

# 2023-2024 Yearbook



**•IVEP**  
International Volunteer Exchange Program

**•SALT•**  
Serving And Learning Together

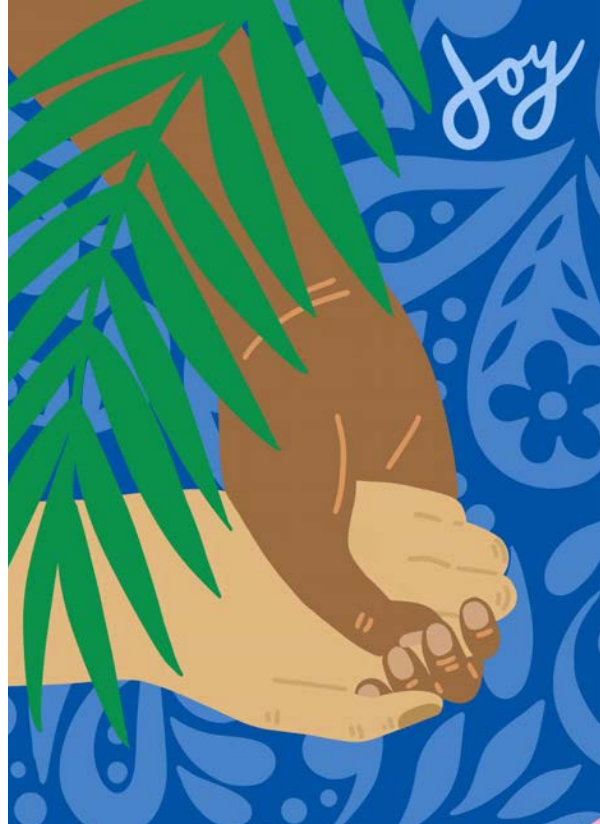
**•YAMEN!**  
Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network

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

This yearbook is a reminder of an incredible journey! You left behind the familiar and stepped into the unknown with great faith. As with any journey, you are celebrating the memories, mourning the losses and trying to decipher what God has shown you over these months. I do hope that you are firm in the knowledge that God has been for you, alongside you and within you during this journey and always.

After an experience like this, there may be such a flurry of activity and change (yet again) that processing your experience can be difficult. The distance from the experience can make us ask if it really happened. This yearbook can be a reminder that you did this! It was fun, difficult, joyous, painful . . . all the words and all the feelings. Use this yearbook as a tool for expanding your learning from this year. Use it as a prayer guide for processing your experiences and praying for friends and family that you learned to know.

May you find a way to use the memories, events and learnings of this year in your journey through the river of life. And may these experiences enrich you and your faith as you continue into the next seasons.



Here is Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving that I offer as a blessing for each of you:

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. – Philippians 1:9–11 NIV*

*Beth Good*



# GLOBAL SERVICE LEARNING

## MCC Global Service Learning Department Staff



**Beth Good**  
Global Service Learning Director  
(Based in Akron, PA, U.S.)



**Andrea Geiser Leaman**  
IVEP Coordinator  
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**Carolina Perez**  
YAMEN Coordinator  
(Based in Bogotá, Colombia)

**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, SOOP (Canada), Summerbridge and Summer Service.**



# IVEP participants



IVEP orientation in Akron, Pennsylvania, U.S.

Name .....	Pages
Elias Algarin Escalante .....	8, 10, 26, 28, 29, 31
Seonyoung Baek .....	8, 29, 31
Ivan Misael Barron Kipfer .....	8, 10, 25, 29, 31
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Gabriela Colman Rios .....	8, 13, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31
Nely Cotuc Perez .....	8, 13, 25, 29, 31
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Ritu Kapali .....	8, 17, 25, 29, 30, 31
Adonis Kodjihiti .....	8, 17, 27, 28, 29, 31
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**Elias Algarin Escalante**



**Seonyoung Baek**



**Ivan Misael Barron Kipfer**



**Zilpa Charles**



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**Nely Cotuc Perez**



**Maria Isabel Fuentes Fuentes**



**Sreynith Hong**



**Zozahbe Guy Kagonbe**



**Fionah Kansiime**



**Ritu Kapali**



**Adonis Kodjihiti**



**Andres Ledesma Perea**



**Iha Missa**

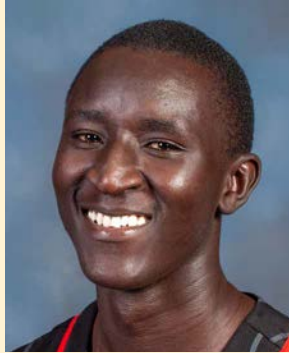


**Inkosiinhle Ndlovu-Mathuthu**





**Maswe Nyihongo**



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**Serim Park**



**Hulda Lily Sharon**



**Dorcus Sibanda**



**W. Anne Sobdjolbo**



**Daisy Toews Harder**

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**Elias Algarin Escalante** (*Colombia*)  
R CITY Youth Assistant Instructor, River City  
Community Development Center (R CITY)  
Chicago, Illinois



**First Impression or Differences:**  
I was terrified by the different English accents, it made the communication hard at the beginning. I enjoyed the city and nature, beautiful, singular and big landscapes, houses and buildings. The people were very friendly and helpful, so many people

and restaurants from different parts of the world. The variety of sports was very interesting, I enjoyed baseball, football, hockey and basketball, unlike Colombia where only soccer predominates. Adapting to greetings was difficult, no kisses on the cheek or hugs, most people are inside their homes, so greeting your neighbor daily is not common. Here, dinners seem like snacks, and rice is not part of the daily diet, which is sad.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** At work we prepared a presentation for Black History Month, where kids dance, recite poems and do other activities. I was in charge of a dance with the little children. We chose the song Waka Waka by Shakira, because the artist is from Barranquilla, my hometown in Colombia, and the song talks about Africa. Rehearsals were challenging, sometimes the kids misbehaved or got distracted. Two days before the presentation all the kids quit. I felt very frustrated and almost cried, but one of my coordinators motivated me to talk to them to continue with the dance, and they agreed. We did the presentation, and it was a success. Seeing them dance, smile and enjoy filled my heart with joy.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** For my job I had to understand the dynamics between Black, white, Latino and immigrant communities and learn about their stories and perspectives as victims of violence and racism. I wanted to contribute much more to help with the social problems of the community, but I felt limited for being a foreigner, unknowing about their history and culture, and for my English level. But I learned that all roles are important in peace and social justice work, even if they seem small and simple. I understood the value of helping pack food, loading and organizing boxes, greeting and saying goodbye to people, playing with children and doing activities with them, actions that contribute to a great cause.

**Faith Journey:** I participated in different churches, which contributed to my spiritual growth, although sometimes I felt confused by the different perspectives on the Christian life. Translating the sermon from English to Spanish at River City Church was a very interesting and

beautiful role, feeling how the word of God can reach other people through you. The Church Outside the Walls was an important pillar in my spiritual growth and, as a foreigner in Chicago, they made me feel part of the family. Their support, lessons and advice will forever remain in my heart.

**New Perspectives:** IVEP was an experience that changed my life completely. It helped me to know and understand new aspects of myself, confront fears and insecurities, leave bad habits and focus on what is truly important. I learned to be more understanding and empathetic toward other people's life stories and find better ways to connect despite differences. It helped me connect with my family in a deeper way despite the distance. It motivated me to continue working for God, the church and the community, to strive to improve the realities of vulnerable communities plagued by social problems.

**Skill Development:** On a personal level I have learned to be more independent, organized and pragmatic. I have also improved my level of English and my ability to establish relationships with people of different cultures and beliefs. Professionally, I have learned to trust more in teamwork. Working with children has taught me to be more patient, attentive and flexible. There were times at home, at work and with friends, where I faced conflict situations in which I had to intercede as a mediator to solve them, which was a challenge in English, because clear communication is important in the process.

