

MCC Peace Project Highlights

Fall 2019 Update for The Meeting House

Your partnership is ushering in peace in communities throughout the continent of Africa. Because of your generosity, peace work is being funded, leading to a decrease in violence, helping girls stay in school and enabling more peaceful elections. Thank you for helping make this important work possible!

This report highlights some of the ways your donations are making a positive impact in Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

CHAD

Project: Interfaith Peace Education for Religious Leaders



(MCC photo/Mark Tymm)

Pictured are participants at an interfaith workshop in Abeche, Chad, hosted by Ethics, Peace and Justice (EPJ), an MCC partner for peace initiatives for over 20 years. Participants are discussing challenges to interfaith collaboration in their communities. This peace project brings together leaders (clergy, youth, women and others) of the Islamic, Catholic and Evangelical faith communities to foster cooperation, learn peacebuilding skills and promote a culture of peace. Tensions between the faith communities often threaten peaceful coexistence.

During a three-year project cycle (2018-2021), EPJ plans to do peace education with students, public authorities, community leaders (including clergy and women) and Chadian returnees from Central African Republic. In the past reporting period, they conducted peace trainings for 174 religious leaders and youth (74 Muslims, 60 evangelical Christians, and 40 Catholic Christians).

Story:

Oum Hadjer is a growing city on the main highway between Abeche and N'Djamena, which connects Chad with Sudan. It has historic Muslim roots, and most Christians there have migrated in the last decade. Differences between languages and cultural and religious practices add to the tensions in this city. During an EPJ youth training in Oum Hadjer, a young Christian named Nadeyo Philemon stood and publicly committed himself to be a Christian advocate for Muslims, contradicting those in his community who would group all Muslims together. Upon hearing this, several Muslim youths stood and said they will likewise commit to working against stereotyping and generalizing towards Christians. Participants pointed out that this was the first time they have received any sort of peacebuilding training in Oum Hadjer, and they requested that EPJ return to train community leaders and others.

SOUTH SUDAN

Project: Loreto Peace Club at Loreto Girls Secondary School



(MCC photo/Candacia Greeman)

The girls in the Loreto Peace Club (pictured above) face unique challenges in Rumbek, South Sudan, but your support helps them remain strong. Because of the extreme situations of violence and uncertainty that surround their community, the peace club and the school act as a haven and provide the tools needed to face overwhelming challenges. Thank you for partnering with MCC to help change the lives of girls in South Sudan!

A poor road network and insecurity have contributed to an increase in commodity prices as transportation of goods has become risky and expensive. The community is also affected by climate change, which has led to unpredictable weather patterns manifested in delayed rains. The rains were expected in May this year but did not come until July. The community lost seeds planted in anticipation of the rains.

This led to increased food insecurity as families depleted their food reserves. These factors have contributed to stress in families in Rumbek as the cost of family upkeep soars, and families have had to spend considerably more in order to have basic supplies. Food scarcity at home and lack of adequate nourishment have been attributed to an increase in irritability and aggressive behavior within the student population, particularly young children in the primary school.

This economic strain on families has also contributed to family violence and in some cases has led to forced marriages for financial gain in the form of a bride price. Forced marriages of girls under the age of 18 are a big social challenge in the community and for the school. Young girls are withdrawn from school and forced into arranged marriages by their close family members – usually uncles and fathers.

This practice equates the value of a girl to the amount of dowry that will be received from their suitors. Currently, there are six young girls studying at the Loreto Girls Secondary School (which is a boarding school) who are facing forced marriage. Due to their situations, the girls are unable to stay at their homes or join their families during the school holidays because they are likely to be given away in exchange for a bride price. At the secondary school, the girls have accommodation, security and an opportunity to pursue their education. In addition to this, counsellors help these girls process these difficult experiences.

This state of food insecurity is likely to lead to a continuation of the protracted crisis, displacements, cattle raiding and inter communal conflict.

In response to the food crisis, MCC supports a school feeding program at Loreto Primary School, serving two meals per day at the school. The all-girls secondary school, where the peace club takes place, is a boarding school, so all meals are provided for students.

Project Progress:

- There are currently 30 girls in the secondary school peace club. This club oversees a variety of special events, including an annual peace concert and a peace day celebration. Both were successful events this year.
- 136 student teachers went through training on trauma resilience, including the use of art to help young students express themselves through drawings and paintings. They also were trained on the concept of “peaceful play”, whereby they learned about the “ABCDE” of problem solving. This process entails **A**sking what the problem is, **B**rainstorming solutions, **C**hoosing the best solutions, **D**oing it and **E**valuating if the solution worked.
- One of the highlights of this project is the Nyankai (big sister/little sister weekends), which take place once per quarter. The peace club members (big sisters) host primary 7 and 8 students (little sisters) from the Loreto Primary School. The most recent weekend event included doing art and making peace messages. Participants enjoyed cookies prepared by the peace club members (big sisters) and this provided a good environment for the group to discuss and share experiences. The girls shared personal stories during the listening circles (a trauma healing tool facilitated by the big sisters), which enabled the little sisters to share their feelings and emotions and describe the challenges they face at home and in daily life.

- The big sisters served as advisors and offered their little sisters support and encouragement. This activity also provided an opportunity to talk about academics and how to balance studies with domestic chores at home. The girls discussed the importance of peace and encouraged each other to be agents of peace and reconciliation in their daily lives.
- During the academic year, a trained counsellor who is a former Loreto School teacher, well-acquainted with the challenges facing the girls, visited the school for one month to provide individual and group counselling sessions as needed. In this past year she has provided individual counselling sessions for 26 students and group counselling for 31 students.

ETHIOPIA

Project: Engaging and empowering leaders in peacebuilding



(MCC photo/Rose Shenk)

- **1207** church leaders participated in trainings at over 67 churches (698 of them were women)
- **206** disputes resolved
- **211** campus youth ministry leaders and college students trained

December 2018 – September 2019

MCC has partnered with Meserate Kristos Church (MKC), one of the largest Mennonite conferences in the world, since 1976. Currently through your generosity, MCC is able to support MKC as they train church leaders, including women's ministry leaders, youth leaders, deacons and Sunday school teachers in peacebuilding methods, including trauma healing and reconciliation. This teaching impacts congregations, college campuses and communities by helping leaders mitigate conflicts especially before they erupt into acts of violence. Above, Tsahai Debebe (left), Hamsale Anulu and Zenebewich Oshawa participate at a peace leadership training in June 2019. The women are part of the women's ministry leadership group in the MKC, and these peacebuilding trainings have given them tools to reduce conflict in their personal lives, churches and families.



(MCC photo/Rose Shenk)

Pictured are members of the "Banana" group as they get ready to have a small group discussion during a training session for children's Sunday school teachers from MKC held in June 2019. One larger group was subdivided into three groups—Mango, Banana, and Avocado.

With MCC's help, MKC has developed a comprehensive peace-themed Sunday school curriculum for three different ages of children. The curriculum was written in 2013 by Krista Allen, a participant in MCC's Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program and is currently finishing a trial phase. MKC hopes to publish and distribute the curriculum widely in the next several years. Currently, 4800 children are receiving this peace-themed Sunday school curriculum.