



EXTENDING BEYOND

We are called to work together

By Marisa Smucker, interim executive director



At the end of October, 10 Mennonite Mission Network board members, seven Mission Network staff members, a Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) representative and several spouses,

participated in a tour of Colombia, to learn about Mission Network’s key partner in Colombia, the Mennonite church known as *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia*, also referred to as IMCOL. To facilitate this learning experience, Mission Network’s regional director for Latin America, Linda Shelly, worked with leaders at IMCOL to arrange time for us to hear from our international worker Bekah York; IMCOL staff and

committee members; pastors of member congregations; and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Colombia workers.

Through onsite visits, sharing and conversation, we came to a deeper learning and understanding of what it has meant for the Colombian Mennonite churches to be strong in their faith. They accompany others in a country where there are many displaced individuals and families due to political unrest, corruption and guerilla warfare along with thousands of refugees crossing the borders to flee their own countries’ unrest and instability. These leaders also spoke about Mission Network’s role with IMCOL in Iquitos, Peru, and with the global mission partnerships with Ecuadorian and Venezuelan churches, which

“We must work together, by sharing resources, encouraging one another, serving one another, and most of all, uniting our voices in the spirit of peace and reconciliation through Christ.”

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Mission Network board and staff learn about the *IgleParque* (church park with biblical themes) that the Mennonite church in Anolaima, Colombia, is developing. The Anolaima church, established in 1952, was the third Mennonite church in Colombia. Photo by Gisselle Guity.

“I pray that our God, who calls you and gives you perseverance and encouragement, will join all of you together to share one mind according to Jesus the Anointed.”

— Romans 15:5
(VOICE)



Photo by Everett Ramer

Miriam Ramer staffs the *Maison de l'amitié* vendor table at a farmer's market in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Ramers serve in the big city and the wilderness

By Zachary Headings

From late June to early September, Everett and Miriam Ramer served at Maison de l'amitié (Friendship House) in Montreal, Quebec; and Camp Péniel, outside of Montreal, through Service Opportunities with Our Partners (SOOP).



Service has been an important part of Everett and Miriam Ramer's lives. During the 1970s, they met while serving with Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) Teachers Abroad Program in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They envisioned that they would do much

the same in their retirement years, but fulfilling this desire was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In spring 2023, they began looking for service

opportunities and eventually found SOOP. "We saw that Montreal was [a SOOP location], and that immediately drew our attention," Everett Ramer said.

The Ramers wanted to immerse themselves in a French-speaking community. "When we served with MCC, we did so in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a French-speaking country. We both had good memories of that," said Miriam Ramer.

The Ramers' first served at *Maison de l'amitié* in Montreal, a community center that was founded by Mennonites in 1974. Its mission is to "build a vibrant community and empower people."

At the community center, the Ramers served in many capacities. They primarily taught English as a Second Language to immigrants, many of whom had only been in Canada for a few months. During the six-week term,

they taught, served as teaching assistants and helped lead conversation classes. Their class sizes ranged from 13 to 23 students, with students from across the world.

Additionally, the Ramers helped with two weekly neighborhood farmers markets, in addition to staffing two weekly concerts, called *Duluth en Arts* (Duluth in Arts), held on Saturday afternoons. These concerts brought music and dance from multiple cultures to the neighborhood, including traditional Quebecois music, Irish music and dancing, rap, rock, jazz singing, and Brazilian music and dancing.

“We didn’t do a lot of dancing,” Everett Ramer said. “But it was great. Lots of people, of all ages, came to listen and had a lot of fun.”

“[The concerts were held] on a pedestrian-only street,” Miriam Ramer added. “This brought so much life to the street. People would walk by and stop for the concert. It was very lively.”

Although it was not without challenges, the Ramers enjoyed their time in Montreal. “Our schedule was very packed, but it was a lot of fun,” Everett Ramer said.

