

# Service Adventure orientation handbook

## The program: a general overview

Service Adventure was created in 1989 to provide service opportunities for post-high young adults, ages 17–20. The program is structured in a way that allows participants to become involved in issues and activities of a local community and a local Mennonite congregation, share in a household where a simple lifestyle is affirmed and caring relationships are nurtured, and demonstrate compassionate service that honors and imitates Jesus Christ's love for all people and his special concern for those who suffer from injustice.

As you join with local Christians who are making a difference in their community, we hope you will:

- **Build** meaningful relationships.
- **Strengthen** your personal faith by seeing where God is at work.
- **Share** your gifts through service and leadership.
- **Challenge** assumptions about the way the world functions.
- **Explore** a new culture or setting.
- **Integrate** these experiences to live and inspire others to live as lifelong learners and followers of Jesus Christ.



Photo by Susan Nisly

Risa Fukaya volunteers at the Education Station in Jackson, Mississippi.

## **Service Adventure is a program of Mennonite Mission Network**

We are committed to partnering with local Christian faith communities that are centers of mission, and to creating mutually beneficial relationships. We recognize that as we enter our host communities we will see areas of need in those communities, and we will see areas of need in ourselves and our home communities. In addition, we will see the gifts the host community has to offer us, and we will see the gifts we have to offer them. **Together**, we will live the whole gospel of Jesus Christ that attends to the social, physical and spiritual needs in all of us.

As we join in God's work in the world, we look to the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 as a foundation:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

God's project is to reconcile the world—to reconcile humanity to God, and to reconcile people to each other. Del Hershberger, former director of the Christian Service department at Mennonite Mission Network, says it this way:

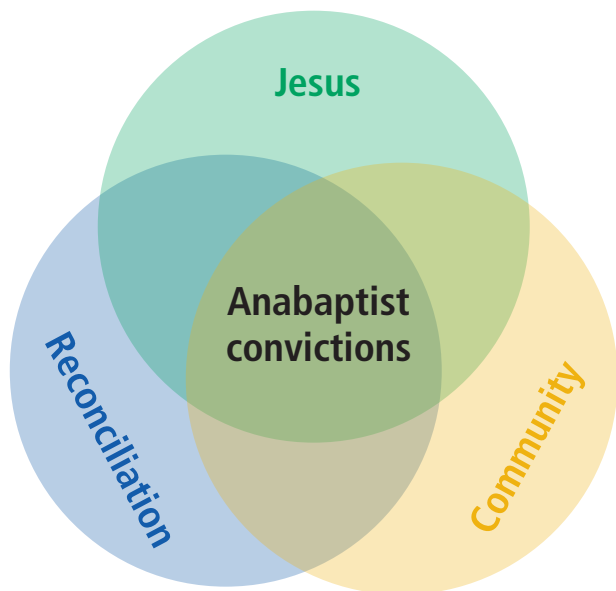
*This is the foundation in this whole enterprise, joining God in God's work in the world—reconciling and healing the world so that all of God's creation experiences the shalom of God, and that the kingdom of God increasingly becomes a reality for the whole world.*

As you listen and learn from your host community, we hope you, too, become part of God's reconciling work in the world.

In short:

Jesus is the center of our faith;  
 Community is the center of our life;  
 Reconciliation is the center of our work.

—Palmer Becker



## What you can expect

- In each location, we connect with a local congregation that identifies several members to serve as a support committee for the Service Adventure unit. The support committees and unit leaders find service assignments for participants based on what is **most relevant** in their community. They take into consideration the interests and skills of the participant, but participants need to be flexible.
- Service Adventure has been intentionally developed as a service-learning opportunity where **mutual** service and learning is expected. Often, North Americans have understood service assignments to be one-way relationships with participants as givers and hosts as receivers. Instead, we recognize and appreciate that the host community offers service and gifts as well.

- Service Adventure participants are challenged to see the world through the eyes of Jesus and the gospel story, and then are further challenged to understand the biblical story from the perspective of their host community.
- Worshiping and partnering with local Christians provides you the opportunity to actively encounter faith experiences that challenge your own assumptions of God in the world, and lead toward a deeper maturity of your faith. As a Service Adventure participant, you will have the opportunity to use your prayer journal to reflect on what you are hearing and seeing during and after your assignment.

## Preparing to go

*Adapted for Service Adventure from Merge, by Krista Dutt*

This activity can be useful as you prepare for your Service Adventure assignment. Take some time to go through these questions before you depart for your location.

- What do you expect related to your work assignment, the accommodations, or food?
- What do you expect the people to be like who you are serving or who are hosting you?
- What worries you about the trip?
- How much time do you expect to have for free time versus work?
- What difference do you expect to make?
- What do you expect God to accomplish in your life?

It is important to realize that even though you will come with lots of expectations, we go as servants who don't really control what happens, because we are responding to our hosts and to God. What we really want to do may not be what is practical, wanted, or the best solution for the situation.