**Future Plans:** In Colombia I am part of a group of young leaders from different churches, and we are interested in creating a Community Development Center (CDC) to work with vulnerable communities. My experience at River City CDC has helped me to understand the dynamics of the programs that can be offered, their vision, values and objectives. It also has helped me to understand the challenges we can face, the strategies we can implement, and to identify the role of the people we need to start and maintain the CDC.

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**Ivan Misael Barron Kipfer** (*Bolivia*)  
Dairy Farm Employee, Steffen Farms  
Apple Creek, Ohio



**First Impression or Differences:**  
When I got here, I did not know how to greet other people when I arrived somewhere, shake hands, give a hug or anything similar, but a single hello was enough.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:**  
I came without knowing much of the language, so during the first few months, I always said yes to everything people proposed to me. When I

understood the language better, my boss asked me what I planned to cook for the international cooking class from Central Christian School. I'm sure they proposed it to me the first month I was here, and without understanding what they were saying, I committed to cooking some food from my country. I really enjoyed cooking meals from my country.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Wanting to bring peace to this world is impossible; there will always be injustice, no matter what we do or what we say. Many times, we ourselves are the cause of these problems and we live comfortably, far from the problems, and to feel good about ourselves, we donate what we have left over, instead of going and suffering with those who suffer, crying with those who cry. We cannot change the world, but we can change a life. Being a peacemaker for me means going where that person is who needs help and being someone who gives them hope.

**Faith Journey:** We say that we trust in God, that he is the owner of everything, that no leaf falls if he does not allow it. But do I really believe it? I am scared of the future, it is difficult for me to trust God, but in every moment of my life he has been there, directing me, but whenever I feel that something is going to change, I am still scared. This has been my moment with God. He is teaching me to trust Him.

**New Perspectives:** Knowing and living in a new culture often makes you wonder why we do the things we do. I am 100% sure that the strongest shock is not facing a different language, it is facing a different culture. Something I learned from all this is: shut up, listen, and understand.

**Skill Development:** In the professional area, I was learning about artificial insemination, embryo transfer, pregnancy detection, health, dairy management, etc.

**Future Plans:** My plans are to return to my country, enter a livestock company and work in the reproduction area, but if God has other plans for me, may His plans be fulfilled.

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## Zilpa Charles *(Kenya)*

Living Works Assistant, Living Works  
Chicago, Illinois



### **First Impression or Differences:**

Chicago is a large city with many tall buildings. It's quite different from the small village where I grew up. The weather here is also different; it's colder compared to Kenya. I'm surprised at how well I've adapted and feel comfortable in 20 degrees Celsius (68 Fahrenheit), which used to feel too cold for me back in Kenya.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** I had a great time and a very sociable life, even though I consider myself an ambivert. Surprisingly, my introverted side seemed to be awakened. One amusing moment occurred on my second day at school when an eighth-grade student asked if I was a new student joining their class.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** My understanding of being a global citizen working for peace has grown greatly. I've learned how important it is to help others and fight for fairness. I've also realized that some people have more power and advantages than others, and it's important to use that privilege to help those who need it. This journey has taught me to listen to others and work together for a better society.

**Faith Journey:** I have experienced God's work in my life through my stay here. I love singing, which is one of the ways that I deeply connect with God. Participating in the church choir and small groups has enriched my faith and understanding in so many ways.

**New Perspectives:** Since coming to the U.S., I've gained a deeper appreciation for myself, others and my home country. This experience has been enlightening, providing valuable lessons in all aspects of life.

**Skill Development:** I've enjoyed discovering different learning methods in the classroom. One thing I've noticed is that experiential learning is more commonly used compared to rote learning, which is widely used in Kenya. Working with children in the after-school program on peacemaking has been a rich learning experience for me. Interacting with diverse individuals and gaining new perspectives has also been valuable, as it exposes me to lifestyles different from my own. This exposure has sparked new ideas on how I can better balance my self-care routines.



**Future Plans:** I'm incredibly enthusiastic about incorporating hands-on learning activities into my teaching approach and can't wait to share this passion with my community to make learning more engaging and enjoyable.

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**Innocent Chuma** (*Zambia*)  
Teacher Aide and Library Aide,  
Hinkletown Mennonite School  
Ephrata, Pennsylvania



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression of the U.S. was the trees. I remember before coming to the U.S., I had a different picture about the U.S. I had seen it through TV, but I never knew that the U.S. had so many trees and other vegetation. I thought it was just buildings everywhere. So,

seeing the trees everywhere made me love the U.S. more. Everything is different. When it comes to the stores, the U.S. has a lot of big buildings. While in the U.S. I have had an opportunity to interact with different people and cultures. I also thank God for giving me such an amazing host family. I remembered how I prayed for the host family before coming to the U.S. When I arrived at the house and after just a short moment living with them, I felt so at peace. It took time for me to miss home again, because of how sweet my host family was to me.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** My first time seeing the snow. This was the funniest experience for me. I remember hearing my host knocking on the door early in the morning. He asked me if I could follow him. As soon as I entered another room, he just opened the curtain on the window. I saw this beautiful snow. I was so excited, and I went back to my bedroom. I'm just there watching the beauty of God. One day we had a lot of snow, like 6 inches. I went outside without a shirt and shoes on, but I had shorts. So, I went in the snow for a few minutes. Christmas celebrations in the U.S. are the best. People make a lot of different dishes. Cheesecake is my favorite. There is also giving gifts; this is the best, because I received a lot of presents from families and friends.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Firstly, I give all gratitude to God and MCC for giving me the opportunity to participate in this journey and experience. This is the best experience ever. I will never forget it. I learned that being a peacemaker, you don't have to judge, but instead you have to make peace and joy. I'm very ready to take part in peacemaking because of the new and powerful experiences I got. I also learned that as global citizens, we need to stand for the truth and

protection of people and the environment. Also, we need to cultivate values of tolerance, compassion and empathy for others, and build supportive relationships with people from other cultures and countries.

**Faith Journey:** This is one of the most important parts to me. This experience here in the U.S. has been very different with a lot of changes, especially with my faith journey. I see the bigger me. My faith has grown. I have had the privilege to worship with different churches and Christians. I have had an opportunity to serve God in different places, such as disability ministry and to serve as youth leader at Good Shepherd church. This helped me to grow my faith. I was also invited to Messiah University to speak to the students, and each time I get involved in God's work, I see my faith and trust in God are growing. A lot of people gave testimonies. Even some challenges I was facing helped me to understand how God works. I am so excited to see what God has for me in the future, and I'm also ready to work for him.

**New Perspectives:** The new perspective is how I started to see now compared to how I thought it would be. Also, how God has been using me to serve others for him.

**Skill Development:** Being a teacher, I developed a lot of skills. Being in the U.S., I learned time management, adaptability, initiative and solution-driven skill development; all will help make me a great teacher. Communication is an essential skill in an international environment. Communicating across cultural barriers can often lead to some rather amusing anecdotes. I learned how to communicate with the students, my colleagues and students' parents – all of which offer me insights into the nuances of different types of communication and how to communicate most effectively. Cultural sensitivity and awareness allow me to bridge gaps between vastly different cultures in a meaningful and impactful way and prepare me as a global citizen, understanding the world beyond my own lived-in scope and experience.

**Future Plans:** My future plan is to continue working for God by volunteering to the world, sharing peace and love. In 1 Peter 4:10, we read, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace." This is a calling from God to serve others. So, I will use the gifts he gave me and share my experience with the world.

