

Two new VIMs, two unique journeys

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New Volunteers in Mission: the Rev. Aubrey Hemminger and the Rev. Emilie Smith.

General Synod's [Volunteers in Mission](#) (VIM) program has sent unique people to unique places. How can an ordained veterinarian serve God overseas? VIM set her up to teach animal anatomy and support church life in Uganda. What about a retired couple, passionate about organic farming? VIM connected them with a participatory agricultural school in Japan.

The Rev. Aubrey Hemminger and the Rev. Emilie Smith are two new recruits to VIM, which places lay and ordained Canadian Anglican volunteers with overseas partners, at their request, often for several years.

The two are currently exploring how their gifts can plug into a placement. Mr. Hemminger is a chaplain at a long-term care facility in Winnipeg. He is considering opportunities in Belize and South Africa. Ms. Smith is a self-described "roving priest," in the Diocese of New Westminster. She will travel to Guatemala, hopefully by next fall.

The pair was in Toronto last week for a mission orientation conference offered by the [Canadian Churches' Forum for Global Ministries](#). They visited a Six Nations community, toured multicultural Toronto neighbourhoods, and learned some Biblical foundations of missions.

Over lunch last Friday they sipped soup and talked about what led them to VIM.

Seeking God through every change

"I see seeking God as a rule of thumb for life," explained Mr. Hemminger, a tall man with a warm smile. In 1993, he was working as a letter carrier for Canada Post and his dream was to work as a non-stipendiary pastor priest. He said God opened up an opportunity for him to work as a chaplain at Deer Lodge, a long-term care centre.

At Deer Lodge he developed a passion for spiritual care, working with veterans, the mentally ill, and those recovering from major surgery.

VIM had intrigued him for many years, but he never saw a post that fit his skills. Finally he contacted Jill Cruse, General Synod's coordinator for mission education and personnel, who said that matching people and placements was part of her job. The conversation continued on what best to do with Mr. Hemminger's passion for spiritual care and his bilingual talents.

Already Mr. Hemminger says he feels blessed by his community's support. His home church—the Anglican-Lutheran congregation of St. Stephen's and St. Bede's—has been, he said, "deeply faithful in the midst of change."

Long-time love for Guatemala

As for Ms. Smith, she's going to a country she knows well.

"I've had a long relationship with Guatemala—over 25 years," she explained. She's led pilgrimages there for young people, written a master's thesis on the country, and developed a friendship with Bishop Armando Roman Guerra Soria. Their ongoing conversation about how she could serve in Guatemala came to a head about six months ago.

"He just turned to me and said, 'can you just come?'" she said. "And because I'm a thoughtful, reflective person, I took about three seconds to say 'yes!'"

Back in Canada, Ms. Smith set up the arrangement through VIM and began a discerning process with her bishop, church community, and three sons about what comes next.

The plan is to head down this fall to work as an assistant to the suffragan bishop in Chichicastenango for two years.

"It's a very little church," she said. "For half the year, the rainy season, the water pours into the church and pools under the altar." She laughs.

Though Ms. Smith knows much about Guatemala, this will be the first time she travels to the country as an Anglican priest supported by a community back home.

"I feel so grateful to VIM for helping me learn this way of being active in the life of the church," she said. "I'm so moved by the support that I have. I'm almost speechless."

Over the next months and years Mr. Hemminger and Ms. Smith will settle into their placements and keep in touch with the rest of the church. Their updates will be posted on the [VIM website](#).

Do you know a lay or ordained Canadian Anglican who is interested in volunteering overseas? [Email Jill Cruse](#) to see if their unique skills (whether in physics, phys. ed. or church embroidery) fit with needs somewhere out there in the Anglican Church of Canada's vast network of partners.