



PRESENCE

THE MUST FOR TOUCHING HEARTS

MELISSA (BLYTHE) ALTMAN, LV 02-04

During my time as a Lasallian Volunteer and campus minister at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn, New York, I often had students stop by my office and just sit and talk. Some students were daily visitors and others only visited every so often. For some of the students, it was their way to touch base with their own thoughts and feelings. I never really had any advice or words of wisdom for them. But through those conversations, I learned how important it is to take a break from paperwork and just be present to them.



Melissa Altman now lives and serves in El Salvador with her family.

Looking back, much of my job at Loughlin was a ministry of presence. High school is tough, and these students were trying to figure it all out. Many did not come from very supportive homes, and they needed time to process their thoughts and feelings. **As an LV, I learned how to be present to the person in front of me.**

More than 15 years later, I find myself yet again in a ministry of presence as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in El Salvador. I work at a women's sewing cooperative in the town of Zaragoza, El Salvador. Much of my work as

a missioner is organizing workshops, promoting sales of artisanal products, completing administrative tasks, and promoting a positive working atmosphere. But the majority of my job (and one of my favorite parts) is sharing life with the women in the cooperative. Being present to them reminds me of my days at Bishop Loughlin. These women are not dealing with the same issues as my former students. They are dealing

with trauma from a brutal civil war, gang violence and poverty. Sharing life with them and being present through pain, sadness, joy and triumph is why I continue to do this work.

In January, we will complete six years living here. Our kids, now 9 and 12, tell us we are not allowed to leave El Salvador because it is home. But who knows where the spirit will lead us next.

As a LV, I learned countless lessons that I've carried through my life. Here in El Salvador, what I learned about being present to the person in front of me has proven to be the most valuable lesson of all.

Melissa Altman, LV 02-04, served at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn, New York. She lives with her husband, Peter, and their two children, Elijah, 12, and Evangelina, 9, in El Salvador. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of Lasallian Volunteers, this story is one in a series of reflections by LV alums on how the LV experience has impacted their lives. Additional reflections can be found at www.LasallianVolunteers.org.

