



# EXTENDING BEYOND

## Migration, empathy and welcome

A message from Stanley W. Green, executive director



In his Pulitzer Prize-winning epic, *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), John Steinbeck recounts the harshness of the Great Depression and gives us a glimpse into the struggles of migrant farmworkers. In it,

he tells the heart-rending stories of people who loaded up their vehicles with all they could fit and moved from a devastated and ravaged land in search of an escape. The grinding poverty and desperation that beset so many east of the Rockies thrust these families forth.

While Steinbeck documented a particular historical episode during which the movement of desperate peoples was greatly accelerated, we know people are moving all the time. Some people

move, or are moved, against their will and under duress or with force. The original inhabitants of the North American continent, Native Americans were forcefully removed from lands they occupied for generations, in forced migrations that devastated their communities. Africans were brought shackled to the shores of North America to work as slaves. Others came reluctantly in face of the loss

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of what was left behind, but of their own volition, in the hope of better circumstances for them and their families. Fleeing famine, persecution and extermination, they came to this land in order to grasp at chances for survival.

Once here, even after generations of being settled in a particular place, migration and people movement continued unabated. Young adults moved to cities to find educational and job opportunities.

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Mural photo was taken on the campus of *Fontera de Cristo*, a migrant resource center in Agua Prieta, Mexico, right across the U.S.–Mexico border from Douglas, Arizona. Photo by Wesley Bisset Ncube.

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

—Galatians 6:2



Photo by Travis Duertksen

**“It’s great to see a student understand a difficult concept or use words that we learned last week in conversation.”**

Jonatan Moser serves with Mennonite Voluntary Service in Alamosa, Colorado.

# MVSers work to su with dignity and re

By Zachary Headings

Immigration is a hotly debated topic in America today. With 24/7 coverage, argumentative approaches, and fearmongering, the news cycle seemingly wants us to forget what immigration is actually about: real people with hopes, dreams, struggles and fears.

With such a complicated system, these real people have to work through a process with hurdles and obstacles to their success at nearly every turn. Even if they do everything right — dot every i, cross every t, grasp every single detail — their path into this country may still be blocked.

Anyone going through this system could use some help. That’s where Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) participants come in. Some MVSers spend their service term advocating for people going through America’s immigration system.

Jonatan Moser serves with MVS in Alamosa, Colorado. Moser, an Eastern Mennonite University graduate, works with the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center. Moser and other volunteers teach English to adults as young as 20 years old and as old as 65, as well as tutor pre-kindergarten to 8th-grade students in reading, math, or any other homework they need help with. They also help people prepare for the naturalization exam and ensure they feel confident before taking the exam at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office.

“A lot of what I do is supporting immigrants who want to feel more comfortable here in the United States,” Moser said. He added that some of his students have lived in the United States for 10 years and just now have access to these resources to improve their English-language skills. He also teaches people who have just arrived and want to learn the basics. “It is important to make the process of moving to a new country easier for everyone, each step of the way,” he said.

Education is not the only important service for aiding people who are immigrating or have immigrated. MVSer Kylee Schunn helps on the legal side of things through her placement at Catholic Migration Services (CMS) in Queens, New York.

Schunn is from Whitewater, Kansas, and graduated from Bethel College with a degree in social work. At her CMS placement, she helps people navigate the complicated immigration system. That navigation includes focusing on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and green card renewals, as well as Freedom of Information Act



Photo by San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center

Angelica Raya Trejo, MVSer Jonatan Moser, and Carmen M. Stevens receive the Soul of Leadership Award from the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado. On either side are Antonio Pares and Elaine Torres, board members of LCFC.

# Support immigrants with respect

filings. These applications and renewal processes are form-heavy and time-consuming.

“[This is] what this [process] might typically look like for DACA,” Schunn said. “We complete four forms and send copies of a valid photo ID, passport face sheet, social security card, [a] money order of \$495, and two passport photos.”

According to Schunn, the DACA renewal process can take anywhere from three to six months to complete. After DACA status is renewed, it only lasts for two years.

