



## NEWS FROM YAGM SENEGAL

Pastor Kristin Engstrom, YAGM Country Coordinator

January 2018

### Christmas as a Missionary in Senegal

Senegal is a predominately Muslim country, with about 90% of people adhering to the Muslim religion. One might assume, then, that Christmas comes and goes without much notice. But Senegal is a particular country. It is a country where religious peace and accompaniment are the bedrock of society. It is a country where even Muslims look forward to celebrating Christmas! And, as with Muslim holidays in Senegal, where Christians are invited to celebrate with our Muslim neighbors, Christmas is an opportunity for Christians to invite our Muslim neighbors to share meals and festivities.

This year, I was privileged to participate in the annual End-of-Term Christmas program at the Elementary School of our ELCA partner 'Senegalese Lutheran Development Services.' Each class sang a much-rehearsed song, the students with the highest grades were recognized, and a local theater group performed a hilarious skit about educational priorities. For the finale, Santa Claus arrived with a gift for the younger students - who are both Muslims and Christians.

As a missionary living far from my biological family, holidays can be both exciting and lonely. This year, I was again bolstered by Senegalese hospitality as I was invited to celebrate Christmas Day with Pastor Deb Diouf's family.



#### Accompanying YAGM Senegal

My work as an ELCA Global Missionary is possible thanks to the generosity of many congregations and individuals in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Thank you! Jerejef! Merci! Jokonjol! Jahram! You can contact me via e-mail at [kristin.engstrom@elca.org](mailto:kristin.engstrom@elca.org). [You are also invited to support me as an ELCA Global Missionary here.](#)

If you would like to more closely follow YAGM Senegal, please check out our blog at <http://yagmsenegal.wixsite.com/blog>. You will find pictures and stories of daily life from me and the YAGMs. *On est ensemble! (We are together.)*



*Director Leon Dione recognizes the top achieving students.*

Pastor Diouf is the former Vice-President of the Lutheran Church of Senegal. Several of his young adult children have become friends and guides for our YAGM in Senegal. After we ate our fill of Christmas lunch, I was surprised by a dessert I had never tasted: Bouye Creme with fresh pineapple, melon, and apple. (I may have eaten more than one!)



**Pastor Kristin Engstrom**

As an ELCA missionary, I serve as the Country Coordinator for the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program in Senegal.

I'm originally from the mid-western United States, and served as a parish pastor in northern New Jersey for six years prior to moving to Senegal.

#### Inside Senegal

Bouye: fruit of the grand Baobab Tree. Baobab's give their fruit in the dry season, before the rains come and there are no leaves on the tree. It is sweet and sour and will resolve a myriad of stomach and digestive issues. The bouye fruit is nicknamed "monkey fruit" because monkeys love it too.



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### A very YAGM Christmas

For American young adults, celebrating holidays in another country, culture, family, and sometimes religion can be daunting. Yet, it can also be a once-in-a-lifetime experience of unexpected joy and connections. Where else but in YAGM Senegal will a young adult receive a tailor-made dress that matches those of her host siblings (as YAGM Lily experienced this year)? Or have the opportunity to visit your host family's village and extended family, complete with dancing and special food (as YAGM Hannah experienced)? Or share American Christmas traditions, stories, and food with your Muslim host family (as YAGM Casey and YAGM Kristian experienced)?



*YAGM Casey with her United States map and Senegalese flag Christmas cookies.*

And where else will young American adults learn how to make frosting by hand to decorate French biscuit cookies on the rooftop of a Senegalese hotel? In YAGM Senegal of course. The first weekend of January, after the YAGMs had celebrated Christmas and New Year's with their host families, the YAGM gathered for a Christmas weekend together. We exchanged simple Christmas gifts. Collaborated on a service of Lessons & Carols. And we attempted to make Christmas cookies. YAGM Casey, with her great attention to detail, even made a cookie with an outline of the United States to place beside one decorated with the Senegalese flag.

Over the course of the upcoming months, the Senegal YAGM will be gathering several times:

- February 1-3, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Senegalese Lutheran Development Services Community Center in Yeumbeul.
- February 18th, we will gather with our sisters and brothers in the Lutheran Church of Senegal for the Annual Festival of the Church.
- March 19-25, we will gather for the second YAGM retreat.



*Senegal YAGM decorating Christmas cookies.*

Please keep these gatherings and our sisters and brothers in Senegal in your prayers.

**THANK YOU! Jerejef! Merci!** to everyone who sent Christmas card, prayers, and well-wishes for the YAGM and myself. Merry Christmas to you all (a bit late) and a blessed Epiphany season as we keep watch for God at work in all the hidden places in our world.