
6. The people of Lebanon have faced many crises over the decades. The statistics in this video come from the year 2023. For information about the current reality there, individual members of your discussion group can use their smartphones to do searches on the websites of Mennonite Central Committee (mcc.org), the UN Refugee Agency (www.unhcr.org), and Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org). As a group, listen to some of those updated numbers and spend time in silent prayer for the real people those numbers represent.

“Actually, most people are not migrating into Europe. Right now Lebanon has the highest portion of refugees per capita in the Middle East. About one out of every five people in Lebanon is a refugee.”

Kate Mayhew –

MCC representative for Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, in Beirut



“In Syria, we’re in the twelfth year of ongoing conflict, with half of the original population displaced. We have about seven million internally displaced. This is still the highest number in the world. And really part of what MCC is trying to do is give opportunity and hope for people to stay.”

Garry Mayhew –

MCC representative for Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, in Beirut



“The most important thing for us as people who have been displaced is to trust each other and to be able to live together.”

Riad Jarjour – MCC partner, pastor and general secretary of the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue



Lesbos, Greece: refugees through Türkiye

Many people transit through Türkiye (Turkey) by boat to arrive on the Greek island of Lesbos, with the goal of reaching countries in Europe. Today, the new Mavrovouni camp takes in asylum seekers from many countries such as Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

To ponder and discuss

1. The US-based organization i58 has chosen as its key verses Isaiah 58:6-7. Read the passage together and discuss how those actions are manifest in the volunteers' work on Lesbos. Think back to the other locations shown in this video. How have God's words in this Isaiah passage been carried out in other countries where displaced people are present?
2. Several people interviewed in the video say that they feel called to help displaced people and refugees. Do any of the stories in this video "call" to you in a special way? What gifts would you personally bring to share with displaced people near you or far away? What might you learn from them as you experience life together?
3. Consider times when you have been with people who are living in different circumstances from yours. What did they receive from you? What did you receive from them?
4. Volunteer Travis Raver talks about serving displaced people "who have never experienced the gospel before." What challenges might the Christian volunteers on Lesbos face as they try to communicate God's love to the refugees there? As a group, consider together how your individual actions and the actions of your faith community can witness to people who don't know the good news of Jesus Christ.
5. As you come to the end of the video, why not take up Sebastian's challenge to invite a newcomer in your community over for a cup of tea or coffee? Or maybe you have already done this kind of hosting. What did you learn from each other?

"I'm here in Lesbos, Greece, and across the water is Türkiye, where all the refugees come from. They're coming across on a very difficult journey, often choosing bad weather and in small boats to avoid the authorities ... Since 2015 i58 has had around forty volunteers each month, here from the U. S. serving in Greece."

**Nate Shrock -
field coordinator of i58, in Lesbos**



"The refugees have taught me so much about the spirit of resilience and the ability to adapt to difficult and changing circumstances."

**Margaritha Guenther -
i58 volunteer**



"I have learned what it means to be hospitable. They are some of the most giving people that I know. I have been challenged by them."

Felicity Nolt - i58 volunteer



Background information



1

At the Mexico–U.S. border migrants from many countries seek to cross, with hope for a safer and more stable life. A young American couple in Baltimore is motivated to help address the needs of the migrants.

2

Millions of forcibly displaced and stateless people have reached Colombia, fleeing economic hardships, human rights violations, insecurity, and violence. Mennonites in Colombia are working with Mennonite Central Committee to address the needs of migrants.

3

The Democratic Republic of the Congo faces enormous challenges as violence displaces people from both within and outside the country. Mennonite communities there seek to address the many and complex needs of the people fleeing their homes.

4

The country of Lebanon hosts nearly 1 million displaced people struggling to meet their most basic needs. Mennonite Central Committee has a long history of supporting refugees and providing emergency relief there.

5

The island of Lesbos is a stopping point for refugees fleeing violence in neighboring countries and seeking new and safer places where they can live. Responding to the biblical mandate to help one's neighbor, volunteers serve to alleviate suffering of these asylum seekers.

