

What You've Been Made For

Student Missions Week Jan. 23-27

Campus Ministries | Posted on February 3, 2017



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Former [student missionaries](#) Bruna Barbosa, senior [speech pathology & audiology](#) major, Mikelle Wile, junior [social work](#) major and Joffre St. Hillare, first-year [seminary](#) student, understand the Andrews University motto, “Seek Knowledge. Affirm Faith. Change the World,” on a personal and practical level.

These three, each with their own unique missionary experience, open up about what being a missionary is really like. Through discussing both their joys and sorrows, Bruna, Mikelle and Joffre communicate their student missionary journey in a way that inspires others to go forth in order to seek knowledge, affirm faith and change the world for themselves.

My Journey

BRUNA

I served as a kindergarten teacher in [Palau](#), an island country in the western [Pacific Ocean](#), from August 2014–June 2015. I heard all these stories about people going to be student missionaries and I thought I would want to do that. It was April, and the deadline was in March. I was late, but I talked to God and told him, “Send me now. I’m ready now, God.”

I laugh thinking about it now, but at the time I asked him to send me a butterfly as a sign. It didn’t have to be big, but I just hadn’t seen one in a long time! I was scrolling through [Pinterest](#) and I saw a post about penguins chasing a butterfly. I knew that was my sign.

I wanted to travel, experience a different culture and do something no one in my family had done. I knew it would be an adventure; that’s part of what pulled me to missions. I think that’s how God got my attention.

One of the most memorable experiences I had during my time in Palau was at our regular morning worship in the classroom.

I had worship with the kids every morning and we went through the Bible stories—you know, Adam and Eve, Daniel, David, all the regulars—and finally we got to Jesus and I got to the part where he died. I showed them crucifixion artwork. I was thinking, “Man, this is really gruesome to be showing five-year-olds,” and wondered if I was doing the wrong thing.

Then this little boy started crying like one of his favorite story characters had died and it made me realize that these kids don’t know. They’ve never heard that story before now. It was powerful to know I gave them that first exposure.

I grew up a lot over there. I used to slack off in school and didn’t have a sense of direction. From the moment I arrived on the islands I was an adult. I was a teacher. They called me “Ms.” I had to conduct parent-teacher conferences. I wasn’t trained and I had to pretend like I had it together. I ended up chaperoning field trips with 18-year-olds and I was 19 but still the adult, so I had to mature and rise to the occasion. I learned to adapt.

Within that reality, I realized you may not always be prepared for a situation, but you can do it. I was called but not qualified, and God used me anyway.

MIKELLE

I served as a house mother for an orphanage in [Bolivia](#), a country in central [South America](#), for 9 months, from September 2015–May 2016.

I went to Bolivia because I wanted to go to a Spanish-speaking country, but also because the project was an orphanage and I knew it was a very needy project. That was one of the things I wanted—a place with a lot of need. I didn’t want an adventure, necessarily; rather, I wanted to be used until I was used up.

A typical day in my life there involved a lot of house duties. I woke the kids up and made them breakfast. I had to learn to cook that Bolivian food and it took me a while! I couldn’t cook when I got there, and all of a sudden I’m cooking three meals a day. And if I messed up, I would just say “Well, that’s how we do it in Canada!” I never let on that it was a struggle because I was already struggling to speak the language and they would laugh at me. I also helped the kids with homework and served as emotional support.

This experience as a whole is what led me to switch my major when I returned to Andrews at the end of my service. The kids needed so much emotional support and I didn’t quite know how to give it. That was a part of the reason I switched my major from education to social work.

The orphanage where I served also took in child and teen mothers. It’s really cool because the moms get the chance to go to school, which they wouldn’t get otherwise, because I was there to watch the babies.

This part of my experience taught me something about mothers. I learned that moms are angels. They do so much for us that we never knew about or understood. I didn’t realize it until I had to be a “mom” myself.

I also learned what it was like to really depend on God. Whether you’re lonely, you can’t communicate or because you’re in a job that’s got you in way over your head, you have to learn to lean on him. At home in [Canada](#), I knew God, but not what it was like to really realize my need Him for on a day-to-day basis.

I will always feel connected to Bolivia and those kids. In fact, I plan to go back this summer. Theirs are the faces I see when I’m learning about a new concept in social work. They are what compel me

to work harder so I can offer the help I wish I could've given them at the time. I am more passionate about my studies, about people and about helping them.

JOFFRE

I served in [South Korea](#) as a teacher, then a coordinator for a mission school during 2015.

While I was there I learned a lot of things about myself and other cultures and I had to really trust God full-on. I've never had to trust Him in such a capacity and I've never experienced Him in such a capacity. I was in a state where I just wanted to do whatever God wanted me to do.

I was lonely a lot while I was there. I needed someone to pour into me emotionally and spiritually, but that wasn't available. I was taken care of physically—they gave us a stipend and set us up in housing. But the deeper, emotional need was something I struggled with.

A typical work day for me in South Korea lasted 15 hours. Class began at 6 in the morning, and didn't finish until 9 at night. There were gaps when I could prepare for the other classes, but I had to literally fight for my time with God and fight for my walk with Him.

Around the 6-month mark, I went through a tough time. There were a lot of people around me there who had plastic surgery. The atmosphere was really secular. I got into this depressed state and I started to feel self-conscious. I didn't like what I looked like and I didn't want to be there anymore. I was thinking, "Maybe I should get plastic surgery. Maybe I should I go back to the States."

With God's help, I was able to become a leader at the school. But I had to spend time with God every day, and that's really what helped make the change. I found him and I saw how much he cared about me. I still have to fight those feelings of insecurity every day.

