

# 2023-2024 Yearbook



**•IVEP**  
International Volunteer Exchange Program

**•SALT•**  
Serving And Learning Together

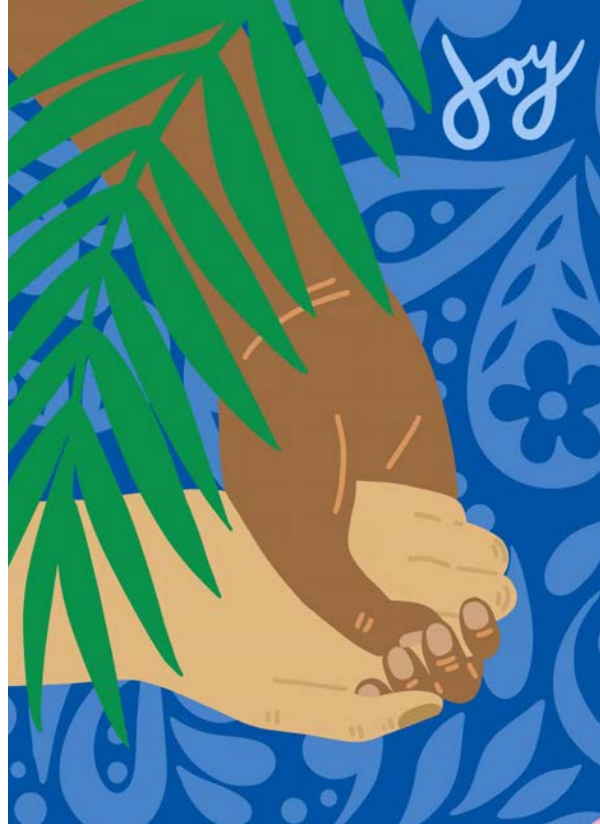
**•YAMEN!**  
Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network

**“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



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



# SALT participants



SALT orientation in Akron, Pennsylvania, U.S.

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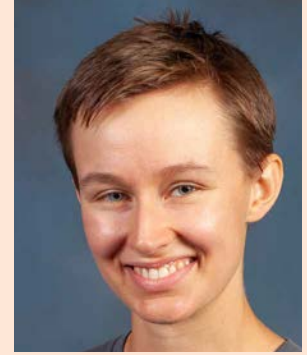
**Kaitlyn Bell**



**Adrian David Berrío  
Klassen**



**Elizabeth Breckbill**



**Naomi Derksen**



**Beth Heppner**



**Lily Kennedy**



**Tamar Klassen**



**Keyan Krabill**



**Ernest Lipscomb**



**Lisa Nalliah**



**Carrie Noort**



**Amelia Warkentin**



**Elim Welty**

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**Kaitlyn Bell** (U.S.)

Research and Advocacy Assistant, Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem (CCPRJ)  
East Jerusalem, Palestine



**First Impression or Differences:**

I've been struck by the sense of community that is the base of every aspect of life here. There's an inherent warmth and flexibility that's both refreshing and inspiring. Witnessing the genuine care and support people offer one another, especially in these times, has been

incredibly touching and helped me understand the power of love and community.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** Coming back to Palestine and going to the Christmas Mass in Bethlehem.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** The practice of humility in these spaces is essential, and our presence here is temporary unlike our partners, so we need to ensure they are leading the way in shaping their futures.

**Faith Journey:** Being faced with massacres and genocide has made me understand that evil is part of humanity, but also that those who commit these crimes are often normal people that are either in a system or being oppressed by one. Remembering that, redemption and forgiveness have been on my mind often. A new exposure to liberation theology has helped me think about how we can apply Jesus' teachings to places that seem void of God or hope.

**New Perspectives:** Many people in my country have no idea what is happening here. The power that my country has over the situation, combined with that lack of knowledge, is terrifying. Noting that it is probably the same in the rest of the world has deepened my understanding of the dangers of U.S.-centered foreign policy.

**Skill Development:** I have learned how to work with a truly local partnership. My previous experience here helped and has allowed me to act as a bit of a cultural and professional translator of words and advocacy.

**Future Plans:** I hope to return to school someday to build upon the knowledge and skills I've acquired here, with the aim of making a meaningful impact in my community and beyond. A key focus will be on refining my understanding of monitoring and tracking human rights violations, utilizing methods such as policy analysis and mapping. By gaining expertise in these areas, I hope to contribute to informing policymakers and supporting initiatives aimed at safeguarding the rights of Palestinians and others.

