

MISSIONARY UPDATE

The Eskesen Courier Update



YAGM Central Europe 2015-2016



YAGM Central Europe 2017-2018



YAGM Central Europe 2019-2020



YAGM Central Europe 2016-2017



YAGM Central Europe 2018-2019



Zach, Dorothy, Rachel

Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil

WRITTEN BY PASTOR ZACH COURTER

I remember hearing this hymn for the first time as a kid, standing with everyone else in the congregation as the pastor made their way to the pulpit to preach. It stood out to me because usually we just said "Glory to you, O Lord" or something simple like that. But for some reason (only later I would learn the reason was Lent) we started singing this instead.

Fast-forwarding to the present, this is a hymn that we've used frequently in the YAGM Central Europe program for the past few years during our Advent retreat. The retreat center is situated at the most peaceful bed and breakfast in hilly Western Hungary that you can imagine. Aside from its rustic farmhouse-like charm, and the horses and sheep in the stable up by the owner's house, there is also about 2 acres of vineyard. Because we're there in the winter time, the vines are barren, and the grapes are a distant memory.

We use this setting to explore many of Jesus' parables and stories that deal with vineyards and seasonal labor. While we are quite aware that God invites us to blossom into ministries that bear good fruits for our society and the world, we often forget that good fruits require good soil.

Good soil is messy. It's dirty. It's stinky. It's full of death, and at the same time it's teeming with new life. Good soil is not available with the click of a button or a polite word. It requires the right ingredients, and maybe most of all, it requires time.

The Lead

THE YAGM PROGRAM IS CANCELLED FOR THE 2021-2022 SERVICE YEAR BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC.

*Lord, let my heart be good soil,
open to the seed of your Word/Lord,
let my heart be good soil, where
love can grow and peace is
understood. When my heart is hard,
break the stone away. When my
heart is cold, warm it with the
day. When my heart is lost, lead me
on your way. Lord, let my heart, Lord,
let my heart, Lord, let my heart be
good soil.*

In March 2020 when it was announced that the 2020-2021 YAGM year would not move forward, it felt simple for me to point to the tradition of sabbath. It would be healthy for the YAGM program to observe a year without volunteers. It would allow our global partners, our churches and communities in the USA, and our own selves time to deal with the pandemic. Then we would be ready to come back stronger the next year.

Obviously we are well into the next year, and it's still not possible to safely and faithfully send YAGM missionaries into the world. I am realising how accustomed I had grown to being a part of the process of shaping and guiding devoted young seekers of God on their journeys of faith. Being there to challenge them, comfort them, watch them blossom and bear good fruits of faithful service in their communities throughout Hungary and Serbia.

Again, this upcoming year it's not to be. The YAGM vineyard will lay empty for two years in a row.

But God wastes nothing.

And though this means there are perhaps more questions than answers for what lies ahead for the YAGM program, we can rest assured that God's Spirit remains active in the hearts, minds, and communities of our global companions, and program supporters and participants throughout the USA and beyond.

For me personally, I can definitely say that there is a part of my heart in each of the communities where a YAGM has served here in Serbia and Hungary. Though I don't know what the future holds for the YAGM program, I can find comfort in the words of the hymn from my childhood—trusting God to be at work throughout the world in ways that will only be revealed to us in the future.

Lord let my heart be good soil.

Lenten Blessings,

Pastor Zach

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILL THE YAGM PROGRAM RE-START IN 2022?

THAT IS THE HOPE! OF COURSE WE CANNOT KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS, BUT THERE IS LOTS OF EXCITEMENT AND ENERGY AROUND MAKING SURE THAT THE PROGRAM RE-STARTS AS SOON AS IT IS SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE TO DO SO.

WHAT DOES THE CLOSING OF THE PROGRAM MEAN FOR ZACH, RACHEL & DOROTHY?

ZACH WILL WRAP UP HIS WORK WITH THE YAGM PROGRAM AT THE END OF MARCH. FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE HE WILL FOCUS ON TAKING CARE OF DOROTHY AND SUPPORTING RACHEL IN HER ROLE AS THE EUROPEAN DESK DIRECTOR.

RACHEL WILL CONTINUE IN HER ROLE AS THE ELCA'S DESK DIRECTOR FOR EUROPE, SHEPHERDING THE ELCA'S PERSONNEL AND CHURCH ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT EUROPE.

DOROTHY WILL CONTINUE GROWING FASTER THAN WE CAN IMAGINE, AS WELL AS BEING UNBELIEVABLY SWEET.

CAN I CONTINUE TO SUPPORT YOU AS MISSIONARIES AND/OR SUPPORT THE YAGM PROGRAM?

ABSOLUTELY, YES! YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE YAGM PROGRAM WILL HELP IT TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AS SOON AS IT IS SAFE TO DO SO. YOU CAN SUPPORT THE YAGM PROGRAM HERE:

<https://community.elca.org/yagm/give>

YOU CAN CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK AS MISSIONARIES SERVING IN CENTRAL EUROPE HERE:

<https://community.elca.org/MissionaryGiving>

DOROTHY'S CORNER

