

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION



Speaking the Language of Faith

Erika Randall remembers that her time in Malaysia always began with a short walk under the hot sun (about 15 steps) followed by greetings (“Good morning, Teacher!”) and hugs from her students. It was a quick commute to a job that was very far from home.

The 23-year-old from Minnesota taught English to children in Malaysia for a year as a young adult volunteer with the ELCA.

Her students, ages 6 to 13 years, eagerly soaked up their lessons. So did Erika, who considered herself as much a student as a teacher.

She gained some proficiency in Malay, the local language, with enthusiastic tutoring from the children in her classes.

Part of learning a new language, Erika discovered, was being open to the uniqueness of each person speaking

the language and to the nuances of the culture that frame the words.

Taking that step asked Erika to engage in one-on-one relationships with her students—a task the Luther College graduate relishes.

“At first I had a difficult time teaching the students, and I think it was because we just didn’t get each other,” Erika confesses.

“I realized I had to really listen and really hear the children. I learned the hard way about the value of making relationships and getting to know people as individuals.”

Most important, Erika adds, is that “we grew together. I loved those kids! They taught me that patience and conversations are the most important characteristics in developing relationships, especially in a cross-cultural setting.”

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