

Michelle E. Armster, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee Central States

*We've come this far by faith
Leaning on the Lord
Trusting in His Holy Word
He never failed me yet
Oh' can't turn around
We've come this far by faith*

2020 is the centennial year for MCC, an exciting milestone for our organization! The spreading threat of COVID-19 has drastically changed our world, yet MCC continues to focus on the most vulnerable people in the over 50 countries where we work.

The above lyrics are from an African American spiritual and provided the theme for the MCC CS Centennial Celebration: We've Come This Far by Faith that took place at Tabor College on Feb. 29, 2020. "Leaning on the Lord, trusting in His holy word," were faithful acts that shaped the ministry of MCC in 1920, and continues to shape the ministry of MCC Central States today.

This past year, when horrific images and details of the treatment of immigrants along the Mexico/U.S. border came to light, we found that our faith demanded us to respond. After listening to constituents and partners along the border in Texas, Central States staff started to dream up ways to respond. Ana Alicia Hinojosa, Immigration Education Coordinator and Kate Mast, Workroom Supervisor created immigration detainee care kits, to help meet the local needs of individuals being released from immigration detention. This initiative gave MCC a way to show Christ's love by welcoming the stranger and it was eagerly and generously supported by people from across the U.S. and Canada. We are blessed with new relationships/partners in Texas who continue to inspire us.

Another "accomplishment" this year was opening Thrift on Woodlawn (ToW) in Wichita, KS. It has been a while since an MCC thrift shop opened in the CS region. We had a vision of an urban thrift shop, in a "non-traditional Mennonite" setting and a store that partnered in and with the Wichita community. The reality of COVID-19 is that all MCC thrift shops in the region (and across the U.S. and Canada) closed for the safety of volunteers and shoppers.

I continue to be mindful that accomplishments and challenges are co-journeymen. As we step out in faith, responding to COVID-19, the immigration crisis at the Texas border or opening a new MCC thrift shop, our humanness should call us to not only reflect on the learnings but also hold space/place to repent and readjust.

Here in Central States, when it is safe to do so again, we look forward to connecting more with our constituency and the community through Lunch & Learns, Service & Pizza Parties for youth, our annual Christmas Soiree, and Spring Fling Volunteer Appreciation. These events have been well attended in the past and we hope to grow in the future! We will continue to partner with Everence and the Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren colleges in our region. We open our office to local non-profits to hold meetings.

In the spirit of MCC's 100-year celebration, we have commissioned a local writer to create a play about Vesta Zook and Vinora Weaver, two Goshen College faculty members who served with MCC in Constantinople. We plan to rejoice and celebrate the lives of these, until now, forgotten women who too were called to respond to the devastation in the early days of MCC. Our dream is that the play will be performed as a dinner theatre at MCC CS in our Store House!

We have come this far by faith!