After six weeks in the city, the Ramers served at Camp Péniel. Camp Péniel is a restoration and rest center for young people, families and groups of all ages. The camp integrates conferences, training, outdoor and artistic activities, which are inspired by Christian values. It is located 1 ½ hours northwest of Montreal.

While at the camp, the Ramers helped prepare and serve food for groups from multicultural churches in Montreal that would come to the camp on weekend retreats. “Camp Péniel has an excellent chef,” Everett Ramer wrote in a report about their time of service. “[They] prepare all meals from scratch and made a commitment to not use disposable tableware. Preparing and serving food to 100 people means chopping a lot of vegetables and fruits and washing a lot of dishes. We were physically exhausted by Sunday

afternoon.” But the Ramers were also blessed by the guests’ compliments on the quality of the food and service, being part of an organization that values their environment, and having had the chance to get to know another group of Christians from a culture different from their own.

During the week, the Ramers worked on maintenance projects, like painting, refinishing woodwork and furniture, cleaning and defrosting refrigerators and freezers, planting trees and shrubs, and doing laundry. They also enjoyed biking, hiking and canoeing in the camp’s lake.

“After our time in the city,” Miriam Ramer said, “it was a relief to get out into nature and into a totally different experience. I enjoyed both experiences.”

The Ramers plan to continue serving like they did with SOOP. “I would like to do a service experience like this again,” Everett Ramer said. “Service experiences are

transformational. I saw this in my father’s life; he served in Civilian Public Service during WWII. My service with MCC in Africa was one of the most important experiences in my life.”

Miriam Ramer sees service as formational, rather than transformational, bringing her back to the values she learned at home that were reinforced by her time with MCC. “I need regular times of service and immersion in an environment where I see real needs, in order to keep my perspectives aligned with the kingdom of God,” she said. “Even when I see real needs close to home, I

can become complacent with the contributions I am making, and I need to be shaken up a bit.”

Both Ramers mentioned their grandchildren when talking about future service opportunities. Everett Ramer hopes that their grandchildren will be able to have some of their own transformational service experiences, and Miriam Ramer mentioned that it was important to her that their grandchildren see their grandparents living for other people, as Christ did, rather than relaxing into what is comfortable. ■

“After our time in the city, it was a relief to get out into nature and into a totally different experience. I enjoyed both experiences.” — Miriam Ramer



Everett and Miriam Ramer at Camp Péniel.

Photo provided



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Photo by Martin Gunawan

IMCOL administrator Oscar Ospina, President Carlos Moreno and pastor Peter Stucky (right to left) receive a quilted wall hanging as a 75th anniversary gift from Mennonite Mission Network. It is an artistic integration of the IMCOL logo (taken from the former General Conference Mennonite Church) and the Mission Network dove. *Colegio Americano Menno* Director Rebeca Muñoz and Mission Network Interim Executive Director Marisa Smucker (left to right) display other gifts.

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Central Plains Mennonite Conference also participates in. No matter what country, ministry or agency was spoken about, the common theme that kept rising to the surface was the need for peace and reconciliation.

As Christians, we have read in Scripture about the kind of peace that Christ offers. This is the kind of peace that IMCOL, and their member congregations, seeks to pass on, as they walk alongside those who have lost their homes, refugees who are learning to live in a new country, and many who have been traumatized by violence and other experiences of harm. In doing this work, they have learned the importance of partnership. No group can do this work alone. No one agency or church has all the necessary resources to repair the ills of this world. We must work together by sharing resources, encouraging one another, serving one another, and most of all, uniting our voices in the spirit of peace and reconciliation through Christ. ■

Marisa Smucker

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Interim Executive Director



Photo by Cindy Cumberland

Jaime Ramirez, pastor of *Iglesia Menonita Suba*, located on the outskirts of Bogotá, shares with the congregation and visitors. The board and staff divided into small groups to attend seven churches Sunday morning.



Photo by Cindy Cumberland

Mission Network worker Bekah York provides orientation for the group.

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