



# EXTENDING BEYOND

## Resiliency in Service Adventure

A message from Mike Sherrill



**F**or 30-plus years, Service Adventure has empowered hundreds of young people, ages 17-20, to mature and grow beyond their childhood communities. For 10 months, within the embrace of unit homes

and host church families, Service Adventure participants serve with various organizations in Christ's name, as well as participate in weekly faith formation and learning experiences together as a unit.

Service Adventure shares its heartbeat with other Mission Network volunteer programs — offering opportunities to join God's mission of hope and healing, through partnership. Mission Network has served as the conduit between volunteers and places of service and as the catalyst for the growth of servants who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We look forward to sharing the stories about God's presence in our 2021-2022 units: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Anchorage, Alaska; and Jackson, Mississippi.

While connecting with faith communities

through Service Adventure, Mission Network has remained resilient in the face of these changing times by staying connected to the vine that is Christ. Though the branches of these programs may change, the lifeblood that gives them purpose keeps them green and vibrant. As Mission Network re-aligns to better partner with others across the street and around the world, the agency is seeking to bear new fruit in innovative ways.

Please consider being a part of the ongoing growth of our many branches that are reaching out to the world, providing shade in the heat of the world's turmoil, peace in pandemic pain and roots of antiracism work in the unraveling of injustice. Along with the Mission Network staff, I am deeply grateful for your ongoing contributions to the mission that remain ever green because of God's unfailing grace and the gifts of God's people. ■

Mike Sherrill  
Executive Director

This photo was taken in 2005, during a retreat for the Service Adventure units on the east coast. They met near Philippi, West Virginia, and went for a hike during their time together. Photo provided by Susan Nisly.

*"But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant ..."*

— Matthew 20:26  
(NLT)



Photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson

From left, Susan Nisly, former director of Service Adventure, a program of Mennonite Mission Network; Rick Lee Service Adventure unit leader in Jackson, Mississippi; Michael Oyer, unit leader in Anchorage, Alaska; and Eric Frey Martin, recruiter for Mission Network's Program Human Resources, engage in a role play during a unit leader orientation in Newton, Kansas, in late July.

# Preparing for a new Service Adventure program year

By Laurie Oswald Robinson

**W**hen the Kansas prairies endured a 100-degree heat wave in late July, at least one person was happy to soak up the heat.

Michael Oyer, who is beginning his third year long term as the leader of the Anchorage, Alaska, Service Adventure unit, made the trek down to the Midwest to participate in this year's Service Adventure leader orientation. Oyer said the orientation, which took place July 27-30, gave him the resourcing and fellowship he needed to fuel his soul for the upcoming 10-month program term.

Oyer welcomed this year's participants, ages 17-20, into the Anchorage unit home in August. As they form a unit family, they will serve in volunteer placements

and relate to Prince of Peace Mennonite Church.

As part of their orientation for the new program year, beginning in late August, Oyer joined four other unit leaders, former program director Susan Nisly, and administrative and recruitment staff at Mission Network's offices in Newton, Kansas. During their day in the office, July 28, they received resourcing on both antiracism and hospitality, ate lunch with Newton staff, and engaged in sharing and reflection.

"I love the mentoring aspect of the unit leader role, because you have the sacred privilege of watching 18- and 19-year-old youth grow and change," said Oyer, who works as an elementary teacher, while serving as a unit leader.



2020-2021 Anchorage Service Adventure unit: Michael Oyer, Kelby Youngberg, Ginny Miller and Isaiah Fellers.



“They are still so malleable at this stage, and it’s incredible to witness the depth that they can have as they are processing their experiences.”

The other unit leaders said that, like Oyer, they are eager to begin accompanying young adults in their Christian discipleship and formation journey.

Rick and Debbie Lee are returning for their second year of leadership with the unit in Jackson, Mississippi. The unit is hoping to welcome four German participants in November.

“I am really looking forward to this cross-cultural experience,” said Debbie Lee, who will teach English as a Second Language in Jackson public schools during the school year. “We have already bonded very strongly.”

Every year, a distinctive group comes and forms a community, Rick Lee said.

“This year is no exception,” he said. “It will be a whole new challenge, as we strive to help the young men and women gain a full experience here, in Jackson, and learn from exposure to other parts of America through our travels.”

Rick Lee added how sharing food in their neighborhood has forged connections between people of different cultures.

“One time we distributed some corn a church member had picked,” he said. “We shared some with our neighbors. One of them said she was going to fix us some fried corn. We had no idea what that was but soon found out. Another time, we shared some fresh eggs with another neighbor, and soon, plates of catfish were coming over our backyard fence for our participants.”

“We were just sharing food in simple ways. And yet, important connections were formed.” ■



Photo by Isaiah Fellers

Left to right: Michael Oyer, Kelby Youngberg, Ginny Miller, and Isaiah Fellers on a hike in the Alaskan wilderness.



Photo provided

2020-2021 Jackson Service Adventure unit: Back row: Debbie and Rick Lee. Front row: Jocelyn Baker and Malachi Lind.



Photo by Rick Lee

Pastor Horace McMillon and members of Open Door Mennonite Church participate in a blessing of Service Adventure participants Malachi Lind and Jocelyn Baker at the end of their time of service in Jackson, Mississippi.

**Programs like Service Adventure** forge important connections, which are foundational in the faith formation of young people in the church. Your gifts help make that happen. Thank you!

# Learn more about Service Adventure!

**T**ake a break from the classroom, test out a vocation and experience self-discovery, all while serving God and living in Christian community. Service Adventure units are spread throughout the United States. This gap, or bridge, year opportunity is for participants ages 17-20 and offers 10 months of hands-on learning.

## What to expect

Units are composed of a leader(s) and three to five participants. Unit leaders serve as mentors, live in community, and share the responsibility of participating in activities and leading participants.

## Service placement

Volunteer daily in your placement(s) at partner agencies, such as local childcare facilities, soup kitchens and other similar service-oriented organizations.

## Learning components

Take turns leading a household experience. Do you have a special skill or unique tradition in your family you would be willing to share?

## Worship nights

Set aside time to connect spiritually with your unit members and hear where others are seeing God at work.

## Household responsibilities

Help with cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, etc.

## Host church(es)

Connect weekly to a place of worship; this is often a place where participants are encouraged to use their gifts. Host families: Spend time away from unit life with a family from the host church — a “home away from home.”

## Still have questions?

Visit [www.MennoniteMission.net/ServiceAdventure](http://www.MennoniteMission.net/ServiceAdventure) for more information, or e-mail us at [info@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:info@MennoniteMission.net).

[www.MennoniteMission.net](http://www.MennoniteMission.net)  
Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872

**Office locations:**  
Elkhart, Indiana  
Newton, Kansas

## Service Adventure leadership



Photo by David Fast

For 17 years, **Susan Nisly** has led the Service Adventure program with grace and a servant's heart. On August 9th, Nisly stepped down from this position. “Service Adventure has brought me many times of joy and some times of tears. It has been an honor to see lives transformed by the learning that has been part of Service Adventure,” Nisly said.



Photo provided

**Lauren Eash Hershberger**, recruitment coordinator and personnel counselor at Mission Network, has taken on a leadership role with Service Adventure through the end of the calendar year, as we navigate this transition.

**Thank you** for being part of what God is doing! How is God calling you to share in additional ways with Mennonite Mission Network?