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**Adrian David Berrío Klassen**

(Canada/Colombia)  
Communications Assistant and English Teacher, New Dawn Association of Santiago Atitlán (ANADESA)  
Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala



**First Impression or Differences:**

Tortillas with every meal, traditional Mayan clothing, volcanoes, night life, street dogs, birds, lake, humble and warm homes, honest working people.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** On my nocturnal trip to Mexico, I was

so asleep when getting off the bus that I forgot to take out my suitcase. It can now be said that my suitcase has gone more places than I have in Guatemala.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Being a cosmopolitan involves embracing diversity holistically in the manner of a systemic relationship between distinct beings of one same general group. This is what I'm reminded of when witnessing ANADESA's women advocate for their social justice in sexist and colonialist environments, demarginalizing themselves to work for the greater good of the community, and Mayans' symbiotic relationship with nature. Peace means living in harmony with the other (be it a person or a rock), engaging nonviolently in conflicts of diversity and as a means for personal and collective growth.

**Faith Journey:** It has been difficult to reconcile my Christianity with my anti-colonialist views. This struggle has helped me separate Jesus' life and teachings from the way his narrative was and is adulterated as a means for power and manipulation. I now experience God through more than just European culture and its Christian doctrines, evidencing Jesus' way in Mayan culture and its religious doctrines. A symbol of this is the "Rilaaj Maam" (Great Grandfather), a wooden man created by the "Nawales" that gives favors to people in return for an offering. It has become the synthesis of a clash between two cultures, the Mayan and the European, combining religious aspects from both.

**New Perspectives:** Living for consciousness instead of living for realities is the principle of an authentic life. This perspective unifies the apparent other with the apparent self, empowering what it means to be a cosmopolitan and embracing God as inherent to the whole. It allows for a life of luxury and a life of austerity to be of equal value.

**Skill Development:** Communicating, introspecting, decision-making, washing clothes, taking public transport, accompanying, managing technological

systems, promoting ideas, educating, thinking. The development of these skills has made teaching and writing a possible career mode.

**Future Plans:** Re-connect with my family and friends in Colombia and Canada and go to university to study philosophy. This year-long experience in rural Guatemala has inspired Mayan virtues of honesty, modesty and temperance within me, which I hope to reflect through example in my community and church down the line.

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**Elizabeth Breckbill** (U.S.)

Peace Education Assistant, Education for Peace (Edupaz)  
Cali, Colombia



**First Impression or Differences:**

My first impression of Colombia was that it was much more similar to the U.S. than I was expecting. I feel that based on how media portrays other countries and based on previous cross-cultural experiences I've had, I thought Colombia would feel a lot more

foreign. However, life was very similar in many ways. I was pleasantly surprised by how friendly and warm the people in Cali are. The culture at my church, in my workplace and in general, was very comfortable as well.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** One funny experience during my time in Cali was becoming friends with a random older man who spent a lot of time at the bakery where I waited to catch the bus after work each day. After I had been in Cali for about six months, he began to chat with me asking where I was from and what I was doing in Colombia. He introduced himself to me and told me a little about his life in Colombia. Nearly every day he would shake my hand and tell me, "God bless you," and if the bus was coming while I was still on my way to the bus stop, he would tell the bus to wait for me so that I could get on in time. He was very friendly, and it always made me smile when I saw him.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** One thing I have learned while working for an organization that provides peace education and peace work is that change is slow. Patience and constant presence within the community in Cali is what has allowed Edupaz to be so successful and stick around for as long as they have. Also, a big part of change and peacemaking is just showing up and being both available and willing to work alongside people. It does not require a grand plan or strict guidelines — simply having a vision for the future and being willing to work in partnership with communities will often result in progress.

**Faith Journey:** One new insight about my faith is that religion is so heavily impacted by culture. I attended a Mennonite Brethren church in Cali and while it is still under the umbrella of Anabaptism, services and relationships within the church looked very different than what I was used to in the U.S. At times the music and structure felt unfulfilling to me, but there were also many things to appreciate and enjoy, such as receiving a kiss on the cheek from nearly every person at the church most Sundays. I think that it was a good reminder to me that culture usually plays a bigger role in developing a worldview, understanding and actions than religion does.

**New Perspectives:** I was very comfortable and self-assured before SALT. While I do not believe that either of those things is bad, SALT has allowed me to take a step back and be humbled. There have been so many instances where I am not the most capable person for a specific job or task, or where my lack of knowledge of language and culture has hindered my ability to step in and help. During these instances I need to be willing to accept where I'm at, continue to support in ways that I can, and at the end of the day, still hold true that my value is greater than the things I am able to accomplish.

**Skill Development:** My Spanish language skills have greatly developed during my time in SALT, along with my ability to understand and relate to another region of the world. Through my SALT experience I have been able to work with people from various countries in Latin America who have also had various experiences living abroad. It has been so fulfilling to have conversations with people from different backgrounds and walks of life and to learn about how they perceive and interact with the world around them. Nearly all my interactions during SALT have been in Spanish, and while my Spanish is still far from perfect, I now feel completely capable and able to function within a different language.

**Future Plans:** I hope to use the Spanish skills I have gained in Colombia in my next job. Although I do not believe I will directly use them, I have gained skills in conflict management and peacebuilding. I now have an expanded perspective of the world which is always valuable and applicable to any potential career or position. While I do not think I will continue in work that is directly related to my SALT placement, I will be able to integrate my new understandings and perspectives into whatever next job I have.



