

## God's Timing on Island Time: Communications & Event Specialist Participates in Puerto Rico Peace Camp

By Marianne Fitzkee

[LEER EN ESPAÑOL](#)

### *The Right Time*

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.”

There are moments when circumstances align so precisely that an opportunity feels less like a coincidence and more like a calling.

For me, it was the right time to attend a February 15–21 [Peace Camp](#) in Puerto Rico organized by Mennonite Central Committee. The ANE District's Continuing Education funds covered the exact registration cost. I had just completed the six-month employment requirement to begin taking vacation days. And with all the snow, I had developed an increasingly desperate vitamin D deficit. The timing felt meant to be.

Peace Camps are one-week, hands-on learning experiences for young adults (who don't have to be Mennonite!) who want to explore social change, experience personal transformation, and apply Anabaptist biblical foundations of peace and justice to real-world issues. This particular camp was held predominantly in Spanish.



Around twenty participants—from across the Americas and representing multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds—gathered at a retreat center outside of San Juan for a transformative week of learning and relationship-building alongside local and national MCC organizers.

The opportunity to gather with a diverse group of Spanish-speakers who care about peace in the way of Jesus felt especially timely given the current realities of rising polarization and anti-immigrant sentiment around the world.

### *At the Same Time*

“ . . . a time to mourn and a time to dance . . . ”

The week held both lament and joy.



MCC organizers led sessions on Puerto Rico’s history, biblical hospitality, trauma and migration, peacebuilding practices, and MCC’s presence on the island.

We processed what we were learning through embodied activities, such as morning stretching with an accompanying prayer, acting out scripture passages, and art-making.

We also left the retreat center to take a learning tour of San Juan and visit MCC partner organization Finca Guakiá, a women-led agroecological farm in San Lorenzo.

Over the course of the week, we learned hard truths.

We learned that the synonym for Puerto Rican, “Boricua,” comes from Borikén, the indigenous Taíno name for the archipelago, meaning “land of the brave people,” but that the Taíno people were destroyed in the process of Spanish colonization.

That in 1898, the United States took control of Puerto Rico from Spain. That in 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship—just in time to be drafted into World War I. That only in 1948 did Puerto Rico get to elect its own governor rather than having one appointed by the U.S. president. That despite being U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections unless they move to the mainland, and that the island is represented by just one non-voting delegate in the House of Representatives.

We learned about gentrification in San Juan. About tax incentives that have drawn wealthy investors and crypto entrepreneurs to buy property, often converting homes into short-term rentals and displacing locals. About shady private electricity contracts that have resulted in more frequent outages for everyday Puerto Ricans. About ICE targeting Dominican neighborhoods in the city.

We learned that for over sixty years the U.S. Navy used the inhabited Puerto Rican islands of Vieques and Culebra for intensive military exercises—bombardments that left environmental devastation and long-term health consequences.

We learned that after Hurricane Maria, people were so thoroughly traumatized that many stopped going by the name Maria.

And at the same time, we encountered and experienced joy.

There is a famous Puerto Rican painting, *El Velorio*, that depicts a baquiné—a funeral for a child that is communal and vibrant due to a belief that the child is now in heaven.

In life, we often inhabit overlapping and contradictory realities. Grief and gratitude. Anger and hope. Lament and celebration. As people living in the “already and not yet” kingdom of Christ’s victory and the world’s brokenness, the invitation is not to resolve the tension but to hold it faithfully.

One of the most powerful ideas I carried home was this: joy is resistance. The logic of empire cannot comprehend—indeed, it fears—joy that persists through oppression and sorrow. To dance in the face of despair is to reclaim dignity.

One peace camp participant led a morning devotional on Ecclesiastes 3, during which she played the song [“Baila” by The Common Hymnal](#). “Baila” means dance, and the lyrics say, in part: Though I walk without knowing my next step / I can move forward knowing that I’m kept / So let’s go, I’m ready, no looking back / Dance / It’s time to delight.

*It’s Go Time*

“. . . a time to be silent and a time to speak . . .”

One phrase shared during the farm visit continues to echo in my mind: *socialmente consciente, socialmente responsable*—socially conscious, socially responsible.

Now that I have learned more about injustices and struggles that have taken place and persist in Puerto Rico, I feel that I have a responsibility to share what I have learned.

On the trip, we were encouraged that we do not have to wait until we are experts to begin acting for our neighbors’ good, and that if we cannot directly impact Puerto Rico, then we can at least work for positive change within our own communities.

There is a time to be silent. And there is a time to speak.

A time to mourn. And a time to dance.

A time to learn. And a time to act.

The time is now.

