



AMBS
window

Winter 2026 | Volume 36, Issue 1

Learning that transforms

Students engage questions of calling, purpose through final projects

Each year, candidates for graduation from AMBS complete final projects and papers to fulfill the requirements of their master's degree programs. Through this process, they take a deep dive into topics they're wrestling with and that matter to them. We invited five recent graduates to share about how they chose their theme and how what they've learned is shaping them as leaders.

Evaluating the impact of a young adult exchange program



Christian Berambaye Nawai, N'Djamena, Chad

Christian completed his coursework for his Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies in December

2025. He wrote his final paper on "Evaluating the impact of the young adult exchange program: A case study of Chad participants in Mennonite Central Committee's International Volunteer Exchange Program (2014-24)."

I chose to evaluate the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) International Volunteer

Exchange Program (IVEP) through the lens of Chadian participants because it's my own story. I was an IVEPer from 2021 to 2022 at Goshen (Indiana) College, and that year was a profound mix of incredible growth and sometimes painful challenges. I wanted to move beyond just

I also learned that pain, when channeled, can become purpose.

listing successes to explore the gaps, cultural misunderstandings, spiritual disconnects and lack of reintegration support upon returning home that can undermine the program's beautiful goals.

The research process was an important learning experience. I conducted interviews with fellow alumni from the past 10 years, which revealed that we're all thankful for the IVEP program. But we also *(continued on p. 2)*



Above: Christian Berambaye Nawai talks with fellow student Andrew Zetts of Pennsylvania during orientation in 2023. | Top (l. to r.): Students converse in the AMBS courtyard in 2023: Misgana Alemayehu Eshete of Ethiopia, Amy Marshall of Ohio, Pornchai (Paul) Banchasawan of Thailand, Daniel Teye Nuertey of Ghana and Debbie Bledsoe of North Carolina. (Credit: Brittany Purlee/AMBS)



Chialis Thuan (at right) responds to a question during class as Dee Awoke of Ethiopia listens. (Credit: Brittany Purtee/AMBS)

(continued from p. 1)

shared common struggles: feeling unprepared for cultural shocks, missing meaningful peer connections in church, and feeling lost upon returning home. Analyzing a peer’s dehumanizing experience with a host family, and reflecting on my own trauma from racial profiling, taught me that good intentions aren’t enough. I also learned that pain, when channeled, can become purpose.

After my own encounter with racial profiling in Goshen in April 2022, I used this experience as a platform to advocate for the rights of volunteers and people of color with accents in the community and was recognized with a civic award by Goshen Mayor **Jeremy Stutsman** — a moment that showed me that our voices can turn personal struggle into systemic advocacy.

This research has shown me my purpose. It has inspired me to build programs that will really empower young adults and to advocate for systemic change within cross-cultural service. I no longer see myself just as a program beneficiary, but as a bridge-builder who can translate participant experiences into actionable strategies.

My goal is to work with organizations to design ministries that are truly mutual, with better preparation, authentic spiritual accompaniment and concrete post-service pathways. I desire to help ensure that young volunteers from the Global South are not just visitors in a program, but empowered and supported agents of peace in their own communities for the long term.

Practicing spiritual care



Chialis Thuan, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia

Chialis graduated in 2025 with a Master of Arts in Christian Formation. She chose “Practice of spiritual care” as the theme for her final project.

As I reflect on my spiritual journey, I’m thankful to have been surrounded by Christian friends whose kindness, prayers, leadership and genuine companionship helped me grow spiritually as a teenager. Through taking Pastoral Care 1 with **Leah Thomas** (Associate Professor of Pastoral Care), I came to understand that those qualities were part of the pastoral care ministries.

Later, I was thrilled to find out in my research for the History of Christian Spirituality class taught by **Andy Brubacher Kaethler** (former Associate Professor; current Core Adjunct Faculty) that pastoral care — or as I would prefer to call it, spiritual care — is actually a ministry that God has invited all believers to be part of when He firstly ministered to us through His grace! Hence, I have grown my interest in and passion for spiritual care, and I chose it as the theme for my final project to further learn, practice and embrace it as part of my lifestyle.

I became aware that soul listening invites the listener to let go of expectations and to be fully present, appreciating the unique value and sacredness of each individual.

