

2024-2025 Yearbook



•IVEP

International Volunteer Exchange Program

•SALT•

Serving And Learning Together

YAMEN!

Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network

**“God for us, God alongside us,
God within us.” – Richard Rohr**

I remember attending orientation in Akron, Pennsylvania, and then going on my SALT assignment. Even though I had traveled before, this was the first time I was traveling by myself with the plan to be away from home an entire year. It seemed like an eternity! My flights were all confirmed, and when I landed in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, I followed the instructions given to me ahead of time for immigration and visas. I waited for the MCC Cambodia representative to meet me inside to get the visa, but no one came.

Eventually all the people from the plane had gone through immigration and it was quiet again. I decided I should just get a tourist visa and proceed to gather my luggage. Maybe I had misunderstood, and the person couldn't come inside the airport. After finding my suitcase, I went outside. The crowds gradually dissipated, but no one was there holding an MCC sign or calling my name. Various taxi drivers offered to take me to my destination, but I declined their offers, being too nervous to trust them in a new city.

How many times in your year of service did something go differently than you had planned for or expected? My guess is that you each have had many surprises along the way and you've had to improvise, figuring out what to do or say in the moment and wondering if you were choosing the right path.



I think the Christian faith can also be like that at times. We have a map, of sorts, in the Bible, but it doesn't give us exact actions to take in every situation. Instead, we have to know as much of the context as possible and give it our best try. Sometimes we will succeed and sometimes we will fail, but most of the time we will end up somewhere in the middle, hoping that what we did made some sort of impact on the positive side of things.

While we might never know exactly who or what we have influenced during our year of service, let's embrace that we did our best with the tools we had at the time. And I imagine that you now have many more tools at your disposal than you did just 11 months ago.

Back to my arrival in Cambodia. At the airport, I eventually borrowed a taxi driver's phone and called the MCC office. They answered and upon learning who I was, they offered a hasty apology and said they would be at the airport as soon as possible. I don't remember if my flight got in early or if they got my arrival time mixed up, but it all worked out in the end.

May you look back on your year of service and rejoice, knowing that you gave your best with the skills and tools you had at the time. You learned new things, you had new experiences, and you grew personally more than you realized was even possible. Blessings on the journey!

*Andrea Geiser Leaman
International Volunteer Exchange Program Lead*

GLOBAL SERVICE LEARNING

MCC Global Service Learning Department Staff



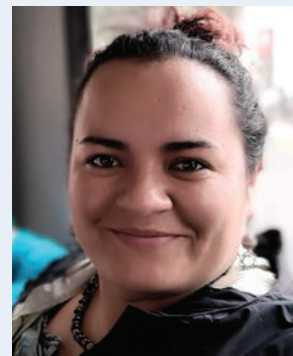
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Global Service Learning (GSL) Department's purpose and mission are to develop and resource short-term, introductory service-learning opportunities within MCC with the aim of facilitating increased understanding and relationships among communities worldwide. Current programs include: SALT, IVEP, YAMEN, Seed and Seek. GSL also resources Work and Learn Teams and Learning Tours, Service Opportunities with our Partners (SOOP), Summerbridge and Summer Service.

IVEP participants



IVEP orientation in Akron, Pennsylvania, U.S.

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Claudia Marcial Gonzalez



**Dianny Julieth Nazarit
Valencia**



Elvis Otieno



Emmanuel Mbainaissem



Erik Warkentin



Ester Joel



Guilherme Wieler



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Juliana David



Melisa Matshazi



Ozioma Okwuchukwu



Pragya Das



Reneé Montúfar Turcios



Santa Jinaina



Shristi Yunus



Silav Yea



Yehyun Choi

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Claudia Marcial Gonzalez *(Mexico)*
Teaching Assistant, Bethany Christian Schools
Goshen, Indiana



First Impression or Differences: I had different impressions, some of them perhaps very boring, others fun and others that impressed me. I remember that I saw clean streets, green and large spaces around the houses. I come from the city and in my country, the houses are built one next to the other. When I arrived with my host family, I was impressed that they had a basement; that was very new to me. Can you imagine living under the house? I had a great time! Not wearing shoes inside the house. The school where I did my service was very big, and they had some different activities and of course the food!

Memorable or Funny Experience: I think everything has been memorable, from applying to the program, meeting people from different countries, getting to know another country, doing different activities and experiencing a different lifestyle. But if I have to choose some special moments, the first was my host family. They welcomed me and gave me so much love without even knowing who I was. I'm very grateful. My host family took me to Chicago – it blew me away. It never crossed my mind to visit Chicago, and it's an incredible place! The midyear conference in Puerto Rico was an incredible surprise, and I loved Puerto Rico. And lastly, getting to know God and having a relationship with him in a different way have all been experiences that have impacted my time here.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I was able to see different ways of life, different cultures and different habits from which I learned that empathy is the foundation for being able to actively work for peace. We often tend toward our certain habits and attitudes, but being empathetic helps us to understand and treat others better. I learned that from the privileges we have, we can be grateful and share with others, helping to bring peace and tranquility, remembering that service is a demonstration of love for others.

Faith Journey: During this time, I met God in a different way. I don't know, maybe it was a form of personal encounter; it was connecting with him in a different way. I come from a Christian family and most of the time I connected through them. This time it was searching for God and having a communion with him in different ways. I could see his grace towards me through other people who didn't know me. I was able to experience his joy and his love when I felt sad and sometimes alone. I knew that he was listening to me when I prayed, and he gave me the peace and the answers that I needed.

New Perspectives: I was able to observe some changes in myself, in my attitude and especially in my perseverance. I realize I can be a resilient but also a sensitive person. My perspective on the U.S. changed a bit. We usually see or know it as a perfect country without needs, but in certain aspects it's also a country with certain needs and flaws, a country where not everything is the American dream. I learned different things that I think are good to share with my community.

Skill Development: Professionally, my experience has allowed me to see other ways of learning, to have another perspective. It has allowed me to put my learning and skills into practice. From everything I have seen and experienced, I have generated some ideas that may be functional for teaching and learning in my country.

Future Plans: Upon returning to my country, my short-term plan is to look for a job. During this time, I will develop some skills that will be very useful in my job search. I would like to continue working in schools and with various communities and be able to raise awareness or change the actions and attitudes we take toward others. I want to find a way to continue serving with MCC or support some work plan. I plan to continue collaborating with the church. I plan to share my experience with the entire church, but specifically with the teens and young adults of my church and others, to encourage them to participate in these programs and advise them in the process!