Mennonites, migration and displacement

The Mennonite-Anabaptist faith stream has an extensive history of migration. Since the early days of the movement, and even today, some have fled their homes due to persecution, famines, epidemics, and violence. On occasion, groups have also voluntarily migrated to new areas seeking more religious freedom and better economic opportunities.

In the 1500s, the first Anabaptists were seen as defying the state-established church where they lived, and some were imprisoned and put to death for their beliefs. Others, like early Anabaptist leader Menno Simons, went into hiding or fled to safer areas within Europe.

Stories of Anabaptist persecution were collected in the classic work, *Martyrs Mirror or The Bloody Theater*, first published in Holland in 1660 in Dutch by Thieleman J. van Braght. The book documents the stories and testimonies of Christian martyrs from New Testament times up until 1660. The Anabaptist accounts take up a large portion of the book; in total around 1,200 martyrdoms are described.

The story of worldwide Mennonite migrations during the past five hundred years would fill many pages. In addition to movements within countries themselves, some of the key migrations include:

- From Holland and Belgium to the Vistula Delta in Prussia (today's Poland)- 1550s
- From Bern and Zurich, Switzerland, to the Alsace and Palatinate- 1600s
- From West Prussia to Russia (now Ukraine)- 1789 to 1870
- From Europe (Switzerland, Germany, France) to US and Canada- 1700s and 1800s
- From Russia to Canada and U.S.- late 1800s
- From Soviet Union to Canada, U.S., Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay- 1920s and 1930s
- From U. S. and Canada to Latin America- 1920s
- From Soviet Union to Germany, North and South America- 1940s
- From Canada to Central and South America- 1950s and 1960s
- From Soviet Union to Germany- 1970s and 1980s
- Within Africa and southeast Asia- currently

For more, see the entry titled "Migrations" in the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia Online: www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Migrations.

In addition to their own history of displacement, members of the Anabaptist family are contributing to the welfare of other displaced people around the world. This video shows a few examples of how modern-day followers of Jesus seek to love their displaced neighbors.

Facts about migrations and displacements

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) more than 120 million people have been forcibly displaced around the world, due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. This number is equivalent to the population of Japan, the twelfth largest country in the world. As of May 2024, the statistics are:

- 43.4 million refugees
- 63.3 million internally displaced people
- 6.9 million asylum seekers
- 5.8 million people in need of international protection, a majority from Venezuela

People flee their homes because of a variety of situations but are always seeking a better life than they can find in the place where they live. The UNHCR classifies them into the following categories:

- **Refugees:** These people are forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence. Ethnic, tribal, and religious violence, and war are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention spells out the definition of a refugee and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights refugees should receive.
- **Internally displaced people (IDP):** These people are forced to flee their home but don't cross an international border. Unlike refugees, they are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many kinds of aid because they are legally under the protection of their own government.
- **Asylum seekers:** These people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country by requesting asylum—the right to be recognized as a refugee and to receive legal protection and material assistance. They must demonstrate their fear of persecution and violence in their home country.



A page from *Martyrs Mirror*

USA: Migrations through the US-Mexican border

In the year 2022, Border Patrol at the U.S.-Mexico border encountered about two million people crossing the border illegally. Some of them returned to Mexico voluntarily and some were deported. In addition, about one million people crossed the border legally.

You must go back decades to see comparable numbers. There is a difference however between the immigrants of the past and the current immigrants. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were more single adults coming to the US. Now, families with children are increasingly arriving, and they have unique needs compared to single adults.

Also, communications have advanced. These days, migrants can easily share information on social media about the best places to go and what services are available.

Decades ago, migrants arriving in the U.S. were almost all Mexican nationals. Experts and officials note that migrants today arrive from a vast array of countries across South and Central America and Africa, as well as from China and India.

Many of the migrants are from Venezuela, where a socio-economic crisis—fueled by President Nicolás Maduro’s authoritarian government and worsened by the global pandemic and U.S. sanctions—has led one in four Venezuelans to flee the country since 2015.