One of the many ways of providing spiritual care that I proposed for my final project and practiced with my church friends was “soul listening,” a way of listening to others introduced by **Cari Jackson** in her book *The Gift to Listen, the Courage to Hear* (Fortress, 2003). I discovered that soul listening aims to create a space for others to explore their inner truths while tuning into divine wisdom. I became aware that soul listening invites the listener to let go of expectations and to be fully present, appreciating the unique value and sacredness of each individual. I gained the understanding that soul listening not only involves listening to others but also fosters a deeper sense of empathy, grace, understanding and the shared consciousness that every human being carries the seed of God within them.

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Volume 36, Issue 1

Distributed two times a year as a supplement to *Anabaptist World* and *Canadian Mennonite*.

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A seminary of
Mennonite Church USA and
Mennonite Church Canada



Through this project, I have learned to seize every moment of listening to others as a divine way to help me grow in compassion through the grace I have received from the Divine. I can extend this grace to others and be more attentive to the Holy Spirit as I reflect on others' stories and pray for them afterward.

Discovering lament as faith



Daniel Teye Nuerthey, Dodowa, Accra, Ghana

Daniel graduated in 2025 with a Master of Divinity with a major in Theological Studies: History, Theology and Ethics. He wrote on "Incorporating lament more deeply into the rhythm of a community's worship life."

In response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I found myself standing with Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart as it joined other congregations and Mennonite Action in a vigil to call for a ceasefire. The prayers and songs were raw, filled with grief and longing. In that moment, I realized I was witnessing something I had once resisted: lament.

For much of my Christian journey, I believed lamenting was an affront to strong faith — a sign of weakness, even a failure to trust in God's power. Faith, I thought, meant pressing forward with confidence, not pausing to grieve. But as an intern at Hively in 2024–25, I was required to participate in a lament service. What began as an academic obligation became a transformative encounter.

Lament revealed itself as more than sorrow. It was theological — a way of naming brokenness before God. It spoke to the reality of death and decay, the undeniable truth of human experience. To resist lament, I realized, was to live in denial of reality itself. This insight echoed **Soong-Chan Rah's** argument that lament is "honesty before God and

each other" (in *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* [InterVarsity, 2015]).

That moment pushed me to reexamine how I read the psalms and prophets. I began to see lament not as weakness but as a faithful cry. And

I discovered its intercultural resonance — echoing across traditions and communities as a language of solidarity and hope.

My curiosity led me deeper. I studied lament as a practice of faith that holds space for both pain and trust. Rah's work helped me recognize the need for balance between the theology of celebration and the theology of suffering. He warns that when one perspective is elevated at the expense of the other, our theology becomes diminished. Celebration without suffering is half-formed theology. But when lament and praise intersect, we engage the fullness of the gospel message, he writes.

Lament, then, became for me a doorway: a way to join the cries of the suffering, to protest injustice and to cling to God's promises even when peace feels far away. What I once dismissed as doubt, I now see as a profound act of faith.

This experience leaves me with a calling — to offer compassionate, authentic, intercultural and prophetic leadership. It challenges me to teach and embody God's Word in ways that honor both joy and sorrow, celebration and lament, hope and grief.



Advocating for community participation in the Congolese criminal justice system



Micheline Ayitoma Ilonga, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Micheline graduated in 2025 with a Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies. She wrote her paper on "The need for community participation in the legal response to crime: The Democratic Republic of Congo's criminal system."

God is loving, just, compassionate, doesn't take bribes, and responds to social injustice with *(continued on p. 4)*

Micheline Ayitoma Ilonga (at left) and fellow student Amy Marshall of Ohio during orientation in 2022. (Credit: Peter Ringenberg/AMBS)

Lament revealed itself as more than sorrow. It was theological — a way of naming brokenness before God.

(continued from p. 3)

punishment for the wrongdoer to be transformed and redeemed. The Congolese community needs peace and justice.

I attended AMBS to deepen my faith and gain a better understanding of my calling. I then chose the Peace Studies program to connect my understanding of peace and justice, rooted in my background as a judge from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with God's perspective on the issue.

