**A little about Bosnia, the war and its aftermath:**

BOSNIA
The country's full name is Bosnia-Hercegovina, but we usually shorten it to Bosnia. Bosnia is a small country, about the size of West Virginia, with a population of about 3.5 million people. An absolutely gorgeous country with beautiful mountains and rivers and forests. It’s in south-eastern Europe - if you’re looking at a map its just to the right of Italy. It is a country with a rich history dating back thousands of years. Many different cultures, ethnic groups and religious traditions coexist in Bosnia with the three largest being the Bosniaks (who are traditionally Muslim), the Bosnian Serbs (who are traditionally Orthodox Christian) and the Bosnian Croats (who are traditionally Roman Catholic).

THE WAR
It’s next to impossible to summarize a war in just a couple of sentences, but here we go: Bosnia was a part of a much larger country, Yugoslavia. In the 1990s Yugoslavia began to break up along regional/ethnic/historical lines. Bosnia was the third section of Yugoslavia to declared its independence, which sparked a civil war that lasted a little over 4 years, from 1992 to 1996. This war was never a war between the peoples, it was planned and perpetrated by some nationalistic leaders. It was a brutal, terrible war that saw years-long sieges, massacres, concentration camps, rape camps, and more. In the midst of this horror there were countless acts of bravery, self-sacrifice, loving resistance and more. The war ended with a peace accord signed at an Air Force base outside of Dayton, Ohio.

THE AFTERMATH
The Dayton Peace Accord ended the fighting, but it established a very unjust “peace”. While in some places things are moving forward, many people and many communities still can’t recover from the war. Many war criminals are still at large (some even serving as police or in the government). Many refugees are still unable to return to their homes. Mass graves are still being found. In many places the ethnic groups are unable to live together. So many of the people in Bosnia want peace and reconciliation, but it is so hard…

**Our Bosnia Ministry:**

BACKGROUND
In 1998 (two years after the war ended) an ELCA congregation in Metropolitan Washington, DC Synod took a team of youth and adults to Bosnia to hold Friendship Camps (described below) for the children who survived the war. In 2000 this ministry moved to the New Jersey Synod where they began bringing multigenerational teams to Bosnia holding Friendship Camps throughout the country. These annual International Servant Trips (ISTs) are about 12 days in length. Since 2000 they have hosted 2 Camp New Hopes and over 160 Friendship Camps in about 35 different schools and orphanages with over 24,000 children participants!

NEW JERSEY SYNOD BOSNIA IST
Our Bosnia IST ministry is a ministry of healing, hope and peace. We work for those in two ways: 1. We hold Camps - New Hope and Friendship (occasionally with concerts); and 2. We live and make friends with Bosnian young people and adults and explore their beautiful, wounded country.

1. Friendship Camps. Our Friendship Camps gather children from the different ethnic groups for a half-day program that teaches peace-making and reconciliation skills, offers diversity training, and provides music and play therapy. We accomplish these through drama, cooperative challenges/games, music and servant projects, and lots and lots of fun, all the while having them do these things with children from different ethnic groups. And of course we spend as much time as possible simply being with them. Our Travel Team members usually return home with many new facebook friends!

Camp New Hope. Camp New Hope began in 2013 with a desire to bring together children and teacher from schools in different regions of the country. Our conviction was that incredible things will happen when we bring together people who want a shared future with their neighbors from different ethnic groups/religious faiths to live together for three days, all the while explore aspects of peace, reconciliation and hope through games, conversation, and visits to a church and a mosque. When we have this special mix of young teens and adults, not only the program time but the play time, meals, swimming and just hanging out becomes transformative. Camp New Hope has met and exceeded our expectations! Here is an excellent article in the [July 13 Philadelphia Inquirer](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/nation_world/20140713_Finding_peace_among_different_faiths.html) about our Camp New Hope by CNH Team member/leader Cindy Henry.

"This has been the best day of my life!" - Friendship Camp participant from Sarajevo

2. Living with them. With our Bosnia partners, young people serving as interpreters and adults serving as coordinators, we travel around the country by bus staying hotels and host homes. We visit sites important in the war (former concentration camps, massacre and mass grave sites, etc.) where we talk with survivors and local peace-builders (our heros and friends!). We visit mosques and churches and beautiful town centers. We tour and stay with local peace-focused organizations. We also find time to relax, swim (sometimes), talk, dance, sing, worship and eat their wonderful food and lots of their even-more-wonderful ice cream! This aspect of the IST is critically important to us and our Bosnian partners and friends.

It's hard work. It's loads of fun and sometimes heart-breaking. It's life changing.