

Finding alternatives to coca in Colombia | New chances outside the city in Haiti | A tree for better nutrition



A Common Place



Finding alternatives to coca

In Colombia's Chocó region, MCC and the Mennonite Brethren Church are helping farmers find legal, sustainable and peaceful alternatives to growing coca for cocaine.

BY EMILY LOEWEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NINA LINTON



No highways connect Bebedó, Colombia, a small town on the shore of the San Juan river, to nearby communities.

The 672 residents come and go only by boat. They don't have electricity or any paved roads.

What they do have is three police stations. Officers

often survey the riverbank, dressed in dark green, the yellow, blue and red of the Colombian flag on their uniforms visible from passing boats.

Residents live in what some call a "red zone," land on the border between areas controlled by the government and those controlled by illegal armed groups.

Since armed groups arrived in the Chocó region in the late 1980s, the isolated area has been known for growing coca, the plant used to produce cocaine.

Before, farmers relied on crops such as yucca, plantain and sugar cane. Small mining operations—time- and labour-intensive work that brings little reward—helped families make ends meet. Today, with low returns on crops and small-scale mining pushed aside by larger companies, families have few options.

Growing coca, a tree that requires relatively little maintenance, gave struggling farmers an income unmatched by any other work in the region.

Farmers themselves are so far removed from the process of making cocaine that they've likely never seen the drug in its

final form, says Bonnie Klassen, director for MCC's work in South America and Mexico. They have little opportunity to know of cocaine's effect in the U.S. and other countries—and, in the midst of their own need, little chance to reflect on that devastation.

"Rural Colombian farmers do know that coca is illegal, but that's more abstract in the face of hunger," Klassen says.

The cost that's most apparent is one close to home. With coca comes an increase in guns and violence. In Chocó, multiple armed groups fight each other over coca production.

Government efforts to eradicate coca put farmers at risk of losing their entire crops, whether legal or not, at any time, and confrontations between the government and armed groups are always a threat.

By 2012, Ramon Casildo Mosquera Murillo, like some other farmers in the region, began feeling the risks of coca were too high. But without the added income, Murillo

For Ramon Casildo Mosquera Murillo, who travels by river to reach his farm, the training and support he received to grow cacao for chocolate gave him a sustainable alternative to raising coca.

“Rural Colombian farmers do know that coca is illegal, but that's more abstract in the face of hunger.”



This cacao nursery was built next to the rice mill, and workers such as Aida Marino plant cacao seeds in small bags with organic compost made from the rice hulls. More mature seedlings are then distributed to area farmers.

would need new ways to support his three children and aging parents.

The MCC-supported Cacao not Coca project, run by the agricultural program of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó, provided a way out.

Murillo attended a training session on how to grow cacao. Then the church's agricultural project gave him 1,900 cacao seedlings in the hope that after two years they will bear fruit that can be harvested and processed into chocolate.

Since 2009, MCC has supported the efforts of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó to help farmers support themselves without raising coca.

A first step was building a rice mill and distributing rice seeds. The church also committed to buying the rice after harvest as incentive for farmers to plant a crop many had abandoned when mills in the area broke or they couldn't find buyers.

From 2012 through 2015, MCC, through its account

with the Foods Resource Bank, is providing \$172,400 to help support the project's efforts to promote cacao, which can provide farmers twice as much income per harvest as other food crops.

A cacao nursery was built next to the rice mill. Last March, the project began training farmers and handing out plants. By October, some 110,000 cacao plants had been given out to 140 families.

Helping families increase their income and live with dignity is part of the mission of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó, says Jesus Alfredo Benitez Palacios, who manages the agriculture program.

"We're not only called to preach the Word but also to find alternatives and help people who are marginalized or people who are poor or in need," he says.

For Jose Rutilio Rivas Dominguez, president of the regional council for the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó, this is part of the church's call to peace. "We believe that peace isn't just an absence of war, but that peace means having adequate life conditions for people," he says. "So if we can help people live better then we're building peace."

The work is not without challenges.

It took months to get electrical lines to the rice mill approved. Farmers have had planting stalled by two major floods in the past three years.