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**Gabriela Colman Rios** (*Paraguay*)

Teaching Assistant, Lancaster Mennonite School  
Archives and Library Assistant, Mennonite Life  
Lancaster, Pennsylvania



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression to be in a different country was, “How will the family be and will I have a host sister or brothers at the house and share time with them? The place where I will do my service, how will it be? Will it be good to talk with people or give hugs to them?” Those

were the questions coming to my mind. I was so worried about that. But it was totally different. It was great. I like the place where I live, and the places where I do my service.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** One of our retreats was in Virginia, and every one of the IVEPers got a ride in a buggy. It was in winter. It was fun and cold. But it was memorable for me to share time with an Old Order Mennonite community and to hear them singing. Also, during the year, I learned how to play mini golf, ski, ice skate, go on a tubing hill and play with the snow with friends. I saw for the first time a balloon fair with two friends who are from Uganda.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I learned that we must respect everyone, build a sense of belonging to a common humanity and help everyone, but first one must be aware that to change something, one must begin to change oneself, and thus be able to help other people to become responsible and active global citizens.

**Faith Journey:** My faith grows more. I also have difficulties because I am in a different place, but Jesus is always there for me. He gives me strength to move forward. As a human, I will always have some moments that I do not like or I do not understand why things happen, but God makes us go through moments like these to show us that he always has something good for his children. I really like this verse and it helps me a lot: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

**New Perspectives:** Every place is different and is good. I learned to be patient, that everything arrives at the time that it has to arrive and arrives perfect. The church and the place for me was different, but it was nice and being at a different place with different people, I enjoyed the time and learned many things.

**Skill Development:** I have learned a lot in my area of work. Making cassette catalogs was one of the things I liked, also cataloging, and looking at old photos. I loved being at school, sharing with all ages, being able to share a little of my culture, music and food with the students and teachers. I learned techniques on how to play the saxophone. Having two places to serve and having time to share in both was great, as well as sharing with different ages and learning from each of them. These places of service helped me a lot to grow as a professional and as a person too.

**Future Plans:** I am going to share my experience with the children, teenagers and young people of the church. For them it is something new, and I want them to listen and learn so that someday they are encouraged to do this volunteering. It is amazing to do. It opens your mind and helps you use all the gifts and talents that God has given you.

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**Nely Cotuc Perez** (*Guatemala*)

Site and Volunteer Coordinator for Casa Alitas program,  
Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona  
Tucson, Arizona



**First Impression or Differences:** Definitely the biggest difference between my country and the U.S. is the weather. Guatemala is known as the “Eternal Spring.” I enjoyed living the seasons here, waiting for the spring, seeing how trees change for autumn, playing with the snow and using tons of sunscreen

because it is very hot during summer.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** I went camping with my church, and my housemates and I shared the tent. That night I heard the coyotes howling. It was so amazing, spending the day there, hiking, looking at the stars, talking and being in nature.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I learned about power and privilege more, mostly here at the border. I used to talk with my housemate about the consequences of colonization, she with her position as a U.S. citizen and me with my Indigenous and Guatemalan position. I am so happy that we are friends, and we can talk and reflect about our own histories. Also, I learned how in my own culture, among us, we need to overcome discrimination and act with social justice.

**Faith Journey:** I think in this time here my faith has grown. My church in Tucson is committed to always welcoming people and taking care of them. Also, every

time people at my work asked me about how I was in the U.S., I was so happy to say: “I am here serving with my church.”

**New Perspectives:** I have changed. Before this experience I used to doubt my abilities, but here everything is different than I am used to, but also my knowledge and capabilities are highlighted, and I trust much more in myself.

**Skill Development:** I learned helpdesk abilities. There are days that I spend my time on the computer helping families to get their plane tickets. Also, this experience has made me become more empathetic. Having friends from different countries is valuable.

**Future Plans:** I have always loved my country, and now I do more. I have read how difficult the migration journey was. I can share the truth and my experience. As a social worker, I can promote projects and social politics.

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**Maria Isabel Fuentes Fuentes** (*Guatemala*)  
Immigration Legal Services (ILS) Temporary Program  
Assistant, World Relief Sacramento  
North Highlands, California



**First Impression or Differences:** My perspective on Sacramento overall has been incredible. God has truly placed the right people in my life at the right times. Working for World Relief has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life. I have grown personally and professionally. I had the fortune to

start living in Sacramento in August 2023, and I can say that this season of my life has become an adventure in every possible way. I had little idea of what it was like to live in Sacramento, what the different weather seasons were like, or what different cultures I would share with here. It was a complete challenge for me. The simple act of leaving my country, my family, my friends, my culture and my language, and starting from scratch, was a personal challenge. One becomes stronger than one thinks.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** One of my first personal challenges that turned into an adventure was commuting to work by bicycle. In my country, Guatemala, it’s not possible as everyone travels by car, motorcycle or bus. I never imagined doing it in the U.S., but I had to do it, and I can only say it was great. I learned to adapt to any situation, to be more independent and to know myself better. I learned to better understand different cultures and see the differences in each of them. I learned to be resilient, which is the ability to adapt to different

circumstances and people. I learned that one can shine anywhere by giving their best.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** My perspective on peace, understanding, justice, power, privilege and service toward others has changed significantly since I started living in the U.S., particularly regarding the issue of migration. Personally, working at World Relief has made me do a 180-degree turn, where empathy is essential to put myself in the shoes of millions of people seeking a better place to live. It’s impressive to see the different types of cases around the world, and how God uses organizations, churches, professionals and volunteers to provide excellent services to those most in need. Professionally, I have grown a lot in this area, and it motivates me to continue studying and preparing myself to give my best and contribute in any way possible. This experience has truly marked my life.

**Faith Journey:** Throughout my adventure, I saw God working in every detail. It’s not easy to live alone in a new country, culture and language, but my experience in Sacramento is called, “God has details in every situation.” I could observe how His plans are good, pleasant and perfect. He places the right people at the right time. I remember one day when I felt very lonely and sad, and I said, “God, I need a hug. I don’t know how you’ll do it, but I need to feel it.” The next day, many people around me started to make small gestures of kindness toward me, like bringing me a coffee, hugging me or simply asking how I was. It’s amazing how God moves. Another day, I remember feeling very sick and having no strength to cook or eat. I prayed, “God, help me because I don’t feel well.” That day, my host treated me like a princess, making me feel very loved and preparing many homemade remedies that helped me feel better. God is incredible.

**New Perspectives:** I am very proud of Maria Isabel Fuentes Fuentes. It’s been incredible how strong and brave you can become when you’re alone in another country. My perspective has always been one day at a time, giving my best every day. I always let myself be surprised by God, and that was my success – being open to adventure, meeting new people, experiencing different cultures and languages, and whatever the day brought was a blessing. I believe that my character influenced my adventure a lot – being cheerful, seeing the positive side, being resilient and having a good attitude allowed me to meet amazing people and visit many places I never imagined. Even in the tough times, I could see how amazing God is in every moment, how detail oriented he can be, and how he provides the necessary tools to cope with everything.

**Skill Development:** I have grown in many areas of my life. The ability to socialize, I believe, has been one of my greatest strengths. I was able to make friends from various parts of the world, such as Afghanistan, Ukraine,



Russia, Canada, El Salvador, Brazil, Africa, Mexico, Nicaragua and the U.S. A positive attitude makes a difference; it can spark interest in people wanting to speak Spanish. I loved working at World Relief because many people were interested in getting to know me and learning about my culture, and during lunch breaks, we always tried to converse in different languages to get to know each other better. Professionally, I discovered my calling, and I can only confirm that I am in the right profession. I am passionate and ready to continue growing. The topic of migration fascinated me; being able to help many people and make a difference has been fulfilling. I see myself becoming a great lawyer in my country, Guatemala, and I plan to study international law since I loved everything I learned at World Relief.

**Future Plans:** I am currently halfway through my law degree. My plan upon returning to Guatemala is to continue studying and graduate within two years. I am passionate about being around lawyers and seeing the significant impact you can make in people's lives. This experience has definitely impacted my professional life; I feel inspired to give my best and become a great lawyer in my country. Regarding my church and community, I want to continue growing and sharing my experience in the U.S. to help many people seek God and grow professionally in various areas.