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Dianny Julieth Nazarit Valencia *(Colombia)*
Teaching Assistant for Spanish Immersion Program,
Lancaster Mennonite School
Lancaster, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences: My first impression about my host country was amazement at the beautiful and ancient places it has. It is very colorful, people are very kind, they like to talk and are friendly. I was very surprised that most of them eat many vegetables as a snack and by their curiosity to know about other countries.

Memorable or Funny Experience: The best experience I had was attending the concerts of my favorite worship bands along with my host family. I attended Maverick City Music and Elevation Worship.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I have learned about being a citizen peacemaker, that not everything can be solved in the same way. Being patient, empathetic and compassionate are three very important things when

being an active peacemaker anywhere. I also learned that the way you serve others can make big changes in the lives of others, just by giving a smile and being kind.

Faith Journey: I have exercised the ministry of worship for many years in my country. Something very difficult for me was to be less involved in leading worship, but I understood that the Lord would continue to listen to me, so now I feel calmer. I also attend other activities that involve worship: services for young adults and singing with Mennonites and elders of the church. These are activities that have helped me on the journey of faith.

New Perspectives: I have the new perspective that serving unconditionally is a great blessing. There are people who value it, and that makes you grow.

Skill Development: I have strengthened my skills with printers, lesson planning and improving my English.

Future Plans: When I get home, I want to spend more time with my family, value every moment. I want to strengthen the love of serving others in my church and my community.

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Elvis Otieno (*Kenya*)

Combined Ministry Pastor, Ohio Pastoral Ministry
Kidron, Ohio



First Impression or Differences: I thought that the U.S. was heaven on Earth because most of the people in my life wanted to come to the U.S. When I came, I found that the U.S. is just a normal country and the information we got about the U.S. was overrated.

Memorable or Funny Experience: My IVEP journey is full of adventures. I remember missing dinner on the first day because it seemed too early for me to eat, unlike our home where we take dinner at 8 p.m. On my first Sunday after reporting to my assignment, seven churches came together to welcome me and just to get to know more about me. They even asked if I was single! One last memory, among the best, is running with my host brother Amos during winter. I almost regretted the decision of going out because I got so cold and it seemed like I added weight, so running three miles was not easy, but I loved the experience.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I'm privileged to be a global Anabaptist. Being a global citizen has enabled me to perform my assignments with a lot of care and understanding since I understand that my culture, tradition and experience is not better than any other;

it is just different. This makes me understand the different groups of people that I interact with and that includes my hosts, students, pastors, congregants, teachers, Congolese, Latinos and friends. I work with all these people with a lot of kindness, knowing that everyone deserves to be heard and understood.

Faith Journey: U.S. churches can be very cold compared to my home church, but I have learned genuine faith, resilience and compassion in the U.S. churches. And now I see God as a sustainer in abundance and when in need.

New Perspectives: Living and serving in the U.S. has transformed my whole life. I have learned that every minute counts, and it's good to plan ahead and trust the Lord to avoid unseen emergencies that can be avoided.

Skill Development: I have learned to be patient, listen, work as a team and give people a chance to share their view. I have also learned to be kind with myself by knowing that I'm not very perfect and strong. Breaks are important to re-energize and be effective. Life is fun when we practice inclusivity.

Future Plans: To continue serving the church and community as a peace ambassador with my global experience by bringing other perspectives of viewing people and situations. The object is to transform the church and community for good.

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Emmanuel Mbainaissem (*Chad*)

Teacher Aide, Hinkletown Mennonite School
Ephrata, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences: My first impression was how huge things are in the U.S. Thinking about shopping, I was expecting things to be like in my home country: shops, market, haggling and so on. The differences between my home country and host country are that people in the U.S. are more independent and

individualistic. They don't care for their old parents. In the U.S., they drop them in a nursing home like they were childless, while in Chad it is a grace for us to have our grandparents beside us.

Memorable or Funny Experience: My funniest experience was when presenting Chad to my pre-K students, one of them shouted "gingerbread house" while seeing one of Chadian's house architectures.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I have learned that to make peace possible in the world, people need to be

connected so that they understand each other culturally, economically and socially. The universal well-being is to live for others. When we figure this philosophy out, everyone will try always to consider everyone's general profit instead of the individual. There upon, no one will think about being unjust, excessively use his power, take privilege from others or oppress them.

Faith Journey: This has been a struggle in my faith regarding the differences, but it also helped me to test how strong can I stay by the grace of God. I've also learned many things from others.

New Perspectives: There is a saying which states that the whole life is a school. I am the one who doesn't consider someone according to who he/she is or where he/she is from, but just as God created him/her. And this experience makes me understand that this is the best thing humankind must value. According to my home country, home is the best place we can feel good and at ease, and we are the one who can make it as sweet as we expect it. Yeah, it won't be easy but not impossible. Regarding my home church, this experience strengthened my commitment to do more than what I have been doing.

Skill Development: Coming from a French speaking country as an English language teacher, this program gave me an opportunity to perform and enhance my English competence. It also endows me with many skills such as classroom management, interpersonal relations and an overview of school management.

Future Plans: My future plan is to go back to school for my master's degree, if God will afford me the capacity of supporting the fees. This is to equip me with more skills that can help me be of service to the people in need. Along the way, I will try to share some experiences I got during the program in the school where I will be teaching or in my community.

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Erik Warkentin *(Brazil)*
Dairy Farm Employee, Steffen Farm
Apple Creek, Ohio



First Impression or Differences:
They have bigger vehicles here and when greeting they don't usually hug.

Memorable or Funny Experience:
Learning to snowboard.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:

We need to be more like Jesus in promoting peace; I learned this through the sessions that we had throughout the year.

Faith Journey: I got involved in song leading at my church, got involved in another church's choir, and started working toward creating my own choir.

New Perspectives: I've learned a lot about different countries and cultures through interacting with my fellow IVEPers.

Skill Development: I've developed my welding and manufacturing skills for different jobs on the farm, and I've also learned about new skills like artificial insemination breeding and more mechanical skills.

Future Plans: Go back to my family's farm and try and apply most of what I learned if it's applicable to our operation.

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Ester Joel *(Tanzania)*

Financial Services Intern, MCC U.S. Financial Services
Department
Akron, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences:

The U.S. and Tanzania are very different in various aspects including economically, politically, socially and culturally. Economically the U.S. is one developed country in the world with such good infrastructure like good roads, flyover roads

and sidewalks which assure safety for walkers, unlike my country where sidewalks are in a few areas in the city. There are many railways and many airports which simplify and bring efficiency in the transportation industry since always people move. U.S. technology is more advanced than Tanzanian. There is high efficiency in electricity and water supply. Here in the U.S. having a car is like a basic need, unlike in my country where people are either walking long distance or taking public transport like buses, bolts (taxis) and boda-bodas (motorcycles). Politically, U.S. politics are very strong compared to Tanzania. Still many people don't know their rights and fail to argue or raise issues for having a better life in the future. Socially, education in the U.S. is goal- or vision-oriented, while in Tanzania it is job oriented. Many youth fail to know what to do after school as there is a high level of unemployed and jobless people. I realize many people have their family doctors which is not common in my community, and to get medicine in a pharmacy it is compulsory to get a note from the doctor which also is not necessary in Tanzania.