While reflecting on a topic to address for my final paper and strategies for reducing violence and

promoting peace and justice, I came across the news of an incident in the DRC that was widely reported: the attempted jailbreak at Makala Central Prison in Kinshasa in September 2024, where more than 120 prisoners lost their lives. This highlighted the judicial system's shortcomings. At that

time, tension existed between the justice minister and the judicial authorities.

I was heartbroken, and I felt pain. There is no shalom. I then decided to reflect on the issue and consider potential strategies. I thought of restorative justice as one of the alternatives in the criminal justice system regarding small claims, as its aim is to restore and repair broken relationships. Restorative justice offers healing to both the victim and offender — holding the offender accountable for his wrongdoing and to repair and

change his behavior, and offering the victim the opportunity to understand motives beyond the offending behavior and to be healed. I recalled the Ubuntu African philosophy, "You are who you are because of others," as a restorative approach applied in Africa to prevent violence and promote change.

I concluded that the system itself has created these insecurities, poverty, corruption and oppression. The change to meet the need should start from the bottom of the pyramid and work its way up. The involvement of the Church, a nonprofit organization, and the media, through education and campaigns, will help rebuild

relationships, ensure discipline and promote good behavior to prevent crime within the community. Also, it is crucial to strengthen the mechanisms to combat corruption at high levels of governance and ensure the independence of the judiciary from executive power.

I have learned that God is the foundation, the cornerstone of peace and justice. No one can be a peacemaker if their own life is not transformed and rooted in peaceful principles from above. No one can work in this field of reconciliation and be successful if they are not partnered with God.

How do Anabaptist communities live out the relationship between church and world?



Joshua Landis, Telford, Pennsylvania

Joshua graduated in 2025 with a Master of Divinity with a major in Theological Studies: Biblical Studies. He explored the theme, "Relationship between church and world within different Anabaptist communities."

I began my studies at AMBS after working most of my adult life in the field of information technology in the retail business space. While in seminary, I continued to work full time while taking classes, exploring the intersections of my faith and convictions of love, peace, community and mutualism, while working within an industry that valued competition, individualism and economic growth.

For my first internship, I worked for a parachurch ministry — the Mennonite Heritage Center in Harleysville, Pennsylvania — which serves local Anabaptist communities in southeastern Pennsylvania. Here, I experienced how different Anabaptist communities and

traditions engage in the work of the church within their larger local community contexts. To use a phrase from seminary, I explored the relationship *between the church and the world*.

For my final project, I reflected on an experience from that internship and considered its biblical, theological, ethical, historical and intercultural

Living life faithfully as partners with Jesus in the good work of the church is found within the messiness of living life within community, steeped in prayer and a commitment to God's desire for shalom.



Joshua Landis (center) during class on one of his visits to campus. He completed his degree from a distance. (Credit: Peter Ringenberg/AMBS)

"I recalled the Ubuntu African philosophy, 'You are who you are because of others,' as a restorative approach applied in Africa to prevent violence and promote change.

dimensions, as well as those of my internship. This time of intentional reflection offered space to discern the Spirit's movement within this work.

I wrote about my trip to the annual Eastern Mennonite Associated Libraries and Archives meeting in Cumberland Valley. Most of the participants were Plain Mennonites, and the meeting focused on their collaborative work to preserve and share Anabaptist history with their communities. I got to listen to their stories and watch them work together. It was a wonderful cross-cultural experience, and I learned a lot about how they operate as communities living intentionally separate from the world.

Throughout my internship, I met people who answer the question of how the church relates to the world by living separately through strict dress requirements and rules of community order, while others respond by committing themselves to deep involvement in their local communities through social and political engagement.

The answers to the questions I have carried with me throughout seminary have not always come through textbooks or simply replicating the work of others. My time at AMBS helped me put into words the understanding that living life faithfully as partners with Jesus in the good work of the church is found within the messiness of living life within community, steeped in prayer and a commitment to God's desire for shalom. The church must prayerfully discern the movement of the Holy Spirit within their lives and community context and be willing to move as God moves, always desiring the wholeness and flourishing of all creation. ●

Invest in AMBS's future with gift planning!

