



EXTENDING BEYOND

A servant's heart

A message from Stanley W. Green



Each year more than 200 young adults serve in cities across North America and around the world through our Christian Service programs. In each program we are intentional about discipleship formation

that helps the participants grow in their capacity to follow Jesus and to make a difference for healing and hope in the world. Many young adults are rising to the challenge and accepting the opportunities to prepare for leadership that Christian Service programs offer. In addition, countless young adults have discovered their passion in life, developed important work skills, and learned to live in community.

One program that seeks to accomplish all these objectives is Service Adventure. A few years ago, in the company of our Service Adventure director, Susan Nisly, I was given the privilege to observe the ways in which young people were being formed for discipleship, leadership, and

to become positive contributing members of their communities. We visited the Anchorage, Alaska, Service Adventure unit. In the unit, five young people lived together and shared their lives while they worshiped with the Prince of Peace Mennonite Church and served the community during the week. We observed how they were learning to live together while sharing various tasks. We also joined them in their worship night, which is a regular feature of their life together. Perhaps one of the most inspiring engagements during our time there was visiting these young adults in the places of their service assignments. In each place we were encouraged as we observed them making a difference for good. I wish I could tell you the story of each visit. Space allows for just one.

We visited the Downtown Soup Kitchen Hope Center where Mariah Denlinger served. Susan and I were told to arrive well before noon. We were put to work in food preparation. As Susan and I worked at various tasks, the director

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The 2014 Anchorage, Alaska, Service Adventure unit: Lizzie Schrag, Renee Neufeld, Tyler Gehring, Mariah Denlinger, and Alex Navari.

"The greatest among you will be your servant."

—Matthew 23:11



Photo by Bob Tolle

Albuquerque Service Adventure unit participants Judith Penner, Marie Saleh, Kristin Jantzen, and Jon Voth worshipped with Eden Mennonite Church in Moundridge, Kansas.

Shaping servant leaders of the church

Mennonite church pews may be looking a little grayer in recent years, but Service Adventure continues to form young adults' faith and to connect them to the larger Mennonite Church.

In Service Adventure, participants live and serve in a community. They grow their faith by participating in worship nights and a local Mennonite church, and by being mentored.

"As young adults become part of a different Mennonite congregation, they feel more of a connection to the broader Mennonite Church,"

said Susan Nisly, director of Service Adventure. "This often means that they tend to stay more engaged with the church as they go on to college or careers."

Nisly realized this her first year as director. Two leaders of Service Adventure units had recently graduated from college. They

were interested in pastoral ministry and thought of Service Adventure as a way to try that out. A few years later, a young couple who had recently graduated from Hesston College's pastoral ministry program came to test their call by pastoring a small group of participants.

Shaping young leaders who love the church

When Service Adventure participants and leaders join a community, the local congregation makes it a priority to

involve them. The churches with which Service Adventure partner recognize the value of giving people a chance to test their gifts. "As participants are given the opportunity to preach or lead worship, sometimes they discover a gift they hadn't recognized yet," said Nisly.

"Through the experience, they definitely learn and grow and



Photo by Susan Nisly

Erin Rhodes, Abby Turner, and Krista Rittenhouse, part of the Johnstown Service Adventure unit, worship at Crossroads Community Church in Johnstown. Church member Barry Blough plays bass in the back. Barry is also a member of the Johnstown support committee.

develop their gifts, which hopefully makes them stronger leaders in whatever ministry they pursue afterward.”

That was true for Marc Schlegel-Preheim, who was a Service Adventure leader in Philippi, West Virginia, from 2003–2005. Schlegel-Preheim credited those who mentored

What budding young leaders do you know who might be interested in Service Adventure?

him at the local church. “[They] kept slowly moving me toward pastoral ministry,” he said.

“My work as a leader was to be in relationship with the participants, to help broaden their worldview, to begin to consider new ways of thinking about life, faith and work,” said Schlegel-Preheim. And now he continues that work,

but as pastor of Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship in Boise, Idaho.

But not everyone is called to pastoral ministry. And Service Adventure grows those leaders, too.

Lauren Eash Hershberger, a former Service Adventure participant, served in Johnstown in 2005 at an after-school program called New Day. At first, she was overwhelmed at the thought of creating a daily schedule, Bible lesson, activities, and managing a classroom of third graders. “But I grew to love it. I saw skills forming that I never knew I had,” said Eash Hershberger.

“My true self finally felt seen. It was also incredibly affirming in a way

because I was giving people a view of my leadership gifts, and people were giving me feedback that I was doing well. I entered the year being a shy kid who felt overlooked, and left as a leader.”

Eash Hershberger was mentored by her Service Adventure leader and placement supervisor. She was affirmed in her leadership, organization, and conflict management skills—all of which were honed when she and her husband, Mark, became Service Adventure leaders in 2011. They served for two years in Albany, Oregon.

Now, Eash Hershberger works for the larger church through Mennonite Mission Network.

“[Service Adventure] actively works at strengthening the church by strengthening the people,” Nisly said. ■



Photo by Susan Nisly

Evan Finger, a Service Adventure participant, with part of his class at New Day. Evan taught one of the classes at this after-school program for kids in the community in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

SERVICE ADVENTURE

10
months

17–20
ages

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hovered around us. After a while, she sauntered over to me and said, “We deeply lament that Mariah’s term is coming to an end. She has been such a godsend. I wish we could clone her.” We offered our understanding and regret and went back to our work. When lunchtime arrived, the guests started to stream in—more than 200 of them. Serving complete, Susan and I took our meals and joined some guests at the table. Our table mates were happy to share with us their appreciation of Mariah. It was clear that Mariah offered them not only food and welcome, but also love and a regard for their dignity. Mariah was either stretched in her ministry to so many people, or she was being equipped and empowered by God to look beyond surface appearances. Instead of seeing their unkempt dress and un-showered bodies, she saw the human beings whom God loves and who are thus made deserving of our love.

Mariah completed her work, and with plate in hand, she joined us at the table. As I watched the kindness and care reflected in her face, I began to understand the appreciation of both the administration and the guests. What awed me, however, was seeing the light turn on in the eyes of the guests responding to the company of Mariah at the table. What I realized was the Holy recognition that these guests had looked into her eyes and had seen the face of God filled with love and compassion for them. Mariah offered them dignity and invited them back into the possibilities of full humanity—she was an instrument of healing and hope in their lives.

I am so honored by the young people, like Mariah, who come to us every year, ready to grow and learn and share their lives. They are an extension of our witness as Mennonites in the world. I am also grateful to you, who, by your sharing, support the transformation in these young people’s lives, and allow them to move their world in the direction of healing and hope. Thank you! ■

Stanley W. Green

Stanley W. Green
Executive Director



Photo by Susan Nisly

Tyler Gehring assists in the office of Homeward Bound, a treatment program for homeless people dealing with alcoholism.



Photo by Susan Nisly

Lizzie Schrag tells a children’s story during the worship service at Prince of Peace Mennonite Church in Anchorage.



Photo by Susan Nisly

Mariah Denlinger does laundry at Downtown Soup Kitchen Hope Center. Part of the ministry at this agency is laundering clothing for people who are in a homeless situation, while they shower and get cleaned up. Mariah spent part of her time doing laundry, part of her time distributing clothing through the clothing pantry, and part of her time helping prepare and serve food in the kitchen.

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