

Answered Prayers

God's Love, Grace, and Hope Changes Everything

Heidi Schreiner

Youth and Summer Ministry Coordinator - First English Lutheran Church, Appleton

I came on this trip with little expectations. I have never witnessed a Synod Day at a Youth Gathering, nor have I ever attended a Youth Leadership Summit. I envisioned lots of kids excited to meet new people, many speakers paired with many powerpoints, lots of sitting and listening, and lots of typical camp-like food. This isn't to say I wasn't excited, of course I was excited, but given the timing within my personal life, this trip went from feeling like a great opportunity to share, to more of an obligated weekend of busy work. In preparation for this trip, I prayed diligently for two things: 1. To have a roommate that didn't snore. 2. For God to direct me towards people at this conference that were going to inspire me, empower me, and make me feel like I'm where God wants me to be.

Let's rewind back to Oct. 27. I was in Madison visiting a friend when I received a call from an on-call pastor that a friend of mine from our church passed away. He was the father of the youth that was supposed to join me on this trip. Denial manifested my entire being. I was sad to lose my friend, and overwhelmed with the thought of how many students that would be affected and would need my care as we walk alongside each other in grief. This man was a small group leader in confirmation, was a part of my ministry team, and has helped me to lead every mission trip I have ever led. After a few days of being present emotionally and physically with the family and my church family as a whole, I realized that Anna and I would no longer be able share this experience together that we had been looking forward to for months. The bad news kept its speed once I knew I wouldn't be able to change my flight to be able to attend the funeral. In the end, I just kept telling myself, this is what Lance would want me to do.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. I'm here to share with you that God truly showed up. Throughout the days of Houston, we all had time to reflect on the ways God's love, grace, and hope changes everything. God's love, grace, and hope changed everything for me in Houston. God took the good and the bad, and didn't waste a crumb of what was offered to Him. God showed up. God showed up when

the presenter read the slide with the gathering focus verse on it, Ephesians 2:9, the same verse that was put on Lance's visitation program. God showed up in my conversations about family with my new friend at dinner who had struggled balancing grieving while caring for her step-sons that lost their mother last year, and for when she lost her brother to suicide. God showed up as I transitioned from Synod Day Director back to the Youth Summit and the first slide I see is Psalm 139—a verse my lead pastor sent me for comfort amidst my sadness. The Spirit intertwined the harmonies of Beautiful Savior that we belted out acapella on All Saints Day. God showed up not just for me, but for the countless kids that showed the courage to sing, act, play, talk, pray, and listen throughout talent shows, meeting new friends, and participating in program activities. God shows up everywhere we are, but it's when we are open to Him working through us and when we unite together as a family in Christ where I sense the Spirit at work so palpably.

What I was able to witness and experience exceeded any expectation I could have had. I witnessed kids connect on levels of courage and joy while they supported each other in vulnerable moments and prayerful moments. I witnessed leaders who were genuinely excited about trying new things, about reaching our kids on levels we haven't before and with clear, thoughtful intention to impact their faith formation. I listened to curriculum builders, service planners, video makers, Christian singers, site directors, and tech gurus who were using their gifts and passions to live out God's call for them. I became empowered, equipped, and excited to continue to serve God and serve our synod in ways that make a difference in God's Kingdom.

And yes, my roommate didn't snore. Thanks be to God.

Summit Snapshots

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Youth and Summer Ministry Coordinator – First English Lutheran Church

My name is Heidi Schreiner and I am the Youth and Summer Ministry Coordinator from First English Lutheran Church. I have the privilege of being the Synod Day Director for our Eastern Central Wisconsin Synod at the ELCA Youth Gathering this summer in Houston. This past weekend I was able to “double dip” as a Synod Day Director and an Adult Leader for the annual ELCA Youth Leadership Summit. Although I wasn’t able to attend the entire Youth Summit due to training sessions with the gathering, I was able to meet enough people and experience enough activities and programs to leave a lasting effect on me. It is my hope that through reading through some of my experiences, you can get a glimpse of the many ways God was at work in transforming these kids minds and hearts in Houston this weekend.

