



**MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE (MCC) NEWS RELEASE  
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**MCC Seek program helps young adults explore faith and culture  
By Sienna Malik**

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) invites applications for Seek, its newest young adult program for 18- to 20-year-olds who want to do six months of service, discipleship training and cross-cultural sharing in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Starting in January 2024, Seek participants from around the world will stay in the Southeast Asian country, considering together what it means to live, love and serve like Jesus. Seek is firmly rooted in an Anabaptist reading of Scripture and involves Bible study, individual prayer, lectures and conversation.

Seek participants will live in a gender-divided dormitory with Cambodian Christian youth, an arrangement that lends itself to cross-cultural dialogue and worship. The Seek cohort will be a group of 6-10 international participants.

Charles Conklin, MCC representative for Cambodia, believes that such experiences are invaluable to young adults' spiritual development.

"On graduating from high school, young adults are faced with the decision of 'What next?'" he says. "Seek offers the opportunity to prepare for that decision by taking a pause and centering on Jesus by engaging in intentional discipleship among the global church."

In Phnom Penh, Seekers will also learn what it is like to belong to the country's Christian minority.

Cambodian Christians were one of many groups persecuted by the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s. Many Christians were killed or left the country. Until 1990, churches in the primarily Buddhist nation had to worship in secret.

Through visits to an array of Anabaptist, Catholic and evangelical churches, Seekers will come to understand how the church provided healing and hope in the aftermath of atrocity.

MCC partner organizations in Cambodia have identified a need for English speakers to help with their education and communications efforts. Therefore, Seekers may serve as English teachers or help to write and edit locals' stories. Other service opportunities will include working with peace clubs, leading Sunday school activities and photographing the work of partners.

During their time in Cambodia, participants will also:

- Consider how Buddhism (and, historically, Hinduism) have shaped national identity during a visit to the temples of Angkor Wat.
- Participate in facilitated, interfaith discussions with local Buddhists.

- Reflect on visits to the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum and the “killing fields” where over 1.7 million people died in the Khmer Rouge era.
- Accompany MCC partners on environmental peacebuilding projects in the country’s forests.
- Learn about the experiences of current and former missionaries and service workers.

In early 2023, the nine participants from Canada and the U.S. who participated in the first Seek cohort experienced the cross-cultural benefits of the program in Palestine, where they were accompanied by four Christian young adults from the area.

The 2023 cohort engaged in service projects like leading English lessons at the Lajee Center, a grassroots organization in Bethlehem’s Aida Refugee Camp. They visited sites such as the Shepherds’ Fields, where the angels announced the birth of Jesus. And each week, Seekers took Arabic language lessons at the home of James and Joan Alty, who were serving as MCC Jordan, Palestine and Israel representatives.

The Altys’ idea for creating a program that incorporates spiritual growth into service work started in 2019, while they completed a previous assignment in South Africa. “We saw a need for a more intentional focus on young adult spiritual formation,” recalls James Alty. “We had a lot of focus on service, but not really on the question of ‘Why service?’”

Conklin hopes that the 2024 Seekers “come away from the experience with a deepened faith, a sense of purpose and calling, and a clearer understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.” While in Cambodia, he hopes they will discover how culture and theology are intertwined — both abroad and in their own faith communities.

“Stepping away from the pressures and priorities of one’s home culture to learn and serve in a foreign one has been a transformative experience for many,” Conklin says.

*Young adults who want to participate in the 2024 Cambodia program can apply between Aug. 7 and Sept. 30 While Seekers must cover preliminary expenses like visa fees, MCC pays all in-country costs and provides participants with a small monthly stipend. To learn more, please visit [mcc.org/get-involved/serve/volunteer/seek](https://mcc.org/get-involved/serve/volunteer/seek).*

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