Culturally, in Tanzania it is very easy to make friends with people compared to in the U.S. I think we are raised to go outside, play and make friends which makes it

easy when we grow up. We can talk to strangers and make friends. Here kids most of the time stay or play inside the house and watch cartoons and if they are disrespectful, they will be given time-out, like to stay alone. It is very fine for a neighbor to knock at any time if they need something at home, but here you need to set an appointment to meet your neighbor. Also, in Tanzania we don't change the clock's time in any season.

Despite the differences, I am very impressed with how the U.S. is very clean and beautiful, and each season is unique. Snow during winter, blooming during spring, trees changing colors during fall and becoming green during summer. I'm very impressed with how people respect individual privacy.

Finally, I grew up in a Mennonite church in Tanzania. Before I came, I thought there was one Mennonite church, but I have come to realize in the U.S. there are many Mennonites churches with different perspectives, and they have strong disagreements.

Memorable or Funny Experience: One day I went shopping. I had a need for lotion, and I didn't know which one, but I saw there was a Dove product section. I chose one without reading, bought it and went home to use it after a shower. Sadly it was not lotion; it was shower body wash. Since that day I learned that I need to read the product labels.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: Working with the Financial Services department at MCC Akron has made me realize the real meaning of being a good steward. The whole process of payments and how they solve queries. Personally, I enjoy numbers. The investment that MCC has made in me in learning and making me a global citizen has made me know myself and realize I am a steward. When we process payments and deposits and provide financial reports on various expenditures, we show good stewardship of how MCC as an organization works. When we work on time and as a team, we value each other regardless of our cultural/political/personalities differences. This way we allow services to reach more people around the world on time.

Using my singing talent at work made me enjoy and connect more with colleagues. I've learned that unity is powerful, and I should not underestimate my contribution even if it's small. Also communication is key to understanding what others believe and create respect for others. Working with MCC really opened my eyes to how important it is to care and serve others who really need help. Hence, I will continue using my talent, skills and privilege to make the world a better place for people to live, above all to be a good steward of Jesus Christ as we are called to be peacemakers (Mathew 5:9). Everyone in this world deserves to live a peaceful life. In my opinion, killings, bombs and nuclear war do not bring peace, but understanding each other and valuing each other and loving each other do (1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

Faith Journey: I am grateful to God that despite changes in my faith journey, the churches I attended back home are pretty similar but not the same as here. I grew up in a Mennonite church so singing from hymnals is similar, but songs are not the same. The worshiping and praising style is a little bit different, but I really enjoyed and learned different styles of worship. Here in the U.S., I attended a Centering Prayer experience. I was lucky since my first hosts, Barb and Marlin Good, are the ones who coordinated it. I also joined a women's group and participated in assembling and arranging MCC school kits and relief kits. It was so great, because when I was young, I used to receive these gifts at school, and I did not know how they made them. So being part of the process felt so good. Attending camp made me know more about myself. Joining a Bible study group enlightened my biblical understanding. Therefore, my faith journey here in the U.S. had a very big impact in my Christian life. It added inner passion of wanting to know Jesus more and serve him strategically.

New Perspectives: There are different ways of serving a community, and I also contribute to changes by working hard and cooperatively according to my career. I have realized that sometimes I must push myself out of my comfort zone to experience new things and not miss out on opportunities that come through. It is a good time for personal and spiritual growth. I need to add value to my community, and I should use my talent and skills to educate my community and church on how to run projects financially for the betterment of our community.

Skill Development: I learned about teamwork and boundaries at work and how to be creative. I'm more advanced in using Excel than before, learning different accounting systems such as Dynamics and Sparkrock. I've learned not to fear making changes in the company if the current system does not provide a good result and simplify work. I learned about how to fight fraud in an organization. I learned about time management and how to take care about myself. I used to work for long hours, sleeping very late and it affected my efficiency at work. But work here in U.S. has brightened my working habits and helped me to take care of myself and to do everything on a timely basis.

Future Plans: I will be open for any job opportunities that will come, and I am planning to take the CPA exams. This year is an election year in my country. I am planning to organize a peace camp for my fellow youth to educate them about peaceful actions during the election so that we can continue to maintain our peace. Also, I will use my platform of being a youth leader in my church and in the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) to educate youth about peace by having seminars, trainings and workshops.

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Guilherme Wieler *(Brazil)*

Communications and Community Engagement Intern,
Eastern Mennonite Missions
Lancaster, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences:

I thought it was very different from my home country in the way people treat each other. Physical touch in greetings is not as common among people in the U.S. as it is among Brazilians. The community was very welcoming and polite. It felt like they enjoyed having someone from another country around.

Memorable or Funny Experience: I had my first experience with snow here, so I went outside to play with it. Soon after I slipped and fell on my back on the snow. First it hurt a little, but eventually I started laughing.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I learned everyone has their part to play and that together we can make a difference. Being a peacemaker doesn't only mean not to use violence, but to impose yourself in moments of injustice or violence in defense of others. All this knowledge has helped me to better understand my place in society and the role I want to play in the future, aiming for a more peaceful world.

Faith Journey: I've fit very well to the church I started attending. People were nice to me from the beginning. I even had the chance to lead worship a couple of times, which was definitely a highlight.

New Perspectives: I now have a new understanding of what a community looks like, based on this culture. The main challenge was to adapt to the new routine and to speak the language every day and every time, even though I was already a fluent speaker.

Skill Development: I learned a new language, Spanish. I'm not a fluent speaker, but I found out I'm good at learning new languages. I also learned how to deal better with conflicts, with differences that might appear to me eventually.

Future Plans: When I return home, I'll get a job, eventually get married and have a family. I'll certainly try to apply what I learned in the U.S. in my community and church. All the group dynamics and conflict resolution classes were very useful for me to understand my place in a community and how to work together.

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Joélcio Chiringa *(Mozambique)*

Engineering Intern, Harper Industries Inc.
Harper, Kansas



First Impression or Differences:

My first impression when I arrived in the U.S. was very good because I realized that nature is still well preserved. There are beautiful landscapes, and I also found the cars very beautiful. The other thing that impressed me is that the houses here are made of wood,

unlike in Mozambique where the houses are made of cement blocks.

