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Amy served in the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission ministry in Rwanda from 2016-2017. During her YAGM year, she taught English, facilitated Bible studies, and coached a debate team at the Protestant Institute for Arts and Social Sciences. St. Barnabas contributed \$7000 towards Amy's position through our "Building with Living Stones" Capital Appeal.

Now that her YAGM year is complete, Amy is working as a journalist and editor at the Sun Thisweek in Apple Valley.

The 2016-2017 Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program sent 85 volunteers to 11 different countries around the world. I was sent with five other young adult women to Rwanda.

I worked at a University called the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (or PIASS), where I was assigned a job teaching English. But to be honest with you, my most important job was getting to know my community. Peeling potatoes or playing board games with my neighbors, talking about our hopes for the future with my students — that is how I spent most of my time.

The YAGM Program is founded on the model of "accompaniment" — the idea that we all have something to share. Rather than leading or following during our year of service, we walk along-side our communities.

So rather than talking to you about my work at PIASS, I'm here today to talk to you about something much more important. The guavas.

I lived in a house owned by the university, just across the street from campus. And in the side of our yard was an enormous guava tree. The tree was so big, its branches extended over the top of our house and into our neighbor's yard. It was the landmark of our home, and everyone in the community knew about it.

When the first rainy season ended, fruit began to appear on the tree, and neighbors began to appear at our gate. I remember hearing a knock and unlocking our gate to find a group of 10 students, dressed in athletic clothing, carrying backpacks and bags and scarves.

"We're here for the guavas," they said, and walked past me into the yard. They spent the next hour climbing the tree, picking the fruit, and filling their bags.

But they also spent that hour shouting down to me from where I stood under the tree. They tossed me fruit and helped me practice counting by 5, then by 10, then by 100 in Kinyarwanda. They taught me a song called "bringing in the sheaves" — a song about collecting the harvest making an offering. They told me jokes that I'd finally gained enough cultural competency to think were funny.

Just as the students left, there was another knock at my gate. I opened it to find my 9-year old friend, Teta, and several other children of the PIASS students.

"We are here for guavas," Teta said, running past me to begin collecting fruit that had fallen on the ground.

And it went on like that all afternoon. Just as one group left, another group would arrive. People from different areas of our city — people I'd never met — came over, without invitation, expecting to pick ripe fruit off the tree.

The next day, I asked my friend Gady (who had been one of the students in the first group) about the great-guava-picking festival that had seemed to happen in my yard. I remember that he looked at me, bewildered in his eyes.

"You weren't going to eat all of them, were you?" he said.

Rwanda has a strong culture of sharing — a culture rooted in a philosophy of generosity. My community knew there was more fruit than our household could eat, and just as they took care of me by sharing their time and company, they expected us to share our guavas.

There were a lot of days in Rwanda when I wondered why I was there — days when I didn't have classes to teach, days when it rained for 12 hours, days when I felt like I should be working, days when it felt like I should be accomplishing tasks. But what I learned, from the guavas, is that my most important work, my highest calling, was to be in community with my Rwandan friends and neighbors.

Today, we read about Jonah and the disciples — two powerful stories of believers who followed God’s calling, even when it meant giving up everything. And I think, if we are truly to accompany our neighbors, if we are truly to engage in community as the body of Christ, then these stories are relevant to all of us — because all of us have been called, in one way or another.

One of the first phases of YAGM is the Discernment-Interview-Placement event. It’s four days of learning more about the program, interviewing with country coordinators, and forming a community with the other volunteers. I remember Pastor Rafael Padilla telling us about the story of Jonah.

See, he said, Jonah wanted to go on a mission trip. He wanted to serve God’s people. And God said, that’s great Jonah! Go to Nineveh. And Jonah said, “No thanks.”

Then, Pastor Padilla asked a question that gave me chills — a question that still gives me chills. He asked: “How often do we pray for God to do something incredible with our lives, and then run the other way when we are called?” He said, “You have been called. What are you going to do?”

I returned from Rwanda at the end of July, and today I’ve been home for nearly six months. But almost every day I reflect on my last night in my site placement. I found myself sitting in my house, surrounded by members of my community — all of whom had collected guavas from our house at one point or another. The sun had set and the power had gone out, and I remember seeing candlelight reflected in my friends eyes and against the empty Fanta bottles we were holding — we always had Fanta when there was something to celebrate, and this, my friend David announced, was a celebration of the way God had brought all of us together this year.

As we said our goodbyes, David said to me: “If God puts something on your heart, it will break your heart.” At first those words were a riddle to me, but I’ve learned what David meant is: if we truly want to accompany our neighbors, then when God asks us to follow, it will bring us joy to say “yes.”

There’s a word in Kinyarwanda, the local language of the entire country, that I said every day. And I want to teach it to you. The word is: *Karame (car-ah-may)*.

It’s a word that means “Here I am.” Any time you answer a call — whether it is in response to someone calling out your name, or answering a telephone call, you say “Karame.” “Here I am.” Throughout my YAGM year, it became a metaphor for me. Responding “here I am” to the calls of my community reminded me of my own, sometimes reluctant, willingness to respond to God’s call.

I am grateful to have had this opportunity to accompany my Rwandan community through a constant exchange of teaching and learning — a practice that will forever change the way I interact with others. And I’m grateful for the way this congregation accompanied me — through prayer and emails and all of your support throughout my YAGM Year.

Before I close this morning, I want to leave you with a question: What is your Nineveh?

In what ways, or to what places, or to which people is God calling you that you cannot or will not accept?

What is your Nineveh?

It doesn’t have to be a year of serving in another country. God is calling us to be in community with our neighbors, right where we are.

Imagine if rather than answering God’s call, Jonah had simply been swallowed up by a whale. Fortunately, that’s not how the story ends. Jonah got over himself and chose to follow.

Imagine if when Jesus asked the disciples to follow him they said, “that sounds amazing, but I could never do that” and went back to fighting sea-sickness and sun burn. Fortunately, that’s not how the story ends. They chose to follow.

What is your Nineveh? And how are you going to let God use you there?

God is calling you. When will you finally let go and say, *Karame*. Here I am.