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**Naomi Derksen** (*Canada*)  
Community Development Assistant,  
Olepolos Mennonite Church  
Olepolos, Kenya



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression of the Maasai culture was that the people are very proud of the things that make them uniquely Maasai (language, dance, art, clothing, tradition). The people of this community are also eager to share this culture with visitors such as myself and get excited when they see me learning. It is this eagerness that makes this community very warm and welcoming.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** During one Sunday service, Karen Saenger Echeverria (YAMEN participant from Paraguay) and I were called to the front of the church. However, because of the language barrier, we did not understand what was happening. Then Maasai music started playing and the song leaders came down beside us and started dancing. It was then we realized we were expected to dance with them. It was our first time Maasai dancing and while I can't remember very well, I don't think we were that good. Fortunately, this was the start of many Maasai dance presentations and we quickly improved.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Peace is a long road, but it is the small incremental instances that are the most important: taking chai with your neighbor, helping a friend to carry maize to town, rolling chapati together, teaching one another to milk cows, or sharing seed to be planted in the garden. These are the things that are most important.

**Faith Journey:** Discovering where you can offer your gifts takes time. Sometimes it is OK to simply offer your presence.

**New Perspectives:** On the perspective of community engagement, I have learned that to build community, you need to be tolerant and resilient. You cannot be quick to judge. If you want community you may have to be intentional about building it yourself, but to do this you have to meet people where they are.

**Skill Development:** I have become very proficient at milking cows.

**Future Plans:** I plan to share with my community in my home country the things I have learned and experienced.

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**Beth Heppner** (*Canada*)  
Teacher, Operation Hope Foundation  
Prey Veng, Cambodia



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression was that it's very humid and driving is chaotic. The main difference I see is that the culture is more community-oriented, therefore, the organization of day-to-day life is different. Cambodia is not as time sensitive, and efficiency is not top priority as in Canada. This leaves lots of room for relationship building which I think is something we in Canada can learn.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** The first and, so far, only time I got called Oun (word used to refer to someone younger than you). I went to my normal breakfast place, and I must have not been paying much attention, so the person serving said, "Oun," to get my attention. This made me feel like I was a part of the culture instead of just visiting it.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** While I have known that people from the West, especially white people, speak unreservedly more than other groups, I didn't realize just how much, and how that would affect my day-to-day life. I must be careful what I say as people in this context will almost always agree with me. My words have so much more power in different contexts than I thought they would.

**Faith Journey:** Because Christianity is regrowing in Cambodia, it's amazing to see how people view God and life. This also trickles into worship songs and devotionals. It's amazing to see so many young people accepting Jesus and how dedicated they are to him. My main struggle is that I don't understand what is being said at church as I don't have that much skill in the Khmer language.

**New Perspectives:** I have learned just how important deep relationships are. I find myself lonely, more often than not, because it's hard to build strong relationships due to cultural expectations and language barriers. I agree with something multiple people have said in that it is nice to be "seen," that is, when someone knows you at a deeper level and not just by what you do and say.

**Skill Development:** I have learned how to connect with teens. As someone who has mostly connected with children in the past, this is exciting for me. My passion is helping young people navigate through life and now I have some skills and, most importantly, more confidence to connect with teens.



**Future Plans:** I am currently looking for an opportunity to serve in Republic of Korea (South Korea) as that is where I feel like God is leading me. So far, many doors have closed but I am trusting God's plan and timing. Once I get back to my church in Canada, I plan to jump right back into volunteering as I miss the people I served and served with.

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**Lily Kennedy** (U.S.)

Administrative and Advocacy Assistant, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center  
East Jerusalem, Palestine



**First Impression or Differences:** Jerusalem is a diverse but politically and geographically segregated city where history and politics cover every square inch of land. Religious, family and political identities, including citizenship status, determine every aspect of people's lives.

The biggest difference from the U.S. is being constantly aware of these many varying identities and how they impact people's livelihoods, the infrastructures of their neighborhoods, human rights and mobility.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** Worshipping for a month at an entirely Arabic-speaking Anglican church in Amman where I also taught English and music to the kids in the church. After a week of lessons, games and often failing to navigate the language barrier, it was beautiful to watch my students line up to come forward for the Eucharist every Sunday. I will always remember this.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Working for "peace" and "justice" sounds nice in theory. The reality of doing so means resisting a status quo that proclaims violence and abuse of power. I've learned that this resistance requires hard work and strategy to live out in practice. There are many organizations, movements and advocacy groups that are doing this important work.

**Faith Journey:** I am relying on Christ's promise of justice and redemption in new ways. When the death and devastation in Gaza seems unending, and the ripple effects of this are felt throughout the rest of Palestine, this hope has never been so difficult to maintain, yet it is essential. I have had the opportunity to worship and serve in several churches, both Arabic- and English-speaking, and have been exposed to Christian faith traditions very different from those I was raised in.

