



MENNONITE VOLUNTARY SERVICE HANDBOOK

Mennonite Voluntary Service is a program of
Mennonite Mission Network - the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering
God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

MVS MISSION STATEMENT	4
FAITH AND VALUES STATEMENTS	4
WELCOME	4
DEFINITIONS	5
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES	6
LOCAL LEADERSHIP MODELS.....	6
UNIT VISITS	6
ASSIGNMENT	7
PROCEDURE.....	7
SUPERVISION	7
TERMS OF SERVICE	8
PHILOSOPHY.....	8
LENGTH OF TERM.....	8
PRIOR SERVICE	8
CHANGES IN ASSIGNMENT	8
EXTENSION OF TERM.....	8
TERMINATION OF SERVICE.....	8
EARLY TERMINATION	8
LEAVES	9
RE-ENTRY AFTER SERVICE.....	9
CROSSING INTERNATIONAL BORDERS	9
ORIENTATION.....	10
RETREATS	10
BI-MONTHLY REFLECTIONS.....	10
END OF TERM EVALUATION/REPORT.....	10
RELATIONSHIP TO SUPPORTING CHURCH OR CHURCHES	11
UNIT LIFE	11
PHILOSOPHY AND COMMITMENT.....	11
BASIC NEEDS.....	11
VEHICLES IN SERVICE.....	12
PHILOSOPHY.....	12
UNIT VEHICLES	12
PERSONAL VEHICLES IN SERVICE	12
MEETINGS.....	12
PETS	13
VISITORS	13
DATING	13
MARRIAGE/MARRIED COUPLES	13
FAMILY ADDITIONS.....	13
HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION.....	14
GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH OFFENSES	14
ACTS OF CONSCIENCE	15
PERSONAL PROBLEMS/COUNSELING.....	15
SUBSTANCE ABUSE.....	15
FINANCES AND FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	15
PHILOSOPHY.....	15
MMN FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS.....	16
EDUCATION.....	16
EDUCATIONAL/RECREATIONAL ALLOWANCE	16
EDUCATIONAL LOAN ASSISTANCE	17
FOOD AND SUPPLIES SPENDING GUIDELINES	17

PERSONAL MONTHLY STIPEND	17
SPECIAL COSTS.....	18
SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME	18
TRANSPORTATION AND MOVING.....	18
VACATION.....	19
INSURANCE	19
MEDICAL	19
SELECTING ANOTHER HEALTH PLAN.....	19
COUNSELING.....	19
MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT	20
DENTAL AND OPTICAL.....	20
COVERAGE FOR CANADIANS SERVING IN THE US.....	20
COVERAGE FOR MVS PARTICIPANTS TRAVELING OVERSEAS.....	20
EXTENDED HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOLLOWING MVS.....	20
PERSONAL PROPERTY	20
WORKMAN’S COMPENSATION	20

MVS MISSION STATEMENT

We seek to provide opportunities for persons to act on their faith by assisting congregations in ministry to their communities.

FAITH AND VALUES STATEMENTS

MVS shares the Mennonite community's Vision for Healing & Hope:

"God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ, and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world."

MVS declares Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and sees Jesus as the model for service! Guidance for MVS arises from Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching. It is his example that we seek to follow.

We emphasize:

- Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.
- Jesus as the model for our service.

We believe service:

- involves justice for people who are marginalized and suffer from injustice.
- demands compassionate nonviolent action as the means for social change.
- captures the harmony of word and deed.

We believe service is best done in a community committed to:

- living simply.
- worshipping and learning together.
- caring for and confronting each other in Christ-like love.
- recognizing the equality of all human beings.

WELCOME

We welcome you into Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS). We value your commitment to live in a community of faith, and to caring for the needs of others while you grow and are nurtured. As an MVS participant you have an opportunity to use your training/education and experience to work with and learn from a wide variety of people and situations. During this time, you will explore new places and opportunities, face difficult questions, and discover new ways of being and doing. You will be able to use your gifts and talents in walking alongside others in your service placement and the communities you engage, while being supported and prayed for by many people and churches.

The policies outlined in this manual will help you understand the financial, administrative, and spiritual resources and guidelines of the MVS program. While providing order and clarity, policies can also be flexible when special situations arise. MVS participants may discuss needs not covered in this handbook with the local leadership and MVS Staff. Any special arrangements should be detailed in the MVS Covenant.

