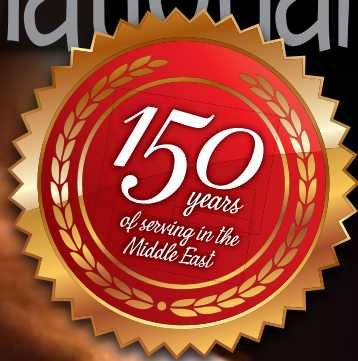


meco | international

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 4, 2010



The price of following Jesus

Also includes: Did you know - facts about the Middle East ■ Getting beyond the small talk

MECO Magazine

Keeping you up-to-date and affirming the importance of your role in the ministry of MECO.



- 04 The price of following Jesus**
A moving description of the challenges many who come to faith from a Muslim background face
- 06 Beyond the small talk**
Read about how teaching English can open doors to meaningful conversations
- 08 Did you know - facts about the Middle East**
Interesting facts about the Middle East that you may have never heard before!
- 10 Supporting teachers in the Middle East**
Some ideas on how to pray for MECO teachers, their students and schools
- 11 MECO opportunities**
Are you a teacher? Could God use you in the Middle East?

Comments or questions?
Email info@aboutmeco.org

MECO International is an interdenominational fellowship of evangelical Christians from many countries with shared goals for the Middle East. During 150 years of service in the region, MECO has played an important part in the growth of the church, and now serves in many Middle Eastern countries.

MECO International Magazine

Publisher Rob Cullen (Publicity Manager), Faltod Limited, PO Box 40662, Larnaka 6306, Cyprus
Printers Masterprint, Alsoupoleos 1A, Larnaka 6052, Cyprus
Press and Information Office (PIO) Cyprus Registered: Ref. No. N.3530
Editor Ruth Cullen **Design** Rob Cullen
Photography Some photography supplied by istockphoto.com and may feature models

Get in touch!

australia

A PO Box 136, Kerrimuir, Victoria 3129
T (03) 9898 0077
E australia@aboutmeco.org

canada

A PO Box 610, Burlington, Ontario L7R 3Y5
T (905) 335 7329
E canada@aboutmeco.org

newzealand

A PO Box 76656, Manukau, Auckland 2241
T (09) 263 6819
E info@meco.org.nz

southafrica

A PO Box 7231, Birchleigh
 Kempton Park 1621
T (011) 393 7212
E sa@aboutmeco.org

uk and ireland

A 22 Culverden Park Road
 Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9RA
T (01892) 521541
E uk@aboutmeco.org
Registered Charity 272327
A Unit 1, Ravenhill Business Park
 Ravenhill Road, Belfast BT6 8AW
T (028) 90 460780
E donhowe@aboutmeco.org

usa

A PO Box 14896, Bradenton
 FL 34280-4896
T (800) 747 MECO
E usa@aboutmeco.org



Editorial

As together we pray for more people to come to know Jesus in this part of the world, we must acknowledge that for many this choice will result in hardship.

In this edition of the Magazine, MECO worker Simon*, powerfully describes what life can be like for those who come to know Christ from a Muslim background, and how we can stand with them in prayer.

Read also about how God is opening doors for Christian teachers to be able to talk about Him in the classroom and so inspire their students to know Jesus. Teachers certainly have the power to

influence their students whether positively or negatively, and so need our prayers for wisdom, compassion and patience. As you join us in praying for these teachers, look to page 10 for some tips on how you can pray for MECO teachers in the Middle East.

Thank you for praying with us and supporting your brothers and sisters living and working in the Middle East!

MECO celebrates 150 years

MECO workers recently celebrated 150 years of service in the Middle East at our general conference in Budapest, Hungary. The conference was a time of reflecting on the past and considering with eager anticipation what God will do in the Middle East in the future. It was also a wonderful time of fellowship as we prayed,



worshipped and studied God's word.

Thank you for partnering with us the past and please continue to pray as we move forward, looking to God for His plans for us.

* Names changed for security.

The price of following Jesus

Simon*, a MECO worker serving in the area of advocacy, describes some of the challenges for those in the Middle East who come to faith in Jesus - and the challenges for those who seek to support them.

Hassan's phone rings*. It's the call he dreads but which is now becoming routine - the call to report to the police.

This time, after being kept waiting for three hours, Hassan is warned that the police cannot protect him from his family who are threatening violence against him.

Hassan's family feels deeply shamed by his decision to follow Jesus. They have rejected him. To be ostracised from the family home is devastating enough - but now he is being pursued and has good reason to be fearful.

Questions race through his mind. Where should he go? Where can he stay? He's been forced to leave his job - so how will he support himself? How can he obey the Bible's command to honour his parents? The physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual strains are huge.

Despite the intense pressure, Hassan is determined to stay faithful to Christ. And he is grateful for the support of other believers who encourage him discreetly, help with

accommodation and even provide some part-time work. They tell him that many around the world are praying.