**New Perspectives:** As a U.S. citizen, I have learned many new things about the complex role the U.S. has played in the Middle East throughout history. In every way, this experience has stretched my view and perspective of the world and of myself. My faith, political opinions and my imagination for the future were all much smaller before this experience. Being surrounded by conversations about Palestinian Indigeneity has also led me to a deeper realization that the land I am from also has an oppressed Indigenous population, and that I am likely descended from settlers.

**Skill Development:** In general, my resiliency and flexibility have been challenged by the change and immense difficulty brought on since Oct. 7. I have also learned how an organization and its many projects function on the grassroots level, which will equip me with experience and perspective to bring to my next roles.

**Future Plans:** I want to continue to be involved in advocacy, education and justice work upon my return home. I want to share what my experience of living in Palestine was like to show my communities, especially Christian ones, the reality of what is happening on the ground. I want to bring and proclaim perspectives from liberation theology to a Christian culture that largely emphasizes a definition of salvation that is individualist and disembodied, rather than communal and related to political and real-life circumstances.

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**Tamar Klassen** (Canada)

Child Care Worker, Talita Cumi Childrens Home  
Santa Cruz, Bolivia



**First Impression or Differences:** My first impression of the city was that it wasn't as different as I thought it would be. The drive from the airport looks somewhat similar to Winnipeg, and there are even tractor dealerships! The biggest visual difference is that there are very few foreigners; almost everyone you see is Bolivian. Of course, looks aren't everything. After being here for a few weeks I learned that almost everything is different. The food, the weather, the language, how you greet friends, especially how you greet strangers, how you wash dishes, and wearing shoes all the time.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** My host mom has tried to break my barefoot habit but has yet to succeed.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I have learned that the biggest differences are language and climate. We eat different food, live in different houses and perform daily

tasks in our own ways; however, the basic behaviors and needs are the same. I have worked with children in both Canada and Bolivia, and really, they are the same. They want to love and be loved, which, in reality, is what all people want. Kids just show it better. Even the ways kids show love are the same. Boys will make fun of you for messing up words and find joy in scaring you. The girls will give you all the sass, but actually enjoy spending time with you, sitting around talking, listening and singing along to the music. It doesn't really matter what you are doing together, only that you are together.

**Faith Journey:** What I learned in this time of everything being different is that God stays the same. When everything was new, different and uncomfortable, I could lean on Him, because He is the same and always will be.

**New Perspectives:** I have realized I didn't know how much I didn't know. And now that I know how much I didn't know, I can imagine how much more I can learn. I didn't know a lot of things about different countries. After meeting people from around the world and living here in Bolivia, my eyes have been opened. I didn't know how people in other countries viewed my country.

**Skill Development:** I had been thinking of starting to work in the education system before I came on this adventure, and my work in the children's home has affirmed that for me. If I can assist the children in a language that I am only learning, it should be easier in my first language. I am excited to see where God leads me next in this field.

**Future Plans:** Upon my return to Canada, I hope to study and begin working as an educational assistant.

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**Keyan Krabill** (U.S.)

Education Assistant, La Puerta de Esperanza  
Guatemala City, Guatemala



**First Impression or Differences:**

I've noticed lots of differences in cultures (and otherwise) between my host and home countries. Just a few of these include sense of community/family, driving etiquette, party/gathering culture, hygiene standards, safety in the streets, warmth toward foreigners,

diet, greetings, presence of Christianity, public school standards.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** The most memorable experience was one Saturday in which I was sent by my organization to participate in four graduations throughout the day for a local English learning school.

I believe the main reason I was there was to pose in pictures with those graduating. It was an undeniably weird and unique experience, in which I learned that graduations could look very different from culture to culture. Coupled with this surreal feeling was the way the students treated me, almost like an idol, just because I was white and someone who could speak fluent English. It showed me a lot about how Guatemalans view the U.S. It made me think about my place in this scenario and how to use my privilege in a way that accompanies people.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** As the months pass here, I have a growing sense of being part of a larger team with a common goal; it's an amazing feeling. Seeing the posts of my companions from orientation on social media, all over the world, makes me appreciate MCC for providing me with a vessel to serve with and connect to these people. I think I've really had to internalize the concept of "accompaniment" that MCC talks about so often. Being a white male volunteer in Guatemala is a scenario with a lot of room to harm the people I'm trying to help, or at the very least, offend them. I feel I'm learning every day what my place is here and how best I can respect and walk with others instead of inadvertently insulting them, or worse. I certainly still have a long way to go.

**Faith Journey:** My relationship with God has certainly been developing. I've struggled to connect with the churches my host family takes me to, as they are the opposite in almost every way to the church I attend back home. Relatively connected to this is the fact that I've felt my relationship to God becoming more individual. More and more I've found myself able to connect with God when I'm completely alone, as opposed to in a group of people.