There are innumerable misconceptions surrounding America’s immigration system, and perhaps chief among them is this: “Why don’t they just come here legally?” According to Schunn, it just is not that simple.

“Most unauthorized immigrants do not have the necessary family or employment relationships and often cannot access humanitarian protection, such as refugee or asylum status,” Schunn said. Generally speaking, these are the only routes to citizenship in the United States. Essentially, this means that it is very difficult for people to find a path to “legal” status. “Even those who pay taxes, work hard, and contribute to their communities have no way to ‘get in line,’ unless Congress were to create a new path to legal status.”

With growing tensions around immigration issues in the United States, it could seem like a bleak field in which to work, without much hope. But Moser and Schunn find their work extremely important.

Moser said that helping adults learn or improve their English helps them feel more comfortable interacting with people and expands their social circle. Helping prepare people for the naturalization exam is key, too. But the best part for Moser is when he sees a student improve. “English is a difficult language to learn with its dumb rules and exceptions to those rules and exceptions to those exceptions. So, it’s great to see a student understand a difficult concept or use words that we learned last week in conversation.”

For Schunn, it’s all about making the client’s day better. “Many of the stories we hear at CMS are harrowing examples of what it’s like trying to create a better life. In this job, I have the privilege of making it just a little bit easier.”

One of Schunn’s goals is to be a positive presence in what might otherwise be a grueling and disheartening process. “We are all human,” Schunn said, “and I believe we all deserve dignity and respect.” ■



Photo by Travis Duerksen

**“We are all human, and I believe we all deserve dignity and respect.”**

Kylee Schunn serves with Mennonite Voluntary Service in Manhattan, New York.



Photo by Robert Mumroe

Kylee Schunn (center) with coworkers Jeanne Sanon, Caitlin Wright, Marisol Canales, and Xiomara Bustamante at a Shining Star event sponsored by Catholic Migration Services earlier this year.



Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson

Participants of Mission Network's alumni and friends service-learning tour took part in a vigil in Douglas, Arizona, honoring those who have died in the desert. They carried crosses etched with the names of the deceased, and took turns shouting out the names before setting their crosses down on the sidewalk next to the highway.

## Migration, empathy and welcome

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Families moved in the 1960s and 1970s to suburbs in search of more space and a “more secure” livelihood. Blacks moved from the south to the north to escape the denial of their civil rights. Mobility is a defining feature of the American ethos. On average, people move, or migrate, more than 10 times in their lives. (According to a study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the average person will move their household 11.7 times in their lifetime.)

Everywhere that people have moved, they yearn to find welcome. They yearn for hospitality that will ease the loss of all they have left behind, the severing from that which was familiar and known. They need the kind of support that will help them to overcome the trauma of loss, and the tools to navigate in a strange new environment.

Those who moved or migrated within our context did so in search of better opportunities. Today, also, for many of the same reasons, desperate people still come from many places. Will we ignore them because their timing is not right — they chose the wrong era in which to move? Or will we recognize their predicament as the common plight of our forebears, many of whom came in quite similar circumstance? Our response to this question of how we will receive and treat the vulnerable and desperate is, to be sure,

an undeniable measure of our humanity and compassion. Can we empathize with those whose circumstance mirrors our own, even if removed by a few generations? More importantly, our response to the suffering and struggle of displaced and distressed people is also an authentication of our Christian confession. Or not.

The Bible's teaching holds us accountable for our response to the alien and the stranger, the refugee seeking safety and succor within our territory (Deuteronomy 10:19, Leviticus 19:34). Our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, was himself a refugee in his infancy and cares deeply for those in like circumstance. He calls us to do likewise.

We are grateful for those who are seeking thoughtful, compassionate responses to the issues that immigration present us with as a nation. We pray for their important work. Meanwhile, as people come, we must respond with humanity and care as is reflected in the stories included here. Mennonite Mission Network is grateful for your sharing and support that helps us together respond in the way of Jesus. We are all pilgrims on a journey; let us help each other to reach home whole. ■

*Stanley W. Green*

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Executive Director

**Thank you** for being part of what God is doing! How is God calling you to share in additional ways with Mennonite Mission Network?

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