It is our hope that you will feel welcomed, appreciated, and supported as you undertake your

assignment, and that this handbook will be a useful tool to refer to during your term of service.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used in the MVS Handbook:

MVS Participant: The MVS participant is a person bringing unique skills, feelings, and motivations to a full-time service assignment. All MVS participants commit to:

- working alongside marginalized people and those who suffer from injustice.
- participating enthusiastically in issues and activities of a local neighborhood and local faith community.
- living simply in a shared household where caring relationships can be affirmed and nurtured.
- learning from new cultural settings where perceptions and outlooks may vary from one's own.

Service Unit: One or more individuals living in a common residence in a particular geographic area and sharing living responsibilities and resources while serving to meet human needs.

Mennonite Mission Network (Mission Network): Mission Network is the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA and provides MVS staffing, recruitment, participant affirmation, financial commitments, resourcing, and consultation.

MVS Staff: MVS is a program of Mission Network, in partnership with host congregations/organizations that have service units. There are MVS staff in two main locations: Newton, Kansas and Elkhart, Indiana. Through Mission Network, the director and staff work with promotion, recruitment, placement, and program resources, within the MVS structure at the national level.

Host Congregation and Local Leadership: The host congregation/organization provides local leadership through appointment of a support committee, a committee chair, and/or a local program coordinator. This appointed leadership team represents, and is responsible to, the host congregation in carrying the vision for the local service unit within a given community. This team is then responsible for communicating with the host congregation, MVS participants, and MVS staff collaborate to make MVS service possible in each community. (A more in-depth description of Local Leadership Models is found under "Organizational Responsibilities.")

MVS Director: An individual from Mission Network staff whose responsibilities include staff supervision, resourcing, and unit/program guidance.

MVS Advocate: An individual (or several individuals) chosen by an MVS participant from their home congregation or community. The advocate has two responsibilities:

1. Communication: Maintain regular contact with the MVS participant and communicate their experience back to the home congregation.
2. Support Raising: Assist the MVS participant in receiving financial and prayer support.

Program Human Resources (Program HR): Comprised of a team of personnel counselors,

recruiters, and human resource staff who work with applicants throughout the application process and during the program year. (This process is described in detail in the “Assignment: Procedure” section.)

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The MVS program depends upon a partnership between the host congregation(s)/organization and Mission Network to support the service unit and participants. Each entity is responsible to the other and should be involved in making decisions regarding the long-term vision for MVS in the local setting. The following describe structures, roles, and responsibilities.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

Currently MVS uses the following leadership roles in operating service units. MVS participants are also active in the operation of the unit.

1. **SUPPORT COMMITTEE MODEL:**

The supporting congregation organizes a committee that establishes the unit’s long-term vision and is responsible for its healthy, day-to-day operation. The support committee and unit work out a plan that will allow the unit to meet its goals locally and connect with the national MVS network.

2. **LOCAL PROGRAM COORDINATOR (LPC) AND SUPPORT COMMITTEE MODEL:**

One or more individuals are paid or volunteer their time as the LPC(s). These individuals are responsible to ensure the healthy day-to-day operation of the unit.

Generally, these service units have a support committee from the sponsoring congregation that helps establish the vision for the unit and is used as a sounding board for the LPC and service unit. The LPC and service unit work out a plan that will allow the unit to meet its goals locally and connect with the national MVS network.

The LPC and support committees are referred to in this handbook as local leadership. The primary responsibility for determining the service assignments and the direction of service in the local community rests with the local leadership/congregation and the service unit. The MVS staff gives guidance and is available for consultation in these matters.

UNIT VISITS: IN PERSON OR VIA ZOOM

Unit visits by MVS staff have several functions:

1. **INFORMATION GATHERING:** Since the MVS staff coordinates recruitment and general promotion of the MVS program, firsthand information is important. Visits to the units are one of the best ways to obtain this information.

2. **GENERAL CONSULTING:** At times, MVS staff will serve in a consulting role, both for individuals and groups, and is available to give counsel and advice regarding finances, support committee matters, and other concerns.

3. **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION:** MVS staff will assist as needed in evaluating placement sites, program planning, and goal setting for the unit and individual MVS

participants.

RECRUITMENT

Mission Network and local leadership work closely together for recruitment. Local leadership provides information and links for applicants to learn about their unit, local context, and service placements. Mission Network provides Recruitment and Marketing staff that advertise and connect with other Mennonite agencies, educational institutions, volunteer networks, individuals, etc. MVS displays and publications are available by request from the MVS offices in Newton and Elkhart. Individual MVS participants may be asked to attend MVS recruitment events.