Did you know that you can donate land to AMBS? This is only one of many options to consider if you're thinking about creating a charitable giving plan that would include supporting AMBS's mission:

- **Real estate:** Give real estate including land, buildings or other property. You can make an outright gift, bypassing capital gains and estate taxes, or you can retain a life interest in the property while still obtaining a charitable income tax deduction and estate tax savings.
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If you have any questions, we're happy to help. See ambs.edu/gift-planning or contact us at development@ambs.edu. Thank you for the many ways you support AMBS! — Bob Yoder, DMin, CFRM, CFRL, CPGM, Director of Development

Employee transitions

The AMBS learning community marked the following transitions in 2025:

Top row (l. to r.):

- **Karl Stutzman**, MLS, ended his time as Director of Library Services on July 24.
- **Lisa Guedea Carreño**, MSLIS, began July 1 as Interim Director of Library Services and will serve through Sept. 30, 2026.
- **René LeBlanc**, BS, CFRM, ended his time as Caterer in Residence on July 31.

- **Tara Swartzendruber-Landis**, BA, began Aug. 4 as Caterer in Residence.
- **Cheryl Zehr**, MA, retired Aug. 31 from her role as Executive Assistant for the Church Leadership Center.

Bottom row (l. to r.):

- **Meleah L. Ladd**, PhD, began Sept. 2 as Administrative Assistant for the Church Leadership Center.
- **Steve Norton**, BA, ended his time as Assistant Director of the Journey Missional Leadership Development Program and Church Leadership Center Program Coordinator on Oct. 31.

- **Karen Sherer Stoltzfus**, BA, retired Dec. 12 from her role as Executive Assistant for the President and Vice President and Academic Dean.
- **Triest R. Fisher**, MA, began Dec. 1 as Executive Assistant for the President and Vice President and Academic Dean.

Read the full articles: ambs.edu/news-and-updates



Meet our Journey graduates!

Six participants in the **Journey Missional Leadership Development Program** completed the distance-friendly undergraduate-level certificate program in 2025.

The program — which develops leaders centered in Jesus Christ for ministries in local churches and communities — is designed for pastors, those exploring a call to ministry, church planters and lay leaders. It consists of online study, biweekly meetings with a mentor, and face-to-face gatherings twice a year. The program currently has 38 participants in Canada, Nigeria, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Uganda and the United States.

Learn more: amsb.edu/journey



Shella Franz of Mountain Lake, Minnesota; Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake (Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Church USA)

Mentor: Lois Janzen Preheim, Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota (Central Plains)



April Lo of Chicago, Illinois; Chicago Community Mennonite Church (Central District Conference, MC USA)

Mentor: Anne Munley, North Suburban Mennonite Church, Libertyville, Illinois (Illinois Mennonite Conference, MC USA)

Mennonite Conference, MC USA)



Benard Oguti of Kampala, Uganda; Ntale Mennonite Church, Mukono (Mennonite Church Uganda)

Mentor: Simon Okoth, Ntale Mennonite Church



Shane O'Leary of Wauconda and Schaumburg, Illinois; North Suburban Mennonite Church, Libertyville (Illinois Mennonite Conference, MC USA)

Mentor: Ben Bouwman, Walnut Hill Mennonite Church,

Goshen, Indiana (Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, MC USA)



Jason Pauley of Hamilton, Ohio; Trenton (Ohio) Mennonite Church (Ohio Mennonite Conference, MC USA)

Mentor: Ron Wenzel, Trenton Mennonite Church



Rachel Stolpe of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Milwaukee Mennonite Church (Central District Conference, MC USA)

Mentor: Mariah Martin, Faith Mennonite Church, Goshen (Central District) ●

Thank you to our board members!



The AMBS Board of Directors includes representatives from the seminary's sponsoring denominations (Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA) and other constituencies. We're grateful to all of our board members for contributing their time, experience and expertise! See the full list: amsb.edu/board

Board transitions in 2025 (pictured l. to r.)