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**Sreynith Hong** (*Cambodia*)  
 Museum Education Associate,  
 Mennonite Heritage Center  
 Harleysville, Pennsylvania  
 Programmatic Support and Welcome Lead,  
 Manna on Main Street  
 Landsdale, Pennsylvania



**First Impression or Differences:**  
 People in the U.S. work from 9 to 5 and only have 30 minutes for a lunch break. Living with a host is a very different setting. I like it a lot.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:**  
 The best memory I will carry on with me is when I went to Florida.

I went during winter, just to get out of the cold for a bit and chill with the warm weather. The weather in Florida reminded me a lot of home. A funny moment I will never forget is when my host and I were at their cabin house on a mountain. I brushed my teeth with an allergy cream because it really looked like toothpaste. I didn't read anything that it said on the box. So the whole night my mouth smelled like medicine cream and tasted like when you chew a whole box of medicine.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I've learned to be aware of what is happening around the world and to contribute in making peace in any way possible.

**Faith Journey:** I believe that every day as a Christian, we all are facing battle. I've learned to trust God and let him work. When I was in Cambodia my way of seeking God was through worship, which I still love doing, but since I was here I found a new way to appreciate and seek God through prayer and nature. I've learned to understand that he has his reasons for its own existence.

**New Perspectives:** I've learned to know that I can be dependable and mature.

**Skill Development:** I've learned how to play pool, and I'm pretty good at it.

**Future Plans:** I will finish my school and continue my outreach mission.

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**Zozahbe Guy Kagonbe** (*Chad*)  
 Teaching Assistant, Bethany Christian Schools  
 Goshen, Indiana



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression was the weather. I came in the summer, but it was too cold for me. I remember wearing three jackets while Americans were sweating in one shirt. The different time zones were also incredible – six hours difference. There are tall trees closely placed together. I first thought Indiana people were living in the forest.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** After spending two weeks and some days in Goshen, my host parents invited me to get into a freezer to feel the inside temperature. When we all got in, I could stay in for only about ten seconds. They said to me, when the winter comes, you will be three times colder than that. That was a memorable and fun experience I can mention here.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I have actually learned a lot about being a global citizen actively working for peace. First, Bethany Christian Schools is a Mennonite organization. The behavior of my coworkers and the administrative staff teaches me every day, because not only do they show how resilient and flexible they are, but also they show love through their way of talking to everyone. This is an important lesson I have been learning so far. I have seen clearly that we humans must be treated fairly and equally. At my workplace it is hard to differentiate between the boss and the staff because we all love to serve others. Truly, my assignment at Bethany, and my attendance at Rock Run Church of

the Brethren, have shaped and changed me to see how much I can try to be a peacemaker everywhere I am.

**Faith Journey:** In my local church here, we have lunch after worship service every Sunday. That moment is for us the moment of sharing and of serving. Being together, we learn difficulties from each other, and we ask God’s assistance. I am of course involved in my local church activities. I lead the children’s story sometimes, and also lead the prayer when needed. I do not see any difficulty so far, but just some ways to worship God and praise that are different.

**New Perspectives:** Well, we are all worshiping the same God, but in many different ways. I have learned the way we lead the worship service here is quite different from the way we do in my home country. My challenge is the hymnal. It is still hard for me to sing some songs because in my home country music is not written.

**Skill Development:** At school, for example, I have seen my coworkers use different approaches. There are many of these that I did not know. Now I am impatient to try those new approaches with the students in my home country. Besides, I also learned that frequent recess and fun games can help students be more intelligent and increase their retention. I look forward to applying this method with the lower and middle school students of my home country.

**Future Plans:** I enjoy teaching. As soon as I return home, teaching will be the first thing I want to do. I used to be a secretary of the youth movement in my home country’s local church. I know they will be eager to hear about the U.S. culture, food, churches, etc. I am also willing to go back home and share with my church what I learned in the U.S.

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**Fionah Kansime** (*Uganda*)  
Forestry Intern, Hungry World Farm  
Tiskilwa, Illinois



**First Impression or Differences:** The weather greeted me with intense heat and humidity the moment I stepped out of the airport. Surprisingly, the U.S. turned out to be hotter than Uganda, reaching a scorching 96°F (36°C). My workplace was really beautiful, it had flowers, veggies, animals and

trees. I loved the feel of nature around me but the lack of public transport and people on the streets gave ghost town vibes in my assignment community, I would go weeks without seeing anyone outside their house or on the streets.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** Seasonal changes. In fall, leaves turned different colors, the snow sparkled in the winter, and when spring arrived, new buds started growing. It felt like watching the earth grow. Celebrating the holidays and participating in the different traditions, games and food.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Small actions can create significant change and the ripple effect of what I do in my assignment is amazing. Lastly, things don’t always go as planned, you need to adapt, make an effort or sacrifice to make change.

**Faith Journey:** My journey has been both humbling and spiritual. I’ve learned, succeeded and faced failures, all of which I’m grateful for. I’ve witnessed God’s influence in the world, seeing how creation still follows his design. But my most significant spiritual growth came from connecting with God through other living beings, and realizing that he transcends our human descriptions and limitations.

**New Perspectives:** I have discovered hidden strengths and weaknesses, and the ability to adapt to new norms and behaviors. I had to redefine my values, and the exposure to diverse viewpoints led to my understanding that there’s no universal right way of living. I view everyone as an individual; this helped me break some stereotypes. I learned to appreciate the beauty of Uganda. I noticed so many things that I take for granted or never questioned that I now appreciate like the weather, food, people, culture and more. Everyone has a calling to serve God, and that can be achieved through various ways. Despite differences in worship, practices and beliefs, all churches have a similar purpose of spreading Christ’s love and compassion for us. Exposure to diverse churches taught me to respect different spiritual paths.

**Skill Development:** Interacting with fellow volunteers, locals and visitors from various backgrounds at the farm helped improve my ability to communicate effectively across cultures, and exposed me to different customs and traditions. I also acquired hands-on knowledge of regenerative farming techniques, soil health, crop rotation, etc. I applied and improved my forestry management skills like working with forest ecosystems, tree planting and other forest improvement practices. I’ve learned to care for my body through proper nutrition, rest, exercise and connecting to nature. Working on a regenerative farm and forest fueled my passion for environmental conservation, and I will pursue a career focused on sharing knowledge about regenerative practices, advocating for sustainable land use and starting a regenerative farm or forest-based venture.

**Future Plans:** I am eager to advance my education by pursuing a master's program in agroforestry. I intend to share with my church and fellow youth about sustainable land use and how taking care of God's creation is part of our calling to serve God.

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**Ritu Kapali** (*Bangladesh*)  
Refugee Case Aid, Salem for Refugees  
Salem, Oregon



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression when I came to the U.S. was to wonder why it's so beautiful and clean, with no traffic jams, because my country is overpopulated, has lots of traffic problems and is polluted. But when I started to meet new people here, I was wondering why people are so busy and hard to make friends with. It's so easy to make friends in Bangladesh and my culture is relationship oriented.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** Seeing the snow for the first time, visiting different places, riding a horse and trying so many different foods. But it is always very special to me to celebrate my birthday; it was the longest birthday I have ever had in my life. I got a bunch of gifts.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Being a peacemaker is something that God always wants us to be. I always feel like it's God's calling in my life. Serving other people is a great opportunity and it helps to bring happiness, peace and love among the people.

**Faith Journey:** I really enjoy going to church here. It's so big and alive. They have a young adult group and worship night once a month. I found it so peaceful and powerful for my spiritual growth. I have contacts with some of the pastors at the church, and they really help me to shape my spiritual life. I have some good friends at the church as well.

**New Perspectives:** Sometimes I feel like I am so brave, but not always (haha) – and especially when I face a lot of cultural shocks, mental shocks, even though people help me. But I always help myself and love myself as I face those challenges. I think this opportunity improved me a lot. I feel more confident about myself.

