

My Year in Senegal

Newsletter
June - July

BONJOUR!

I am a missionary in the Young Adults in Global Mission program through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I am serving in Senegal from August 2018 to July 2019. I am working with the Lutheran Church of Senegal's Department of Community Development. This is one of the newsletters I will be sending out to update friends and family about my year!

Well, here it is. My final newsletter. I cannot believe that this year is already over. I feel like I am only a few months in. I wanted to send this final newsletter out before I come back home. Currently I am saying a lot of goodbyes and preparing to return home to the US. There are a lot of emotions and thoughts that come with that (read on and I will explain). I wanted to share some of those with you ahead of time. I hope that it will make my transition back easier for everyone involved. I am looking forward to seeing you all!

The photos to the left are of my cohort on our final retreat. We have been through a lot this year, and I am not sure I would have made it without them.

Ubbibabs (our group name): Thank you for sharing in my tears and laughter. We shared this experience and we understand each other better than anyone else ever will. I am grateful that I have a group of friends I can turn to for support. I am going to miss you all.

Pastor Kristin (YAGM Senegal coordinator): Thank you for walking with us this year. You lead by example and fearlessly guided us through each challenge with care and love. You pushed us to become better global citizens. I am not sure any of us would have made it through without you.



Saying Goodbye and Hello

Tips for greeting this returned YAGM

That is right. I am coming back to America. I know that many of you are looking forward to seeing me, so I wanted to explain some things first. I am excited to see you all, but this year has shaped me into a different person. Before reading this section of my newsletter, please read the blog post I have attached to the email. Below, is a response to that blog post. The numbers correspond to the numbers in the blog.

First, thank you Andrea Roske-Metcalf, for writing the blog post I have just shared. I tried to write my own, but found the words she used described my feelings perfectly. I am just going to add a bit of commentary to each point.

1. Please, please, please do not ask me "how was it?" If you do, I will likely not answer simply because I do not know what to say. I cannot sum up a year of my life into a sentence.
2. Daily American life is going to be really hard. The sight of plastic disgusts me, we use too much water, we are polluting everything, our consumption is horrifying, we cycle through clothes too much, etc. These are all things I am figuring out how to handle. I will be outspoken about my opinions.
3. I will talk about Senegal. For you, it will be too much, but for me it will not be enough.
4. I have not worn any clothes shorter than my knee. Your short shorts will freak me out. I have been wearing the same clothes all year and I own too many. I do not want to go clothes shopping for a while. I already know of a few stores I can never shop at again.
5. I have so many photos and videos.
6. Refer to number 3
7. Please give me updates from your life! It will help me adjust back. Just don't be offended if I do not get super invested. Problems in the US and problems in Senegal are very different.
8. I took bucket showers and used nonwestern toilets. It is not impressive. Please do not think that I am strong, or you could never do something like that. For many people this type of stuff is not a conscious choice. "Simple living" is just living.



My colleagues at PROSAF

9. Do not ask me what is next. I will figure it out day by day.

10. This is not going to be easy. I have a lot of emotions and they frequently change. I want to share all of my thoughts and ideas, but it might feel like a lot. I may get angry, frustrated, and sad. Please give me grace and give me time.

Now to add two of my own points:

11. I want to talk. I have been reading books, watching movies, and have conversations about tough topics. I have had a year to ponder and reflect on them. I want to have these conversations with all of you. They will make you uncomfortable and maybe angry. You have to be vulnerable, but in the end we can live our lives not at the expense of others.

12. I am angry. Once we start having discussions, you will understand why. I have seen the consequences of our decisions. They are unacceptable. I am ready to take action. I do not want to live my life with the knowledge of issues and doing nothing about them. I hope, that I can share this with you. These discussions are not quick. They will take time and work. If you are willing to start, I would love to walk and learn with you.

I know that is a lot to take in. I do not expect you to be perfect, I certainly will not be. I simply hope this makes you think.

I miss you all and I am looking forward to seeing you. Just remember, I am already missing the life I had in Senegal. See you all soon. Inshallah.

Pictured below (from left to right): My final lunch of Chebugen at PROSAF; a photo of myself and my fellow YAGM, Hannah, on a camel; my host nephews and niece washing their clothes.



Thank You! Merci! Jookanjal! Jera jef!

I appreciate all of the thoughts and prayers that you are continuing to send my way. I could not do this without all of the love and support from home. I am beyond thankful that God has put you in my life.

I have reached my goal for fundraising, but that does not mean it is over! Any extra donations I receive help other young adults complete their year. If any of you would like to donate you can visit my donation page at

<http://support.elca.org/goto/RachelOlson>