



NEWS FROM YAGM SENEGAL

Pastor Kristin Engstrom, YAGM Country Coordinator

January 2021

Returning to Senegal

When I returned to the United States in March, 2020 due to concerns about COVID-19, I thought I would be in the US for only a couple months. As with most of our expectations around COVID, my expectations were stretched by reality as I continue to live and work in the United States ten months later. And so it is with great joy and some trepidation, that I am excited to share that I will be returning to Senegal at the beginning of February.



Kristin's apartment building in Senegal

Please continue to keep our sisters and brothers in Senegal and myself in your prayers. Senegal is currently responding to a second wave of COVID infections. Masks are mandatory, an evening curfew is in place, and large gatherings are not allowed. The government of Senegal is hoping to begin COVID vaccinations in March, as part of the COVAX initiative. COVAX is part of a partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and Gavi (Global Alliance for Vaccines & Immunizations) “with the aim of providing innovative and equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines... in order to ensure that people in all corners of the world will get access to COVID-19 vaccines once they are available, regardless of their wealth.”

Even as I plan my return to Senegal, the YAGM program is in the process of discerning the feasibility of this global program for 2021-2022. This discernment process has included listening to our YAGM companions, researching COVID statistics and trends, and discussing and praying about how and if we can facilitate the YAGM program next year while also protecting and ensuring the health and safety of YAGM participants and companions. Once a decision is made about the feasibility of the YAGM 2021-2022 program, it will be announced on the YAGM facebook page (facebook.com/ELCAYAGM).

Thank you for your continued support of the global church and of my work as a missionary during this time of uncertainty. I have been inspired and fortified by your faithfulness and your partnership in ministry. God be with you. Nio farr.

Accompanying YAGM Senegal

My work as an ELCA Global Missionary is possible thanks to the generosity of many congregations and individuals in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Thank you! Jerejef! Merci! Jokonjol! Jahram! You can contact me via e-mail at kristin.engstrom@elca.org. [You are also invited to support me as an ELCA Global Missionary here.](#)

If you would like to see more pictures and stories from YAGM Senegal, please visit our blog at <http://yagmsenegal.wixsite.com/blog>.



Pastor Kristin Engstrom

As an ELCA global missionary, I serve as the Country Coordinator for the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program in Senegal.

I'm originally from the mid-western United States, and served as a parish pastor in northern New Jersey for six years prior to moving to Senegal in 2016.





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YAGM Perspectives of Accompaniment

During the season of advent, YAGM alumni from all programs shared stories from their YAGM year in which they witnessed Christ embodied in another. Below are stories from YAGM Senegal alumni. Find all the Advent Narratives at the Young Adults in Global Mission facebook page (@ELCAYAGM).

(un)Stable Stories: Lily Brondyke, YAGM Senegal 2017-2018



Left-Right: Penda, Adjii, Lily

"Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'" Luke 24:31-32

Advent in Senegal looked entirely unfamiliar. I couldn't see "Christmas" in the life happening around me. Just a few days before Christmas day, I went to the office to call my family in Iowa. I left with tears in my eyes, longing for my family, my friends, and a sense of familiarity.

I didn't know Adjii well at this point. She worked in the same place but we had never talked. And yet, when I came out of my office that day, she was so happy to see me. She exuded the anticipatory joy of the season. Her hair had been freshly braided and adorned with gold beads. She was preparing for the Christmas celebration. And, as tears streamed down my eyes, she held out her hand and invited me into her joy.

That afternoon we went shopping for Christmas shoes. She told me what to buy for my host family's Christmas celebrations. She said goodbye that night, promising to see me the next day – Christmas Eve. We saw each other Christmas Eve and every day after for the rest of my year. She taught me how to cook, we walked to market, we shared meals, and we began a legendary prank war.

Advent is a season of preparation. I couldn't recognize or feel the preparation, and yet, the joy of Christ broke me open. Nothing stops the love of God entering this world as Jesus Christ. In that season, Adjii's joy was the joy of Christ inviting me into God's love. I had thought since I couldn't see it, it couldn't be there. But she invited me into that joy, that could only be God's, and her friendship changed my life.

(un)Stable Stories: Jessica (Roit) Eckhardt, YAGM Senegal 2016-2017

During my first weekend in Yeumbeul, I was invited to dinner at the home of my supervisor, Maguette. When I arrived, she took my hand and led me through the crowd of people, introducing me along the way. I stumbled through "Hello! How are you?" in Wolof, which was met with smiles and kindness.

I was introduced to Maguette's mother-in-law, and noticed she was praying with everyone. People came to her, hands open and head bowed. They would talk for a while before the mother-in-law would start praying. I didn't have a strong enough grasp of the Wolof language to ask questions, so I sat in silence during the prayers, hoping to show my respect. During one of the prayers, the woman sitting next to me motioned for me to place my hands – palms up – on my lap, and to bow my head. I did this for the remainder of the evening.

As the evening came to a close, I spoke English with Maguette's brother-in-law, where I learned the day's celebration was a Muslim ceremony honoring the mother-in-law's return from Mecca. Traditionally when someone returns, people come to pray with this individual. They pray together for forgiveness and to ask for their burdens to be lifted. When I heard this, the hairs on my arms stood on end. I, a Christian, was asked to pray with this family during their ceremony. I saw Christ embodied in Maguette for inviting me into her home a week after meeting me. I felt the Holy Spirit in the mother-in-law's prayers. I felt at home with God with my Muslim siblings.



Jessica with Maguette's mother-in-law