At one point messengers from an armed group came to ask for money from the project. Rivas Dominguez, in a response almost unheard of in this region, talked to the group's commander, explaining that, as Christians committed to non-violent peace-making, the church would rather close the project than contribute to armed conflict. The commander later called back, saying the group would respect the church's position.



Cacao seedlings are raised in the nursery until they are ready for planting.



Agricultural manager Jesus Alfredo Benitez Palacios checks on rice being hulled at a mill built with MCC's support. Community members can have rice processed at the mill, and the project also purchases rice, ensuring that farmers have a market for their crop.



Ramon Casildo Mosquera Murillo, left, who is clearing this field to plant cacao, talks with José Rutilio Rivas Dominguez, president of the regional council for the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó. Go to this article online at acommonplace.mcccanada.ca to see a video with more from Rivas Dominguez and MCC's work alongside the Mennonite Brethren Church in this region.



The most devastating blow came last spring, when nearly 70 per cent of the project's rice crops were wiped out by fumigations that were part of an anti-drug program of the Colombian and U.S. governments. While the fumigations were intended to eradicate illicit crops, in some cases fields without any coca were destroyed, leaving farmers to start over.

The fumigations also had a significant impact on the cacao effort, not only destroying some of the new plants but also making farmers hesitant to devote time and resources to a crop that takes two years to produce and could be destroyed at any time. Project leaders who had initially hoped to reach 240 families re-evaluated the project, deciding instead to devote more training and support to the 140 families already growing cacao.

Despite the setbacks, Rivas Dominguez says the church remains committed to the agricultural project. "I believe that our community's dreams are more important than the difficulties we may face and that we have the right to live differently, to have a better life," he says.

Seeing farmers who've had success with the project also is encouraging.

Nubia Maria Valencia Rivas and her husband Genaro Jabe Hinestroza finished their first rice harvest with the agricultural program in August. Though Valencia Rivas grew up farming rice with her family in Paimadó, just upriver from Bebedó, they stopped cultivating it 12 years ago when the local rice mill broke and they had difficulty finding buyers.

It was challenging to make a profit growing only crops like plantain and yucca, so they turned to coca to support themselves and their children. In early 2013, however, they decided the risk of fumigations was too high. When a friend told them about the church's agricultural program, it was the option they needed.

Valencia Rivas says growing rice with the project is an improvement on the past because of the church's mill and commitment to buy the product, which it sells back to community members for a small profit. "Here there's a lot we can do and grow, but if we can't sell it then we're just left with it. So that's the main thing for us, having the guarantee that we can sell it," she says.

In May, the couple decided to add cacao. They had tried planting a few cacao seedlings in the past, but they hadn't been trained in techniques such as using natural fertilizer. Now they use the waste from rice plants to provide extra nutrients for the cacao. Because they cultivate both crops on the same land, the cacao will increase their income without much added labour.

This is what Rivas Dominguez would like to see happen throughout the Chocó region.

"We want to see people living differently," Rivas Dominguez says, "to see agriculture being strong here in this region, big rice crops or cacao crops, and know that people have the income they deserve and that they are able to live better lives with dignity." ■

Emily Loewen is a writer for MCC Canada. Nina Linton is a photographer from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.



Nubia Maria Valencia Rivas harvests rice. Because of the project's rice mill and guarantee of buying the crop, she now grows rice instead of cultivating coca for cocaine. She also began planting cacao and learned to fertilize it using waste from rice plants.

Give a gift — Food

Help farmers grow enough to support themselves and their families.

\$32 provides 1,000 cacao seeds in Colombia. Send contributions in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcccanada.ca or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).

Speaking out against fumigations

Since 2000, the United States has provided \$9.4 billion in aid to Colombia. More than 70 per cent of this aid supports Colombia's military to fight drug productions, drug traffickers and illegal armed groups. This strategy has often caused harm to communities such as Bebedó. The conflict has expanded, especially in terms of human rights violations

carried out by the Colombian military.

MCC U.S. advocates for change in U.S. policy toward Colombia by encouraging policy-makers to promote peace instead of militarization and war. Rather than pursuing fumigations, which affect the food and livelihoods of MCC church partners and others in Colombia who grow legal crops, MCC

U.S. urges the U.S government to both support viable economic alternatives for coca growers in Colombia and address drug abuse as a public health issue here at home.