**Skill Development:** I learned how to take care of myself when I am alone in a new culture and also learned how to help people in a new culture and community. My English has improved a lot, and I am learning how to behave friendly but professionally at the workplace.

**Future Plans:** I want to do my master's in social work in the U.S. if I get the opportunity and also I want to work and serve my community in Bangladesh.

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**Adonis Kodjihiti** (*Chad*)  
Educational Services Program Assistant,  
Esperanza Center Catholic Charities  
Baltimore, Maryland



**First Impression or Differences:** Baltimore is a major city in Maryland. It is a significant seaport with Fort McHenry, birthplace of the U.S. national anthem; most of the population, 62.3%, is black and 31% is white. The city is built of skyscrapers and amazing museums and infrastructure.

Streets are paved and rebuilt each season while back home in Chad the reality is totally different. Most of the streets are not paved, and we count on our fingertips a minimum number of skyscrapers in the capital N'Djamena. We do not have as many museums or sophisticated agricultural machinery like in the U.S. Culture in Baltimore is different and that's why not everyone you meet in Baltimore greets you hand to hand. In the U.S., you don't have to snap your fingers before speaking. We are so sociable in my country greeting hand to hand and we know our neighbors well, while here we don't even know who our neighbors are. It is a blessing to live in a community house, Reservoir Hill House of Peace (RHHP), where we live with different people who have different cultures. We are more than a family at RHHP, enjoying and sharing a community meal every Monday of the week and organizing stuff for the sake of all.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** When I first landed in the U.S., I looked for dry detergent to wash my clothing using my hands as I'm used to back home in Chad. That was funny because I came to realize that is not the case here. People started laughing at me and I ended up laughing as well; that was the first time I discovered the word laundry. Something that is memorable to me is that speaking somebody's language or learning somebody's culture and respecting it makes unwavering bonds in relationships and binds together differences and flaws to make them unique and perfect. That was something that happened to me. I am flabbergasted that my housemate and I were having misunderstandings but now we have become best friends. I have shown her that I'm a peacemaker and started valuing and speaking her native language. She started learning my language and we learn from each other Christ's love and peacemaking principles. Living in a community house is a significant



way to learn from others' cultures and lives, sharing and enjoying peaceful moments together.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Being a global citizen brought me to learn how stupendous cultures are. I learned that we need each other as one body to collaborate and help. I've understood what it means to talk about humanity and how blessed people are through MCC, reaching out to those in need by sharing God's compassion and love. It is a really good experience to be a part of this and making peace and building good relationships with people at work, my boss and coordinators and volunteer teachers. There's a quote which I really like repeating, "Humble yourself and learn."

**Faith Journey:** I experienced loss of my dear friend during the term and other challenges, but I learned to trust God and his mercy and comfort. I am also thankful for God's people who helped me through those hard times and challenges.

**New Perspectives:** I have learned a lot through the International Volunteer Exchange Program. I have a new perspective on collaborating with friends and family and hosts and about my country. I have a new perspective of seeing things and working them out. From now on, I have a new perspective on perceiving the world and working with humility and peace.

**Skill Development:** I'm proud of my workplace Esperanza Center where I have learned many things about work experience and work proficiency. Getting to know Sandra Hunsicker and Joi Pride was one of the best things that happened to me because they helped with sharpening my current English accent and taught me Spanish. I started with translating flyers and documents in Spanish. Now I'm able to communicate in Spanish and respond to voicemails, and also handle computer tasks perfectly due to their encouragement. I enjoy working with them. I got to know all these things thanks to them. They are doing a great job. It's funny because they were never fed up with answering my questions even though I know I'm asking and bugging them a lot sometimes.

**Future Plans:** The purpose of this journey is to learn and then go back to share what peace is and what makes peace stand out through the word of God. The next step will be probably for me to share and use what I have acquired as a tool of integrating more and more in my community. Sharing knowledge about music at church, helping with teaching my friends back home and teaching English and Spanish at school. I'd like to put into practice everything I've learned here during the program.

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**Andres Ledesma Perea** (*Colombia*)

Legal Intern, La Posada and Restorative Mediation and Facilitation Services Assistant, Center for Community Justice Elkhart, Indiana



**First Impression or Differences:**

The space. Everything looked much bigger, more spacious and I also felt like I was in a U.S. movie in the middle of summer.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:**

The best experience I had was going to a National Basketball Association game. It was an experience of another level; it is something that you can only have in the U.S. and something that I really wanted to do.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** It is a very strong and important constant work, which requires a lot of dedication and is worth it, because I believe that we are actively and directly working to build a better world.

**Faith Journey:** It was a mix of everything. It was difficult because I come from a very special Latin context, where we are more expressive and here in the U.S., they are more reserved. On the other hand, what stands out the most is the level of closeness between the Mennonite community; all their activities are part of the daily life of the community.

**New Perspectives:** It made me highlight much more the value of community life and that expressiveness that characterizes us, but also now I feel that I have more tools to share and help in my local community.

**Skill Development:** I have definitely gained much more experience in my field of action, conflict resolution and restorative justice, which gives me a better overview of the global perspective.

**Future Plans:** I hope to have the opportunity to support more processes in my community and also processes that Mennonite Central Committee has and develops in my country.

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**Iha Missa** (*Indonesia*)

Meadow View Memory Support Intern, Life Enrichment, Pastoral Services, Garden Spot Village  
New Holland, Pennsylvania



**First Impression or Differences:** I came to the U.S. in summertime, and I was impressed by nature and people. Beautiful green trees, houses with a yard full of green grass, large farmland and friendly people and Amish people as well.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:**

People in the U.S. won't offer something a second time. I remember the time I went to dinner with my housemates. They asked me to order a drink, but I refused. I thought that they would ask a second time and that didn't happen.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I am blessed and grateful to have an opportunity to serve others, especially people with dementia. I see how God used their lives to teach me many things and give me good experiences that will never be forgotten.

**Faith Journey:** My work does not just give me an opportunity to learn about culture and education but also gives my spiritual self a chance to grow and that is about how to love others as you love yourself.

**New Perspectives:** I really appreciate how I tried my best and did not give up.

**Skill Development:** Conflict resolution. Growing my skills in this topic was so helpful on how to resolve conflicts.

**Future Plans:** My future plan is continuing my education and to keep doing what I learned from my IVEP experiences.

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**Inkosiinhle Ndlovu-Mathuthu** (*Zimbabwe*)

Yearlong Volunteer, Mennonite Disaster Service  
Lititz, Pennsylvania



**First Impression or Differences:** Food, culture, how people greet, how people are always on time.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** New Year's Eve at Times Square and dancing at the Beth-El Mennonite church in Colorado.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I have learned that people can achieve peace through having a common goal. For example, I serve with MDS, in which we come together to help those in need. Having the same goal makes it easier for people to co-exist, take time to listen and know one another. At the end of the day, we come to a conclusion that with the same vision and the same mind, a future with peace can be achieved if not already begun.

**Faith Journey:** I would say the way of worship and just how the service goes is different. Here it's calmer.

**New Perspectives:** The church feels like having a second family, people who can support and be there for you.

**Skill Development:** I have been particularly pleased with learning to deal with different personalities in the workplace and adjusting to suit the conditions that just arise when working on a particular job. I have learned the importance of proper planning and communication also; these lessons particularly relate to being a leader or a team player.

**Future Plans:** I would like to try to inspire young people starting from my church to stand and start contributing to helping out in their community in whatever way they can to those who need the help.

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**Maswe Nyihongo** (*Tanzania*)

Agriculture Intern, Landis Farm  
Sterling, Illinois



**First Impression or Differences:** I thought about the lifestyle differences, foods and the culture of the host country, of how it might be different compared to mine, and it turned out to be true in some things. Not everything was as different as I had thought.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** For my country's Independence Day, my host mom surprised me with a dessert that was colored in my country's flag colors, but also my church and MCC surprised me with a birthday cake during the mid-year conference in February.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Through engaging with the society, especially young adult Bible study and men's Bible study, I got to meet people who could share the challenges they have gone through, their struggles and how they came out of their distress. This increased my awareness to a new level toward peacemaking, anti-oppression and how to make our society a better place for everybody.

