



Presbyterian Mission
**Young Adult
Volunteers**

WELCOMING BACK

Continuing the Journey of Young Adult Volunteers: A helpful guide for congregations and returning volunteers

The Young Adult Volunteer program is a year of service and vocational discernment that leaves a mark on its participants. Once a year of service has officially ended, the second part of the YAV program's saying, "a year of service, a lifetime of change" begins to take place. Returning back to home communities or transitioning from a YAV year into a new place can be a jarring experience for many. While family and friends may be wanting to celebrate the return of their loved one, the YAV might still be processing their year and how to discern God's call for future steps.

This period of transition can be a great time of deep reflection, but it can also be a confusing and challenging place. As the home-community welcoming back the YAV, there are things you can begin to think about to best walk beside the YAV during this time.

We have collected some best practices from congregations over the years and want to share them with you here. Please use this as it best fits for your congregation, and also let us know if you have great ideas to add to this list! During this time:

- Provide a welcoming and safe space for the YAV to share honestly about their YAV year. This does not need to be in a large nor formal gathering necessarily. During this, we encourage:
 - o Following the YAV's lead. Be curious about the fun facts regarding their location, work, living space, etc., but make a particular point to ask about how their experience has changed them.
 - o Encourage the YAV to speak about their own year and less about how they perceived others to experience a year of service (i.e., housemates, placement supervisors, site coordinators, etc.).
 - o If there is a clear need for reconciliation with people from the YAV's year, encourage the YAV to reach out to that person (if appropriate) or our office staff. We want YAVs to have spaces to share about their experience, but we do not want these spaces to circumvent healthy communication with people from the YAV's year.

- Allow space for celebrations but more importantly, allow space for the YAV to talk honestly about what they struggled with. It is okay if you do not always understand where they are coming from. Sometimes providing a good listening ear is enough.

- Transition is a time to commemorate what they have gained but it is also a time to grieve. The YAV might be going through 'reverse culture shock' or be homesick for the community they left behind. Everyone grieves differently and the cycle of grieving can manifest with various emotions (sadness, anger, confusion, etc.) and at various times.



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- Remember it is okay for some YAVs to seek quiet space away from others for a little while. This may appear like withdrawal from loved ones. Let them know that you care but allow them to be in the desert/wilderness with God for a little while. [Luke 4:1-13]
- If the YAV seems to have difficulty connecting with anyone, see if you can connect them with a YAV alum or someone who has done a similar program. Our office would be happy to assist in such a connection (yav@pcusa.org).

If you received the YAV program's Commissioning materials you may remember our office providing the following blessing. It is also fitting now in this new transition time for your YAV and your congregation, as we continue on the journey of faithfulness:

*May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
So that you may seek truth boldly and live deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work tirelessly for justice, freedom and peace among all people*

*May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain to joy.*

*And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world,
So that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.*

*~Fourfold Franciscan
Blessing*

These very blessings that we send out our Young Adult Volunteers with may be manifesting themselves in new ways for the YAV. Blessings to you as you join with the YAV on this part of their journey as well. In this work we remember Christ's words in John 16:33:

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (NIV)

Amen.