- **Ending: Terry Stefaniuk**, Vice Chair, of Hague, Saskatchewan (2014–25); Osler (Saskatchewan) Mennonite Church; Mennonite Church Saskatchewan
- **Ending: Rachel Siemens** (MDiv 2007) of Edmonton, Alberta (2020–25); First Mennonite Church of Edmonton; Mennonite Church Alberta

- **Ending: Mandy Yoder** (MDiv 2003) of Goshen, Indiana (2020–25); Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana; Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference
- **Beginning: Garry Janzen** (MA 2003) of Delta, British Columbia (2025–29); Sherbrooke Mennonite Church, Vancouver, British Columbia; Mennonite Church British Columbia
- **New Vice Chair: Myrna Miller Dyck** (MDiv 2004) of Baden, Ontario (2022–26); Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
- **New Member-at-Large (Exec. Comm.): John Daniels** of Sarasota, Florida (2020–28); Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, Sarasota; Central District Conference

“An education drenched in Anabaptist theology”

Michele Hershberger, Robert J. Suderman receive 2025 Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition

Michele Hershberger, MA, of Hesston, Kansas, and **Robert (Jack) Suderman**, DTh, of Kitchener, Ontario, are the 2025 recipients of AMBS's Alumni Ministry and Service Recognition. The annual award honors alumni with an outstanding record of faithful ministry and service.

Michele, an educator, author and speaker, earned a Master of Arts: Theological Studies with a concentration in Biblical Studies in 2000. Robert, an educator and church leader, earned a Master of Religious Education in 1975 from Mennonite Biblical Seminary (MBS: one of the seminaries that was part of what was then Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries).

“This year’s honorees have had an enormous impact on the Anabaptist identity and biblical grounding of the communities they’ve served,” said Alumni Director **Janeen Bertsche Johnson**, MDiv. “I remember listening in awe as Jack described visiting every congregation in Mennonite Church Canada (in 2006, as General Secretary) and as Michele taught the introductory Bible course at Hesston College, using detailed timelines and participatory drama. Both Jack and Michele know how to engage people’s imaginations and get them excited about faith.”

Michele was pastoring in Oregon with her husband, **Del**, when friends suggested she consider studying at AMBS.

“While pastoring, I realized how much I needed a seminary education,” she said. “I needed an education drenched in Anabaptist theology.”

Michele got that education at AMBS and went on to share it with thousands of young people as a conference and convention speaker, workshop leader, author, and Bible and Ministry Professor and Campus Pastor at Hesston College. She began at Hesston in 2000, after graduating from seminary.

At AMBS, Michele said she learned about the importance of doing good biblical exegesis in a historical context and of tending to her own spiritual life. Her studies also produced a desire to make God’s story, and the story of Anabaptism, accessible to young people.

Michele has written numerous books, articles, chapters, papers, worship services, theater scripts and curricula for use in church. Her books *God’s Story, Our Story: Exploring Christian Faith and*

Life (Herald, 2013) and *Finding Ourselves in God’s Story: Exploring Christian Faith and Life* (Herald, 2025) have served as the official catechism for Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. She’s ordained by Western District Conference (MC USA).

Robert said he “grew up in a small-town church and had little in the way of Anabaptist or theological education.” While teaching at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg, he experienced faculty room conversations that were intensely theological, biblical and historical, and his desire for further biblical education took root.

Through his ensuing studies at MBS, he came to develop a more complete knowledge of Anabaptist history and convictions. He and his wife, **Irene**, also appreciated the campus community — including the obligatory Koinonia groups — and enjoyed meeting people from all over the world.

“It opened our eyes to the importance of ecumenical dialogue and exploring what the Bible means in other cultures,” Robert reflected. “It nurtured in us a desire to expand our own ministry horizons to other parts of the world.”

After graduation, Robert served as Principal at Rosthern Junior College in Saskatchewan before the Sudermans moved to Costa Rica to study Spanish. They then moved to Bolivia, where Robert taught at Seminario Teológico Bautista (Baptist Theological Seminary). In 1994, he earned a Doctor of Theology from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia.

After that, Robert served Mennonite Church Canada as Executive Secretary of the Council of Christian Education, Executive Secretary of the Mission Commission, and General Secretary. He also served Mennonite World Conference as Secretary and then Chair of the Peace Commission.

Read the full article, view the reception recording and nominate a graduate for 2026: ambs.edu/alumni — John Longhurst for AMBS



(l. to r.): Michele Hershberger and Robert J. Suderman (Credits: Larry Bartel/Rebecca Seiling)

“It nurtured in us a desire to expand our own ministry horizons to other parts of the world.”

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Pastors & Leaders 2026

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ambs.edu/pastors-and-leaders

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- Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture
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- Spiritual Practices: Trees of Life: May 29–30

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Orienting With the Word

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