



EXTENDING BEYOND

A people-driven purpose

By Marisa Smucker, Executive Director



I first connected with Mission Network when an employee, who is also a friend of my mom, invited me to consider applying for an open position. I was living and working in Costa

Rica at the time, and after 6 1/2 years, I felt called to return to the U.S. So I applied and, after the interview process, was invited to begin working at the agency, in February 2015, as a church relations representative. Since then, I have held a number of positions, including director of Mennonite Voluntary Service, senior executive of Ventures and interim executive director.

Now, as of late January, I was honored to accept the invitation to move from the interim role to the

permanent appointment as executive director.

I love the opportunities I have had, in each of these roles, to work with extraordinary people! It is such a joy to work alongside our staff, workers and partners, as well as connecting with donors, the Mission Network constituency and colleagues in other agencies. Our narratives, both individually and collectively, of how we connect to God's movement in the world, help highlight each person/group and how we are each unique within our shared activities.



Marisa Smucker talks with David Maldonado, one of the presentors at SENT 2018

Photo by David Fast

Before working with Mission Network, I had conflicting views about mission. As I began my work with the agency and entered into conversation with colleagues and ministry partners, I found that the language and perspective of “joining in God’s mission in the world” was helpful

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MVS participants and Mission Network staff at MVS orientation in 2021. Back row: Roxy Gehring, Kaitlyn Skelly, Claire Waidelich, Tonia Martin and Zachary Headings. Front row: Erin Kauffman, Sabrina Bellar, Anali North Martin, Connor Born, Polly Carlson and Marisa Smucker, —then MVS director. Photo by Zachary Headings

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

— Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

We are here with purpose

By Zachary Headings

Mennonite Mission Network is intentional in what it does and how it does it: building partnerships next door and around the globe to participate in God's work in the world. Our purpose is to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ — across the street, all through the marketplaces and around the world.

Mission Network staff embody this purpose. Recently, staff members were asked to consider their role in the agency, and how they see their daily work joining into Mission Network's purpose. The contemplation of these questions is important not only for staff, but also for anyone connected to Mission Network, whether they be donor, partner, mission worker, service participant or prayer partner. ■



Zachary Headings
Marketing Specialist



Photo by Michael Oyer

Mission Network staff members Michael Oyer and Naomi Leary met with Service Adventure participants during a recruitment trip in 2023. Around the table are Michael Oyer, Nelly Sandersfeld, Anna Millsap, Miriam Offe, Naomi Leary — with daughter Maggie Leary, Melanie Wenger, Lukas Tepper, Daniel Schumacher and Josia Kaemper.

What brought you to your role with Mission Network?

I have always been drawn to work that is more than just a paycheck. After graduating from college, I worked in community organizing. My husband and I worked together at Camp Friedenswald, a Mennonite camp in Cassopolis, Michigan, with people of all ages, to connect them to themselves, others and God.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I went through a career transition and was looking for the next way to work in the world and build something meaningful.



When this position became open, I remembered how my Service Adventure experience was so formative for my life, and I couldn't think of a better place to engage with people from my faith community and the broader world.

Naomi Leary
Regional Director for North America (Longer-term Service)

We invite you to contemplate your own answers to these questions and reach out to us with your answers!



Thank you for choosing to connect with God's work in the world through Mission Network! Know that this agency could not fulfill its purpose without your support. Visit MennoniteMission.net/Donate to give today!

What is your favorite part of your role with Mission Network?

My favorite part of my role with Mission Network is that I get to relate to constituents across the church. I have a unique privilege in that I often get to be the one to hear stories about people's time with Mission Network or predecessor agencies, as I connect with churches and conferences. Sometimes, I get to enter the sacred spaces of discernment that happen when someone is considering service through one of Mission Network's programs. I also love being part of meetings in which we wrestle with what it means to be part of God's mission and what that looks like.



Eric Frey Martin

Interim Director for Constituent Engagement



Photo by Travis Duerksen

Eric Frey Martin led a seminar titled, "What You Do Next Matters," during MennoCon21.

How has your perspective on your role with Mission Network changed during your time with the agency?

I left my community and my well-paying job at a well-known mental health hospital to join Mission Network. I had worked so hard to get where I was, overcoming poverty and discrimination. It was a big risk to leave all that I had achieved. I had to break my pride to accept the "assistant" title.

However, I have learned so many things while being part of the Mission Network community and during my time at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, where Mission Network encouraged me to study as part of my leadership development training. I still struggle with all the pain and hurt in our society. I can understand that this happens in the outside world, but we should not hurt one another in the church. I want to help Mennonites process and acknowledge that hurt, as many tend to spiritualize their emotions or become passive-aggressive when they are confronted with racism or other forms of injustice.

In my work with patients experiencing addictions and psychoses, I was prepared for difficult encounters, but in the community of God's people, individuals are often trusting and unguarded, which make them more vulnerable to being hurt. I have learned the value of understanding, forgiveness and sharing God's love in all circumstances. If God changed me, God can change anyone.



Gisselle Guity

Executive Assistant to the Executive Director



Photo provided by Gisselle Guity

Board member Cindy Cumberbatch and Mission Network staff member Gisselle Guity visit *Colegio Americano Menno* (Menno American School), as part of the board meetings held in Bogota, Colombia.

How do you view your role with Mission Network fitting into God's mission for the church?

I understand my role within the broader context of God's shalom to be one of bridge building and relationship fostering. I am deeply convinced that the work of God's shalom invites each and every one of us, within our contexts, and getting to be a small part of that in this work has been a joy.



Sara Gurulé
Constituent Engagement Representative



A panel, lead by Mark Charles, Sara Gurulé, Bizzy Feekes and Jonathan Neufeld, discusses the documentary "Custodians: A Story of Ancient Echoes," at First Mennonite Church Hutchinson, Kansas.

Photo provided

What is something that has surprised you about your role with Mission Network?

I have found that in any context or organization, we will always deal with people, thus we need to deal with conflict. I have learned that my role at Mission Network also deals with many conflicts related to the history of mission — how to decolonize mission in various contexts — and conflicts within our own constituency. As a person who is called to be a peacemaker wherever I go, I need to embody the example of how Jesus always dealt with people. It's a journey. It's an art. It's a life-changing skill. I need to balance how to



bring peace, justice, harmony and love amid different contexts, conflicts and conversations.

Andi Santoso
Regional Director for Asia and the Middle East



Andi Santoso puts a Mission Network dove pin on Roy A. Dajmil at the Musrat Jahan mosque during the 2023 Youth Venture trip to Indonesia.

Photo provided by Andi Santoso

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in understanding Mission Network's approach to mission. Firstly, mission starts with God, and secondly, it is important to pay attention to where God is already at work in the world and the ways that God is working through others. As an agency, we are a part of something so much bigger than ourselves. We join in a partnership that goes beyond us and our goals. **We are engaged in a decolonizing approach to mission that begins with mutuality.**

At heart, I am a networker and a collaborator. Caring about the ways we work with others and connect with our partners is needed in so many spaces. I am reminded of this almost daily, as we join others in conversation and collaboration. ■

Marisa Smucker
Executive Director

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