



Jill Rode (left) said her experience with Young Adults in Global Mission in Thailand helped her discern a call to ministry; she is now a pastor at St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn.



20 YEARS OF FORMATIVE SERVICE

Jessica Craver's feet felt frozen.

Recently deployed by ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) to the Lutheran Church in Australia, she'd failed to pack adequate footwear to withstand the continent's harsh winter. Her host mother had noticed.

"She set out a basin and washed my feet," Craver said. "What a beautiful sign ... that we are called to serve each other in ways that are uncomfortable."

That was four years ago, but Craver, now a nurse in Seattle, said the moment continues to influence her approach to hospitality when she cares for the city's most vulnerable.

Such stories are common among the more than 1,100 YAGM alumni. The program, which recently celebrated 20 years, originated from a partnership with the U.K. volunteer organization Time for God. Since then, it has evolved to include collaborations with ELCA companion churches or organizations in Argentina/Uruguay, Australia, Central Europe, Jerusalem/West Bank, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Kingdom.

And it has a history of influencing future ELCA leaders.

"YAGM volunteers are formed by our companion churches and the ELCA during their time in service; they come back to the United States ready to effect positive change within our congregations and U.S. society," said

Michael Busbey, acting director for mission personnel and leadership formation.

This rings true for Jill Rode, who taught in Thailand through YAGM more than 15 years ago. After her YAGM year, she returned to teach there for 3 1/2 more years.

"[During] that YAGM year ... my faith was broken open and put together again. All those years formed the foundation for me to think about seminary," said Rode, now a pastor at St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn.

Although YAGM will pause in sending out young adults during the 2020-21 year due to COVID-19, staff say the future of this program is "very bright." **Funded in part by Mission Support, YAGM continues to affect the church through its rich cohort of alumni who are pursuing callings as rostered leaders, educators, farmers, medical professionals, lawyers, camp directors, filmmakers, politicians, social workers, human rights activists and more.**

"It really acts as confirmation and affirmation of an individual's call to serve God and welcome our neighbors," Rode said. "YAGM takes this really big world and shrinks it down. People who were once strangers become neighbors and friends."

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