Increases in violence in certain regions of Mexico have also fueled more migration. In July 2022, for example, U.S. Customs and Border Protection figures indicate 4,000 Mexican family encounters at the border. A year later, that number had more than quadrupled, reaching nearly 22,000.

Colombia: Immigrants from Venezuela

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) the Americas region currently sees some 20.3 million forcibly displaced and stateless people. Forced displacement was driven by human rights violations, persecution, violence, insecurity and inequality, coupled with the economic consequences of COVID-19, the global economic impact of the Ukraine situation, and severe climate-related disasters.

A record number of people made their way to the United States in mixed movements, enduring extremely hazardous conditions. The most dangerous area is the Darién Gap on the Colombia-Panama border. There is no road, not even a primitive one, across the Darién. Heavy rain and flash floods are frequent, law enforcement and medical support are nonexistent, rapes and robberies are common. However, this route was taken by hundreds of thousands of migrants since the 2010s, primarily Haitians and Venezuelans, to reach the Mexico–United States border. By 2023 over 500,000 migrants had crossed the Gap.

With a history of colonization and slave trade, Colombia has seen violence through civil wars, a large drug trade and economic recession.

In the early twenty-first century, the situation improved. Violence declined after 2002, and the economy grew rapidly, and poverty and unemployment declined. Colombia, like the rest of the world, suffered in the recession of 2009 but the economy soon recovered. The country also suffered severe floods in 2010.

Today tourism in Colombia is growing, and the country is developing steadily. In 2020 the population of Colombia was 50 million.

Mennonite presence began in the country in 1945, with missionary work done mostly by Mennonites from North America. They did evangelistic work, planted churches and were involved in the education of Indigenous children and health services.

More recent arrivals were the Low German Mennonites, who started to settle in Colombia in 2016. These immigrants came mainly from Mexico, but others came from the United States, Canada, and Bolivia.

There are currently four Anabaptist groups present in Colombia. In 2020 approximately 3,402 members worshipped in seventy-three Anabaptist congregations throughout the country. For more information about their story, search for “Colombia” at www.mwc-cmm.org. See also the Colombia entry in the Global Anabaptist Encyclopedia online: www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Colombia.

In recent history, the neighboring country of Venezuela has seen more than six million people fleeing due to violence and economic challenges. Colombia is the largest recipient of this migration, welcoming over two million people. Mennonites in Colombia are working with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to address the needs of migrants.

In the city of Cali, located in the south of Colombia, MCC supports the Mennonite Brethren denomination with various projects and institutions (with volunteer resources and personnel). One program, Programa de Atención a Migrantes, (PAM) offers displaced people and migrants material assistance, as well as psychosocial support for those affected by violence and educational services for youth.

The Mennonite Brethren denomination in the Valley of Cauca has twenty-one churches of which ten are in the city and who are recipients of migrants and displaced people. These migrants and displaced people who arrive at the churches are referred to the PAM program, where they are cared for in a comprehensive manner.

Migrants provide labor in various activities for the city. The majority manage to acquire official documents to remain in the country and thus find work. However, a large percentage of the population performs informal jobs such as selling groceries from their country, cleaning, both in homes and on car windows on the streets.

Francisco Mosquera is the pastor of a Mennonite Brethren church of approximately sixty members, Luz y Vida congregation. Francisco is a great charismatic leader and is also dedicated to social work. He coordinates the PAM program for assistance to migrants and displaced people.

Ricardo Torres has served with Mennonite Central Committee in different parts of Latin America for twenty years. He is currently linked to MCC Colombia as coordinator of the program with boys, girls, adolescents and young people through a project called Church Initiatives; Ricardo is present with the Mennonite Central Committee in the Valley Region and supports the PAM program.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC or DR Congo) is located in central Africa. By land area, the DRC is the second-largest country in Africa and the eleventh-largest in the world. With a population of around 115 million, the DRC is the most populous officially francophone country in the world. The national capital and largest city is Kinshasa, which is also the economic center.