Hassan's situation is not unusual for Middle Eastern believers from a Muslim background. In fact, some face even greater pressures. Courts might nullify marriages and remove custody of children. Imprisonment and even martyrdom are possible in extreme cases.

What support can be given?

To provide effective support for believers facing such pressures is challenging.

In countries with traditional Christian communities and recognised churches, these national Christians routinely face marginalisation, discrimination and surveillance themselves. They know that if they openly offer assistance to those like Hassan, who have become Christians from a Muslim background, they will invite far greater hostility. Expatriate Christians may be similarly cautious, aware that they rely on the goodwill of the authorities for their visas. But even those willing to take these risks can struggle to know what level of support is appropriate.


The New Testament clearly teaches that we should expect persecution (John 15:20, 2 Timothy 3:12). The Apostle Paul even delighted in hardship, for Christ's sake (2 Corinthians 12:10). Should we simply

acknowledge that discipleship is costly and even rejoice when suffering comes?

Hassan has certainly counted the cost. Yet it is right that fellow believers should feel outrage at the injustice and suffering that he and others endure. Just as Paul chose to claim his rights as a Roman citizen as they prepared to flog him in Jerusalem, so today it can be appropriate to make a stand against the injustice of persecution. Just as Paul fled Damascus to escape those making murderous threats, so today it can be appropriate for persecuted believers to seek refuge in safer places.

Christian human rights groups advocate for those who are persecuted. Hassan's friends are doing what they can in other practical ways. They all need the Lord's wisdom as they seek to help. And Hassan needs the Lord's strength to persevere - and his protection and provision, comfort and peace.

The church worldwide has the privilege and responsibility of standing alongside our brothers and sisters who suffer for Christ's sake.

Will you pray? 

"They tell him that many around the world are praying."

* Names and details changed for security.



Many Middle Easterners remain faithful, despite intense pressure

Action!

Will you commit to praying for suffering brothers and sisters in the Middle East? For more information contact your local office (details on page 2) or visit www.aboutmeco.org/pray



Getting beyond the small talk

You're at a gathering of people - a wedding, a party, a business conference. You know hardly anyone and many of them are internationals. What do you talk about? For Brits, it's the weather, while Americans may exchange geography, and Aussies and Kiwis may discuss sports. But how do you get beyond the small talk?

Heather*, a MECO teacher in Egypt, describes how teaching English can lead to spiritual conversations.

Teaching English to speakers of other languages causes doors to swing open. Yesterday I was teaching an Upper Intermediate conversation class. In the text book (Cutting Edge Advanced) there was a questionnaire entitled 'Mind, Body, Spirit'. The thirty questions for discussion included: Do you pray regularly? Do you read horoscopes? Do you believe in life after death? - not the questions you would normally ask a stranger or even a new friend, but under the guise of learning

vocabulary or grammar they can open a fascinating discussion.

... these questions can spark off soul-searching discussions.

The classroom is obviously not a preaching platform, but I had the opportunity to agree with students that if we believe in God, and trust that He is in control, we don't need to read horoscopes or trust to luck, and we certainly believe in life after death.

What are your ambitions? What do you think you will have achieved in the next ten years? Apart from giving practice in the future perfect tense (I will have

graduated, I will have become a millionaire, etc.) these questions can spark off soul-searching discussions. What a privilege to hear those hopes and dreams and maybe add a few (all in the name of grammatical constructions!)


Unique opportunities for sharing

On another occasion, I gave the students a speaking task. They had to prepare to speak to me for three or four minutes about one aspect of their culture: music, art, architecture, history, sport ... I interviewed each one individually in the corridor just outside the classroom, setting a reading task for the others. One student chose to tell me about his religion, Islam. He spoke with fluency, eloquence and passion. At the end, he said, 'I expect you have some questions?' I had lots! What an opportunity to gain insight into how he felt about Islam, which I would



Doors open to spiritual conversation

not have known had we been speaking in a different context.

As a teacher I'd love to enable Middle Eastern students to distinguish the difference between western and Christian. I cringe at the thought of being aligned with the life-style portrayed in the films and soaps that find their way on to Arabic TV screens. My students have no concept of secularism, and religion is the very fabric of their society. My prayer is that while I am with them, God will continue to open doors so that we can get beyond the small talk, and they will see the love of Christ demonstrated through me. Maybe I should devise a different questionnaire. What could I call it? You, Me, Us and Them? 

Action!

Are you a teacher? Could God use you to start meaningful conversations in the classroom in the Middle East? See page 11 for just a few of the teaching opportunities available or visit www.aboutmeco.org/opportunities

Did you know - facts about the Middle East

This vibrant part of the world has a rich heritage, fascinating geography and is full of creative, modern, inventive people with a thirst for knowledge and development - most of which is not portrayed in Western media.

How much do you know about the Middle East? Read some interesting facts that might just change your view about this part of the world.