- So, with all the expectations that you listed during your brainstorming, what will your response be if those expectations cannot be met?
- Which expectations are not negotiable to you?
- How will you handle the difference between your expectations and the reality of the situation?

- As is the case with most volunteer assignments, you will likely find that things do not go exactly as you have expected them to go. This is an opportunity for you to exercise your flexibility so that you can embrace the experience for what it is. **Don't let your expectations get in the way of seeing what God is doing in this location and allowing yourself to join in that work.**
- Please be flexible!

## Principles for new community members

As a Service Adventure participant and new in the host community, we ask you to commit to:

- **Listen** to what God is saying to you.
- **Pray** for people you meet.
- **Realize** that your experience is a small piece of a bigger picture.

Additionally, we ask you to, please:

- Respect what is, and not label situations as “problems” or offer “solutions.”
- Be prepared to listen and learn from those around you.
- Focus on relationships and look for God's face in the people you meet. The people you meet, the conversations you have, the worship you share, will be far more important than anything else you do.
- Accept invitations to meet new people and try new things.
- Be OK with vulnerability. Don't be afraid of your own and other people's weaknesses being exposed; it's normal, and it's a great way to grow.
- Be ready to change and think about how God is calling you to live differently in light of what you are experiencing.
- Receive hospitality and be a considerate guest of your host family, host church, and host community.
- Practice flexibility and gratefully (and gracefully) receive the unexpected!
- Walk with humility. Remember, you are showing up late for a meeting—God was here long before you were.

**“Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy; else we may find ourselves treading on someone's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.”**

—Max Warren, *Maryknoll*, 1987

# A quick guide to addressing street harassment

## **First: Assess the situation**

- If you feel unsafe, ignore the harasser, walk away, or call for help!

## **If you decide to confront the harasser...**

- Use strong body language.
- Look the harasser in the eye.
- Speak in a strong clear voice.
- Hands on hips, shoulders back, no smile.
- Project confidence (even if you don't feel that way!).

## **Be direct**

- Name the behavior and state that it is wrong!
- Instead of saying, "Excuse me" or "I'm sorry" or "Please," say directly, "Stop doing X."
- Do not swear or lose your temper to avoid escalating the situation.

## **Put yourself first**

- Do not get into a dialogue with your harasser, try to reason with them, or feel the need to answer their questions.
- Decide when you are done. Success is how YOU define it.

*From Stop Street Harassment.org*

*Find more information on their website: [www.stopstreetharassment.org](http://www.stopstreetharassment.org).*

a quick guide to addressing

# STREET HARASSMENT

## FIRST AND FOREMOST:

### ASSESS THE SITUATION

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### ② BE DIRECT

- Name the behavior and state that it is wrong.
- Instead of saying "Excuse me", "I'm sorry" or "Please" say directly "Stop doing X"
- Do not swear or lose your temper (avoid escalating the situation).

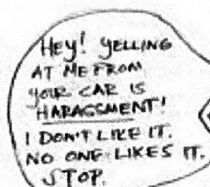
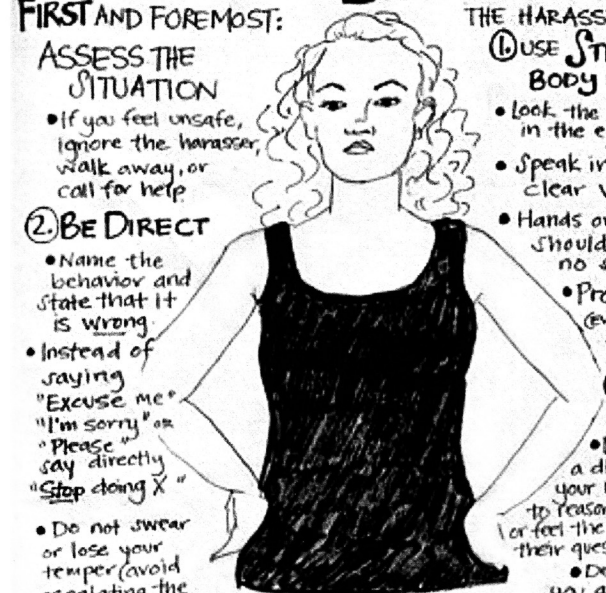
## IF YOU DECIDE TO CONFRONT THE HARASSER...

### ① USE STRONG BODY LANGUAGE

- Look the harasser in the eyes
- Speak in a strong, clear voice
- Hands on hips, shoulders back, no smile
- Project CONFIDENCE (even if you don't feel that way)

### ③ PUT YOURSELF FIRST

- Do not get into a dialogue with your harasser; try to reason with them, or feel the need to answer their questions
- Decide when you are done. Success is how you define it.



SOURCE: "Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Spaces Safe and Welcoming for Women" by Holly Lear!