Through this experience I found God. I thought I knew him before, but it wasn't until I was in a place where I didn't really have people to assist me in my personal growth that I found Him. I couldn't really call family; there was a 15-hour time difference and I didn't always have Wi-Fi. I was literally by myself. But God took me to [Jeremiah 29:13](#) and it says, "If you seek me, you'll find me if you search for me with all your heart."

When I went back home, I found a journal that was from 2010/11 that I hadn't looked at or written in since then. I had done a five-year plan, and in the plan, I see 'Go to Korea!' I mean, the years were off by a bit, but I hadn't even remembered that this was in the plan. God did his thing.

The Best and the Worst

BRUNA

The best part? Those kids. I had 17 kids and I will never forget them. They've become part of who I am and they formed me, in a way. Leonard Paloma, a student in my class, was the cutest kid ever; I've never had someone show me such unconditional love. I could discipline him and he'd still hug me and love me.

The worst was the drama. There were so many expectations on you. Parents want you to be a particular way and it was hard sometimes. They want you to be what the natives expect a missionary to be, which makes sense, because it allows them to be more open to you.

MIKELLE

The best part of my experience was seeing and believing that God answers prayers. I saw Him do it so many times for both small things and big things. My mission partner left after two months, so I was really lonely. I learned God can be a friend just like a human can be a friend.”

I will never forget Liz. She was a young with plenty of love and she left quite the impression on me. She was the youngest little girl in my house. She was the cause of the most annoyances, but also brought up so much love in me. She really loved me, showed me what love looks like, and even when I disciplined her it didn't take long for her to give me a hug and say sorry. She always wanted to be near me. I loved her because she was someone who needed so much love but gave so much love and I just wonder if anyone is reading her books anymore, or allowing her to be a kid.

The worst part, honestly, was coming back. You come back changed because you build such strong relationships where you serve, and you know what it's like to make sacrifices for God and to serve him. For me, coming back made it harder to see how I could be continually sacrificing for Him. It was really obvious when I was cooking for a child who wouldn't otherwise have food that you're serving God. But when you're just focused on finishing the semester it can be hard to see how you're serving him.

JOFFRE

Absolutely the best part of my student missions experience was finding God and finding purpose. My last week was so amazing. Usually missionaries and teachers say their students always love on them but that wasn't my experience.

However, at my school, they switched groups of students every so often. The group I had those last two months was super loving, and I was kind of bummed that it took until the end of my time there for me to find a group of kids who actually loved me. I had donated all my clothes to the homeless in the days before leaving, but I didn't tell anyone I did that. Long story short: They gave me coats, jackets, shoes and suits. I just felt super loved in that last week. And in my Bible class people were giving their lives to Christ. It was amazing.

The worst part, though, was the development of insecurities that I have to face even still today.

Who is The Ideal Student Missionary?

BRUNA

Anyone. I've seen your typical student missionary. You know, the person who reads their bible every morning and everything about their lives is all about God. I've seen in a guy that came with me the person who is running from himself and God uses him anyway. He was completely changed. You don't have to be anyone specific because God takes us where we are.

MIKELLE

I think that everything will follow if you have a sincere desire to help and fill a need. We all go for some selfish reason—getting away from school or having an adventure—but if part of your reason is a desire to serve God and people then everything will follow. You don't have to speak many languages or consider yourself particularly adaptable; those things will come.

JOFFRE

Anyone can go. If you want the experience and the stories, you'll get the experience and the stories. If you want to know God, you'll know God. If you want to find God, you'll find God. If you want to know your purpose, you'll find your purpose.

What to Expect

BRUNA

I suggest you expect nothing at all.

They told us to lower all our expectations, and I think they were right. Don't expect anything, don't expect to have this life-changing story just like the other student missionaries whose stories you've heard because that won't be your experience. The first two months can be so hard. You're in a foreign country, there's a language barrier, the food is different and you're expecting this magical transformation. Just let your trip speak for itself.

MIKELLE

You can expect to not be doing the job you were sent to do. Expect to find out things about yourself that you didn't know before, but then, that's necessary when you're growing up. I would say, expect to have a change in perspective, maybe to understand better what is really important. This happens especially when working with people who don't have as much as you.

JOFFRE

If you want God to speak purpose into your life and show you what you've been made for, it will happen. In mission, God has a different kind of access to you than when you're not in mission, or not in a foreign land. Abroad, you're by yourself. Expect for God to reveal himself in a way He never has before. Expect to learn about yourself at a rapid pace.

Want to Give it a Try?

BRUNA

You should definitely do it. It needs to be a calling, but really talk to God and ask him and be willing and open to the idea of being a missionary. Let it happen. Let it change you. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable and finding out all these flaws about yourself you didn't know were there. When you're a student missionary there's so much about yourself that you learn. Every problem you've pushed down becomes so real. It's different for everyone.

MIKELLE

Do it. Now is the time. You have a pretty fleeting window where this is really available because you'll have to start paying off loans, you'll start a family, and you can totally go then as well, but it's not the same as going as a student. I would say go because it helps you to discover your passions and how you can best use the talents that God already gave you. You learn how to love people and love yourself too.

JOFFRE

Pray about it right now and start trying to look for a place because God wants you to do it! He wants you to have an experience with him like no other. You'll come back and be an amazing force for him.

Learn More

- Click through the image gallery at the top of this story for more pictures of Bruna, Mikelle and Joffre on their missions.
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- Email: sm@andrews.edu
- Phone: 269-471-3211
- The Office of Campus Ministries is located in the Campus Center ([virtual map/campus tour](#))

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