MCC encourages people to write to their members of Congress and call for these changes. Learn more at washington.mcc.org/colombia.

Wilfrido Murillo

A pastor talks about his call to ministry and the challenges facing his rural community.

AS TOLD TO EMILY LOEWEN

I was born in Bebedó, Colombia in 1960, and have lived here most of my life.

When I was growing up, I remember that we would call not only this community, Bebedó, but the Chocó region in general a peaceful place. We could sleep with our doors open and we could go up and down the river whenever we wanted and nothing would happen. We never heard gunshots.

But armed groups began to arrive in 1989. Then we started hearing the sounds of these weapons, and we've learned to cope with fear.

You can learn to live with fear the same way that you learn to live with a disease or illness or with poverty or with riches—you just get used to it because it's going to be there. You get used to hearing shots at some point, and you just keep going.

In my case, we live across the street from a police station so we know that if there's a confrontation we'll probably be in the middle of it.

I remember there used to be more than 2,000 people living in Bebedó, more than twice the population today. Due to violence people have left and they never came back.

I am the pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Brethren Church. I was born in a Christian family, and I had Christian training since I was a child, but I came to work as a pastor more because of need in the community than because it was my dream.

Growing up, I always dreamed of being a soccer player. I played soccer as a child, but I wasn't very good at it. After that I was more interested in agriculture. I wanted to be an agronomist or agricultural engineer. I didn't get to that level, but I did manage to get a technical degree in agricultural sciences. In 1990 I started working as a teacher here in Bebedó. Since then, I've been teaching agricultural science, and I also work with my wife in our small grocery store.

In 2006 there were several Mennonite Brethren churches in the area that did not have pastors. They did a survey of the different churches and they suggested different people's

names and I got quite a lot of votes. I was the first one to be surprised because I had no idea that people from the other churches knew me. I talked it over with my wife and we decided that we had to meet the expectations. It was a challenge that was before us and we couldn't say no.

After beginning work, I started falling in love with the ministry and I'm still here. When you have a ministry like this you have a closer relationship to God, and that helps you fall in love with what you do.

Over the years I have seen changes in my community because of the increase in mining and growth of illicit crops, mainly coca. We had more contact with different kinds of cultures. Violence increased as well as prostitution and drug addiction.

I think as long as there are illegal armed groups in the area violence will always be a concern for people here in the San Juan river area and in Chocó in general.

About two years ago, the government started fumigating crops here. When they did, the illicit crops were affected, but it also affected the rest of the community because other food crops were damaged.

Here, the church is trying to get people to be a part of the agricultural program so that those who are still growing coca



can stop and can start growing other crops, food crops.

In other communities, churches have responded through social programs working with children and also working with people who've been displaced by the violence. Churches are giving counselling and sometimes, if they have the means, economic help as well.

One of my main goals for our community is that all people be Christian or convert to Christ.

Only four brothers in Christ from the church are part of the agricultural program, but some people who are part of the program who aren't part of the church are trying to get

closer to the church. Their relationship is becoming a bit closer because they feel that the church has an interest in their lives. ■

Wilfrido Murillo is pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Brethren Church in Bebedó, Colombia. Members of his congregation and community are part of the agriculture project run by the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó, an MCC partner, which provides legal and sustainable alternatives to growing coca, used in the production of cocaine.

MCC's support helped to construct workshops such as this one used by an auto mechanics class at a technical school in Desarmes, Haiti.

New chances outside the city

In Haiti, MCC is helping give rural youth the chance to complete vocational training without leaving home.

BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SILAS CREWS



For Rosie Tannis, the tragedy of losing her home in the earthquake has led to new opportunities in Desarmes.

Tannis and thousands of others fled to the countryside in the next weeks to escape chaos and tragedy in the capital, where houses had flattened like pancakes, trapping people in the rubble for days. More than 1.5 million were left homeless and 200,000 people died—many of them victims of living in substandard housing in an overcrowded city.

