



MINUTE FOR MISSION

Young Adult Volunteers: Serving Others Opens Eyes to the Church's Relevance in Our World

Sitting on a city bus in Washington, DC, with the plight of homeless people weighing heavily on him, Andy Thomas experienced a homecoming of faith.

This Presbyterian Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) had just attended a memorial service for the 41 homeless people who had died in the nation's capital in 2015. Andy and others had marched through the streets with signs bearing their names. After the service ended, his fellow YAV Lynette decided to participate in an overnight vigil outside a government building in honor of those who had perished. Andy didn't stay, but he gave her his beanie to help keep her warm and headed home on the bus.

He knew Lynette would be safe, but he felt the need to pray for her and for "the well-being of every soul who doesn't have a place to call home." As he prayed, tears streamed down his face. "And for the first time in my life," he says, "I had this overwhelming feeling that the Holy Spirit was with me."

The son of a Presbyterian pastor, Andy grew up going to church, but like many others, he drifted away as a teenager. While he continued to respect his parents and the congregation where he was raised, he felt the institutional church lacked the sense of community and relevance his heart craved.

After college, he left his native Arizona for Oregon, hoping to land a job with a non-profit organization to work for "positive change." No career opportunity came his way, and after a year of waiting tables in Portland, he considered his mother's suggestion that he apply to the YAV program. He had a desire to serve but was unsure about working in a church context. "I didn't want to spend a year with church people," he admits. Nevertheless, he applied to be a YAV and accepted the offer to serve in Washington, DC.

His attitude began to change when he arrived at Church of the Pilgrims, a Presbyterian congregation there. The diverse congregation seemed to embrace the message on its front door: "All Are Welcome," and he admired how members built connections with one another and with the surrounding inner-city community.

Andy and other YAVs joined with the congregation in serving the neighborhood and amplifying the concerns of those whose voices often go unheard. Though reluctant at first, he soon found himself participating with his fellow YAVs in daily spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and theological reflection. His experience at Pilgrims and with his YAV group led this former church skeptic toward his encounter with God on that city bus.

Andy is among thousands of YAVs whose lives have been forever changed by their year of service. Through your gifts to the Pentecost Offering, you are helping to change lives and prepare leaders. Sixty percent of the Offering goes to the YAV program and other national causes that serve youth, young adults, and children at risk. Forty percent is retained by our congregation for local ministries that empower individuals in this crucial first third of life.

Please give generously to this Offering, and support the future of our young people.

Let Us Pray

Empowering God, Pentecost Sunday reminds us of the Spirit's power to transform lives. Help each of us to hear the Spirit's call every day of our lives. May we follow that call into a world of need. **Amen.**