

My YAGM Year

Lainie's Newsletter #1

September 2026



In the United Kingdom

A quick reintroduction!

Hello from London!

This is my first (of six!) newsletter for my time in the Young Adults in Global Mission program.

I thought it would be good to reintroduce myself. My name is Lainie, and I am originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. I graduated from university in 2025 with my B.A. in International Studies, and I have spent the past year living and working in Kenya. In my free time, I love spending summers camping with my grandparents and cousins. But I also love being cozy, spending time reading a good book with a matcha.

I attend Erickson Lutheran Church with my grandma, and this congregation is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). Through the ELCIC's connection to the Lutheran World Federation, I have been introduced to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its ministries in the United States and beyond.

This year I am a part of the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program, run by the ELCA. I was placed in London, England, and will be serving at St. Augustine Church (StAC) in the borough of Islington. Once placed in the United Kingdom, I joined the UK Cohort consisting of five other YAGM participants.

I applied for the program because learning about the YAGM model and its emphasis on accompaniment and mutuality felt deeply aligned with my values. I am drawn to opportunities to learn from others, build relationships across cultures, and better understand how God is at work around the world. Through discernment, YAGM has felt like a meaningful opportunity to walk alongside others and deepen my understanding of what it means to love my neighbours beyond borders.

This year I wish to grow through relationships, lived experience, and connection. Ultimately, I hope this year will deepen my humility, challenge my assumptions, and strengthen my ability to respond to others with more compassion and love!

I am so excited that you are here and that you are following along on my journey of accompaniment. I can't wait to show you glimpses of my YAGM year!

With love,

Lainie



Buckingham Palace



Harry + London Eye



YAGM UK Cohort



British History Museum



YAGM Orientation in Chicago

In the middle of August, we had our YAGM orientation in Chicago! This was a wonderful opportunity to spend time with other participants serving in different country programs, including Argentina, Uruguay, Cambodia, and Mexico.

Throughout the week, we participated in sessions covering a range of topics, from intercultural competencies and Lutheran theology to safety and wellness. While there was lots to learn and reflect on, one of my favourite parts of the week was getting to know the other YAGMs serving around the world, as well as the YAGM staff. Following our whole group orientation in Chicago, we had an orientation with just the United Kingdom cohort! This included Jocelyn, Jensen, Ryan, Dinkinesh, our country coordinator Kelly, and me.



During this time, we focused on preparing for the UK context, learning more about what our year might look like, and getting to know one another better. Kelly led us through the orientation, helping us think about the practical and personal aspects of serving in the UK. I am so grateful for the time we have had to build relationships as a cohort. Although we are each serving in different communities across the United Kingdom, it is comforting to know that we have one another to learn from, support, and share this experience with.



A Little London Exploring

I arrived in London on August 27th, but my placement site wasn't ready for me or the two other YAGMs until September 3rd. So, for about a week, I had the opportunity to explore London with my two friends Jocelyn and Jensen before we all headed off to our placement sites!



We spent our time sightseeing and visiting some of London's most famous landmarks, including Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, the London Eye, and Westminster Abbey. We also walked along the River Thames, visited parks, and found plenty of other places to explore along the way. I was so grateful to have this time with my YAGM friends before they headed up to their placement site in Northern England. It was such a fun way to begin my time in the UK, and I feel very lucky that we got to experience a little bit of London together before starting our year of service.

Time for God Conference

In the middle of September, we had our Time for God conference! Time for God is an ecumenical organization that partners with YAGM to provide support and placements for the UK cohort. The conference took place in Chirk, Wales, where we had the opportunity to meet volunteers from different sending organizations and countries, including France, Germany, Austria, Brazil, Colombia, India, Nigeria, and more!

It was such a great few days filled with opportunities to meet other volunteers, connect with the Time for God staff, and explore a little bit of the Welsh countryside. I really enjoyed getting to know people from different backgrounds and hearing about their experiences and the places they will be serving.



My Placement at StAC

My placement site is St. Augustine's Highbury, also known as StAC! StAC is a welcoming community, and I have really enjoyed getting to know the members of the church and the people who attend the different programs we offer.

Since arriving, I have been helping with a variety of programs, which means that each day looks a little different. So far, I have had the opportunity to assist with everything from our food bank and community warm space to youth groups.

As I am only a few weeks into my placement, I know there is still so much to learn and experience. I hope that, as the year continues, I will grow in confidence, build relationships, and become more comfortable in the different areas where I serve. I am looking forward to sharing more about the people I meet, the programs I am involved in, and the things I learn throughout the year.