The country was colonized and exploited by European powers but gained its independence from Belgium in 1960. It has many natural resources but has suffered from political instability, a lack of infrastructure, corruption, and centuries of both commercial and colonial extraction and exploitation, with little widespread development. The country's level of human development is ranked 171 out of 193 countries by the Human Development Index and is classed as a least developed country by the United Nations.

Christianity is the predominant religion of the DRC. Estimates are that Christians constitute 93.7 percent of the population, with Muslims making up 1.5 percent of the population, along with other smaller communities of other religious groups.

There are about 35 million Catholics in the country and the Catholic church owns and manages an extensive network of hospitals, schools, and clinics, as well as many diocesan economic enterprises, including farms, ranches, stores, and artisan shops. Sixty-two Protestant denominations are federated under the umbrella of the Church of Christ in the Congo (Église du Christ au Congo), representing more than 25 million members.

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) lists four Mennonite groups in DRC as members: Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCO), the Communauté Évangélique Mennonite (CEM), Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo, and the Communauté Mennonite de Kinshasa. Members of the Anabaptist-Mennonite community in the DRC number almost 200,000 baptized members and they represent 9.56 percent of total of the global Anabaptist family. (Two other groups are in the process of joining MWC.)

The situation in the DRC is a major moral and humanitarian challenge. Over the decades the country has dealt with large numbers of people displaced by conflict both internally and from neighboring countries. According to the UNHCR, internally displaced people in the country number 6.9 million, with over 5 million in the eastern part of the country. The DRC also hosts over 517,000 refugees and asylum seekers who have fled violence in neighboring countries, mainly the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan.

In addition, civil wars and continued internal conflicts within the country have caused large numbers of Congolese to flee to neighboring countries. UNHCR reports their numbers at more than 1 million.

The eastern area, Kivu, has suffered decades of unrest because of ongoing conflict in neighboring Rwanda. Violence between the Tutsis and Hutus in neighboring Rwanda led to mass killings there and the flight of almost one million refugees into the DRC. An estimated five million people died because of the conflict which lasted until 2003, with some armed groups active until now in the Kivu areas near the border.

Violence also increased in the Kasai region of DRC, in the central part of the country. Armed groups sought gold, diamonds, oil, and cobalt for use both in the region and internationally. Ethnic and cultural rivalries were also at play, as well as religious motives, along with a political crisis with postponed elections.

Violence initially flared in the Kasai region of in August 2016, sparked by tensions between customary chiefs in the Kasai region and the government. The violence spread rapidly in early 2017. Existing intercommunity tensions became part of a wider conflict involving militias, armed groups and security forces across a region the size of Germany.

Hundreds of thousands of people ran for their lives. Women and children displaced by violence escaped to isolated locations to find safety, losing access to essential goods and services such as health care, safe water and sanitation, and education. The militias used children to fight and kill, or to function as human shields. According to UNICEF, 3.8 million people in the Kasai region need humanitarian assistance, including 2.3 million children.

Armed conflicts have affected Congolese Mennonites as well. Over the years thousands of them have been displaced and dozens have been killed. Church buildings and church schools were damaged or destroyed.

Mennonites in the DRC serve their neighbors in a variety of ways. In addition to congregational life and evangelism, they operate schools, medical facilities and educational institutions. They are also involved in reconciliation and peace-building projects, with support from Mennonite Brethren Mission, Mennonite Central Committee and other international groups.

A poignant peacemaking story is about Michael (MJ) Sharp, an American Mennonite who worked for MCC in a peace and reconciliation effort to convince rebel fighters to lay down their weapons and return home. In 2017, while employed by the United Nations and investigating civil conflicts in the country, he and a colleague were ambushed and murdered by unknown assailants in the DRC.

Ever since survivors of brutal fighting in the Kasai region fled to the city of Kikwit in 2017, Mennonite Brethren churches have been ministering to them with faith in action. The survivors came with burns, wounds from machetes, and babies about to be born. They were exhausted from walking for weeks or months from various regions of neighboring Kasai Province with little food or water. They carried emotional wounds from watching their family members and neighbors massacred.