Tannis returned to her hometown of Desarmes, about 100 kilometers north of the capital. Although her parents were no longer living, she had relatives who would take her in.

A far cry from the bustling capital and its bumper-to-bumper traffic, Desarmes has one main road and dusty side roads, where motorcycles and a few four-wheel-drive vehicles navigate ruts and holes, dodging roaming children and goats. Drivers make way for farmers coming down from the hill-sides, clutching chickens or leading burros laden with sacks of

When a 2010 earthquake destroyed the house where 16-year-old Rosie Tannis lived with her aunt and uncle in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, it took not only her home but also her plans to finish high school and study agronomy and languages at a university.



charcoal, heaps of reeds or burlap bags of corn to sell.

Schools provide basic education, but as in most rural towns, students who could afford it went to Port-au-Prince to attend technical school or high school and college, and often stayed there for work.

Tannis left for the capital at six, earlier than most. “They say the best schools are in Port-au-Prince. That’s why my father sent me there,” she explains.

Over the next decade, she did well in school, especially in chemistry and physics.

After the earthquake, though, she and several hundred other young people from Desarmes found themselves back home, with nowhere to develop the skills they had studied.

And they were the fortunate ones.

Yoline Jules lost three daughters in the earthquake. Today, she is vocal about the need for better schools in all regions of Haiti so that youth can remain at home and study. “If this was done already, many people that died wouldn’t have died,” she says.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, that sentiment was echoed by the Haitian government, civil society groups and non-governmental organizations, including MCC, who agreed that a renewed effort to decentralize many services—including education—was essential for the rebuilding of Haiti.

Since MCC already had a thriving reforestation program in Desarmes and almost three decades of trust established there, it channeled 17 per cent of its earthquake response funding to create work opportunities, improve the water and sanitation systems and strengthen educational opportunities in and around Desarmes.

The fledgling Desarmes Professional School was a logical place to focus educational support.

In 2009, Groupe d’Accord Solidarité Action (GASA), a group of Haitian professionals committed to empowering people in Desarmes through education, reopened a technical school that had not offered classes in several years.

Located a little more than half a kilometer from the centre

of town, the school had one building with two classrooms. Under GASA, new programs in agronomy, plumbing and masonry began in fall 2009, drawing about 50 students the first year and 85 the second year.

To strengthen the capacity of the school, MCC applied for and received a \$682,123 contribution from the Canadian government through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD). MCC added \$232,625. With these funds, GASA, which also raises its own support, could improve its agricultural and building trades programs and increase opportunities for women.

GASA built four new workshops with eight additional classrooms; established programs in electricity and mechanics; began offering instruction in computers, English and business management for every student and purchased a truck, outbuildings and animals for the agronomy program, as well as land for an experimental garden.

A construction store and food-processing centre were built and supplied, so that GASA could sell products to support the school well into the future. In the initial five months, those endeavors generated some \$38,000, and the school expects that proceeds will grow as the businesses become more established.

Enrolment during the 2011-2012 school year jumped to 229 students. In 2012-2013, 257 students were taking classes, about 150 of them people who had previously studied in Port-au-Prince, including Tannis, who is enrolled in the school's electrical program.

"Because I am in my native town and the school is here, I don't have a reason to study in Port-au-Prince," Tannis says.

Rithot Thilus teaches a class on business skills, an important part of the school's curriculum.

Living in the capital would be more expensive,

she says, and learning to be an electrician allows her to use basic physics. Work as an electrician may also help finance further study in civil engineering and electromechanics.

Tannis was one of only six young women enrolled in the construction trades in 2012-2013. The more popular program of study for women is agronomy, where a third of the students are female.

"Many of my friends were telling me not to enter into electricity because that's a trade for men," Tannis says. "I said, 'There's nothing a man can do that a woman can't.'"

Challenging gender roles and persuading women to enrol in the trades has been a goal for the school administrator, Ramel Altidort. When he recruits in the community, he emphasizes the economic value of having two wage earners in a family and offers tuition breaks to get females to come. GASA also runs a daycare at the school, so mothers with children can study.

Tannis tells her friends, "There's a school here where you can come and learn about something and maybe find a job after. You don't have to depend on your parents or family."