Memorable or Funny Experience: One of the best experiences I had was seeing the snow. I found it very beautiful and cute. It was interesting to see the transition from fall to winter as the leaves fell from the trees. During the winter I had the opportunity to do several activities such as making a snowman, sliding with a toy car and playing with snowballs. This time of year is great for taking photos. During sunrise and sunset, it looks really beautiful with the snow, especially here in Kansas where there are open fields. It is also common to eat soups at this time of year to warm up a little from the cold.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I learned that it is very important because at the same time your faith and Christian activity grow in terms of kindness, building peace and a better world with justice and social equality is very important too. The experience is good because in the eyes of the Lord we are all brothers (Matthew 23:8). Sometimes when you meet with other IVEPers from different countries, we all speak the same language and realize that in the world there is no need for conflicts because we are all brothers.

Faith Journey: My Christian faith has grown a lot. I have participated in church activities, but at first I had a little difficulty because the church I attend here is calmer. Some people attend Sunday school, and some people chat before the worship service. In my church in Mozambique, it is a little more lively, people sing and dance and there is no Sunday school. But in any case, it's been good to learn what Christianity is like outside of home.

New Perspectives: My outlook has changed as I have come to realize the diversity in church activities and how important this is to their faith.

Skill Development: I learned new skills and abilities. In my workplace it was more about computer drawing which was very good because it is a new skill that I had

never worked with before. I also learned that to resolve conflicts, it is important to maintain dialogue.

Future Plans: When I return home, I will teach others what I have learned and also strengthen my church with activities and faith in God.

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Juliana David *(India)*

Teacher Assistant, Central Christian School
Kidron, Ohio



First Impression or Differences:

My very first impression in the countryside was that there aren't any streetlights. It made me wonder, how do people at night walk down the road? It made me feel uneasy for a few days when I looked out of the window. But as the months have passed by, I feel

safe, and I can go on a walk in the late evening as well. The second surprise was that adjusting to the countryside without any transportation was very difficult, since I come from the city. If I felt like visiting any place, I had to depend on someone to take me, which made me quite dependent on others because here the only transportation is personal vehicles.

My third surprise was when I saw the Amish buggies around the place. I was so amazed to see how they live without electricity and electronics. After visiting an Amish museum and staying around them, I got to explore and gain knowledge about their lifestyle, their beliefs, practice of hosting church services rotationally, different cuisines, different dress code and separate Amish schooling.

My fourth surprise that I noticed was that here students don't have any school uniforms, and for elementary there is one assigned class teacher for the entire day for each class along with teacher aides. In India every school has a uniform (government schools, private schools or public schools) that the students have to wear from kindergarten to high school. For every grade, one assigned class teacher is allotted, but there would be different subject teachers, even at the elementary level. American schools have more digital resources in the classroom, but India is more of a manual classroom.

Memorable or Funny Experience: One of the funny experiences I encountered when I first came here was that from my host family house to my school by car is five minutes, but if I plan to walk, it would take me an hour to reach school. I knew that American food is quite bland and has minimal use of seasoning, but I observed that people here eat salads, tacos, fast foods

just as their daily meal. My most memorable experience was to witness the fall season and snow because this was my first time experiencing how the trees change their colors and look so colorful, going sledding, building a snowman, throwing snowballs at each other, having snow day off and designing a snow angel. Another memorable experience was visiting Chicago and adventuring different places through local buses and walking down the streets. Attending a Maverick City Music concert was one of my bucket list experiences. Eating spicy foods and exploring different local food on the streets were all memorable.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I have learned that being a global citizen is creating a more just and equitable society. My understanding about peacemaking while traveling has given me a better understanding about MCC's global community. As a result, I have learned how to appreciate and value different cultures, serve others and volunteer for social service.

Faith Journey: My journey towards faith has been incredibly beautiful because the family that I stayed with are members of Salem Mennonite Church. When I first visited the church and attended the service, it made me feel just like home. The songs were familiar to me and even the church service was well-known to me. It's just not church, but every place I have been has always kept me connected to God, and I shared similar belief and values with others.

New Perspectives: My perspective on certain things and on others has totally been changed. I'm Indian and belong to a Christian family, but here people had an assumption that I attended church services in Hindi. In fact, our services are also in English, as well as Telugu. Or they assumed that I celebrate Hindu festivals. I explained that there is Hindu religion in India, but being Christian, I don't follow Hindu festivals at home.

Skill Development: I'm a teacher back at home and working as an assistant teacher at Central Christian School has been a wonderful journey. Throughout this journey, the skills that I have developed are healthy work-life balance, resolving conflict with empathy, taking care of myself mentally, physically and spiritually, listening attentively to the other person's perspective, being actively present and volunteering whenever it's needed.

Future Plans: My future plan is to teach at a school, as I'm professionally a teacher, so applying for schools would be my first priority. I will definitely be sharing about my journey with my church members and home community about the things that I have learned. I also experienced that life is much happier and more rewarding when living somewhere that is far more in line with new cultural beliefs and values, so perhaps I will return someday.

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Melisa Matshazi (*Zimbabwe*)

Responsive Services Assistant, Franciscan Center, Inc.
Baltimore, Maryland



First Impression or Differences:

The U.S. is huge, the roads and infrastructure are pretty, people in Baltimore are very direct and addiction rates are high. Therefore, there are a lot of organizations for the people. Zimbabwe is small, infrastructure is nice and old, and drugs are pricey, so we have very

few addictions and fewer organizations for the people.

Memorable or Funny Experience: When I gave a presentation about myself and my country during an event at work, I received a lot of follow-up questions from the crowd afterwards.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I understand that it is a full-time job. I understand that everyone must be treated fairly, and it's good to be pro-peace when doing so will not put them in further danger. I understand that I must be an advocate for the oppressed, and if I'm being oppressed, I could correct someone in a peaceful manner that could teach them something.

Faith Journey: It was constant, and then it went down a little bit for a month or two. However, I'm at a great place now and hearing from the Lord. I serve in kids church every Monday after work, and I'm in the church band that plays on Sundays.

New Perspectives: I've learned to understand before I judge or commit. I understand that places, people and backgrounds are all different, and it's okay to embrace the differences.

Skill Development: I play a little piano, I engage with others in a better way, I run and eat better. This has taught me that there's always a better way to do something too, if you're willing to listen and try.

Future Plans: I'm not sure yet of my plans. I just want to soak everything in before I take on anything. As soon as I arrive from the airport and rest from my long flight, I'll start integrating what I've learned. It'll be a lifelong venture.