**Faith Journey:** I was used to a worship style which involved dancing and active participation of the audience. Here, I'm in a church which has very few youth, but also the worship service is more like focusing on the word and singing hymns. It took me time to adjust but it became easier to adapt because the church members showed me love and respect in a way that I felt I was part of them.

**New Perspectives:** I have learned to look at things from my perspective but also from other people's perspectives, because at times it is the best way to avoid conflicts and it gives room to learn from others.

**Skill Development:** I learned about communication skills, conflict resolution skills and self-awareness. It is helpful because for my career, I will meet people with different views, ideologies and beliefs. Thus, by developing these skills, I will have done a huge favor to myself.

**Future Plans:** I'm planning to continue working on my project related to guiding the youth in the high schools and secondary schools on agricultural and dairy farming and how these can be done in a better way at their level. And I want to expose them to the challenges and opportunities existing in these sectors, so they could be part of the solutions and take their opportunities.

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**Jack Odhiambo** *(Kenya)*

Yearlong Volunteer, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)  
Lititz, Pennsylvania



**First Impression or Differences:**  
There was a total difference in the way of living and culture, which I had to acclimatize to and learn. The food was different, and I had to get used to it, and get used to using silverware all the time rather than using my hands to eat. I am not used to four different climatic conditions, and I had to adjust to the changes and various activities done during these times.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** Getting to work with volunteers who, when asked if they would come again, said only if I'll still be there to work with them again. It's not quite usual to work alongside and to make fun and joke with older folks of probably 65 years to 89 years back home, but I got that opportunity here, serving together and bonding in the form of jokes and sharing.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Through my service organization, it's quite interesting to see how MDS can bring together people from different diversities to work and serve toward achieving a common goal. This gives everyone an opportunity to learn from one another as

they serve. It is good to serve as a team. Teamwork makes a dream work. Getting to serve others opens your horizon for the future. You get to learn and experience some techniques you didn't know. You make a difference in someone's life.

**Faith Journey:** My service with MDS got me to meet believers from different denominations. I had to learn from them how to do spiritual devotions. I got devotional books and pamphlets that I could use daily to help me grow spiritually.

**New Perspectives:** I have received positive challenges toward service. There are different ways you can serve the community you live in or even ones that you don't know of. Irrespective of your denomination and place of origin, you get to serve one another in one accord.

**Skill Development:** Professionally, I have gained more construction skills. That includes framing, drywall hanging, roofing, siding, etc. I was also able to strengthen myself in basic areas of construction like setting out a house foundation, painting and familiarizing myself with house plans. Self-care: I have managed to grow spiritually and socially. Meeting people and making more friends became something I liked. This made me learn some things I wasn't aware of.

**Future Plans:** The first thing I would love to do is to find a job in a construction company or firm and relay the skills I learned. I want to be a change in the community by coming up with new ideas under construction that can help in some areas experiencing flooding, and some activities to engage the youth in different ways of service.

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**Serim Park** *(Republic of Korea)*

International Fellow, Mennonite Central Committee,  
National Peace & Justice Ministries (NPJM)  
Washington, D.C.



**First Impression or Differences:**  
My first impression of the work placement was that it was very welcoming and warm-hearted.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:**  
There were a lot of memorable experiences, but one of the best memorable experiences was going on a trip to one of the housemates' grandparents' houses. The life in the countryside was different from Washington, D.C. We went riding in my housemate's car to look around a university and to go to Walmart just looking at things. She told me that they go to Walmart every day because there is nothing else to do. Celebrating my housemate's birthday and her grandma's birthday was also a fun and memorable experience.



**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Working in NPJM has definitely broadened my understanding and views of looking at things that are happening around the world. To be honest, when I was back in Korea, I really did not have a chance to look outside of the country at the busy life that was going on around me. From the day I came here, I began to learn and care about things that I haven't before. I found out that there is so much I can do to start the change.

**Faith Journey:** When I was preparing for IVEP, one of the goals I had was to be closer with God. I'm not sure how much closer I got with God than before, but one thing I know for sure is that I have been feeling God's love all along the journey in the U.S. Whenever I felt struggles, I just opened up the Bible and started to read and it brought peace in my heart.

**New Perspectives:** Looking at church, I feel like the church here in U.S. is a lot simpler than the church in Korea, in a good way. I feel like in Korea church has too many outer things happening or focuses too much on how the event looks whereas church here in U.S. seems to be more focused on what is important.

**Skill Development:** I feel like I have learned to be creative. I was a person who likes to do a work that has answers and has a structure. But here in the U.S., I feel like creativity is necessary, people always ask you questions and want to know how you think about a thing. At first, it was really hard to come up with something new. But as time has passed, I tried to think or see things in a creative way even before people asked me to do so. Also, I have learned the skill to reach out to people to organize a newsletter or a meeting.

**Future Plans:** I do not have a specific plan yet, however, I will try to find a job that is related to the international development field or study deeply in international development.

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**Hulda Lily Sharon** *(Indonesia)*

Regenerative Carbon Farming Internship and Field Research Assistant, Jubilee Climate Farm  
Harrisonburg, Virginia



**First Impression or Differences:**  
The summer here wasn't as hot as in Indonesia. I could still feel the cold air at noon, even at night. It's so different in the city where I live. Also, most of the houses have an air conditioner that is also a heater. In my country, we don't need heaters, so we just have air

conditioners. The other thing is the food. Generally, they have a big portion for one person. So when we can't finish eating the food, there's always a box for those who need it.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** When I worked in an elementary school for three months, especially in the winter season, I really enjoyed working with children. I also learned many things from the teachers and, of course, from the students. There was a warm hug from some students that I got every day, and I loved it. On my last day at school, I got a gift from a second-grade student, and there was a note and also artificial flowers, which touched my heart, and it means I can keep and bring those flowers to my country. Then, a few days later, I got a gift from a second-grade teacher, there were some notes and drawings by the students. I'm really grateful for the short experience at school.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** My view as a global citizen regarding serving others and social justice while here is something new for me. For example, apart from working at Jubilee Climate Farm, during winter I also worked at New Community Project-Vine and Fig. They truly instill the values of social justice and care about helping others. They distribute fresh produce from their garden to approximately 300 families. They also provide opportunities and are open to anyone who needs land for gardening. They also provide several houses for homeless people who need a place to stay. It really opened my eyes to how important it is to care for others who really need help.

**Faith Journey:** I have had a few ups and downs since I came here. But above all the struggles, I still put my trust in God that I can face all of the difficulties and challenges here. I was involved with the local church here and joined the kids' Sunday school. I learned lots from them, starting with little things, even though it was just a small group with a short discussion. I used to go to Bible study with my friend every Thursday. She's a student from James Madison University, she invited me to join that Bible study, and it helped my spiritual growth. We also had a discussion in a small group. We shared if we were still struggling with school, family, friends or maybe our spiritual journey as well, and there was a mentor who gave support, and then we prayed together for each other.

**New Perspectives:** When I started this volunteer exchange program, I felt this was more than just going abroad as a volunteer. I learned to open my mind to new things that I didn't know much about before and started to care about those issues, for example about countries who are still struggling with peace, and serving and helping others who don't have a home. It really means a lot to me and I learned a lot about that since I found out about the issues in the U.S. One thing that I hope for from my

country is to start caring about marginalized people and those who need a home to live in.

