

As many of you know, I moved to Atlanta on September 2nd to begin a year of service work through Young Adult Volunteers (YAV), a program of the PC(USA). Living in Christian community is a key component of the program, so I am sharing a house with the four other YAVs serving in Atlanta. We spent the first week getting to know each other, the program, our neighborhood, and the city. In doing so, we tried to see Atlanta through different eyes, imagining how it would be to live in the city as someone without the privileges that we all enjoy. I quickly began to realize how I am treated differently because of my skin color or socio-economic class. For example, while on an assignment to explore some highlights of the city using public transportation, we got caught in a sudden downpour several blocks from the train station. We quickly ducked into the first fast food restaurant we passed and no questions were asked. Only moments later, a homeless woman also tried to take cover in the same restaurant and was told that she would have to stand outside. My hope is that by noticing these kinds of injustices, I will be able to understand, in a very small way, what it would be like to live as this woman does and that this awareness will help me to better empathize with those whom I see at my service site.

After a week of orientation, we began work at our individual service sites, where we will work four days a week. (The fifth day of the work week is devoted to community building activities.) I am working at the Central Outreach and Advocacy Center, which is a part of Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Atlanta. The Outreach Center assists people with few resources in getting the services they need. Some of these services include help obtaining birth certificates and ID cards, a food pantry, clothing referrals and prescription eyeglasses. So far I have been doing various jobs as I learn how things work at the Center, but I will eventually be doing case management with the guests of the Center. The needs of the guests are at times overwhelming, but I am constantly encouraged by the victories shared daily with guests, be it a gentleman sharing that he has been clean from drugs for over four months, or a woman celebrating the receipt of her birth certificate which will allow her to start working.

In the few weeks that I have been here, I have already seen that this year will present many opportunities for growth and learning as I seek to share and receive God's love with and from those around me. Looking ahead, we will be traveling to Ghost Ranch, NM the last weekend of September in order to join with all of the YAVs serving across the country for a national orientation. Please feel free to contact me with any comments or questions at aliciabwilson@gmail.com.

Peace,
Alicia