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Ozioma Okwuchukwu (*Nigeria*)

Teaching Assistant, Lancaster Mennonite School
Lancaster, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences:

I saw a dog in a stroller – in a stroller! It was hilarious. Pet handling was one big difference; children's discipline was also hard to adjust to. The liberal nature of the U.S. is also a big difference because most people believe that they can do whatever they want

to and be whoever they choose to be.

Memorable or Funny Experience: I went skiing for the first time and it was by far the scariest experience of my life. I ran into a tree headfirst, ran into another skier, ran into the woods and tumbled so many times. It was amazing.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I realized while on this program that being a global citizen means realizing how my decisions and choices impact others around me and my environment. Each action I take has a ripple effect on the people around me, be it in my decision to embrace peace or in my decision to embrace good and proper human interactions. My interactions with people of diverse backgrounds and ethnicity have taught me to approach matters of social justice with sensitivity because I have come to realize that my perspective and biases are mine and greatly influenced by the background and are not universal. Understanding power and privilege has enabled me to better relate injustice and inequality and how to use my voice to speak up against injustice. Anti-oppression is a continuous process of learning, education and actions, and also actively listening to marginalized communities. Listening to others, putting myself in their shoes, and being sympathetic and compassionate towards them have enabled me to open my understanding to their stories and better change my biases and sway my understanding to being more open and receptive to others' opinions. I plan on deepening my understanding and working with other communities on building peace and giving voices to people who desperately need to be heard and understood.

Faith Journey: I realized that even though we all have different ways of serving God across different cultures and countries, the intent is the same. God brings connections between people everywhere.

New Perspectives: I have learned to look at people past their physical appearance or societal labels and see people for who they truly are, and to always keep an open channel of communication with everyone around me, both young and old.

Skill Development: I agreed to be a teacher's aide to explore my passion for working with children, and I have developed so many skills in teaching and managing a classroom.

Future Plans: I have decided to take a teaching certification program and become a teacher to be able to integrate all that I have learned in the U.S. to provide proper education for people at home.

Pragya Das (India)

Program Analyst, Purdue Home Care
Aurora, Colorado



First Impression or Differences:

When I first came here, I was mesmerized by the landscapes of the U.S. and the vast cultural differences. I loved how everyone greeted one another with a smile and a hug. Coming from a warm country, I absolutely loved the extreme cold and enjoyed the

snow for the first time in my life. My host home and workplace were really beautiful. I lived and worked among Ethiopians and could never imagine the bond I would develop with the Ethiopian community. I was away from my family, but this place felt like home. My host family looked after me as their own child and my co-workers treated me like their own family. Celebrating Christmas in the U.S. was a whole different experience, from exchanging gifts to a pajama party on Christmas Eve. Everything was amazingly new and beautiful.

Memorable or Funny Experience: Whenever I went to any event, restaurant or church with my host family or co-workers, people thought I was an Ethiopian too and always greeted me in their language (Amharic). They also stated the fact that I looked exactly like one of them.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: Besides gaining new perspectives of peacemaking and peacekeeping, I've also come to understand that service isn't just about giving but also about listening, learning, empathizing and forming fellowship that facilitates love and equity.

Faith Journey: The fast-paced nature of life in the U.S. made it challenging for me to deepen my connection with God. At times, I felt a distance from Him and found myself longing for the fellowship of my home church. However, it was after the mid-year conference that God brought about a significant breakthrough in my life, restoring my spiritual strength. This spiritual confidence inspired me to move forward with renewed enthusiasm and deepen my relationship with Christ.

New Perspectives: I have grown to be independent on a personal level and discovered that each new chapter offers a valuable lesson, which, if held onto diligently, becomes beneficial in the long run.

Skill Development: My passion has always been to work closely with special needs individuals and spend meaningful time understanding them. With a background in psychology, I have always aspired to understand them on a deeper level. My experience assisting various individuals with IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) has influenced me by helping me develop skills in safety care, de-escalation strategies and activity planning. These experiences have provided valuable insights into their behavior and helped me gain a better understanding of them.

Future Plans: I would use these skills and lessons to integrate them in both my personal and professional life.

Reneé Montúfar Turcios (Guatemala)

Classroom Assistant, Good Shepherd Montessori School
South Bend, Indiana



First Impression or Differences:

My first impression was of fear, but at the same time curiosity. It was confusing to notice that people live differently, but that it can also nurture me to live with a new perspective. The differences might make us feel uncomfortable at the beginning, like the months when

for the first time I knew the snow and then I wished for a bit of summer sun. This culture is often perceived as cold, and while there is some truth to that, it is not an absolute rule. The difference lies in the upbringing and customs of each society: in countries with warmer cultures, like mine, interactions tend to be warmer too. Deciding to fly away from home with the aim of experiencing a new culture is an act of brave people. And that is what IVEPers decide to do every year, but my experience, as each one is, was different.

Memorable or Funny Experience: I will never forget the way my first host family comforted me from the pain I was going through with my family in Guatemala. It had been a difficult time for me, and I remember the way they looked for ways to ease my pain and make me feel part of their home. From knocking on my door to see if I was okay, taking my hand to have dinner together even though I had lost my appetite and looking for a fun activity after many hours of crying, and leaving the movie theater at 1 a.m. after watching a movie together. It will be one of the best and most memorable experiences I lived, because they made me heal as a

family. They made me feel that I was loved. They were not hosts, they were my family. Meeting them has been the greatest blessing during this journey. They taught me a new perspective of parenthood.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: Living in the U.S. for a year and having the opportunity to interact with people from all over the world has deeply transformed my understanding of global citizenship and peacemaking. Working especially with children from diverse cultures allowed me to see that the foundations of human dignity, values and conflict resolution begin at the youngest ages. This experience has taught me that building peace is not just about resolving conflict but about nurturing understanding and compassion from the very beginning of life. It has also inspired me to continue working to create inclusive, respectful environments wherever I go.

Faith Journey: My faith has been transformed as I have transformed myself during this year. I have gone through times where my faith weakens, the obstacles seem to be bigger than my own faith. However, I am constantly reminded of the grace and mercy God has had on me and the incredible opportunity to be a part of IVEP. It has been difficult to attend a church, but I have been able to learn that even my room or my classroom is a place to praise Christ. I have been a blessed daughter because Jesus reminds me of his love every day through someone saying, “*Te quiero*” (I love you), or “Miss Renéé, this is a drawing for you!” from my students, or “How are you?” from my school team. With these and more, I see the shine of hope and faith during this journey.