**New Perspectives:** My view of myself has changed in the sense that I feel this experience has humbled me. At work, I am one of the youngest individuals as well as the only one who hasn't lived their whole life in this culture. This forces me to take a back seat in planning and overall presence within the team. I think this has been really good for me because it's made me recognize that my needs are so much less pressing and dire than those we are working with. This has helped me be more empathetic in general.

Another line of thought I've consistently reflected on is how quickly many from the U.S. judge the plights of others outside of the country and discredit what they go through. Most prominent and frustrating is the idea that poor people are poor because they are lazy. Being here has shown me that quite the opposite is true. Some of the poorest people I've met here are also the most hardworking. More generally, I've seen how all the issues, such as poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, family dysfunction, discrimination, corruption, exploitation,

etc., are connected to each other. While we are so quick to judge, the hardships people are going through are almost always much more complex and nuanced than we give them credit for.

**Skill Development:** More than anything, I've learned how to adapt to living in a new culture, blending into the background, and not taking up too much space as I learn the norms. I've learned holistic methods for taking care of different ages of kids; specifically, I've been forced to learn the ins and outs of being responsible for a group of kids on my own. Personally, I've learned the importance of alone time and recharging.

**Future Plans:** When I return home, I plan to work and live with my parents until I decide what I want to do next. I know that I would like to do more volunteer service, preferably with MCC, and working with kids. I would like to keep working with Spanish, but where I go to serve really doesn't matter to me. My time here has been unforgettable and makes me crave similar experiences that afford me more opportunities to grow and learn and serve.

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**Ernest Lipscomb** (U.S.)  
Project Assistant, San Jose Parish Social Center  
Santa Cruz, Bolivia



**First Impression or Differences:** It's a lot hotter here! When I left the U.S. in August, things were just starting to cool down, but here in the Southern Hemisphere, it was just starting to get really hot. Before I came, I knew that it would be a big transition to communicate only in Spanish, but it was still a big shock. It took me a long time to gain the confidence to speak to native Spanish speakers.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** Counting down to the new year in the central plaza of Santa Cruz was incredible. The place was packed, and everyone was setting off fireworks. The air was full of smoke, and it was so loud you couldn't hear yourself think. It was nothing like anything I'd ever done before.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** My understanding of global citizenship has deepened significantly. Living in a place where I don't speak the language and don't know the culture has really changed how I think about the world.

**Faith Journey:** My host family here is Catholic, so I've learned a lot about how different church traditions can be. One challenge has been that all churches here play

their music way louder than I've ever experienced in any church in the U.S. It's been an interesting adjustment to have to make.

**New Perspectives:** The biggest new perspective that I have gained is that of a language learner. I now have an intimate understanding of what it is like to be in a place where I can't understand most of what people are saying. I am more aware of what is actually helpful and useful to someone who is just learning a language.

**Skill Development:** I've learned a lot of Spanish, but I can also see how far I still have to go. I've also gotten a lot better at taking care of myself.

**Future Plans:** When I return home, I will be attending college. I think that this experience of going to a new place and living in a different way will prepare me very well for that transition. I'm also looking forward to using my new language skills with Spanish speakers I know at home.

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**Lisa Nalliah** (U.S.)  
Teacher and Community Worker, Mennonite English  
Senior Secondary School  
Dhamtari, India



**First Impression or Differences:** India is very different from the U.S., particularly in my rural host community. Most people eat rice with their hands, women wear saris or kurtas, cars drive on the left side of the road, and aspects of the dominant religion, Hinduism, are visible everywhere. Although the lifestyles appear vastly different, I quickly realized that various ways of living have systems that work. For example, Indians eat rice with their hands, and there's normally a sink for handwashing in the dining area. In the U.S., there's not normally a basin in the dining area, but we mostly eat with silverware.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** It was my second week in India during our orientation in Kolkata. I went to a famous leather goods store in the New Market area with Luyando Munangobe, a YAMENER from Zambia, and Sushant Nand, our MCC connecting peoples coordinator. It was an ordinary Wednesday at 6 p.m., but the store crowd was comparable to Black Friday events in the U.S. As we were walking toward the men's shoe display, I thought I saw a box fall from the ceiling. I looked up, and there was a man peering through a square hole in the ceiling. I understood more of the shoe-passing process when Luyando showed a worker the model of the shoe he wanted to try from the display shelf. That worker



shouted the size and model to a second worker, who was standing under the hole in the ceiling. The second worker passed the message on to a worker on the upper level, who threw the shoebox down. The second worker then threw the shoebox on to the worker by us. Several assembly lines of workers were tossing shoes through the most crowded store I've ever encountered. Fortunately, the workers seemed to be very experienced at shoebox-tossing, and no one got hurt!