ASSIGNMENT

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

A candidate for MVS must submit an application. The Program Human Resource team compiles references, evaluates the file, and does preliminary screening. This process usually takes four to eight weeks.

The Personnel Counselors review all completed applicant files with the MVS Director for approval and placement options. Placements are proposed by matching MVS applicants with complimentary hosting congregations and communities. Theological beliefs, skills and interests, experience, and geographical preference are all taken into account. Options are sent to applicants for their discernment. Once the applicant chooses a unit, their file is sent to the local leadership.

Local leadership reviews the applicant file to determine the appropriate fit for the local site and applicant. This may include a conversation with the applicant to discuss unit realities, availability of placements, housing, and descriptions of the congregation and local community.

If local leadership and the applicant determine this location and placement to be a good fit, local leadership will extend an official invitation to join the unit by phone or email. Local leadership will also correspond with the applicant concerning community living details, start date, travel to the assignment, length of term, and any special allowances. If local leadership or the applicant determine this is not an appropriate fit, local leadership will inform the MVS office. MVS staff will discuss alternative assignments with the applicant.

MVS staff will send information to the participant's home congregation and advocate requesting the congregation's partnership in the MVS assignment.

SUPERVISION

MVS participants are accountable to the host congregation/organization through the local leadership, to the members of the service unit household, and Mission Network. MVS participants are also supervised by and accountable to the agencies which they serve. Their role is expected to be comparable to that of the agency's paid employees, if any. **Participants of**

MVS should not take advantage of their volunteer status in any way.

TERMS OF SERVICE

PHILOSOPHY

MVS sees one of its strengths as being committed to local congregational outreach in communities for the long term. The longer one is in a community, the more able they are to identify with the joy and sorrow of that community and the more able they are to establish significant relationships within that community.

LENGTH OF TERM

MVS is a one-year program with the opportunity for participants to extend up to two or three years. Extensions are encouraged due to the benefit of deeper connections and relationships with the communities and placements.

PRIOR SERVICE

Persons who have served with another Mennonite service program (within one year) prior to entering MVS may be allowed to count this time as "prior service" in determining the length of time in MVS for adjusted allowances. A clear understanding of how much time will be counted should be discussed with the host congregation/organization and indicated in the MVS Covenant.

CHANGES IN ASSIGNMENT

Occasionally a reassignment to a different position or to a different location is made necessary because of changes in program (e.g., closing of a service unit, changes in placements, etc.) or because the welfare of the MVS participant makes it advisable. MVS participants are encouraged to keep local leadership informed of circumstances that might necessitate changes in their assignments. After careful review of any program status or situation with the individual MVS participant, notify the MVS staff regarding any changes.

EXTENSION OF TERM

MVS participants who are interested in extending their terms of service should discuss their interests with local leadership and the MVS staff as early as possible. Extensions are not automatically granted but depend upon approval from local leadership.

TERMINATION OF SERVICE

An MVS term ends on the date agreed upon between the participant and local leadership. Participants are encouraged to leave the household immediately after termination unless other arrangements have been made with the local leadership.

EARLY TERMINATION

Occasionally program changes and/or changes in a participant's situation may make it

necessary for an early termination. Otherwise, MVS participants are expected to remain in their assignments until the agreed upon termination date.

MVS holds the right to terminate any MVS participant's placement with MVS. Before termination is initiated by MVS, conversations will have taken place between the local leadership, the participant, the service unit, and with the MVS staff.

If a participant wants to terminate for personal reasons, they must discuss the situation with the local leadership and with MVS staff. An attempt will be made to find alternatives to termination. If none are found, a healthy way for the participant to end their term will be worked upon with all parties involved.

LEAVES

Should an MVS participant be unable to perform their work temporarily due to illness or an emergency in the immediate family, the participant may present a request for emergency leave to the local leadership. Emergency leave may be granted for periods of up to one month. Persons on emergency leave will be paid the monthly stipend.

In the event of a death in the immediate family of an MVS participant [i.e., parents, grandparents, siblings, children, in-laws], the MVS unit will cover travel costs to the funeral and back to the individual's assignment, if needed.

When an MVS participant needs to be away from an assignment for personal reasons, a non-emergency leave may be granted after a conversation with the agency and local leadership, for up to thirty days without the monthly stipend.

Persons who serve through other organizations would adhere to the policies for leaves of that organization.

RE-ENTRY AFTER SERVICE

The local leadership is encouraged to help MVS participants prepare for the transition from MVS to other involvements. This could be done individually or as a unit. The MVS participant is encouraged to contact the home congregation, pastor, family members and friends for additional support and encouragement during this time of change. MVS staff are also able to suggest resources and support networks which might be helpful during the period of transition.