Ron and Margaret

For the month of September, I have been living with Ron and Margaret, a lovely couple who attend the church I am placed at. They have been part of the church for so long that they remember when there were no windows in the building, and birds would fly through during the service! They have kindly given me permission to share a little bit about them!

Ron and Margaret were both born in Scotland and met while attending architecture school before eventually moving to London. Now, at 89 years old, they have lived in the same home, where I have been staying on the top floor, for over 60 years. Margaret is an extremely talented seamstress. From curtains and rugs and chair coverings to her and her daughter's wedding dress, and even the sweater she is wearing, she has sewn it all herself! Ron, on the other hand, is a talented painter, and his artwork can be found all throughout their home.

I feel so blessed to spend time with Ron and Margaret and to discover something new every time we have a conversation. Margaret will talk about life after the Second World War, especially the different ways people reused materials and practised sustainability, many practices of which she still carries on today. One day, she explained how parachutes used during the war were repurposed into clothing she'd wear. And just this morning I learned that Margaret's aunt was on the research team that developed penicillin!

British Food Rating

One of the most important parts of living in a new country is trying the food! So, I thought I would share a few of the British foods I've tried so far and give you my ratings (they are subject to change, however).

- **English Breakfast – 7/10:** A solid breakfast, but I would prefer some more fruit!
- **Beans on Toast – 5/10:** Not something I would necessarily reach for, but I really don't mind it.
- **Tea and Biscuits – 7/10:** I think I prefer a chewier cookie, and matcha is still my drink of choice. Nonetheless, I can't complain!
- **Percy Pigs – 4/10:** A viral TikTok gummy candy that, truthfully, didn't have much flavour. I think I was expecting more.
- **Squash – 4/10:** Apparently, squash is what they call anything that isn't "real fruit juice." I was explaining that in Canada, we would probably just call it juice either way!



Me + Percy Pigs



Biscuits at our Warm Space

Finding My Feet

I have been very blessed so far, especially because everyone kept telling me that British weather would be full of rain and gloom. Yet, pretty much every day has been filled with sunshine! This first month has been a bit of a whirlwind. A lot of my time has been spent finding my feet, getting settled, and slowly ticking off the bajillion miscellaneous housekeeping tasks that seem to come with moving to a new country. Between figuring out the little things and getting into a new routine, I feel like I have been constantly on the go.

And somehow, it is already the end of September, and I am a month into my YAGM year! I genuinely cannot believe how quickly time is passing. In some ways, I wish it would slow down a little.

As I look toward the next two months, I am praying for more opportunities to build relationships with the people around me, explore different parts of London, and spend time with my beautiful YAGM friends. I am excited to continue settling into this new chapter and to see what the coming months will bring.



Ron and Margaret



New Dinner Friends



Chicago Airport



Exploring London

Thank You

With Immense Gratitude

I am so incredibly grateful for this experience and for the opportunity to see new places, meet new people and walk alongside new communities.

I know that this year will stretch me, push me outside of my comfort zone, and challenge me to grow in ways that I may not always expect. But one of the things that gives me so much comfort is knowing that I have a whole network of people, both near and far, who are supporting me throughout this year.

And that includes you!

So, thank you for taking the time to read my newsletter, for following along with my experiences, and for supporting me in all the ways that you do. Whether you are cheering me on from nearby or from across the ocean, it means more to me than I can put into words.

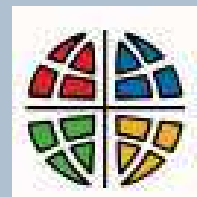
I am so grateful to have you along for this journey. Thank you to the moon and back.

Update on Giving

Thank you to everyone who has been able to donate financially. I have been incredibly humbled by your generosity! Below are updates on how to financially support my year of service.

CANADIAN DONORS: You can make donations in CAD to Lainie's year of service through the ELCIC National Office.

1. Go to [ELCIC.ca](https://elcic.ca) and click on "donate" along the top banner
2. Under "donation fund," select "Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM)" from the menu
3. Select "one time donation only" if your gift is a one-time gift.
4. **VERY IMPORTANT:** put **"YAGM-Lainie Nichols GCS3630"** in the **"personal message"** box to ensure your donation gets allocated correctly.
5. You can access the ELCIC donation page here: <https://secure.elcic.ca/>



Congregations can collect donations from individuals and send in the total amount collected to the ELCIC National Office. Make sure the funds are designated for YAGM. The national office will then pass on funds to the ELCA.

My peer-to-peer page (where it is best to make donations in *USD*) can be found here: <https://give.elca.org/p2p/site/PZSdn/page/4xSvNR#/>