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Coming from an individualistic culture, I initially felt personally responsible for solving every social issue I encountered. While it's great to have a sense of responsibility, I've learned that I can only do my part while many factors operate on a bigger scale than the individual. It requires a community and sometimes several generations of people who care about the issue. I was inspired to take action in my community in my home country by seeing actions through our school and MCC programs in India.

**Faith Journey:** I lived with a pastor's family, so we attended many weddings, church services and church-related events. Most services and events were in a language that I had a 2-year-old proficiency in, so I learned to develop a personal relationship with God outside of formal religious settings. I felt God's presence through experiences and the relationships that I formed in my church, workplace, host family and the MCC India office. God would show up at the right time, and often when I needed God the most.

**New Perspectives:** I learned that cultures and communities each have attributes that serve as a double-edged sword. I initially despised U.S. individualism before my term in India, but now I understand that individualism has both benefits and drawbacks. Indian culture esteems tradition and family much more than the U.S., and because of this, I have experienced community and interdependence on others in a fulfilling way that I have never experienced before. However, I have also seen how certain expressions of these cultural values can marginalize groups of people. I am not calling for cultural erasure or creating a unified blending of cultures, as that could potentially reinforce neocolonial practices and diminish diversity. Instead, I am more keenly attuned to movements that aim to liberate people from marginalization while maintaining and/or strengthening cultural ties.

**Skill Development:** I've gained confidence this year. I renounced my perfectionistic tendencies to engage in another culture and learn another language. I especially thank my Indian host family for giving me grace, acceptance and guidance in adapting to this culture. This skill doesn't pertain to my career aspirations, but I believe that a boost in confidence and self-acceptance will positively impact every area of my life.

**Future Plans:** I plan to pursue work in the Midwest in urban/environmental planning. Although my teaching experience was simultaneously challenging and rewarding, I kept noticing the systemic challenges that my students were facing. Summer vacations at the schools in our state, Chhattisgarh, have been increasingly prolonged due to the unbearable heat from climate change. Both India and the U.S. are experiencing rapid urbanization, which has reduced green and community spaces where children can play. In addition to noticing systemic challenges, living in a village in India has expanded my imagination in how communities can be structured. My experience here has inspired me to pursue urban planning to design better and more sustainable communities.

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**Carrie Noort** (Canada)

Nursing Instructor, Lutheran Aid to Medicine in Bangladesh (LAMB)  
Parbatipur, Bangladesh



**First Impression or Differences:**

Color and company were my first two impressions of Bangladesh. Bright pink, bold yellow and neon orange were commonly worn by everyone. Not only vibrant dress, but the sheer volume of people was also a dramatic difference compared to my home country.

Gender representation, societal roles and privacy were notable differences upon being welcomed into Bangladesh.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** It's 1 a.m. Imagine a rustic jungle cruise in the middle of humid Sundarban mangroves. The star-speckled sky is serene. The dark water, cool and still. However, the cruise is far from any notion of serenity. Our MCC team is wildly, uproariously singing rhymes in attempts to coax the shy Bangladesh tigers out of the jungle so we can spot them. This isn't fiction. It's a fact of MCC history. Ask any member of the MCC Bangladesh team about the cry for the tiger mother!

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** Being a visitor with a role as a nurse and teacher, differentials of power became evident quickly on assignment with my students, patients and team members. I was pushed to examine how to share, steward and transfer power to promote flourishing within communities and workspaces. Becoming aware of the deep cultural nuances of being a global peacemaker allowed me to approach Christian service afresh, wearing humility and a deepened posture of curiosity.

**Faith Journey:** Being a global citizen engaged in a life of peacekeeping, I have learned the value of inviting Christ into moments of pain, confusion, injustice and advocacy. Brokenness and sin exist. More so, Christ is also in these places. This is where hope, creativity and love can take root. This is shalom, and this is the reality of Christ in our world. Hallelujah.

**New Perspectives:** Language learning beholds and creates beautiful art. Language acquisition served as a profoundly meaningful form of connection to and nurturing care for my host culture and neighbors.

**Skill Development:** Within the process of acculturation, personal comforts and strengths were drastically challenged. This made a way for me to adapt to a posture of healthy interdependence with my team, host family and community. Ultimately, I learned that it is not the relevancy of my skill set that is the gift to any area of service, but that I am the gift. Aptitude in relating, navigating complexities of health advocacy and teaching across language barriers are skills that I have honed during my SALT term. I have found the practice of writing and creating poetry to be enriching and purposeful. Putting a pen to paper shall continue! I'm looking forward to sharing these stories and continued learnings.

**Future Plans:** I am intrigued by the intersection between holistic health advocacy and peacekeeping. I hope to explore this further, and apply my skills, passion for holistic health and values of peacekeeping in deeper, more integrated roles. I am eager to work within global contexts and continue working in the international development sector. The richness and joys of this last year are things I take and offer to God, listening to where He prompts my heart and stirs its convictions.