CROSSING INTERNATIONAL BORDERS

Persons of non-U.S. citizenship will generally enter the United States on either a B-1 Temporary Visitor Visa or join the program on their F-1 Student Visa doing their year of OPT (Optional Practical Training). While local leadership can assist in providing supporting documents, the MVS participant has full responsibility to secure any visa and renewals.

B-1 Visas are generally granted for a 6 month stay (and occasionally for 12 months). Renewals of this visa can be applied for before the allowed stay expires. Renewal information and paperwork should be obtained from your local leadership at least 60 days prior to the expiration date. Check with your local leadership to see if the renewal fee is a personal expense

or paid by unit funds.

If the MVS participant returns home before their B-1 stay expires, it is recommended to reenter the United States on a new 6 month stay in order to save the renewal fee. It is the responsibility of the participant to notify the local leadership at least 21 days in advance of a return home to request new border crossing documents.

If a participant should allow their visa to expire before sending in a renewal application, the MVS participant must leave the United States immediately and return on a new visa. In this case, the expense to leave the country and return to the United States will be the cost of the participant.

Specific visa laws should be researched in advance so as to not violate the conditions of the participant's visa. Laws regarding earning income, staying in the U.S. after the participant's service term, and others may be considered illegal and potentially jeopardize the participant's stay in the U.S. as well as the MVS unit.

COMPONENTS AND EXPECTATIONS OF MVS

ORIENTATION

MVS participants will receive orientation upon arrival at their local site. All participants are required to participate in the orientation. Orientations are led by local leadership with help and materials provided by the MVS staff. Some parts of the orientation, such as anti-racism training, intercultural competence, etc., may be scheduled for the national retreat to make better use of outside trainers and take advantage of larger group discussion.

RETREATS

Each unit is expected to participate in the national MVS retreat. National retreats are organized and paid for by MVS, but units are responsible for covering travel costs. Retreats will include ample time for socializing, relaxation, and re-energizing, and will also be used to follow up on topics covered in orientation. Additional speakers and sessions may be determined by the MVS staff (and in consultation with local leaders for suggested topics).

REFLECTION AND REPORTS

BI-MONTHLY REFLECTIONS: MVS participants are asked to submit bi-monthly (6 per year) reflections that talk about their neighborhood, community activities, unit life, placements, and include reflections on personal growth and development. Bi-Monthly reflections are submitted to the MVS staff and may be shared with local leadership and the MVS participant's advocate. Bi-Monthly reflections will be considered confidential upon request.

END OF TERM EVALUATION/REPORT:

An evaluation will be provided by local leadership for MVS participants to complete near the end of the term. All completed evaluations received by local leadership will be shared with MVS staff when applicable.

RELATIONSHIP TO SUPPORTING CONGREGATION(S)

A significant relationship with the supporting congregation(s) is considered an important aspect of the MVS year. Expectations for participation or involvement in worship services, educational programs, music and worship, or other areas of ministry within the church should be discussed with local leadership during the placement process or at the beginning of the MVS year. If there is a desire to be involved in a different faith community, consult with local leadership regarding ways to connect with both faith communities.

UNIT LIFE

PHILOSOPHY AND COMMITMENT

In most cases, a commitment to MVS is a commitment to live in a household with other service participants. Living in community requires tolerance, flexibility, and a willingness to work hard at maintaining healthy relationships. Living in community also provides opportunities for rich fellowship and fun. Members living in the unit are expected to share in household work and activities and meet regularly with the household for unit meetings which could include prayer or study sessions.

Persons in MVS commit themselves to the highest standards of personal and professional conduct. As such, participants are expected to hold ourselves accountable to God, to the church, and to those in MVS with whom we live and work. We are called upon to show sensitive regard for the moral, social, and religious values of others as well as our own.

OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Service units may have a variety of persons living in the household, not just full-time MVS participants. Unit households may include students, short-term MVS participants, volunteers associated with another volunteer program, or persons with regular earning jobs desiring to live in intentional community. This type of arrangement will vary from unit to unit and information about the households will be made available. Local leadership may ask all members of the unit household to sign a covenant indicating their agreement to community living. The covenant may include but not be limited to expectations around understanding service programs such as MVS, navigating culture or undoing racism/oppression, involvement in unit life, etc. It is possible that such persons may be asked to be involved in activities and programs as time permits and pay a monthly fee to the unit for food and housing costs. This may happen through volunteer program funds or individual payments.