Individuals from the churches of the Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC), which is based in Kikwit, saw the need and took people into their homes, providing clothing and food. The CEFMC hospital staff gave medical care, and their churches became temporary shelters.

Of the more than 24,000 people who had fled to Kikwit by the end of 2017, CEFMC supported nearly three thousand the following year with the support of Anabaptist organizations around the world. Mennonite Central Committee worked with CEFMC, training staff to carry out equitable food distribution and development programs. MCC also brought in resources from Canadian Foodgrains Bank for food distributions. (See more at www.mcc.org/our-stories/church-and-mcc-work-together-peace-grows-kikwit.)

Traumatic exposure is common for people from DR Congo and other war-affected countries. Many experienced armed violence personally, lost loved ones to violence, or were forced to flee their homes as refugees. The effects of past violence continue to affect people's current mental health.

The organization Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC) provides community workshops and mental health support. They help survivors cope with trauma and pain and explore how as a community they can overcome difficult experiences and move forward in lifegiving ways. The HROC approach is valuable because it works at both the individual and community levels. Healing strategies apply the Ubuntu principle: I am because you are. One cannot be fully healed alone.

MCC and its partners work with HROC (healingandrebuidingourcommunities.org), to help people name and understand how they have been impacted by different traumatizing events.

To learn more about Mennonites in the Democratic Republic of Congo visit: www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Congo,_Democratic_Republic_of. See also information about MCC's work there at: www.mcc.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/dr-congo.

Lebanon: Refugees in the Middle East

Lebanon has a long and eventful past. Various populations have lived in that land including the Phoenicians, Persians, Romans, Christians, Muslims, Ottomans, and the French.

Today the country has a population of approximately 5.3 million inhabitants, many of whom are facing severe hardships.

In 1943 Lebanon became independent from French rule. Its history since then has been marked by alternating periods of relative political stability and prosperity, interspersed with political turmoil and armed conflict.

As a result of war with neighboring Israel in the 1940s and more recently, close to 500,000 registered Palestinian refugees currently live in Lebanon, with approximately 45 percent of them living in the country's twelve refugee camps. Human Rights Watch reports that they live in "appalling social and economic conditions."

Lebanon is a religiously diverse country, with eighteen state-recognized religious sects: four Muslim, twelve Christian, one Druze, and one Jewish. In the 1970s the country experienced conflict due to sectarian tensions, boosted by the influence of relocated Palestinian militants in the area. This led to a civil war and attacks across the Israel-Lebanon border.

The conflicts caused massive loss of human life and displaced nearly a million people within the country. In more recent times, refugees have entered from other neighboring countries, posing new challenges for the political and economic conditions.

In October 2019, the first of a series of mass civil demonstrations erupted in response to planned taxes on gasoline, tobacco, and online phone calls. Since then, the country has experienced ongoing sectarian rule, a stagnant economy and liquidity crisis, unemployment, endemic corruption in the public sector, legislation that is perceived to shield the ruling class from accountability, and failures from the government to provide basic services such as electricity, water and sanitation.

An explosion at the main port of Beirut, in August 2020, destroyed the surrounding areas, killing over two hundred people, and injuring thousands more. The cause of the fire and explosion was later determined to be the fertilizer ammonium nitrate that had been unsafely stored. In the days following the explosion, protests resumed, and Prime Minister Hassan Diab and his cabinet resigned.

In May 2022, Lebanon held its first election since a painful economic crisis dragged it to the brink of becoming a failed state. Lebanon's crisis has been so severe that more than 80 percent of the population is now considered poor by the United Nations.

The Syrian war brought an influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, now estimated at 1.5 million, 50 percent of them below the age of eighteen. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the country hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Around 20 percent of Syrian refugee families live in informal settlements and collective shelters, often in deplorable conditions. The crisis has also pushed many Lebanese into poverty. Due to the depreciation of the Lebanese pound and high inflation, people's purchasing power has significantly decreased.