New Perspectives: If you want to know yourself, even in emotionally difficult situations, join IVEP. It has been the most enriching experience for me to know myself. Spreading my wings to fly, for the first time, on my new path was terrifying when I was just becoming an adult. But God’s grace was love for me. Family is not just the people who live in my country, family is the people I met here because they loved and cared for me every day, every time. Sharing with cultures from Africa, Asia and even Latin America makes me love with passion the idea that our world is one without borders. Regardless of our color, race or religion, we are humans who love and care for other humans as Jesus commanded.

Skill Development: My Montessori school is not only my assignment place, it is a real place of personal and professional growth. My aspirations lean towards becoming a lawyer, and this experience makes me aspire to pursue a master’s degree in international children’s rights. Currently, I have graduated as a kindergarten teacher and learning about Maria Montessori’s magnificent method has given me a new perspective on early childhood education. Independence, freedom, peace and above all the dignity of the human being start from the earliest age. Teaching about our world and the amazing diversity of cultures is important. The workplace is not just a job, it should also be a family.

The place where more than eight hours are spent every day should be community. I learned that days off for mental breakdowns are also important. Empathy, understanding, care and love are not only important towards children, but also between co-workers.

Future Plans: To return home is to continue my story, my future. *Casa* is synonymous with home, and this experience is also my home. However, my story stopped being written as I had planned. Who I am today could not imagine who I was in August 2024. I don’t believe in reintegrating into my country or community, I believe rather that I will be reborn. I am sure that I will return to college and other situations that I stopped for a year, but I will be a new version. A strong, resilient, transformed and loved version, with the strongest idea that home is the one we build, and not the one they decide to impose on us.

Santa Jinaina (Zambia)

Manager Assistant, Hartville Thrift Shoppe
Hartville, Ohio



First Impression or Differences: My first impression of the U.S. was that the culture of efficiency and time management is very intense because people are always in a rush and days are filled with so much to do. Yet innovations like online shopping, drive thrus, food delivery apps and smart automated services

help people manage their busy schedules efficiently.

Memorable or Funny Experience: One funny experience was running away from my hosts’ little dog on my first day in their home because he came running and barking towards me, and I was sweating and screaming in fear. One memorable experience was attending a Maverick City Music concert in Chicago during the Great Lakes winter retreat because they are my favorite worship band.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I have learned to embrace diversity through understanding and respecting different perspectives. My understanding of serving others now is that it takes intentionality and my ability to listen, and that power can be used for influence and responsibility.

Faith Journey: One of my highlights was belonging to the Bethany Mennonite Church College and Career group. We had Bible studies weekly and other activities such as hayrides, trying different U.S. cuisines and seasonal retreats. They celebrated my birthday, which was heartwarming. I watched God work on my fear of dogs and stretch my faith through different challenges.

New Perspectives: One interesting thing I learned from my workplace is how data analysis reports on weekly sales in comparison to the same dates for the previous year not only helped to evaluate sales but to determine the possible reasons for the outcome. For example, the date with a higher temperature would have more sales generated as compared to the one with a lower temperature. Added to my knowledge of economics is the importance of data analysis reports in business management and the use of incentives to produce desired results. Additionally, effective planning methods to use, researching and record keeping for future reference, effective decision making, paying attention to details because everything has a counter effect, and responding to the need are core in achieving business goals.

Skill Development: I have become more open-minded, confident and adaptable. I learned to appreciate diversity and navigate different social and professional settings. I learned new ways of solving problems, causing me to break social barriers and stereotypes, and helping me understand and respect diversity better. As for my country, I now understand that viewing the world can be limited to the amount of exposure one has.

Future Plans: When I get home, I wish to join an organization that promotes wellness in general across races with an aim to apply peacebuilding skills in my community and church using the knowledge I gained from MCC, with an aim to bring sustainable growth and positive change. I will work on writing short articles, posting them on my socials and utilizing any public speaking opportunity given to inspire through my experience.

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Shristi Yunus (India)

Teacher Aide & Library Aide, Hinkletown Mennonite School
Ephrata, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences: My first impression of the assignment country is that it is a peaceful and serene location, offering a stark contrast to my home environment. The community here operates in a way that is noticeably different, especially in the educational system. The teaching approach is highly technology-driven, with simple, yet effective methods that facilitate student comprehension. In addition, the work culture is impressive; punctuality is highly valued in all aspects of life. The community demonstrates a focused and disciplined attitude toward work, while also maintaining a strong commitment to family, ensuring that time is dedicated to being present for one another. Lifestyle differences are also evident,

particularly in the food, accent and daily routines. The host country's ability to manage everything with such precision and punctuality has been particularly striking, highlighting a level of efficiency that is both impressive and inspiring.

Memorable or Funny Experience: During the retreat, I had the opportunity to stay with an Amish family, which proved to be a truly memorable experience. It was enlightening to learn about their lifestyle, particularly how they live without relying on advanced technology and modern conveniences. The simplicity and contentment with which they live was both refreshing and thought-provoking, offering me valuable insights into a way of life that prioritizes basic needs and meaningful connections over material advancements. This experience greatly enhanced my understanding of different cultural perspectives.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: Being a global citizen working for peace has taught me the importance of recognizing our shared humanity and interconnectedness. Peacebuilding is not just about ending conflict but creating conditions of equity and respect across cultures.

Faith Journey: My faith journey has been a challenging one, and I have encountered struggles in my spiritual growth. However, I am committed to continuing my journey by dedicating time to read the Bible and engage in prayer. These practices are central to my efforts in strengthening my faith and deepening my understanding, and I remain focused on growing through perseverance and reflection.

New Perspectives: Worship does not need to follow traditional sequences or be constrained by external expectations. One can freely express devotion to the Lord, without concern for others' judgment or perceptions. The focus should be on sincere worship, offering one's heart and devotion to God, rather than seeking approval from others. The act of worship is a personal expression of faith, meant to honor and connect with God, not to meet external standards.

Skill Development: Learning how to take care of myself when I am away from my country and family. I keep reminding myself that's just a phase of life, this will pass soon. No matter what I deal with, God is with me every time, everywhere. This thing influenced me to keep going in my career no matter what. I will succeed.

Future Plans: Upon returning home, I plan to continue my master's in psychology. I am committed to applying the knowledge and insights gained during my time here to both my professional work and my involvement in church life. Additionally, I have embraced the importance of punctuality and maintaining a mindset of continuous learning, and I will carry these principles forward in all aspects of my life.

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Silav Yea (*Cambodia*)

Financial Assistant, Asylee Women Enterprise
Baltimore, Maryland



First Impression or Differences:

When I first arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, I was immediately struck by the differences in the physical environment, social atmosphere and even the day-to-day pace compared to my home country, Cambodia. Baltimore has a lot of old buildings that look very

strong. This city is very busy and has a lot of people who travel by car. It is not very common that people travel by motorcycle like in my home country because it is not very safe, and the cars here drive very fast. The majority of people here use public transportation such as a bus and train as well. I live in the community house called Reservoir Hill House of Peace.