It is recommended that all members of the unit household have background checks prior to living in the unit. Mission Network can assist with background checks if needed.

BASIC NEEDS

A service lifestyle is one of simplicity and knowledge about conservation, ecology, health, and justice will reinforce responsible habits and decisions. Local leadership along with members of the unit household plan together for the wise and frugal use of money and supplies.

The host congregation/organization provides support that meets the basic needs of each MVS participant: housing, food, local transportation, medical coverage, and a monthly stipend. (*Spending guidelines and monthly stipends can be found in the Finance section below; medical coverage can be found under Insurance*).

TRANSPORTATION AND VEHICLES IN SERVICE

PHILOSOPHY: MVS views transportation as a justice issue. In wanting to be in solidarity with those affected by oppression, it is essential that we face the discrepancy of access to transportation and the larger impact that operating a personal vehicle has on our world. Therefore, the following are guidelines for transportation and vehicles during the service year.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION:

Depending on the local context, local leadership may provide metro cards, bus passes, etc., to MVS participants during their service term. This is generally the case in large urban settings where vehicles are not ideal.

UNIT VEHICLES:

Some MVS units have vehicles available for travel to and from work, unit activities, and local MVS involvements. Local leadership will establish guidelines for personal use and care of unit vehicles.

PERSONAL VEHICLES IN SERVICE:

Personal vehicles may be brought to the MVS unit only with approval from local leadership. Costs associated with the vehicle may be covered by the unit if the vehicle is available for use by all participants. A written agreement should establish guidelines for the use, costs, and mileage reimbursement of the vehicle throughout the year.

HOUSING AND PERSONAL ITEMS

Local unit housing availability will determine whether members of the household will have their own room or whether couples will have separate housing. Consult with the local leadership about housing for specific locations.

MVS participants are strongly encouraged to keep the number of personal items taken to their units to a minimum. This includes clothing and accessories, some of which should be appropriate for work and other wear that represents well the host congregation and community.

MEETINGS

Each unit should have regularly scheduled meetings with local leadership. Agenda could include individual updates, group and individual concerns, housekeeping/administrative/financial matters, or opportunities to discuss faith issues.

Local leadership meetings without service participants are encouraged to discuss issues such as prospective applicants, personnel matters, or new placement opportunities. Consider sharing minutes or updates from meetings with MVS staff when appropriate.

PETS

Because of varying personal preferences, phobias, allergies, etc., pets will not be kept by service households. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved by the local leadership and the unit household. Service units will not pay any pet-related expenses.

VISITORS

Family and friends are encouraged to visit MVS participants to learn about their MVS involvements. All visits should be approved by the household in advance. Details to consider should include the length of stay, available space in the household, meal arrangements, and if there are any applicable fees for staying in the unit. Because of special circumstances, certain households may have more detailed visitor policies. Also consider the timing of the visit due to holidays or national events that might be affecting the local community, such as riots, wildfires, pandemics, etc.

LIFESTYLE AND RELATIONSHIPS

It is expected that MVS participants will pursue a style of living that is just, healthy, and caring. (Local site handbooks may include their own style of living expectations.)

DATING

All relationships should reflect the Christian witness of the MVS program. MVS participants are expected to give priority to their service assignments and unit life above romantic relationships. Because an individual's behavior and relationships directly affect others in the household, MVS participants should be willing to discuss those subjects openly with the local leadership and members of the unit household.

In general, it is discouraged to have dating couples living in the same unit house.

MARRIAGE/MARRIED COUPLES:

MVS recognizes that unit household living puts unusual demands on married couples and, as such, it is recommended couples be married for at least one year before entering MVS. Couples are encouraged to seek enrichment for their marriages. This may be in the form of time away from the household or attendance at a program such as a marriage enrichment seminar. Interested couples should discuss these options with local leadership. In some locations, couples may live in housing apart from the rest of the service unit.

SINGLE PARTICIPANTS:

In light of the aforementioned as well as the impact on the unit household, single MVS participants are encouraged to postpone marriage until after completion of their service assignments.

FAMILY ADDITIONS:

Although the decision to start or enlarge a family is generally a private matter, it has major effects on a service unit. Couples are encouraged to postpone plans for having a child (or adopting) until after their terms of service.

HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Host congregations/organizations will provide their own policies or opt into the MMN policies stated below as a partner organization.