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**Amelia Warkentin** *(Canada)*

Elementary Teaching Assistant, Mukuru Mennonite Academy  
Embakasi, Kenya



**First Impression or Differences:** Questions that entered my mind during my first few days in Kenya: Where are the road signs? How does anyone feel safe driving here? Where are these cows coming from? What is the proper response when someone points out my visible minority status by shouting

“Mzungu” at me? Some of these questions I am still pondering . . .

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** When discussing pizza in the staff room one day, I did a generic Google search on my phone to show pictures. One of my colleagues observed the pictures and then inquired, “Is it a fruit?” Another day, when I was leaving my compound to go for a run, I was stopped by a few of the children who live in my building. They started to ask me questions: “What are your parents’ names? Where are your grandparents? Do you have any children?” Upon observing my attire, they proceeded to tell me that they also wanted to exercise. We spent the next 10-15 minutes doing jumping jacks and racing up and down the street. It wasn’t what I had originally planned, but it was certainly a lot more memorable!

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I have been made aware of how government systems and cultural traditions can influence peacemaking. A church Bible study also highlighted how corrupt systems of power can affect personal integrity. It is common knowledge here that the police will accept bribes, and I now feel privileged to come from a country where that is generally not the case.

**Faith Journey:** At gatherings and meetings, it is common practice to acknowledge God’s presence and goodness when introducing oneself and before making comments. This tradition has shown me how people prioritize their faith and recognize God as the cornerstone in their lives. The four-plus hours of church have tested my stamina, but I’ve grown to love seeing familiar faces and singing worship songs during church services. I had the privilege of joining the church choir and even preached a short sermon on Christmas day.

**New Perspectives:** My appreciation for my home country has grown as I’ve listened to people here speak longingly about moving to Canada. I also have a new level of empathy for visible minority groups. I have learned that my habits and ways of thinking will not change just because my surroundings change, and I’ve appreciated the people who have encouraged and supported me in adjusting and broadening my perspectives.

**Skill Development:** I have developed a stronger sense of my boundaries and feel more confident speaking up for my personal and professional needs. My confidence in my professional abilities as a teacher has grown thanks to my supportive colleagues and encouraging administration. I also learned how to butcher a chicken!

**Future Plans:** I am interested in finding work as a teacher in a primary school. I had the opportunity to teach creative arts (an integration of music, arts and crafts, and physical education) this year and I hope to teach these subjects more upon my return home.

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**Elim Welty** (*Canada*)

Program Assistant, Evangelical Lutheran Church of  
Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)  
Beit Jala, Palestine



**First Impression or Differences:** I luckily had a previous experience in Palestine, so my initial impression was a feeling of familiarity.

**Memorable or Funny Experience:** I always got a kick out of impromptu lunches with complete strangers, especially when it came to shawarma and knafeh.

**Global Citizenship and Peacemaking:** I think that it has strengthened my appreciation of being raised in a household based on Anabaptist principles.

**Faith Journey:** I would say that it has helped me tremendously. I would equate my experiences to that of a rock tumbler, initially you pick up a rock and it is very rough and coarse. But to smooth it, you must put it through friction. Only once you put it through consistent friction, do you see the true potential.

**New Perspectives:** I have a new respect for those who speak out against injustice.

**Skill Development:** Re-cemented my ability to be flexible, and most of all, enjoy all the time you have with people, because you never know when your life will get thrown a curveball.

**Future Plans:** I will be attending school this upcoming year, studying theology with a major in Pauline theology.



### **Anticipation**

I was always looking forward to something, like becoming proficient in Spanish or building stronger community connections. Slowing down and appreciating the small and slow things was an important lesson I learned from that anticipation.

(Elizabeth Breckbill, U.S. to Colombia)

### **Autonomy**

It has been a year of change and adaptation, choices and decisions, and problems and solutions away from my parents.

(Adrian David Berrío Klassen, Canada/Colombia to Guatemala)

### **Boisterous**

Bangladesh is brimming with life, energy and vivacity. From cultural dress, rosy rice field sunsets and cheerful Bollywood pop music to richly spiced golden curries, Bangladesh and its people have life and energy in abundance.

(Carrie Noort, Canada to Bangladesh)

### **Broadening**

This experience has broadened my relationships, worldview and understanding of the systems around me.

(Lisa Nalliah, U.S. to India)

### **Challenging**

This year has challenged me in so many ways. There have been really difficult times, but I've grown through them.

(Ernest Lipscomb, U.S. to Bolivia)

### **Complicated**

I had so many complicated and conflicting emotions. Also, learning to live in a new country and culture is complicated. There was so much to learn.

(Beth Heppner, Canada to Cambodia)

### **Eye-opening**

I have been exposed to so many realities I had never seen before. I learn something new every day and am given new perspectives so often, forcing me to reflect on my own life, and what I am blessed with and thankful for.