Carline Belceus, 35, the first female

Carline Belceus, the first female masonry student, gained practical experience by helping build the walls of a guesthouse on campus.



Claude Dimanche, 22, is learning techniques of animal husbandry as well as skills for establishing plant nurseries and harvesting seeds.



Photo by Josh Steckley/MCC

masonry student, gained practical experience by working to build the walls of the guest house on campus, another effort established with the help of MCC and DFATD to raise funds for the school.

"I love when I fix the brick and I fix the iron columns and make a plan to implement (a project)," says Belceus, who enrolled so that she could make more money than she did as a hairdresser. She gets some grief from the men in the program for wanting to be a mason, she says, but she holds her head high. "I just find a way to do everything well," she says.

The agronomy program, which requires a high school diploma with skills in biology and chemistry, provides vital knowledge for many young people who live in the fertile Artibonite Valley, where Desarmes is located. A secure food supply in the region and the country relies on productive use of this land.

So students such as Claude Dimanche, 22, who travels about 15 kilometers by bus each day to attend the school, learn skills from establishing plant nurseries and harvesting seeds to techniques of animal husbandry.

"In the community where I live, people lack knowledge to (efficiently use) natural resources. We have land, but we don't have knowledge," Dimanche says. "I want to share my knowledge with the farmers in my area."

That is the sort of vision that Altidort, the school's

MCC's Haiti earthquake response*

\$16.7 million total response (2010—at least 2015)
\$13.1 million committed to projects so far

53 completed projects
12 active projects

*Figures as of November 2013

administrator, was dreaming of when he and others began the school. Altidort, who is from Desarmes, spent years studying, including time in Boston, and teaching in Port-au-Prince and elsewhere in Haiti. Now, inspired by Christ's life and mission, he has committed to give the next 25 years of his life to making sure youth have a chance to learn and develop their skills in Desarmes.

"We think real change will start with education," Altidort says. "You need new leaders, you need a new way of thinking and you need a new way of doing things. The best way is to prepare them. Then they will take charge of their community, their family and themselves." ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Silas Crews is photographer and multimedia producer for MCC U.S. Josh Steckley, an MCC worker in Haiti until August 2013, contributed to this article.



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A tree for better nutrition

In countries including Burkina Faso, MCC food projects are promoting the moringa tree.

BY LINDA ESPENSHADE

Jacques Bayili picks his daily vitamins and minerals from a moringa tree. The coin-sized leaves mix right into the peanut sauce his wife cooks with tomatoes and cabbage that they and their five children eat with rice or *tô*, a thick cornmeal mash common in Burkina Faso.

They add a punch of Vitamins A and C, calcium, potassium and iron to the dish, and moringa's protein content rivals—some say exceeds—soybeans. According to Bayili, it tastes good too, especially when it's made in a sauce.

"It's so good, you want to eat it until you explode," he says.

Tasty and exceptionally nutritious, the moringa tree is becoming an increasingly useful tool in MCC's and partners' plans that address malnutrition, especially in regions of Africa and Asia, where subsistence farmers struggle to produce enough food to feed their families.

Moringa, which is drought resistant and not picky about its soil or growing conditions, thrives in frost-

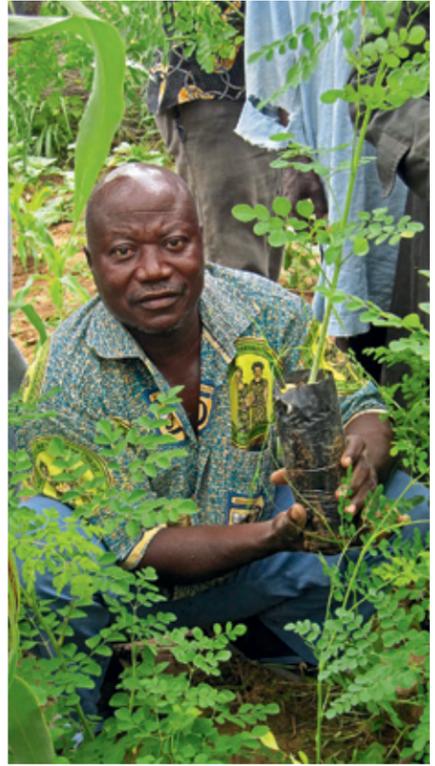
free climates and typically produces leaves 10 months out of the year. Not only are the leaves nutritious, but the branches, seeds and their pods, and even the roots can be used for nutritional and medicinal purposes.