Mennonite Mission Network Harassment and Discrimination Policy:

Mennonite Mission Network strives to provide a work environment where relationships are empowered by respect, where power is not abused, and where no one will be subjected to harassment and/or bullying. Our staff, workers, and program participants go through regular harassment and discrimination prevention training. Mennonite Mission Network will not tolerate workplace bullying or harassment of any kind, or the use of racial, sexual, gender-biased, age related, sexual-orientation related, ethnic, or disability related innuendos, slurs, or jokes.

Mennonite Mission Network does not tolerate any abuse of children, and actively works to prevent child abuse in all its forms. Our staff, workers, and participants are trained in how to create a safe environment for children and youth.

Mennonite Mission Network asks all staff, workers, and program participants to be aware of situations where intervention is warranted, especially when others condone, overlook, or actively ignore the offending situation. If MVS participants experience harassment, intimidation, bullying or abuse, or if they observe another person being harassed or bullied, it is very important to report this conduct. To report harassment of any kind, please contact your local leadership, the MVS Director, the MMN Care Specialist or MMN Human Resources Director.

The full Mennonite Mission Network Harassment and Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures can be found here:

<https://www.mennonitemission.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/MennoniteMissionNetworkHarassmentPreventionandResponsePolicy.pdf>

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH OFFENSES

MVS is committed to maintaining and restoring right relationships within and outside of the unit household. However, experience has indicated that when violations occur, they are most likely to occur in the ethical areas listed below. Violations that require address include, but are not limited to:

- deception and dishonesty
- acts of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse
- harassment and discrimination
- sexual harassment
- gross neglect of personal and professional responsibilities
- any persistent behavior that is hurtful to one's self or others

Therefore, substantiated disclosures of serious ethical offenses, including acts of violence or possession of illegal drugs, may result in immediate suspension of the offending MVS participant. MVS staff may be consulted during the process.

We believe God's Spirit will at times call people to "acts of conscience" considered illegal by the state. Such actions are in no way the focus of this policy.

ACTS OF CONSCIENCE

MVS understands that in one's walk with Christ there may be times that we feel moved to acts of conscience such as civil disobedience (sit-ins, protests, nonviolent resistance, etc.). These acts are individual decisions and thus may not be interpreted as representing Mission Network or the host congregation/organization. These entities will support an individual through prayer, personal contact, and affirmation where appropriate. Persons making decisions of conscience do so at their own risk and expense.

PERSONAL PROBLEMS/COUNSELING

It is natural that at times MVS participants will have concerns they need to discuss. The best place to secure help should be first within the unit if the participant feels comfortable with this, secondly from local leadership or a trusted person in the host congregation, and finally from the MVS staff. It is important that MVS participants find some meaningful way to express concerns and feelings. A designated support group for an individual may be established by the unit and local leadership to work with a personal problem.

Individuals are encouraged to seek adequate counseling when needed and professional counseling may be arranged in certain situations (refer to your health insurance plan). Check with local leadership regarding any available funds to assist with costs.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Participants of MVS are expected to practice a style of living that is reflective of the Christian context of the MVS service year. Sensitivity to the goals of the unit, the host congregation and the broader MVS program should be exercised. The use of illegal substances (as defined by law) and the abuse of non-prescription drugs that would be hurtful to personal growth and group living, or which jeopardize the effectiveness of the service program and witness in the community, are unacceptable as both a matter of personal health and the well-being of the entire unit.

With respect to alcohol, it should be recognized that specific unit contexts also lead to differing local tolerance policies. However, under no circumstances will the abuse of alcohol be tolerated. Every volunteer will be held accountable for their actions whether it be abuse of drugs or alcohol and will require disciplinary action as needed. This includes prohibition of supplying minors with alcohol and purchasing alcoholic beverages with unit funds (i.e., grocery or educational/recreational allowance money).

FINANCES AND FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

PHILOSOPHY

All service unit funds are generated locally through agency stipends, rent payments, or through contributions from congregations, individuals and other organizations. It is recommended that

each service unit have at least one person from the local leadership and possibly one household member who are authorized to do banking transactions.

Host congregations/organizations are financially responsible for the service unit. Any financial reporting shared with the MVS office will be used for facilitating the sharing fund process and to have up to date numbers on what it costs to run a service unit.

MENNONITE MISSION NETWORK FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS

Contributions that are received by Mission Network designated for the support of the unit or participant will be divided with 40% going to Mission Network (for MVS related services) and 60% going directly to the host congregation/organization's unit account.

SHARING FUND

Following the conclusion of each Mission Network fiscal year, MVS staff will facilitate a process where local leadership may contribute a portion of surplus unit funds to be shared with other service units that do not have the same financial advantages. Local leadership will determine the amount they wish to give to this process and MVS staff will decide how best to redistribute the funds once all information has been collected.