Over the decades, tensions and conflicts have continued along the border between the Israel and Lebanon. The recent attacks by Israel on Gaza, starting in 2023, have escalated attacks between Israel, Hamas, and Hezbollah fighters based in Lebanon. These have caused more displacement.

Needs assessments show that all population groups struggle to cover their basic needs, particularly in terms of food and health care. Public services were already struggling before the economic crisis and are now on the verge of collapse. Access to health care has been drastically reduced due to financial barriers and lack of medicine. Many health staff have left the country due to low wages, making it even harder to access critical secondary health care.

Mennonite Central Committee has a seventy-five-year history supporting refugees and providing emergency relief in Lebanon. This work continues today among the Syrian refugees, as well as with vulnerable Lebanese communities. MCC programs help increase food security, expand access to education and encourage participants to reimagine peace throughout the nation. To learn more visit www.mcc.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/lebanon.

An important partner in this work is the Beirut based Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD). The organization organizes workshops, conferences and dialogue sessions to enable society to approach conflicts in a nonviolent manner.

This is the first objective and commitment of pastor Riad Jarjour, who works closely with Kate and Garry Mayhew, MCC representatives for Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. A Syrian from Aleppo, Riad Jarjour grew up in the city of Homs, Syria, and is now president of the (FDCD).



Riad Jarjour in Lebanon

Lesbos, Greece: Refugees through Türkiye

The Greek island of Lesbos (also written as Lesvos) is located in the Mediterranean Sea, off the western coast of Türkiye (Turkey). The local population of the island is about 85,000. In September of 2015, migrants and asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq began arriving on the shores of Lesbos.

That year, the island hosted approximately a half a million migrants and asylum seekers—individuals and families fleeing war, violence, and poverty in the Middle East and Africa. Their goal is to settle in more stable countries in Europe and beyond.

Even though arrivals have significantly dropped since the height of the so-called refugee crisis and they are forced to stay on Lesbos until their asylum claims are decided. Since the 2015 spike in arrivals, it is unclear who should be held accountable for the ongoing human rights violations on the Greek islands and whether an alternative asylum policy is feasible.

The Moria refugee camp was founded in January 2013, and it served as the largest camp in Europe until a fire destroyed it in September 2020. The camp was built to accommodate around 3,000 people, however there were around 20,000 people living there in the summer of 2020, with 40 percent of them being children. In 2018, the field coordinator of Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) called it “the worst refugee camp on earth.”

After the fires destroyed the Moria camp, Europe responded rapidly as countries sent aid to help the host community on Lesbos. Although the new center was created in a short time, today it has all the necessary facilities and provides services to its residents for a humane and decent living environment. New facilities and winterized housing significantly improved the center and, following gradual improvements of facilities, the Mavrovouni center has become a welcoming space for asylum seekers.

Today many organizations and non-governmental organizations are providing aid to the refugees on Lesbos. One of those is i58, whose volunteers take inspiration from the verses in Isaiah 58:6–7: “Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family?”

Volunteers with this Christian service agency help with food distribution, shelter, and clothing needs. To find out more about the work of i58 organization on behalf of refugees in Greece, go to: www.i58global.org/greece.

In gratitude

The video series was conceived by Max Wiedmer, a Swiss Mennonite from Affox (a video, film, and multimedia company) and Hajo Hajonides, a Dutch Mennonite from the International Menno Simons Center. D. Michael Hostetler, a Mennonite video producer in Canada, helped shape the series and provided some video direction. Video teams from various parts of the world captured the stories on location. This study guide was written by Hajo Hajonides, Bruno Waldvogel and Virginia A. Hostetler. Layout by Meagan Matiz and coordination by Max Wiedmer.

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**One generation shall declare
to another God's mighty acts.**

Psalm 145:4

**Una generación pondera tus obras
a la otra, y le cuenta tus hazañas.**

Salmo 145:4

**Une génération dit à celle qui la suit
combien les oeuvres de Dieu sont belles.**

Psaume 145,4

**Eine Generation soll der anderen
von Gottes Taten erzählen.**

Psalm 145,4