

# PRONE TO WANDER

"SEEK THE WISDOM THAT WILL UNTIE YOUR KNOT.  
SEEK THE PATH THAT DEMANDS YOUR WHOLE BEING."

- RUMI



Singing carols by candlelight at the Midnight Communion Service at St. Ninian's and St. Andrew's URC. The two younger men in the forefront of the picture are two of my fellow volunteers/roommates; Noah (left) from Germany and János (right) from Hungary.

## GET TO KNOW HULL URC TEAM CHURCHES

### St. Ninian's and St. Andrew's URC

St. Ninian's and St. Andrew's URC (United Reform Church) is located on Chanterlands Avenue, known locally as Chants Ave. It is the closest church to my house; about a five minute walk!

The current building, which has served for 80 years as a place of worship, was actually supposed to be a church hall rather than the main sanctuary and was at one time used as a game hall! St. Ninian's and St. Andrew's has been a part of Hull URC Team Churches since 2005, and describe themselves as a church that is open to exploration of faith aspires to be a church where honest questions receive honest answers. They were also one of the first churches in Yorkshire to preform same sex marriages.

My role at St. Ninian's and St. Andrew's involves running a film night, which happens on the first Tuesday of every month. I also attend and occasionally help run an LGBTQ-inclusive communion service, which is held on the fourth Sunday evening of every month.

In November I organized a Spoken Word Event at the church, along with one of my fellow volunteers. This event featured local poets and spoken word artists, several of whom are published authors! In addition to this event, I also helped run a Nativity Walk early in December, which involved distributing clues about the Christmas Story around Chants Ave's various shops for children and their parents to find! A carol service/light switch on followed the Nativity Walk, where we lit a Christmas tree that took me and my fellow volunteers about two hours to assemble!

On Christmas Eve I had the privilege of singing a brand new carol at the Midnight Communion service, with the music written by a Hull URC Team Churches member, Paul, and the words written by the Minister (and my supervisor) Chris. On Christmas Day I also led a service at the church, along with my fellow volunteers!

# HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

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I was fortunate enough to spend Thanksgiving in Manchester (a 2 hour train ride from Hull) with some of my fellow UK YAGM's! We gathered for a homemade meal made up of some of our favorite Thanksgiving recipes from home. I even attempted to make my mother's famous cornbread stuffing, though we didn't have any baking powder to help it rise the way it was supposed to. We also had the opportunity to check out the Manchester Christmas markets, which provided a wonderful holiday atmosphere in the city centre.



Our YAGM Thanksgiving group! (First Row from left) Allison, myself, and Sarah. (Back Row from left) Grace, Molly, Jasmine, and Molly.

Back home in Hull, December was filled with preparations for Christmas! In addition to the Christmas events at St. Ninian's and St. Andrew's, Christ Church South Ella hosted a group called the Hunsley Singers for a Christmas Concert, sang carols in a local pub, and held a Crib Service (which prepares the manger for baby Jesus) on Christmas Eve. Christ Church Swanland also held several Christmas events, including carols with the Salvation Army Band, Father Christmas rowing across the pond in the village centre, and a Hanging of the Greens service on Christmas Eve (of Celtic origin), where the church was decorated with holly, ivy, and other greens for Christmas!

On December 18th Zion URC hosted a wonderful carol service entitled "International Carols by Candlelight," featuring the musical talents of myself and my fellow roommates/volunteers: Noah and Anja (from Germany) and János (from Hungary). I sang one of my favorite carols with American origins, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," János sang a Hungarian carol, and all four of us sang various carols and verses of carols in English, German, and Hungarian. A choir from a local primary school also performed some Christmas songs, and Paul, who I mentioned before, premiered the carol he had written in a Ghanaian language (this is the same melody I sang at the Midnight Communion service, just with different words). With the combined glow of candles, the peaceful carols, and the palpable support of the four churches, this was a magical and spiritual evening.

# NEW YEARS IN LONDON

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As I am writing this newsletter I have just wrapped up my holiday celebrations in London, where 10 out of the 11 YAGM UK volunteers gathered for a few days to celebrate New Years! Sarah Bull, one of my fellow UK YAGM volunteers, was kind enough to host us all the her host family's home in east London, where we rang in 2018 with food, fellowship, music, and a healing, cathartic bowl-burning ceremony!



London Bridge, located in the historic City of London.

We spent the past few days reflecting on this year, decompressing from the chaos of this Christmas Season, cooking together, exploring London, and getting to know Sarah's home and placement for this year! While it was wonderful to get to know London and experience a different environment for a few days, I was a bit blindsided by how stressed I felt over the past few days, no doubt a combination of residual stress from organizing a number of church events and missing home, family, and friends. There were a number of times that I noticed myself becoming very overwhelmed by my depression and anxiety, which can unfortunately work rather well together to create what seems like a never-ending spiral when I get particularly overwhelmed or upset. However, what distinguished these moments of challenge and chaos from many before them was the fact that even in the midst of the throws of my mental illness and the stress and homesickness I was feeling, I reached out and sought comfort, support, and solidarity in my fellow YAGM's, who responded in kind with compassion and empathy.

As we move into 2018, I am filled with gratitude for my fellow YAGM's and my family and friends, who have reminded me time and time again over the past few days that there is solidarity in our mutual struggles and our mutual joys, that it's ok to reach out for comfort and support, and that there are people on this earth willing to meet you in your mess. Namaste, dear ones. I see God in you. Thank you for seeing God in me.