EDUCATION

MVS participants may take advantage of educational resources for vocational and personal growth. Such involvements are, however, secondary to participation in unit life and service placement.

MVS staff may provide resources, webinars, and learning opportunities as well as informing MVS participants of connections and benefits with other institutions that can be accessed either during or after the MVS year.

Special courses or seminars are the expense of the MVS participant unless these are directly related to the participant's performance in their position or service tasks. Payment for courses or seminars in the latter category can be arranged in several ways:

- Position-related education should be financed by the sponsoring agency whenever possible.
- In some situations, local resources, such as the congregation, might wish to underwrite costs for seminars or courses.
- When funds are available, a participant can inquire about assistance with continuing education from the MVS office.

EDUCATIONAL/RECREATIONAL ALLOWANCE

Host congregations might want to consider making available an allowance for education/recreation from the unit funds for group educational and/or recreational activities. It is recommended that charges to this education/recreation fund be a group decision. Personal recreational activities are the expense of the MVS participant.

STUDENT LOAN ASSISTANCE

It is the responsibility of the MVS participant to postpone payments on loans while in MVS, if desired. The MVS office can offer guidance on the options available and to assist with the process, but the participant is ultimately responsible to apply for and acquire any alternative assistance that is needed.

Depending on the availability of funds, the MVS office will offer Student Loan Awards to MVS participants with student loan debt. The awards are given at the end of the MVS year to those who apply and successfully complete their MVS term.

ACADEMIC CREDIT

MENNONITE COLLEGES: Mennonite colleges have made special arrangements with the MVS program for participants wishing to earn credit while doing their MVS assignment. For those planning to attend a Mennonite college following their MVS term and wishing to receive this credit, participants should contact the Dean's office to learn more about the college requirements. Arrangements should be made either before the participant's term of service or as early in the MVS year as possible.

ANABAPTIST MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY (AMBS): For those interested in taking a seminary course or attending AMBS after MVS, find additional information at:
<https://www.ambs.edu/admissions/voluntary-service-scholarships>

FOOD AND SUPPLIES SPENDING GUIDELINES

The MVS program views food as a justice issue and believes that how we eat and the dollars we spend for food affects the world around us. MVS participants should eat well while being conscious of how their food dollars are spent. We recognize that there may be other and/or more ways to be socially conscious in the area of food. You may want to discuss this in your service unit household.

Each unit's monthly spending for food and household supplies may vary based local contexts. Below is an example of previous spending guidelines for planning this budget item for monthly spending on food and household supplies.

1-2 MVS participants in unit	\$160 per person
3-5 MVS participants in unit	\$145 per person
6 or more MVS participants in unit	\$135 per person

PERSONAL MONTHLY STIPEND

Personal allowances paid to the MVS participant from the unit should be used for personal expenses such as clothing, personal recreation, haircuts, repair of personal items, postage, traffic violation fines, and other expenses not covered by the unit or MVS program funds.

	<u>1st year</u>	<u>2nd year</u>	<u>3rd year</u>
Adult	\$60	\$80	\$100

SPECIAL COSTS

Special costs for expenses such as nursing fees, license transfer fees, teacher fees, visa renewal fees, and other expenses which are incurred because of an MVS assignment should be reimbursed from unit funds.

SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME

MVS challenges participants to commit to live within the monthly allowance guidelines noted under Food and Household Supplies and Personal Monthly Stipend.

Participants receiving income independent from MVS, are encouraged to limit spending of their personal funds during their MVS term. It is important that such persons have an economic lifestyle that is comparable to that of other MVS participants.

MVS participants who are receiving special direct support from a congregation or group should have the money directed to Mennonite Mission Network and designated for MVS.

If "gift money" is given to an MVS participant, which creates a lifestyle discrepancy within the household, or if shared moves the unit above the MVS monthly allowance guidelines, this should be discussed within the unit and local leadership.

Performing ongoing services for profit, such as babysitting, dog walking, house sitting, etc., are discouraged as this takes from community time with fellow household members. Outside employment while in MVS is prohibited.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOVING

MVS participants will be responsible for moving expenses to and from unit locations and all travel not considered to be an MVS activity.

UNIT FINANCES

It is recommended that each unit have someone on the local leadership responsible for overseeing the unit's finances and record keeping. It is the responsibility of the host congregation/organization to set up a bank account for the operations of the service unit. Each unit will be responsible for maintaining a balanced budget in order to remain sustainable.