Memorable or Funny Experience: One of my most memorable and funny experiences during my exchange program in Baltimore was playing in snow and drinking apple cider. It was a very fun time that I had never experienced in my life. One thing here, when the winter weather comes, the time changes an hour. That's really interesting. After that when the spring comes, I can see the beautiful flowers of many types showing up on the road and the park.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I had the opportunity to not only experience life in a new country but also deepen my understanding of what it means to be a global citizen actively working for peace. This experience has profoundly shaped my views on serving others, social justice, power, privilege and anti-oppression work. Before my exchange, I understood peace mainly as the absence of conflict. However, during my time in Baltimore, I realized that peace is much more complex. It's not just about avoiding violence or disagreement; it's about actively creating an environment where everyone has access to opportunity, justice and respect. I participated in several community events, including volunteering with local organizations that support marginalized groups, such as immigrants, low-income families and people of color. These experiences taught me that peacemaking requires not just tolerance but a commitment to dismantling systems of oppression and inequity.

Faith Journey: I had the opportunity to explore my faith in new and profound ways. The experience was not only a cultural exchange but also a spiritual journey that shaped my beliefs and deepened my understanding of what it means to live out my faith in a diverse and complex world. Living away from home in a new city

also gave me a chance to reflect on my own spiritual journey. The distance from my usual support systems allowed me to consider what I truly believed, why I believed it and how I wanted my faith to shape my actions. Without the familiarity of home and the comfort of routine, I began to think more deeply about my relationship with God and what it means to be a faithful global citizen. During quiet moments of reflection, I felt a stronger sense of God's presence in my life, especially when I was participating in volunteer work or simply connecting with people from different walks of life. I realized that faith is not about having all the answers but about trusting in God's guidance through life's uncertainties. The challenges I faced during my exchange – navigating a new culture, adjusting to a different way of life and even facing personal doubts – became opportunities for spiritual growth. In moments of struggle, I found comfort in prayer and in trusting that God was working in me, even when I didn't fully understand the path ahead.

New Perspectives: It has been an incredibly eye-opening experience that has profoundly challenged and expanded my view of myself, others, my home country and my church. Living in a different culture and engaging with people from diverse backgrounds pushed me to reconsider many of my previously held assumptions and provided me with a fresh outlook on several aspects of life. Before arriving in Baltimore, I saw myself as someone who valued independence, routine and a certain level of certainty in life. However, my time in a new country with a completely different culture forced me to step out of my comfort zone and confront aspects of myself that I hadn't previously considered. The experience of attending different churches in Baltimore also gave me new insights into the role of faith and the church in society.

Skill Development: One of the most significant skills I honed during my exchange was financial skill and communication with people from different countries. Another key skill I developed was conflict resolution. As an exchange student, I had to navigate moments of cultural misunderstanding, differing expectations and even personal conflicts with peers. These challenges taught me the importance of staying calm and open-minded during disagreements. I learned that conflict, while uncomfortable, can be an opportunity for growth and understanding if approached with the right mindset. My exchange also provided opportunities for professional skill development. Through internships, volunteering and participating in local community events, I was able to gain hands-on experience that has influenced my career aspirations.

Future Plans: My student exchange in Baltimore has given me a wealth of new perspectives, skills and experiences that I'm eager to apply when I return home. I look forward to integrating what I've learned into my

church and home community by fostering intercultural understanding, promoting social justice, helping others resolve conflicts peacefully and encouraging self-care and mental health awareness. These lessons have given me a renewed sense of purpose and direction, and I'm excited to continue growing and contributing to my community and the world.

Yehyun Choi (*Republic of Korea*)
 Social Work Assistant, Water Street Mission
 Lancaster, Pennsylvania



First Impression or Differences:

Even though this is my first time in the U.S., I didn't really experience culture shock or find everything unfamiliar. That said, my first impression of Lancaster, my host family and the place I'd be working was incredibly positive. I've often felt that big city life can be draining

and not quite the right fit for me, but Lancaster felt peaceful and calm, while still full of life and beauty in its own way. Water Street Mission (WSM), the organization I'd be working at, was bigger than I expected, but after going through the orientation and touring the facility, I had a strong sense that I'd grow to love this place. I truly believe that out of all the time God has given me during this one-year journey, my time at WSM will be the most meaningful and full of opportunities to learn and grow.

Memorable or Funny Experience: The most special experience so far has to be the mid-year conference in Puerto Rico. When the location was first announced and everyone around me was saying how lucky I was to be going there, I didn't think much of it, mostly because I didn't really know what kind of place it was. But the moment I arrived, I was completely taken aback by how beautiful and captivating the island is. One of the friends I've made here is originally from Puerto Rico, and even before I left, they told me how stunning it is and to make sure I take lots of photos. As soon as I got there, I understood exactly what they meant. Puerto Rico felt like the "island of dream" you often hear about in Latin songs. It's become one of those shining, unforgettable memories that I know I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

Global Citizenship and Peacemaking: I worked in a place where I could be closest to those who experience social exclusion and poverty. The staff offered more than just food and shelter, they showed deep care, effort and commitment to each individual, and I had the privilege of being part of that. We may not be able to change the entire world into a peaceful one, but if we can offer a new life to even one person, then for that person, the world becomes a more peaceful place.

Faith Journey: What stood out to me the most was how reassuring it felt to be surrounded by people who shared the same faith. I especially remember receiving so much prayer and love from people when my dad was diagnosed with cancer last December and had to undergo surgery. I believe that God's work is always good and great, and that He leads me ahead of my own understanding, guiding me day by day. Psalm 23:1 is my favorite Bible verse.

New Perspectives: My experience at WSM has completely reshaped the way I view social work. Every staff member I've met at WSM, including my amazing supervisor, has shown a genuine passion for what they do. They're not only committed but also deeply grounded in their values. The way they collaborate to create something good together left a strong impression on me. It made me realize – this is what social work is meant to look like. Watching everyone give their best in their respective roles was truly moving. I'm incredibly grateful to witness and be part of a social work environment like this, something I never had the chance to experience in Korea.

Skill Development: I was able to discover new sides of myself and enjoy a sense of freedom I hadn't felt before. Connecting with people from completely different cultural backgrounds also allowed me to grow and broaden my perspective.

Future Plans: Nothing's set in stone yet, but I'd like to continue studying something related to psychology or social work. At the same time, I hope to come back to WSM one day and work here.