In countries where MCC is encouraging the use of moringa—Ethiopia, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and India, where the tree originated—moringa is best known for its medicinal uses. Teas and powders made from the leaves and seeds are traditional folk remedies for everything from high blood pressure and diabetes to stomach ailments and pain.

Teaching people to use the tree as a daily part of their diet, not just for medicine, is a challenge that MCC partners face as they encourage people to plant and propagate the tree. They typically use trainings and cooking demonstrations to show various dishes

“It's so good, you want to eat it until you explode.”

Jacques Bayili began growing moringa through the work of an MCC partner organization in Burkina Faso. Moringa is now a daily part of his family's diet.



es that can be prepared with moringa. In Lao PDR, where MCC has distributed some 600 seedlings, the training begins with children who plant moringa in school gardens.

Moringa's medicinal value was all that Bayili knew about the tree until two years ago, when he attended a training by MCC partner Office of Development of Evangelical Churches (ODE). He was one of 42 farmers who were learning how to create moringa nurseries.

Since then, Bayili has grown 1,200 moringa seedlings that he sold to ODE for free distribution to other farmers in the Central Plateau region.

ODE paid Bayili and the other growers a reduced price for the seedlings because the organization provided the seeds. Nevertheless, Bayili says, he still earned about \$60 each year, enough to pay school fees and buy supplies for his children.

Burkina Faso 🍲
Mix leaves into peanut sauce cooked with tomatoes and cabbage.
MCC focus: Establish moringa nurseries to provide seedlings to farmers.

Ethiopia 🍲 ☁️
Prepare leaves like a vegetable and eat with local bread; roots of trees help hold soil in place and control erosion.
MCC focus: Gave out 10,853 moringa trees after nutrition trainings last August.

India 🍲 🐮
Cook the pods for fiber; cook leaves alone or with lentils. In the future? Potential animal fodder.
MCC focus: Promote nutritional value of tree, which is native to India.

Kenya 🍲 🍵
Put moringa powder in tea and porridge. Add ground moringa seeds to unclean water, which acts to pull the particles to the bottom, leaving cleaner, better-tasting water.
MCC focus: Teach nutritional value of this common tree.

Zambia 🍲
Add moringa leaves to stew to be eaten with corn porridge, or put powder into the porridge.
MCC focus: Promote the use of moringa to help boost immune systems of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Lao PDR 🍲
Add leaves to dried fish soup, meat salad or rice soup. Use the roots as horseradish.
MCC focus: Teach about moringa through schools; distributed 600 trees last year.

With the assistance of all the growers, ODE gave away 17,015 seedlings to farmers who promised to build barriers to protect the seedlings from roving farm animals.

The major hurdle so far was a 2012 infestation of worms. ODE estimates that half of the trees the growers produced became fodder for worms. Today, Bayili and other producers have been trained in making natural pesticide from the fermented seeds and leaves of the neem tree, and Bayili says he does not worry about worms eating his current crop.

ODE relies on people like Bayili and his friend and fellow grower Joacin Bako, both in the town of Kordie, to spread the word about the value of moringa. Already in Kordie, about 90 percent of the villagers have a moringa tree, Bayili estimates.

Bayili says he anticipates a growing demand for the trees in his community as people understand its nutritional benefit, so much so that he is considering becoming a moringa producer.

Moringa has the potential to generate income for people, but the real benefit is in improved health, stresses

Chad Warfel, who learned about moringa from ODE in his role as MCC representative in Burkina Faso, with his wife Isabelle. The Warfels completed their term in July 2013.

"Poor nutrition reduces the capacity of farmers to do physical labor and perpetuates the structural food insecurity in the region," Warfel says. "Moringa is providing a culturally appropriate tool to support healthy living for farmers and their entire families." ■

Linda Espenshade is news co-ordinator for MCC U.S.



Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler/MCC

“I have had so many wonderful students.”

INGRID RODRICK BEILER

Ingrid Rodrick Beiler works with student Omar Hamideh during an English class at Bethlehem Bible College.

English teacher

Name: Ingrid Rodrick Beiler

Hometown: Washington, D.C. (Peace Fellowship Church)

Assignment: Teaching English at Bethlehem Bible College and co-ordinating the college’s English program. I also help out with administrative tasks in MCC’s Palestine and Israel office in Jerusalem one day a week.

Typical day: Involves some time at my desk and some in the classroom. I teach a college English class and an adult English class. Between classes, I plan my lessons and attend to program planning for the college’s English program, which includes designing curriculum, ordering materials, recruiting teachers or creating tests.

Challenge: Making the most out of limited resources, in time and money. This is a challenge for students too, who are usually juggling work and family in addition to classes.

Joys: Interacting with colleagues at the college over morning tea, lunch and meetings. Students sometimes invite my family and me over for dinner, giving us the opportunity to see different neighbourhoods and villages around Bethlehem. These students are men and women, Muslims and Christians, young and older, and rural and urban, and I appreciate this entree into some of the diversity of our local community.

I enjoy getting to apply my training in teaching English as a second language. I had previously only taught in the U.S., and it has been a good growing experience to teach in a different country.

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MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to Christian faith, active church membership and biblical peacemaking.

for children

hello

COLOMBIA

How do you greet someone in Spanish?



hola

(Say OH-lah)



My name is Wilmer Alberto Morales González.

Age: 11

Lives in: Bebedó, Colombia

I live with my mom and dad, my brother Weimar and my sister Yessica. We also have a dog named Popi.

Every morning I wake up between five and six, and then I go to school from 6:55 a.m. until 1 p.m. I am in sixth grade. I walk to school every day.

After school I relax for a little while to cool down from the heat, and then I have lunch. I go play a little while and then I come back home and I do homework or study. I really like to play soccer. My favorite team is América de Cali (a Colombian team), the same as my dad.

My dad does lots of different kinds of work. Some days he works as an assistant to the driver on the community boat. Sometimes he helps other people with their farms and sometimes he works in our field, where he grows food like yucca and plantain.

My favorite food: chicken and salad

My favorite subject: computers

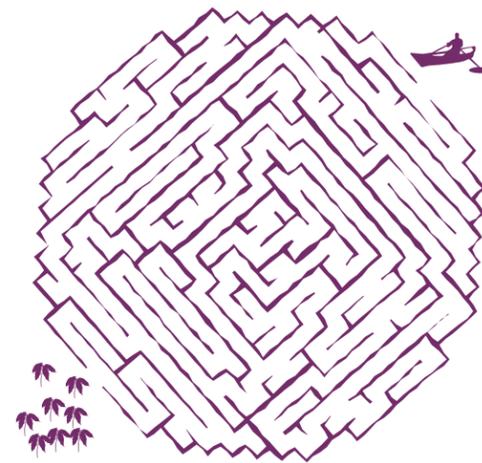
What I want to be: architect



Wilmer draws and does homework at the kitchen table in his family’s house.



Wilmer plays soccer with his friends after school.





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“Bring your thimble, come have some fun and meet new friends,” invite organizers of an annual two-day comforter blitz of the Kansas Friends of MCC. Each March, members of churches throughout Kansas gather in Yoder to tie, bind and finish comforters. As fast as one is done, organizers have another out and ready to knot, says Shana Goering (second from right), who came with women from Bergthal Mennonite Church. Last year, 150 comforters were completed during the event, with another 100 taken home to be finished later.

mcccanada.ca/kits/comforter



making **a difference** *your faith in action*

At Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, Alta., instead of placing offering coins in a plate during Sunday school, Vivian Grasmeyer and other children can buy pencils or notebooks for MCC school kits or toothbrushes for hygiene kits. **“They see in a tangible way how their offering helps others in need,”** says Sunday school co-ordinator Sherry Dyck. Children also work with adults in the church to learn to sew kit bags and to pack the kits.

mcccanada.ca/kits