## As you serve ... challenging our assumptions

*From an article by Regina Shands Stoltzfus*

For many Mennonites, summer or vacation plans include a service opportunity that typically involves travel away from home and encounters with people from different races, cultures and classes. Service trips offer participants a number of positives: time to learn more about their gifts, the opportunity to show God's love through action, space for group bonding or relationship building, the opportunity to travel and meet other people, and a chance to get away from home.

But host communities often experience an unfortunate side of service. For example, groups can bring biased attitudes and stereotypes to the communities in which they serve, and without proper orientation and preparation, they can make judgments about the morality, intelligence and capabilities of people who live there. Groups or individuals planning short-term mission opportunities can add several steps to the orientation process to help each member understand the historical and social context of the host community they seek to serve and, hopefully, minimize their assumptions. Here are some steps to get started:

### **Study the law and the prophets**

In order to gain a biblical perspective on a faithful response to "the least of these," focus on the Old Testament. The law instructs God's people to care for the poor: **The resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake** (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). Spokespersons for God delivered a consistent, sustained message against oppression of the most vulnerable members of society. God's people are not only to care for the poor, but they are also charged with delivering justice. In the book of Amos, the prophet reminds the people that God desires justice over empty worship (Amos 5:21-24).

### **Discuss the teachings and ministry of Jesus**

Jesus displays an unmistakable concern for those that society considers outsiders. In particular, study the healing ministry of Jesus. Note that whenever Jesus heals a person's body, something else happens—the formerly outcast person is brought back into the community. The healing touch of Jesus goes beyond



bringing wholeness to an individual body. Jesus and those who follow him seek to bring God's shalom to all of life. (See Luke 4:18-19 and Mark 5:21-43.)

### **Research the area in which you propose to do service**

What are the demographics of the community? What is the history of the people there—why did they move there? Who are the indigenous leaders of the community—do they welcome outside groups and individuals coming to “help?” What do people living in the community say the issues and problems are? Ideally, the service activity should result from lots of conversation and cooperation between the group coming in and representatives of the people who actually live there.

### **Let part of your “work” be creating and nurturing relationships**

Service should never be divorced from relationship. Make time to get to know people. Often, short-term opportunities don't allow much time for this. It may seem more efficient to swoop in and spend all your time fixing, building and cleaning, and there is plenty of satisfaction to be found in having left behind physical evidence of your hard work. But consider the Jesus model of ministry. Jesus spent time walking, talking and eating with people. And yet, the one-to-one relationships that Jesus modeled were always connected to the larger, systemic conditions that shaped people's lives.

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## **More than one *right***

*By Julie Yoder*

When you grow up in a family, community or place, it's easy to believe that the way you, your family and your community do things is the right way — maybe even the only way. In a Service Adventure house, you mix with people who have grown up in different families, homes, communities and even countries. No matter what else unfolds, one thing is for sure: You will be exposed to other ways of doing things than what you're accustomed.

In our first year as leaders, we often heard phrases like “no, that's wrong” or “that's not how you do that.” When someone else does things differently than you expect, it is easy to assume that the other person's way is wrong. The assumption

is that if my way is right, then their way must be wrong. That assumption can be quite easy to accept. But if it is true, then the reverse must also be true; if their way is right, then my way must be wrong. *That* is much harder to accept.

Instead of assuming that one way has to be the right, correct, or best way, let's try to assume that there is more than one right way. When you are part of a community, you have the opportunity to learn new right ways of doing things. For example, in one home, on taco night, an individual may serve the taco shells and taco meat separately; that is one right way to serve tacos. In my home, I put the taco meat in the taco shells and then bake them in the oven before serving them. That is also a right way to serve tacos.

Each individual is free to choose which method they prefer, but neither method is inherently wrong. Each method leads to an edible, tasty result that can still be called a taco. The taco example is probably not one that will cause deep conflict or resentment in your household. Though it can still hurt to hear someone say that your method is wrong. Other issues in our unit home that caused small conflicts included the right way to see a city, the right way to spend free time, and the right way to clean.

Issues that are more personal in nature can cause deeper conflicts if members aren't willing to accept that there are other right ways of doing things. These deeper issues that could cause divisions in a unit home if they are not resolved may include: how to interpret the Bible, how to worship, and how to find unity in a group of people who hold different values about many topics and experiences.

It is also good to remember that people learn differently. For example, in our second year at the unit home, a conflict arose over learning styles: One individual liked to learn by doing (and figuring things out as they go); another individual liked to learn by planning and instruction. The first individual enjoyed the more experiential form of learning and was frustrated when the second person kept telling her how to do things in more systematic ways. Conversely, the second person did not like to make mistakes and was upset if the first person didn't help her when she was struggling. During my individual check-ins with the conflicting parties, I reminded them that both styles of learning are right, and that we need to allow space for each person to learn in their own way.

So, whether the issues are big or small — ranging from differences in opinion over how to make tacos to how to interpret the Bible — striving to accept more than one right can be the best right attitude of all.