



December 12, 2023

Dear Friends & Family,

It's so hard to believe I'm finishing up my first full year as a Fargoan! (Yes I had to look up the actual term used). Not only was this the first full year in Fargo, but it was also the first full year spent as a husband. There has been so much learning along the way. Not only am I learning new things about my wife (like how she becomes a pumpkin by 7:00 pm on a school night), but I also know how these Midwesterners talk (Like using "uffda" and learning that "Bayg" really means "bag" and so much more)! However, I have caught myself using UFFDA quite a bit; I may have to make it a Southern thing when I visit friends and family.

Carmen and I spent our 1-year anniversary in Minneapolis. This has begun our goal of spending at least one anniversary in every State. As you can tell by the pictures, we shared many laughs along the way (SHOCKING, I know) and lots of food sent from above...Portillo's!

This year of learning was accompanied by some loss along the way. We had to say "See ya later" to Carmen's grandpa, which I was lucky enough to be able to speak at the service. I also had to put down my first dog along the way. It was something that was difficult to get through; however, having a loved one like Carmen by my side during that made the tears a little less sad.

We spent Thanksgiving in Virginia with my family; it was such a great time! We even met Evelyn for the first time (If you're losing track of the number of nieces and nephews my siblings are popping out, it's ok. Cause I am too! Haha). We will fly to South Carolina for Christmas to spend it with Carmen's family. We also will be able to spend some time with friends and some of my family along the way.

Things at Church are moving right along. They just announced on Sunday that we will be buying a piece of land to build down the road. The location is great, and it's exciting to see how the Lord moves and works in the lives of those attending! A prayer request would be for guidance and the ability to buy the land debt-free; the closing date is July 31st, 2024. I have stepped aside from serving in the kid's ministry and have been serving on the praise team, playing drums. I have also been approached to be a "host" on Sunday mornings and am gladly pursuing that calling. Imagine a pastor's kid being on the stage on Sunday mornings... Who would've thought it?! We're so excited to see the continued growth of Harvest Valley and the people it brings into our lives!

As we all know, this letter can't just be about Carmen and me; we'd bore you guys to death! Here's a little update on what our lives have been like through Youth for Christ! This year sparked a few firsts for myself and the chapter. I had the opportunity to coach sixth-grade football at Liberty Middle School (where Carmen teaches). It was honestly such a blessing to be able to grow relationships with kids I had met and would talk to at lunch last year. I even was lucky enough to have some of Carmen's former students. It was so interesting to discuss how a kid was in the classroom

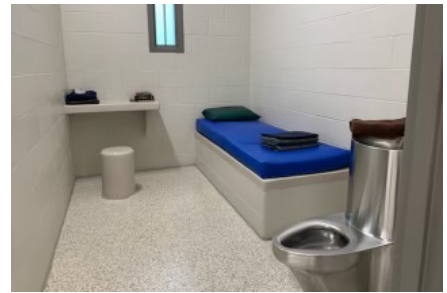
versus how he was on the football field. It was so great to be back on the sideline for a sporting event, and made me miss my playing days a bit! My relationships with the kids aren't the only ones that are growing. I can count on it almost every week when one of the admins asks me why I can't just quit Youth for Christ and come on full-time at the school. It's so refreshing to hear, as a volunteer at the school, to feel valued and desired. The whole staff I have interacted with has been caring and open to my craziness. This relationship has opened the doors for us to be able to mentor 20 kids one-on-one, both myself and my coworker Deb. You could feel the walls built up by the kids on the first meeting. It was so bad one boy didn't say a word unless I asked him a question. His responses to the questions were just that, one word. While at the small lunch group, that same boy was there; he explained to the other kids how we talked earlier that day. Before he could get another word out, I cut him off and said, "No, no, no. You didn't talk at all. I talked to you for ten minutes, and you sat there." He had a big grin and shook his head. Knowing this boy's background, I wasn't surprised by the first meeting. However, I was taken aback when I came the next day to mentor older boys; our main contact came up to



me and shared how the boy had been asking all morning if I would be here today and eat lunch with him. I remember leaving our first check-and-connect meeting. I had told him I wasn't going anywhere; even if we sat in silence for ten minutes every time, I would still show up. This was a reminder of how this boy doesn't have consistency. He's used to just shutting people out and them walking away without really trying. It's the endless pursuit we desire and receive from God. Not only does this boy feel like he doesn't have God pursuing him, but He also feels like no human is chasing after him, and that's something we all need to not take for granted.

We have partnered with FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) this year. We have begun a Bible study on Thursday mornings and are going through the parables. There have been, at most, four students, but what amazes me is the knowledge these kids seem to have. Normally, just two sixth-grade girls attend, but their desire to learn more about God and openness in sharing is amazing! It makes the lack of big numbers disappear with how strongly they crave to grow their relationship with God.

There aren't many new things happening at the detention center. But what's going on there is nothing but God showing up. Earlier this year, I had been meeting with a boy one-on-one; he left and found himself locked up again not long after being released. This was truly the turning point for this young man. Our one-on-one meetings began to deepen, and the desire to truly learn and change was apparent. He got out again, and we didn't hear from him for a long while. However, Deb ran into him at the Moorhead ALC. He even decided he wanted to share his testimony at our Concert for a Cause this year. It was so encouraging to make this connection because we don't see many end results from these kids! If you want to watch Blake's testimony, please put this link in your web browser! <https://redriveryfc.com/stories/> (there are also other things you can watch along the way while you're there)!



*West Central Regional
Juvenile Center Room or Cell*



*West Central Regional
Juvenile Center Pod*



We have also started an "Support a Senior" program at the Moorhead ALC. We are asking volunteers to do life with these young men and women and help prepare them for the real world they're about to embark on. Carmen has decided to mentor a senior in this program. It's such a blessing when she comes home after meeting with the girl and shares her excitement. Not only is this young girl having her life changed for the better, but so is Carmen and every other volunteer who has decided to take this step of faith.

Please be in prayer for all of our ministry sites; there's an increase in kids going from schools into the detention center. I ask that you pray for these teens to find consistent, positive adults to pour into their lives, whether that's one of our staff or someone from a different setting! I also ask for prayer for our chapter as we are trying to make up some of the funds from a drop in giving and losing part of our fundraiser over the summer.

As we enter the Christmas Season and the year ends, please consider supporting Red River Youth for Christ. As a non-profit, we rely on partners like you to fund this ministry. The lives of kids are directly impacted because people like you give. Please prayerfully consider making a financial year-end gift and investing in the lives of teens. It literally could change their eternity. Gifts can be mailed in the enclosed envelope, or you can give online by going to www.redriveryfc.com and clicking on the "Give to YFC" link at the top of the page. Thanks in advance for your generosity and prayers.

This year brought so much joy to Carmen and me. It was such a blessing to have a full year in Fargo and not have to worry about packing up our houses, planning a wedding, or finding a new job! God has been so good to our little family, and I can't wait to see what God has in store for us this coming year!



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