

LEADERSHIP

A camp-call connection

The summer before Nate Berkas started high school, he went on a camping trip that would change his life. Berkas said his faith journey began in earnest on a five-night visit to the Boundary Waters with Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry, an ELCA camp in Cook, Minn.

"It was the first opportunity for me to feel and see and experience God in a really tangible way," Berkas said.



He went on several more trips to the area throughout high school before becoming a camp counselor in college, when he spent four successive summers working with youth at camp. "I realized through that experience that I was really passionate about outdoor ministry and really interested in pursuing that as a profession," Berkas said.

The next step in his journey came through acceptance into the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program, which is funded in part by Mission Support. Berkas, who grew up in Madagascar while his parents served as missionaries there, applied for YAGM because "it was my own opportunity to see God at work in various ways around the world and to be formed and transformed by our companions."

A highlight of Berkas' YAGM year serving alongside companions from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa was a weeklong camp in Cape Town. The experience affirmed in Berkas the importance of "outdoor ministry and creating space for young people to come that's outside of their normal context ... and to send them back renewed and refocused."

After returning home, Berkas served for five years at the ELCA churchwide organization, stewarding the relationships between ELCA missionaries and their sponsoring congregations. His experience with the many facets of nonprofit management would later be an asset when he accepted his current position. "While I loved so much of what I was doing [to support churchwide global ministries], where I feel most called is going back to that canoe trip after eighth grade and thinking about how formative that was for my life," he said.

Today, Berkas is site director at Wilderness Canoe Base—another ELCA camp in the Boundary Waters—where he gets to give young people the same experience he had as a camper. "I feel a deep call to this type of ministry," he said. "I'm grateful for the way that all of this has worked together to shape where I am."