Adventure

I'm a person who loves to find adventure in a new culture, to seek challenges, pushing me from my comfort zone. I am often curious, willing to take risks, open to trying different cuisines and flavors, even if they are unfamiliar, and embracing spontaneity.

(Juliana David, India to Ohio)

Artistic Eye

I like seeing the world or things in a creative way that God has made.

(Shristi Yunus, India to Pennsylvania)

Ascertained

I feel like I've learned a lot this IVEP year, and I've grown as a person.
I'm ready to share this knowledge.

(Melisa Matshazi, Zimbabwe to Maryland)

Awesome

Because it helps me have a new view and change my way of viewing some things.
It reinforces my view of what humankind should be.

(Emmanuel Mbainaissem, Chad to Pennsylvania)

Driven

All my life I always strive to achieve whatever I set my mind to
and work passionately towards it.

(Ozioma Okwuchukwu, Nigeria to Pennsylvania)

Enriching

It was an experience I enjoyed, but also learned and shared.

(Claudia Marcial Gonzalez, Mexico to Indiana)

Gratitude

I am grateful that MCC has given me this opportunity to strengthen my Christian faith
and improve my professional skills.

(Joélcio Chiringa, Mozambique to Kansas)

Growth

A year of growth, adventure and transformation. Every day is an opportunity to challenge what I know and learn something new.

(Elvis Otieno, Kenya to Ohio)

Growth

This journey brought me growth and maturity, teaching me valuable lessons.

(Pragya Das, India to Colorado)

Learning

I learned a lot more in this exchange year than I could've learned back home, mostly because I wouldn't know how or where to look for such experiences. Through being here, I was exposed to different places and professions which allowed me to gather knowledge that I can apply in my home country.

(Erik Warkentin, Brazil to Ohio)

New

Because it's all I have seen, known and experienced this last year.

(Guilherme Wieler, Brazil to Pennsylvania)

Open-minded

Living in a distant and different country opens the doors to the discovery and exploration of cultures, foods, behaviors and experiences.

(Dianny Julieth Nazarit Valencia, Colombia to Pennsylvania)

Presence

In each moment, I sought to focus on the present that was given to me. I chose the word "presence" because I wanted every moment I spent here to carry meaning through my very existence.

(Yehyun Choi, Republic of Korea to Pennsylvania)

Transformative

My interactions with IVEP participants and others have been a great exposure to so many different cultures and ideas from all over the globe. This has built resilience in me, broadened my perspective of viewing the world, and challenged me to adapt, grow and develop new skills both socially and professionally, leading to lifelong meaningful connections filled with global diversity.

(Santa Jinaina, Zambia to Ohio)

Transformative

This year has been filled with growth, challenges and new perspectives that have reshaped how I see myself, others and the world, leaving me more open-minded, resilient and purposeful than ever before.

(Silav Yea, Cambodia to Maryland)

Ubuntu

I am because we are. I am because of the love of this new home.

(Reneé Montúfar Turcios, Guatemala to Indiana)

Winner

Living in a different country for the first time in my adulthood isn't easy at all, and I can tell you it's challenging. But having Jesus Christ by my side is the great joy I got. He strengthens, protects and made me a winner as now I am testifying to his presence in my life. Glory to God.

(Ester Joel, Tanzania to Pennsylvania)

Dianny Julieth Nazarit Valencia (left, Colombia to Pennsylvania) learns important, first-time roller skating skills from her host sister, Magdalena Eby, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



Elvis Otieno (Kenya to Ohio) regularly teaches the sophomore Bible class at Central Christian School in Kidron, Ohio.



Erik Warkentin (Brazil to Ohio) takes a turn at leading hymns at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church in Kidron, Ohio.



Joélcio Chiringa (left, Mozambique to Kansas) regularly receives rides to and from work in Harper, Kansas. One of his drivers is Spike Hostetler.



Ester Joel (center, Tanzania to Pennsylvania) enjoys a snow day and sledding with her hosts Marlin and Barb Good in Lititz, Pennsylvania.



Pragya Das (center, India to Colorado) enjoys a day tour to the Rocky Mountains with her host family: Ribka Teggene, left, and Assefa Assfaw.

Santa Jinaina (right, Zambia to Ohio) attends a retirement party for Benjamin Tyrell, a former Secret Service agent for President Barack Obama, after he gave a presentation in Broadview Heights, Ohio.



Stristi Yunus (lower right, India to Pennsylvania) celebrates her birthday with balloons and her hosts Jason, Jessica, Lexi, Audrey and Anthony Hoover in Lititz, Pennsylvania.



Juliana David (right, India to Ohio) celebrates World Communion Sunday at Salem Mennonite Church with her host, Jennifer Shue, in Kidron, Ohio.



Ozioma Okwuchukwu (Nigeria to Pennsylvania), enjoying the sights during IVEP's mid-year conference, stops for a photo shoot in Carolina, Puerto Rico.



IVEPers take part in a successful mid-year conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



From right, Melisa Matshazi (Zimbabwe to Maryland), volunteer Sherelle Harris and Brother Frank are ready to distribute lunch to clients at the Franciscan Center in Baltimore, Maryland.



Emmanuel Mbainaissem (Chad to Pennsylvania) and his host, Aime Fernback, bring Christmas gift donations to Mohn's Hill Evangelical Congregational Church in Reading, Pennsylvania.



East Coast IVEPs enjoy the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale in Harrisonburg, Virginia.



Santa Jinaina (Zambia to Ohio) worked hard to get over her fear of dogs this year. She successfully made friends with Fin and Ford in Uniontown, Ohio.



Claudia Marcial Gonzalez (Mexico to Indiana) shows off the library at her work, Bethany Christian School in Goshen, Indiana.



Great Lakes IVEPs and their coordinator enjoy fall weather during their weekend retreat in Goshen, Indiana.



IVEPs enjoy relaxing in the Rio Grande River during their mid-year conference at Centro de Retiro Paraíso en la Montaña camp in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico.



Silav Yea (Cambodia to Maryland) enjoys her very first snowfall and building her first snowman in Baltimore, Maryland.



Reneé Montúfar Turcios (Guatemala to Indiana) goes on her first skiing adventure in Otsego, Michigan.



East Coast IVEPers show off their decorated gingerbread houses during a winter retreat in Telford, Pennsylvania.



Central States IVEPers and their coordinator visit Bethel College in the fall in Newton, Kansas. From left: Joélcio Chiringa, coordinator Mahlet Mamo and Praga Das.



Guilherme Wieler (Brazil to Pennsylvania) leads worship during a banquet for his workplace, Eastern Mennonite Missions in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



Yehyun Choi (left, Republic of Korea to Pennsylvania) and host Judy Zook cook Korean food together to celebrate Korean Thanksgiving in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



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