Did you know that:

- Egypt has an estimated 162,000 bloggers, most of whom are between the ages of 20 and 30? They make up 30% of the Arab world's bloggers.
- Syria was one of the earliest centres for writing Christians hymns, known as Syrian chant, which continues to be used by some Syrian Christians today?
- The Dead Sea, in the northwest of Jordan, forms the lowest point on earth?
- The 365 calendar year and 24 hours in a day are Egyptian inventions?
- Banking is a very important part of the Lebanese economy with over 100 different banks?
- Approximately 50% of the Middle East are under 15 years of age and 70% are under 30?
- The name 'Lebanon' appears at least 75 times in the Old Testament?

- Jordan's location within the Great Rift Valley makes the country one of the most important passageways for migratory bird?
- EgyptAir was established in May 1932, making it one of the oldest carriers in the world and a pioneer airline?
- Many Hollywood movies, such as The Mummy Returns (2001), Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989), and Lawrence of Arabia (1962) were filmed in the Middle East?
- Egyptians also invented cement, scissors, toothpaste, potters wheels, eye-liner and toilet seats to name but a few?
- It is believed that the first alphabet of the world was developed in Ugarit, an ancient city in Syria, which archaeologists discovered in 1929?
- Cairo, with a population of 16 million people, is the 11th largest urban area in the world?



Discovered in Syria, Ugaritic is the oldest alphabet



How many stones were needed?

- Petra, Jordan, the capital of the Nabataean Arabs, is a city that was carved into rock two thousand years ago and remained unknown to Europeans until the 19th century?
- The Great Pyramid of Giza is made up of about 2,500,000 stones weighing between 2-70 tons each?
- Many Middle Eastern cities such as Beirut, Lebanon have a very dynamic arts scene, with many performances, exhibits, fashion shows, and concerts held throughout the year in their galleries, museums, theatres, and public spaces?

- Lebanon is the only country in the Middle East that does not have a desert?
- In most Middle Eastern countries the holy month of Ramadan is marked with fasting and praying in the mosque, and celebrated by decorating the houses, shops and streets with lights? At sunset the fast is broken, and then people head to market or gather with family members where they enjoy sweets, specially prepared bread and food? 



Jordan's Dead Sea - the lowest point on earth



Cairo, one of the largest urban areas in the world

Supporting teachers in the Middle East

School bags, pencil cases, lunchboxes and uniforms - a familiar sight to most of us as we send our children and grandchildren off to school each morning, or see them walking to school on our way to work, or get ready to receive them in the classroom.

This scene is also repeated throughout the Middle East, and MECO workers have the privilege of working with many of these children as their teachers. How can we pray for these teachers and schools who will have such an influence on their students' lives, and as a result have a lasting impact on the local community?


For the teachers, pray that God would:

- Protect them from danger such as accidents and illness, and give energy and strength as sometimes the teaching conditions can be difficult with the heat, lack of discipline and long hours.
- Enable them to do a good, conscientious, professional job as this will be a strong witness to the students as well as to the non-believing teachers they work with.
- Fill them with His wisdom as they interact with the children and endeavour to get to know and befriend their colleagues.

For the students, pray that our Father would:

- Open their ears and hearts, as the teachers impart not only knowledge to them, but also show them the love of God.
- Give them attentiveness during the school assemblies or chapels (which many of the schools MECO work in do have) and that they would respond to the truth.
- Use them to positively influence their communities as they learn about Christ and are challenged about issues of morality, forgiveness, honesty, and a lasting, meaningful relationship with God.

For the schools that MECO works in, pray that God would:

- Bring more Christian teachers to fill the many positions required, whether short-term or long-term.
- Ensure that the right students register at the schools, as some of the schools are struggling with low registration numbers and therefore threatened with having to close parts of the school.
- Give wisdom to those in leadership so that the witness of the schools would be a lasting, shining light for Jesus and inspire people to want to know more about Him. 

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

- Henry Brooks Adams



Investing in young minds

Could God use you to change lives in the Middle East?

MECO is looking for people to serve as teachers.

Teacher - Mountain Village, Lebanon

Description: Serving in a Christian village school with mainly non-Christian Druze students aged 3 - 18 years. **Length:** 1+ years **Language:** English. **Qualifications:** Qualified teacher (Nursery, elementary/junior and secondary).

Teacher - Amman, Jordan

Description: Teaching at various Christian schools. **Length:** 1+ years. **Language:** English. Willingness to learn Arabic. **Qualifications:** Teaching qualification - ability to teach more than one subject.

Theological Trainer - Amman, Jordan

Description: Theological training by correspondence courses. **Length:** 3+ years. **Language:** English. Arabic required if tutoring. **Qualifications:** MA or PhD in theology. Computer skills useful.

Teacher - Southern Lebanon

Description: Serving in a Christian school with over 800 mainly Muslim students aged 3 - 18 years. **Length:** 1+ years. **Language:** English.

For more opportunities and information, visit www.aboutmeco.org/opportunities