

# MINUTE FOR MISSION

## FROM NORTHERN IRELAND TO NASHVILLE: ONE YAV'S JOURNEY OF FAITH

Rev. Ashley McFaul-Erwin would not likely be a pastor for the Presbyterian Church today if she'd stayed in her homeland of Northern Ireland, and especially if she had never found the Young Adult Volunteers program. You may have heard us refer to this program as YAV and the young adults who serve as "YAVs" for short.

From Northern Ireland to the U.S. seems like quite a big leap, but it's not unheard of for young adults from overseas to take part in the YAV program. In search of her calling, Ashley contacted the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offices in Louisville, Kentucky. They encouraged her to figure out her visa and they'd do the rest!

While looking for ways to serve in a faith community, Ashley came across the program at Second Presbyterian Church in Nashville. The church was offering a year of service with area nonprofits through its Nashville Epiphany Project.

Things moved quickly. Within a year she had relocated from Northern Ireland to Nashville to serve in a program called "Top Floor," based in a high school with one of the city's the lowest graduation rates. Top Floor is not just focused on graduating more students but helping them plan for what happens after high school—helping with college applications and more. Ashley still keeps in touch with many of the students she served.

The YAV program is supported in part through gifts to the Pentecost Offering and is often a path that leads to a lifetime of community service and leadership within the church, as it was for [now-Rev] Ashley.

"I'm proud that our denomination has a program that helps young adults learn how to live out their faith, not just in church, but embedded in the local community."

After her year of YAV service ended, Ashley returned to Northern Ireland and began exploring options for seminary. She eventually returned to Nashville, attending Vanderbilt University while also managing a group home for adolescent boys. She also completed Clinical Pastor Education, serving as a chaplain for women coping with drug and alcohol addiction.

She now lives in Long Island, New York and serves as the community outreach pastor at Setauket Presbyterian Church on Long Island.

“The YAV program laid the foundation for being embedded in the church and the local community,” she says. “They gave me this feeling of freedom and opportunity to be my authentic self. To be authentic is so much at the heart of ministry whether I’m preaching on a Sunday morning or visiting a local homeless shelter. To be able to be fully who I am has been an incredible gift.”

Please join your gifts with others in our Presbyterian community to help more young adults like Ashley build a life in faith—in authenticity—to share with the world now and as leaders of the church of the future.

### *Let us pray,*

*Holy Spirit, stir in each of us a desire*

*to serve you and your people.*

*As we offer these gifts to help children,*

*youth and young adults,*

*may we also commit ourselves*

*to offering the fullness of our*

*authentic selves to the benefit*

*of all your people.*

*Amen.*