



EXTENDING BEYOND

Being a servant to one another

Frerrany Caro and Dilia Orellana wash each other's hands as part of a church service in Yaracuy, Venezuela. Photo by Linda Shelly.

By Marisa Smucker, Executive Director



When I think of the word “service,” one of the first things that pops into my head is the lyrics to a song we often sing in our congregation, “Will You Let Me Be

Your Servant” (*Voices Together* 778). Our hymnal sometimes uses first lines as titles; however, the actual song title is “The Servant Song,” written by Richard Gillard. I love the simplicity and folk-style music and find the words inspiring, encouraging us to care for one another as we journey on the road of life. I especially appreciate that this song begins with a question.

The question implies an invitation, giving space for one to make a choice ... an opportunity to be a fellow traveler on the road.

“Jesus modeled for us what it means to invite others to follow, to live for God’s kingdom, by choosing to serve others rather than living for personal gain.”

When it comes to our service opportunities, my hope is that people will have this same feeling — an invitation to explore and participate in one or more of our programs. Jesus modeled for us what it means to invite others to follow, to live for God’s kingdom, by choosing to serve others rather than living for personal gain. Jesus met people along the way, spent time with them and invited them to follow him. And in Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus also spoke of what it means to serve one another.

Community is a core focus of Anabaptist theology. We, as Anabaptists, choose to do life with others, rather than rely on and serve solely on ourselves. As we invite people to serve in various parts of the world, we also extend an invitation to participants’

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“Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest. And anyone among you who wishes to be first must serve the needs of all, as enslaved - just as the Chosen One came not to be served but to serve, and to die in ransom for many.”

— Matthew 20:26b-28 (Inclusive Bible Translation)



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2024-25 San Francisco MVS unit: Savannah Walter, Ana Neufeld Esperanza Weaver, and Conrad Liechty.

The future is bright for Service Adventure and MVS

By Zachary Headings

In August, Mennonite Mission Network began the 2024-25 young adult program year, with two Service Adventure units and three Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) units, with at least three participants in all but one location. While this may not seem like much cause for celebration, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the units only had two participants. Some had none.

Fuller units benefit everyone involved, from host congregations to participants, because community — a core principle of these programs — can be more fully realized. Additionally, fuller units help ensure financial sustainability, giving supporting congregations and Mission Network the flexibility to provide continued financial support.

The future for MVS and Service Adventure looks bright. The “COVID bump” — as some Mission Network staff refer to the drop in participants during the pandemic — has

passed, and these programs are gaining strength.

“It feels as though we are gaining momentum, after having crawled out of the initial years of the pandemic,” said Michael Oyer, HR placement coordinator for Mission Network. Oyer, who works closely with Service Adventure and MVS applicants, was a Service Adventure unit leader in Anchorage, Alaska, from 2019-22.

Oyer indicated that one of the most exciting aspects of the programs this year is the quality of unit leaders for Service Adventure and local leaders for MVS. “There is great energy around our new unit leaders and the experience and thoughtfulness they bring to the position,” Oyer said. “I am excited to see them grow into what is such a crucial role within this program.”

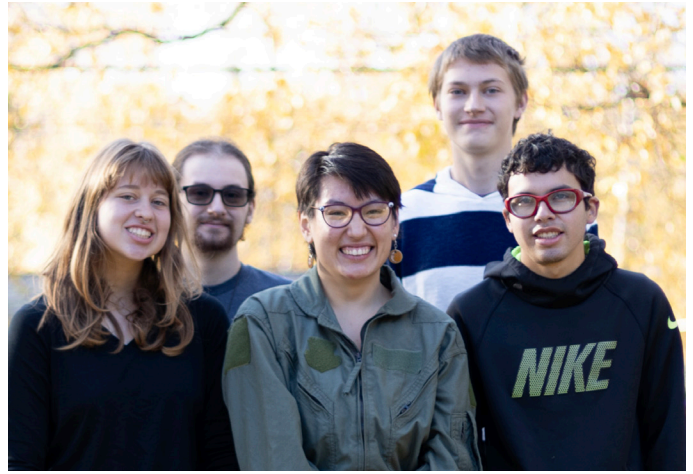
Mission Network is thankful to the people and congregations who have supported MVS and Service Adventure units in the past, as well as those who will support them in

“Storytelling and sharing our own experiences of serving is a great start to continuing this momentum forward.”