**Skill Development:** I got many skills physically from my workplace, especially with the shovel and pickaxe. I often used these tools to make new beds, harvest underground crops and also dig ponds. I feel that after three months in the U.S., I began to speak English better. My supervisor and co-workers also taught me little by little about Spanish. It was hard for me at first, but I am trying my best to understand when they have a conversation in Spanish. Sometimes I also help my co-workers speak English, so we're learning together. I hope that after I return to my country, I can still speak English well and get to know more about Spanish. I think it would be useful for my future job if they needed it. I'm also grateful for this wonderful experience and the people around me.

**Future Plans:** I hope that after I return to my country, I can share the knowledge I've gained here and apply it to my community at church, maybe in my future work or wherever I am placed. I also want to motivate other young people to be able to dream big and not be afraid to try new things and get out from their comfort zone. I also have a dream for the future that I can have a farm that can help people who need fresh food and produce, as my workplace does. The other thing that I hope to do is to collaborate with or serve in an NGO in Indonesia, which still relates to farming and education for children and students about growing local and fresh food.

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**Dorcus Sibanda** (*Zimbabwe*)

Program and Administrative Assistant,  
The Conflict Center  
Denver, Colorado



**First Impression or Differences:**  
Notable differences were about individualism in the U.S. community. Everyone is about their own lives, which made it difficult to know others aside from hosts.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:**  
One funny experience was when

I took a train going in the opposite direction of home. I had gone to a school with my supervisor for a program, and the station I was leaving from was not my usual one, so I boarded a train going in the wrong direction. It took me about three hours to go home that day.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I have learned to be receptive to people of cultures and backgrounds different than mine, as this makes it easier to achieve peace by understanding each other. I have also learned

from a western perspective what social justice, power and privilege, and anti-oppression entail, the different dynamics that come with these concepts and how they affect people of different walks of life. Being involved in works that address these concerns has opened a whole new view of what serving others is about.

**Faith Journey:** I struggled a bit with finding a church that I felt comfortable in, but I finally found it. In all this time I have constantly seen God come through for me in different situations. It became important to know that I can truly rely on God for anything, and he always hears my prayers and struggles.

**New Perspectives:** 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. Once I return to my home country, I will be doing some community re-entry because I realize there are things and mannerisms from here that have become part of my daily routine but are not normal or common back home. My church and the churches here are similar yet still different. I think it will be good to be home once again.

**Skill Development:** Thanks to my assignment placement, I have gained skills in working with different administrative systems, solidified the importance of a good schedule and learned to deliver results even while working independently. I have also had the privilege of working in cases of conflict and participated in the conflict resolution process of these cases, most of which have been successful. It has opened me up to know which path I want to take with my career with regard to conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

**Future Plans:** I plan on furthering my studies in peacebuilding, inspired by my assignment, and seeing if I can be part of any such missions in my community where I can contribute what I learned in the U.S.

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**W. Anne Sobdjolbo** (*Chad*)

Housing Assistant, Project PLASE  
Baltimore, Maryland



**First Impression or Differences:**  
The U.S. is different than Chad in many ways. Culture, food, weather, beauty of nature and the way of thinking are all examples of how my life changed this year. I experience freedom and privilege that I never experienced in Chad.

American people are very open to the public. The U.S. is a country made up of immigrants, so I met many people of different races, and I got to

live in the community house with people from different countries as well. Before I came here, I was not used to random strangers asking how my day was. I do like that about the people here, even though sometimes I find myself wanting to speak in French to someone.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** The most memorable experience was during the winter with the cold. I learned every day how to dress for winter. When I want to go out, I feel like I've dressed well against the cold but when I get outside, I'm very cold and sometimes I go back to the house to get another jacket or coat. However, when I'm in the car, I always ask the driver to turn on the seat heating. That memorable experience I will always remember and laugh at.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** During this year I have been doing social services, which has changed my life to work toward helping people and causes I am passionate for. My dream is to help people to not suffer, particularly people lacking ample shelter and employment. I was surprised to see a high number of homeless people in the U.S.

**Faith Journey:** Going to many churches and speaking about Chad and my experience as a Christian Chadian has made me grow spiritually. Reading the Bible every day and listening to gospel music made me grow spiritually as well. It is something that I couldn't do before but since here, this experience led me to read the Bible every day, to be in contact with God and to feel his presence. In this journey God helped me overcome many things.

**New Perspectives:** My main view of change has been about freedom. In the U.S., I have experienced freedom and human rights. My own home lacks these things. I have gotten used to helping people as a social worker and making an impact in this community; now it is my turn to bring these things I found lacking in my home country.

**Skill Development:** Filing documents, printing landlord letters, doing inspections, speaking to clients and public speaking have been the skills I have worked on this year. Filing documents has been a way I got better at my filing skills, which will help me in the future. I have realized that my words flow better in English. When I first arrived, speaking English with people was a challenge. Therefore, I have strengthened my English to a form where I can call clients to ask their need with no problem. I also developed the ability to relate with empathy and compassion to diverse populations and to be flexible and work in an open setting.

**Future Plans:** My plan will be to take steps forward to make a change in my country, continuing to serve in society as a social worker. However, I will share what I learned and my already existing skills and experience

with my community and church to collaborate in bringing impactful changes and achievements. I hope that experience will be incredible. I will continue to work in peace and let the world know that no matter where you come from, you are capable of greatness.

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**Daisy Toews Harder** *(Paraguay)*

Manager Assistant, Hartville Thrift Shoppe  
Hartville, Ohio



**First Impression or Differences:**

I'm impressed by how clean the streets are. There is no trash on the sidewalks, which made me so happy. In Paraguay it's the opposite. Another thing that I noticed when I got here is that not a lot of people walk. It seems like everyone has a car or even two. In

my country you always see children walking or biking to school. And a lot of adults walk or bike to work as well. The food was very good, but very sweet. I'm used to eating salty food, but here they put sugar on everything!

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** One night I went for a dinner with some friends. It was a sushi restaurant, and it was my first time having sushi. We got our food and started eating. I was wondering why my friends didn't eat the guacamole that was served in each plate, I guessed they didn't like it. But I love guacamole, so I put it on my sushi, and took a good bite. In that very same second, I realized that it was something else, because guacamole never makes me cry! That day I learned what wasabi tastes like, and if you don't know what it is, let me tell you, it's the strongest spice I ever had in my life. It was painful to swallow it down, but at the same time it was so funny, because I didn't expect that flavor at all! I'll always remember that not every green sauce is guacamole!

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Seeing so much violence and injustice in this world always made me think that it's impossible for me to do something about it. But as I learned more about peacemaking and restorative justice, I realized that I don't need to have a lot of money or power to make a change. I have talents, I have skills and I have privileges to use. Just by treating people differently, listening or giving them my time, I can make a huge impact in individual lives and show other people how they can be peacemakers as well.

**Faith Journey:** I went with my host family to a church every Sunday. It was a small one, and there were no people my age. I mentioned at my workplace that I was interested in joining a Bible study group, but I didn't know where to go, because there were so many different



churches. Immediately some of my coworkers gave me contact information for their church. So, I got to go to different young adult programs. I got to a Bible study group where I felt very welcomed, I had fun talking to the people, and also learned a lot about the Bible. I decided to go there every week. I made very good friends there, and I realized how important it is to notice and care about the new people in the church. I will definitely keep that in mind when I go back to Paraguay. I also learned that the church is a huge support for difficult moments. And, when I'm surrounded by other believers, it's helpful in standing firm in the faith.

**New Perspectives:** Living abroad was so helpful to get to know and appreciate my country better. A lot of beautiful details came to my mind every day, that I just had taken for granted. It was a good time for personal growth. I learned to be open-minded and ready for changes. I had to eat different foods and at different times than I was used to. I was living with a family completely different from mine. I had to adjust to the cold weather. I had to settle in in a community where everything was new. And it was a process of learning and changing, but it was beautiful. I learned that churches can be so different, but still worship the same God. And I learned that every culture has something special that makes it unique!