Guidelines and procedures should be determined by the local leadership in collaboration with the unit participants to set up systems for budgeting, paying bills, collecting stipends, etc. The MVS office can offer best practices from previous years as needed.

The MVS office will invite units to participate in a yearly Sharing Fund process where units with surplus funds may share with other units struggling with their financial resources. General financial reporting will be asked for from the MVS office to keep track of where needs or concerns may arise.

The MVS office will continue to collect funds raised by the participants and pass 60% onto the

unit. 100% of funds given to Mennonite Mission Network designated for a service unit will also be transferred.

Each unit will appoint a treasurer who will oversee finances, keep records, and submit a report of transactions to local leadership as needed.

A handbook which describes bookkeeping procedures in greater detail has been prepared for unit treasurers and is available from the MVS staff.

VACATION

MVS participants will receive two weeks of vacation per year plus a one-week retreat each year (to be spent at the national MVS retreat for personal renewal and refreshment). MVS participants in their third year, or beyond, are entitled to three weeks of vacation per year.

It is recommended that participants who have placements that allow for a more flexible schedule or more vacation time consider carefully how and where they spend this time. While we understand desires to visit family and attend key events, also take into consideration your commitment to this time of service and the local neighborhood/community of your MVS experience.

INSURANCE

MEDICAL

MVS participants are required to have health coverage during their term of service. The host congregation/organization will provide health coverage for MVS participants who need it and will provide details of the coverage.

SELECTING ANOTHER HEALTH PLAN: MVS participants can maintain their own insurance instead of joining the health plan if they prefer to do so. The MVS participant is responsible for all medical expenses and for filing claims with their insurance plan.

COUNSELING: It is important to understand that MVS participants are in the program to serve and contribute to their unit and community in a positive way. If the physical or mental health of an individual causes the participant, local leadership and/or MVS staff to question this ongoing contribution, the participant's continuation in service will be evaluated.

Individuals are encouraged to seek counseling when needed during their MVS term. An MVS participant may be asked to seek counseling if unit or placement performance indicates it may be beneficial or if the participant feels a need for counseling.

If an MVS participant wants to seek counseling for something other than a diagnosed mental illness, they are encouraged to access counseling services through their local faith community (i.e., pastor, church counselor, accountability/small group, etc.) where ongoing support and accountability may be maintained. Ultimately, it is encouraged that all participants take adequate care of their physical, mental and emotional health during their term of service while

still respecting the limitations of resources and identifying with the poor and marginalized populations we serve.

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT: MVS participants should check with the host congregation/organization to see if the health plan covers treatment for those who require treatment for a diagnosed clinical mental illness or disorder or treatment of substance abuse, inpatient and outpatient services.

MVS participants who have maintained their own health insurance and receive treatment for a mental disorder diagnosis will need to file claims with their insurance company. Expenses submitted to another insurance company are not eligible for reimbursement from the unit or health plan funds.

DENTAL AND OPTICAL: MVS participants should take care of all dental and optical work before joining the MVS program. Dental and optical exams prior to service are a personal expense, not reimbursable by the MVS unit. Check with your local leadership to find out if a plan is provided or if you can opt into a plan as a personal expense

COVERAGE FOR CANADIANS SERVING IN THE US: Canadians serving in MVS are encouraged to enroll in the health plan provided by the host congregation/organization.

COVERAGE FOR MVS PARTICIPANTS TRAVELING OVERSEAS: Health services provided in a foreign country may not be covered by the health plan. It is recommended that volunteers obtain US traveler's coverage for non-emergency medical care. If travel outside the U.S. is required for your assignment, the agency will cover the cost.

EXTENDED HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOLLOWING MVS: Generally medical coverage ends the day that participants leave MVS. It is recommended for local leadership to discuss this end date and any possibilities for coverage to be extended beyond the service term (including costs to the participant) to allow for participants to make arrangements in advance of MVS assignments ending.

It is advisable that Canadian citizens stay in touch with their provincial health care office throughout their terms of service. Canadians should be in touch with their provincial health care office four months prior to returning to Canada to insure provincial coverage upon their return. Some provinces may impose a waiting period upon the participant's return home before reinstating coverage. If there is a waiting period, the MVS participant will then need to apply for medical coverage with a carrier of their choice.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

MVS participants are responsible for obtaining their own personal property insurance if they wish to insure their personal belongings (i.e. computer, camera, bikes, etc.)

WORKER'S COMPENSATION

MVS participants are covered by a worker's compensation policy through the host congregation/organization or through the service agency which would be noted in the contract/MOU.