(Keyan Krabill, U.S. to Guatemala)

## **Joy**

A friend of mine prayed this word over me before I began SALT. Actively seeking joy,  
whether in my work, during long Uber rides or while walking dusty roads,  
has kept me open-minded and focused on God's goodness.

(Amelia Warkentin, Canada to Kenya)

## **Patience**

Learning takes time, progress takes time, friendships take time,  
and you may not see how far you have come until later.

(Naomi Derksen, Canada to Kenya)

## **Profound**

This year, I have experienced a spectrum of emotions and lived through things  
I could never have imagined, enriching my grasp of what it means to be human.

(Kaitlyn Bell, U.S. to Palestine and Israel)

## **Te Siguiré**

It means I will follow you. It is my promise to the Lord. I followed Him to Bolivia,  
and I will continue to follow His plan, wherever it shall lead.

(Tamar Klassen, Canada to Bolivia)

## **Transformative**

Despite the challenges of this year, living in Palestine during and after the events of Oct. 7  
has shaped and reshaped my perspectives, priorities and resilience in profound ways.

(Lily Kennedy, U.S. to Palestine and Israel)



First year nursing students, along with SALter Carrie Noort (in red), celebrate the successful end-of-term examinations at LAMB Hospital nursing institute in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh.



From left, SALter Carrie Noort, Rekha Joydhar, Kajol Ahsan and Provati Chaugong take part in introducing simulation-based education at LAMB Hospital nursing institute in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh.



Students receive nursing caps marking their entry into hospital clinical rotations. From left are Kamrun Naher, SALter Carrie Noort, Meskatul Jannat and Asma Esha.



SALTER Adrian David Berrío Klassen teaches English to fourth grade students from the communities of Panabaj and Tzanchaj in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala.



SALTER Amelia Warkentin, right, dances with friends after a service at Kenya Mennonite Church in Nairobi, Kenya.



SALTER Amelia Warkentin teaches English to grade five students in Embakasi, Kenya.



# SALT



In Kenya, SALTer Amelia Warkentin, middle, smiles with her host family on Christmas Day. Clockwise from the front are Fred Ogalo, Earl Onyango, Elaine Hadassa and Michelle Aching.



SALTer Amelia Warkentin, right, and colleague and Swahili instructor Phoebe Omuhinda rock matching fleece-lined track suits.



SALTer Beth Heppner goes to hand out cookies she made with the children at Hope Village in Prey Veng, Cambodia.



SALTer Beth Heppner helps her host family prepare lunch for a family gathering in Prey Veng, Cambodia.



SALTer Beth Heppner, middle, her host mom Noun SreyMom, left, and Tasiana M Hanzukule celebrate the religious holiday Pchum Ben at her host uncle's home in Cambodia.



From left, Sara Ospina, Brenda Ramos, Dandy Lourida Gez, Luz Chaguendo Ospina and SALTer Elizabeth Breckbill at a training for women who were participants in an Edupaz program in Cali, Colombia.



# SALT



SALTer Elizabeth Breckbill, top right corner, plays Dutch Blitz in La Cumbre, Colombia, at a youth retreat held at El Tabor, a retreat spot owned by the Mennonite Brethren in Cali.



SALTer Elizabeth Breckbill, at far right in the front row, and her Edupaz team take a photo outside of their office in Cali, Colombia, after sharing a Christmas lunch together.



SALTer Ernest Lipscomb enjoys Pique Macho, a typical dish from Cochabamba, Bolivia.



SALTer Keyan Krabill, top right, joins students from Puerta de Esperanza walking in a caminata, or walk, to promote children's education in Guatemala City, Guatemala.



SALTer Keyan Krabill, left, and coworkers Jose David Algua and Jacobo Miranda after climbing Volcán Acatenango near Antigua, Guatemala.



SALTer Lisa Nalliah, left, and her host family, Hoshanna, Abigail, Karishma and Ashish Milap, celebrate on Christmas day at Bethel Mennonite Church in Balodgahan, India.



# SALT



SALTER Lisa Nalliah, right, plays carrom, a traditional game from India, with Hoshanna Milap, left, and Abigail Milap from her host family.



SALTER Lisa Nalliah teaches actions to accompany a poem in English to first standard students at Mennonite English Senior Secondary School in Dhamtari, India.



SALTER Naomi Derksen works with one of her host family's mixed sahiwal calves during the morning milking in Olepolos, Kenya.



SALTER Naomi Derksen, front, right, and others celebrate Ann Ntutu's birthday with coffee and cake in Olepolos, Kenya.



SALTERs Kaitlyn Bell and Lily Kennedy stand at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem.



The SALT induction at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jerusalem's Old City. Front, from left: SALTERs Elim Welty, Kaitlyn Bell and Lily Kennedy. Back, from left: Pastors Meghan Aelabouni and Sally Azar, and Marc Falconer, MCC's connecting peoples coordinator for Jordan, Palestine and Israel.





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