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2024-25 Tucson MVS unit: Patrick Webb, Hannah Lehman, Schlyer Entz and Zing Bawi Ken.



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2024-25 Anchorage Service Adventure unit, front row: Bria Nyveldt, Avi Setiawan and Armando Perez. Back row: *Mir Knego and Samuel Landis.



Photoprovided

2024-25 Alamosa MVS unit: Josh Kennel and Emily Keefer.



Photo by Christiann Stoltzfus

2024-25 Colorado Springs Service Adventure unit: *Christian Stoltzfus, Elisabeth Daudey, Alea Sagert, Hannah Smith, Sadie Sherman, *Leigha Stoltzfus holding baby Naomi. *Unit leaders.

the future.

These programs are often thought of as “gap year” programs. Service Adventure placements typically serve as a transitional year between high school and the participants’ next steps, whether that be college or a career. Similarly, MVS often offers a break between college and joining the workforce. But the impact of these programs goes far beyond a single year. “Despite a lot of unknowns that come with stepping out in faith and moving to a new place, taking on new daily challenge, and meeting new people, the transformative power of the shared experience [of Service Adventure or MVS] is unique,” Oyer said.

Oyer has seen firsthand the personal growth that occurs in young people when they commit to these programs

— programs that society may not value. “Through serving others and living intentionally in a new place, one’s ability to care for and serve others expands beyond the initial year of service,” Oyer said.

As a church, it is our responsibility to sustain this momentum and energy. The best way to do this, Oyer said, is to tell stories of service, encouraging those who have participated in programs like Service Adventure and MVS to share their experiences. “[This might entail] setting aside Sunday school times to discuss service, while also relating service back to our faith and the biblical importance that comes with the concept,” Oyer said. “Storytelling and sharing our own experiences of serving is a great start to continuing this momentum forward.” ■



Service Adventure and MVS offer young adults transformative opportunities to experience firsthand the important connection between service and faith. Act now to support these programs, and others like them, by visiting [MennoniteMission.net/Donate!](https://MennoniteMission.net/Donate)



Photo by [unreadable]

Part of being a servant to one another is taking the time to listen to each other's stories, even the difficult ones. Just Peace Pilgrimages, like this Civil Rights Pilgrimage, offer spaces to listen, learn and grow. Above, Lynda Blackmon Lowery, author of *Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March*, shares her experience of Bloody Sunday with the Just Peace Pilgrimage group from Central District Conference.

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families, churches, communities and other social groups. When a person says yes to Service Adventure, Mennonite Voluntary Service, SOOP, International Ministries, or a trip with Youth Venture or Just Peace Pilgrimage, they will need your support. This is a moment when a hand is being held out, inviting you to take part in the journey. It is an invitation to pray for and with them, to learn alongside them as they share with you personally or in their newsletter, blogs, vlogs, social media, etc., and to support them with finances and resources when there is a need. This is important; it's a call to action.

It is an invitation to:

- Pray for and with them.
- Learn alongside them.

My prayer today is that we will each consider how we might be fellow travelers on the road, serving one another in walking the mile together, bearing the load for one another, and, no matter where we are, sharing together in times of joy, sorrow and laughter. ■

Marisa Smucker

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Executive Director

Visit us on social media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [X](#) and [YouTube](#), to share how God is calling you to Be the Gospel!



Photo by Cindi Boyer

A supportive community surrounds the Alamosa MVS unit. 2023 Thanksgiving party with past MVSers and community members. Counter clockwise from front: Cindi Boyer, Petra Showalter, Roxy Gerhing, Grantley Showalter, Kyla Nies, Elsa Lantz, Mrs. Gerhing, Mr. Gerhing, Jake Myers, Mark Franchi and Alena Miller.



Photo by [unreadable]

Mission Network worker Laura Schlabach shares about her work in Mongolia with Martin's Creek Mennonite Church — part of the Mongolia Mission Partnership in Ohio — a group that supports her both financially and in prayer.

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