

# Young Adults in Global Mission

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Global Mission



The ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission program provides one year mission service and learning opportunities in international settings. As the young adult volunteers offer themselves in service, they also learn more about themselves, their relationship with God, and their place in God's world. Young

**IMAGINE YOURSELF  
IN THE WORLD...**

adults are transformed by their experiences, equipping them upon return to take on responsibilities within the church and to provide a global perspective on issues facing the church and society.

### Foundation

The Global Mission unit of the ELCA is responsible for the ELCA's mission in other countries. The ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission program is rooted in the ministry goals of the ELCA. The program embodies the spirit of the ELCA's guiding documents that include these elements:

- ♦ *Mission statement of the ELCA*
  - Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world.
- ♦ *Vision Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
  - Sent by God's grace for the sake of the world, we will proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people following the example of our Lord Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the world.
- ♦ *Strategic directions for the churchwide organization (below are two of the five strategic directions)*
  - Deepen and extend our global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God's mission
  - Assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God's mission in a pluralistic world.

The Young Adults in Global Mission program raises up leaders who are both globally formed and globally informed. The ELCA will benefit from leaders who have the ability and facility to relate to people across culture, race, language and faith. This cadre of young adults who appreciate the richness of diversity will greatly assist the church in achieving its goals and in reaching beyond them.

### History

The Young Adult program began in 1999 when a relationship was established with the U.K. ecumenical organization, Time for God. Ten volunteers comprised the first group in the program. From its inception, the young adult program intended to expand to include other countries and types of mission opportunities. In 2002, Argentina, Germany and Thailand were added. The numbers increased to 32. In subsequent years, the number of countries expanded to include Egypt, Hungary/Ukraine, India, Kenya, Mexico, Philippines and Slovakia. For a variety of reasons some programs were dropped or suspended, like Thailand, Hungary/Ukraine, and Egypt. The number of participants has recently been in a range of 37-42 volunteers. The goal is to continue to grow the program through a variety of opportunities and in numbers of volunteers.



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## Goals

The Young Adults in Global Mission program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to carry out the following:

1. To provide ELCA young adults with a **year-long international mission experience** that will contribute to their **development as servant-leaders** for the church.
2. To utilize international settings for equipping young adults in the church with **cross-cultural skills through service and relationship building**.
3. To provide **engaging and challenging opportunities** that will result in young adults who are both **globally formed and globally informed**.
4. To provide young adults with opportunities to **grow in their faith** and to **better understand their place in God's world**.
5. To share the **gifts and stories of the global church and community** with U.S. and ELCA communities.

## Program Characteristics

### 1. International Cross-Cultural Experience

The Young Adults in Global Mission program provides young adults with the opportunity to live and serve in international, cross-cultural settings for one year. YAGM volunteers are expected to act as participant observers, navigating with humility outside of their comfort zones and in situations outside of their control, building relationships with their local community as they seek to be in service to others. The experience will help to broaden their global awareness and to enrich their understanding of the global expression of the church.

### 2. Service-Learning/Servant-Leadership

It is the hope of the ELCA that YAGM volunteers will grow in their understanding of service as Christian vocation and will embrace a life of servant leadership. While service is certainly an important component of the program, participants are encouraged to recognize their year abroad as a learning opportunity as much as an opportunity to serve. The international setting provides a dynamic environment for both learning and service.

### 3. Growth in Faith

A high priority is placed on the spiritual formation and growth of YAGM volunteers. The ELCA fosters leadership development through mentoring groups that utilize spiritual and educational resources, with the recognition that this year of service is a prime opportunity for volunteers to focus on their own personal faith lives and how their faith relates to their abilities and positions

as servant leaders. In-country retreats, congregational worship, and personal devotional practices also contribute to enhancing the spiritual lives of YAGM volunteers.

#### **4. Ecumenical Partnerships**

The ELCA works closely with similar programs of other denominations (particularly with the Presbyterian Church (USA)), to provide comprehensive and integrative orientation and re-entry programs, as well as to share placement sites and country coordinators, providing a wider range of service opportunities to volunteers of the participating denominations.

#### **5. Support System**

A support network is built into the program, both in-country and stateside. Country coordinators assist with adjustment and orientation to the culture, as well as with issues that arise during service. Support and follow-up throughout the year is provided by ELCA Global Mission staff, in addition to orientation and re-entry retreats.

Although a broad support system is in place, YAGM volunteers will face and need to respond to internal and external issues that will be at times intense and confounding. Cross-cultural living will challenge YAGM volunteers to draw upon their reservoir of strengths, looking for support within new relationships in their local community, and learning new ways of healthy problem solving. Commitment, integrity, flexibility, and humility are characteristics that will be required.

#### **6. Community Building**

In response to the program emphasis on community, country coordinators schedule regular retreats or seminars during which volunteers serving in the same country come together to reflect on their experiences, to share stories and struggles, to worship and pray together, and to support and learn from one another.

#### **7. Simple Living**

Participants are expected to embrace a simple lifestyle. Volunteers receive a modest stipend to cover basic living expenses and are discouraged from using their own funds to supplement this income. This simple standard of living is intended to be a spiritual practice as well as a socioeconomic statement, and is understood to be an integral part of the program.