**Skill Development:** By working at Hartville Thrift Shoppe, I learned a lot about business and store management. I worked with staff, volunteers, customers and donors. It was very interesting. I also got new leadership and social skills. I always liked to learn about different cultures, and this year I got to know so many. I was able to improve the different languages I knew already and learn words in some new ones.

**Future Plans:** Once I return home, I want to look for a new job and start working again. In my church, I will step back into the youth staff and leading a small group Bible study. I will probably share my story and experiences with other people and encourage them to go out of their comfort zones. I'll bring in ideas or suggestions of different things that I have learned here and see how we can apply them in our lives.

## **Adventure**

Everything was new for me here in the U.S. Even the food was an adventure to live.

(Nely Cotuc Perez, Guatemala to U.S.)

## **Amazing**

I have experienced new things and self-growth.

(Innocent Chuma, Zambia to U.S.)

## **Amazing**

MCC is the best place to be. This year was extraordinary for me – to participate in this adventure with purpose, to learn together and to serve in the name of Christ.

(W. Anne Sobdjolbo, Chad to U.S.)

## **Blessed**

I got to see and learn a lot of new things here in the U.S. that I was never able to do in my country.

I have gotten some good friends, and I will always be grateful to God for these precious gifts.

(Ritu Kapali, Bangladesh to U.S.)

## **Explorative**

I had many experiences of exploration in culture, work, surroundings, family, church and friends.

Whether I planned to or not, I ended up exploring different aspects of life.

(Dorcus Sibanda, Zimbabwe to U.S.)

## **Exploring**

It is exploring because it is more of learning, unlearning and re-learning of matters.

(Maswe Nyihongo, Tanzania to U.S.)

## **Faith**

Faith is believing in what God has said, but saying it and doing it are very different.

He is teaching me to trust Him.

(Ivan Misael Barron Kipfer, Bolivia to U.S.)

## **Freedom**

I've always been living under rules and for everything I want to do or everywhere I want to go, permission is needed. I'm glad I could have a break and live a life I once could only imagine.

(Sreynith Hong, Cambodia to U.S.)

## **Grace**

Only by God's grace am I here today with all the blessings that I've received. I was given the opportunity and sent by my church to go to the U.S., to learn and have new experiences regarding agriculture here, to meet and get to know friends from around the world as well as new cultures in places I've never imagined before. All of these are only by God's grace.

(Hulda Lily Sharon, Indonesia to U.S.)

## **Grateful**

This year is like my dream has come true because for a very long time I have been looking for an opportunity like this. I am grateful to God.

(Zozahbe Guy Kagonbe, Chad to U.S.)

## **Growth**

Living in a community house and working in River City helped me grow personally, professionally and spiritually. I connected with myself, with God and with his creation in a way I had not experienced before.

(Elias Algarin Escalante, Colombia to U.S.)

## **Growth**

This year has been a time of learning, connecting with nature and deepening my faith.

(Fionah Kansime, Uganda to U.S.)

## **Growth**

Expansion of vision – of the world and of my horizon.

(Andres Ledesma Perea, Colombia to U.S.)

## **Humble**

I've come to realize that I can't do anything, even simple things, alone. I need to rely on God and trust God.

(Serim Park, Republic of Korea to U.S.)

## **Incredible**

I feel like a person with more experience and more life. I realized that I am stronger than I think and that His grace accompanies me every day of my life.

(Maria Isabel Fuentes Fuentes, Guatemala to U.S.)



### **Inspirational**

I'm motivated especially in my career journey and have learned to overcome challenges, resulting in positive personal growth.

(Zilpa Charles, Kenya to U.S.)

### **Never Give Up**

God's love is unlimited no matter what happens, so never give up and keep trying.

(Iha Missa, Indonesia to U.S.)

### **OK**

Been fairly OK.

(Inkosiinhle Ndlovu-Mathuthu, Zimbabwe to U.S.)

### **Opportunities**

It might be something regular, something surprising or a dream you thought would never come true. But there is an opportunity for something amazing every day!

(Daisy Toews Harder, Paraguay to U.S.)

### **Outstanding**

I got to learn a lot from different people in different areas of life.

(Jack Odhiambo, Kenya to U.S.)

### **Perseverance**

I identify myself as a persevering person. I have persevered to the end, even though it was difficult. God always gave me strength and sustained me to go ahead, to be firm and to achieve it.

(Gabriela Colman Rios, Paraguay to U.S.)

### **Perseverance**

It's all about support during hard times and considering challenges as part of the journey. Perseverance because the more you persevere the more you learn; the more you endure the better you understand that it's going to be OK.

(Adonis Kodjihiti, Chad to U.S.)



Adonis Kodjihiti (Chad) and W. Anne Sobdjolbo (Chad) gather with their housemates and friends at Reservoir Hill House of Peace in Baltimore, Maryland.



Andres Ledesma Perea (Colombia), far right, joins his host family for a special Christmas picture in Goshen, Indiana. With him are, from left, Caleb, Anna, Sophie and Brian Yoder Schlabach.



Daisy Toews Harder (Paraguay) and Gabriela Colman Rios (Paraguay) celebrate New Year 2024 in Times Square, New York City.



East Coast IVEPers celebrate Christmas during a regional winter retreat in Telford, Pennsylvania.



Dorcus Sibanda (Zimbabwe) checks in guests at Skills Auction, a fundraising event for The Conflict Center in Denver, Colorado.



Elias Algarin Escalante (Colombia) enjoys a burger and fries with his host Dave Larson in Chicago, Illinois.





Fionah Kansime (Uganda) tends to the onion harvest at her workplace Hungry World Farm in Tiskilwa, Illinois.



Great Lakes IVEP members gather together for their first regional retreat in Goshen, Indiana.



IVEP members show off their home country flags during the international festival at the mid-year conference at Beth-El Mennonite Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado.



IVEP members visit Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colorado, during mid-year conference.



IVEP members dress up for the international festival at the mid-year conference at Beth-El Mennonite Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado.



IVEP members play broomball during the mid-year conference at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp, Divide, Colorado.





Iha Missa (Indonesia) performs an Oko Mama dance during the Meadow View Christmas program where she works at Garden Spot Village in New Holland, Pennsylvania.



Inkosiinhle Ndlovu-Mathuthu (Zimbabwe), from left, finishes siding a house with other Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers in Eastern Kentucky including Angela and Daryl Stauffer, Chris Rhodes and Carl Ranck.



IVEPers enjoy the snowy outdoors together at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp in Divide, Colorado, where the mid-year conference was held part of the time.



Jack Odhiambo (Kenya) works to apply stirrups to the rebar for the footers on a new house in Jennings, Louisiana, during his assignment with Mennonite Disaster Service.



Maria Isabel Fuentes Fuentes (Guatemala), wearing a teal shirt and a hat, participates in the Around the World with Highlands Festival through her work at World Relief in Sacramento, California.



Maswe Nyihongo (Tanzania), Zilpa Charles (Kenya) and Jack Odhiambo (Kenya) watch the sunset at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp in Divide, Colorado.





Ivan Misael Barron Kipfer (Bolivia) gives intravenous fluids to a heifer cow who was very ill at Steffen Farms in Apple Creek, Ohio.



Central States and West Coast IVEPERS and regional coordinators and others gather for a retreat in Pasadena, California.



Nely Cotuc Perez (Guatemala), from left, and her housemates Deborah Yoder, Ally Weaver, Hannah Nuest and Magdalena Wenger visit El Jefe Cat Café in Tucson, Arizona.



Serim Park (Republic of Korea), right, and housemates in Washington, D.C., do a Lord of the Rings marathon. With her are, from left, Lou Broszat, Lisa Lauterbach and Cornelius Raff.



Hulda Lily Sharon (Indonesia) represents Jubilee Climate Farm as she teaches students at Smithland Elementary School in Harrisonburg, Virginia, about the importance of local foods and how delicious they can be.



IVEPERS hold their home countries' flags during the international festival at the mid-year conference at Beth-El Mennonite Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado.



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