

WMI TRIP REFLECTIONS

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WMI Intercultural Experiential/Learning trips can be so many things to so many participants. Eye opening, transformative, heart-breaking, inspiring, joyful. No matter the place for the culture, students and others can always see God at work in the

world. Below are a number of reflections from participants and leaders. Read them and consider joining us in this work—through your prayer, participation, or financial support.

2023 TRIPS REFLECTIONS

ABBY GEORGE—ISRAEL-PALESTINE TRIP



Where did I see and experience God during my time in Israel-Palestine? I expected an introspective encounter with God; I went into the trip assuming that God would emerge during solitude and meditation. Unexpectedly, however, I witnessed God in our community lunch and dinner sessions. In these times, two cultures and experiences came together to break bread and drink water as one body. It is here that Paul's words penetrated my heart: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In addition, I witnessed, in these community dinners, the grace of God. The Palestinian people, living in despair and unfortunate condition, still welcomed Americans at the dinner table and treated us with love and respect. I saw the love of Christ on their faces and in their hearts!

My informative time in Israel-Palestine had a transformative impact on how I understand my future ministry. Unfortunately, the usage of biblical language and narrative had and continues to have a destructive effect on the Palestinian people's way of life. After hearing many testimonies, I realize now more clearly how crucial it is to express the story of the Bible with honesty and carefulness. Therefore, my encounter and conversations with Palestinians reaffirm my vocation to serve others through pastoral ministry and biblical studies at the academic level. I am more confident than ever that my call is to study the Word of God.

EMILY COWSER—LEBANON TRIP



I had the privilege to travel to Lebanon this January to explore the topic of trauma in the context of the Middle East and the role of the Church in healing. It was a rich learning experience to engage with a mosaic of different organizations and leaders, each with a unique set of gifts and a distinct approach to providing care for their communities and the region.

Together, the 17 different partners we connected with truly incarnated what it means to be the body of Christ in such a time as this. I learned to continuously shift my perspective from trying to figure out the "right" way to approach healing to seeing and valuing the unique ways God has gifted and called each of the partners with whom we met. As I return to my U.S. context, I feel invited to listen more attentively to how the Spirit is moving in me and to follow whole-heartedly, while coming

alongside others to do the same, trusting God's work through us as a body.

CAROLINE BAKER—GUATEMALA TRIP



Mayan spirituality says to always direct prayers toward the rising sun. With respect and reverence for the new day, Mayans submit their prayers with an attitude of hope toward healing and restoration. Whether or not it springs from these indigenous roots, the people of Guatemala face issues of justice and survival with a posture of resilience. Over the course of 10 days, I listened to and learned from leaders and educators across the country, all of whom are speaking up and making change because not doing so isn't an option. Having filled a notebook with facts, ideas, names, and stories, I return from this trip with so many questions.

At times I wondered where God was amidst all the injustice, and yet I saw the light of God in the eyes of each and every person I encountered—in the migrant maps guiding thousands along the

perilous journey, the coffee and bread shared at every occasion, and in the people who spoke so adoringly of their country. I experienced God in the food prepared with love, the smoking volcano, the youth group introducing their parents, and financially poor but spiritually rich women who invited us into their homes. I have anticipated this trip since before I started my master of divinity in 2020, and now that it is done, I realize it was only the beginning.

JOHN (LUKE) HILLIER—PHILIPPINES TRIP



One of the clearest places where I saw God in the Philippines was during our time with a fisherfolk community. I was struck by the ways that God felt so immanently present in the web of interdependence that was so apparent there.

The fisherfolk were intimately connected to each other, both in fellowship and in the solidarity of the struggle against the construction of a man-made island that would harm the sea, and they were just as connected to the sea itself. When I joined my homestay family in the morning to glean for seaweed and snails, I realized that God was providing for them in such immediate ways though the sea—loving them by feeding them the way that a mother feeds her children. And likewise, in embracing that relationship, the family had ways of seeing and knowing the sea that I did not; they could see what to glean, whereas I

kept grabbing at shells and seaweed that couldn't be used. God was also so apparent in their embrace of an interdependent relationship with the sea evidenced in their commitment to fight to protect it. Hearing about the ways they have organized to struggle against governmental proposals that would permanently disrupt the ecological web across the shoreline felt like a present-day example of David vs. Goliath, something sacred and miraculous.

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