

# THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Founded in 1920



**23-year old Mennonite relief worker Clayton Kratz standing near a starved horse on a farm near Alexandrowsk (Zaparozhia) in 1920.** As many as 12,000 horses perished from lack of feed. Kratz, one of the first four Mennonite aid workers in Ukraine, was caught by the Red Army and disappeared. It is assumed that he died in Red Army custody in 1920.

“

Our food since last spring has been black tea and herring, and now dear friends, all of this is gone.

If you can't help, then we will die of starvation.

On Central Street alone in our village, forty-two people have died this summer, most of them for want of food.

- Letter from a Russian Mennonite, Christmas Day, 1921.

”

In 1920, Mennonites of the Molotschna colony sent a delegation to seek help from American Mennonites. Upon hearing about an impending Ukrainian famine, Mennonites from several different denominations held a meeting in Chicago, Illinois on September 27, 1920. Together, they founded the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), intending to provide food for Mennonites starving in the Ukraine.

A year passed before the newly-formed Soviet government granted official permission for the MCC to provide relief work in Ukraine. The government's provision was that the MCC would aid all in need, not just Mennonites. The MCC agreed and mobilized. They opened their first relief kitchen in Rosenthal, Chortitza on March 16, 1922, and quickly established another 140 kitchens in other villages. By May, 1922, these kitchens served 25,000 Ukrainians, and by August, 1922, at the height of the famine, 40,000 people came daily seeking food. In their three years in Ukraine, 1922 to 1925, the MCC fed an average of 25,000 people a day.

Relief workers recognized that the region needed a long-term solution to the famine. Years of war had wiped out farming capabilities in Ukraine. Local farmers had lost land, horses, and farm machinery. To help villagers regain their self-sufficiency, the MCC raised \$1.2 million and donated fifty Fordson tractors and plows to Mennonite villages. By 1923, farming had taken hold and Ukraine harvested a crop again.

The MCC left Ukraine in 1925. The organization was inactive until 1930, when the next need for Mennonite relief work called them to action. They helped Mennonite refugees from Russia recolonize in Paraguay and Brazil. Between 1939 and 1957, the organization was active in Europe, providing relief for Mennonite refugees, including meals and shelter, refugee camps, and immigration assistance.

In 2017, the MCC was an active organization with 700 projects in 56 countries. The American branch had an annual 2017 budget of \$87 million, and the Canadian branch had \$114 million, which was used in relief, development, and peace projects. In 2017, the Canadian MCC worked with other groups to bring 1100 refugees to Canada, including 724 from Syria, 118 from Iraq, 61 from Eritrea, and 56 from D.R. Congo. Funds are raised through donations and MCC thrift stores.



**Mennonite farmers near Chortitza harvesting their barley crop with one of the tractors provided by MCC to help reestablish crop production following the Russian Civil War.**  
*MCC Photograph Collection*