I’m really thrilled at the countless ways this summit truly was intentional about meeting these kids where they’re at. Their programming was so interactive, and they were able to build relationships, share experience, sing and dance, and learn more about how Jesus can change their lives and in turn, can change the world.

One of the most valuable experiences I had was the synod day program run through which involved receiving feedback from the kids afterwards. During the run through, we had the privilege of listening to such a dynamic pastor talk about how we are all welcomed to the table, no matter if we are from “Yale or jail”, no matter our race, our age, or our sexual orientation. He talked about the church being an imperfect place for imperfect people. He truly set the tone for the morning as he spoke about stopping and listening before we do anything else. He had us all contemplating how our life and our world might be different if we chose to stop and listen. I enjoyed watching the videos with the kids, singing with them, communing with them, and telling stories about how God’s love changes everything. It excited me to envision what my team would look like on that stage, sending a message of how God’s hope changes everything. Don’t worry Bishop Mansholt, I have faith that you will be just as great as that pastor! ☺

That same afternoon, I went through a series of short stations with the kids where we learned some facts about Houston, opportunities to get involved with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, opportunities to serve/work in a church—not just in a pastoral role, and learning about Christian organizations that are working towards putting an end to racism. I think we all felt very impacted by taking part in a privilege walk. These stations were intentional and each one left us with little nuggets of knowledge and information.

One of the major highlights of being in this role (besides the worship component because I just love to sing with others) was being able to witness the talent show and the evening prayer stations. I'm thankful to come from a congregation who's youth are very interconnected through their faith.. but seeing this in a larger scale at this summit has made me even more excited to experience it at an even larger scale again come gathering time in Houston this summer. These kids were so supportive of each other in every single act during the talent show and every single prayer station. I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to pray with a group of 6 high schoolers. Some cried, some smiled, but all were united in hands and prayer. God was certainly at work through all of it.

Thank you Darlene Kalfahs and the rest of the Eastern Central Synod of Wisconsin for supporting and funding me and Samantha to attend this summit. I am grateful for the lessons and ideas I took away from it, along with the extension of my church family that was established because of this trip.

This gathering was a wonderful experience of community, friendship and God's love. During these 4 days I encountered a great spiritual renewal. We partook in a wide variety of activities such as singing, praying, worship, games, and small group discussions. I was able to reconnect with God and myself during these activities. My favorite event was our talent show, which took place at the end of day 3. Even though it started off without many volunteers to participate, I enjoyed it. Our group of 175 youth slowly got comfortable with each other. The leaders who put on the talent show had anticipated for 15 people to perform and for the show to take an hour. The first day we only had one brave soul sign up, even though the leaders encouraged everyone to sign up. We had all just met, not many people were willing to stand up in front of 225 youth and adults to perform a talent they had. As the days went on, slowly more and more people were willing to make an attempt at performing. It was extremely neat to see my friends grow closer and more comfortable with each other. By the start of day 3, there were 13 people signed up, I decided to sign up to do a magic act, I was number 14. By the start of the talent show we met our goal of 15 acts, everyone was so excited! The talent show started off with some amazing acts, there were all sorts of performances like singing, comedy, playing an instrument, showing of artwork, reading of personal poems, and even some acting. Throughout the night we had some heart warming performances but also some very nervous performers. The entire group was so supportive for every single act, no matter how bad, scared, or amazing these acts were they had an entire group of friends standing up for them. This warmth and welcomeness actually ended up encouraging around 10 more people to sign up on the spot. The entire show ended up taking two and a half hours so our scheduling got a little messed up, but that is what made the night perfect. We all came together and were extremely supportive of one another. This event allowed me to feel and provide God's love through making new friends.

-Samantha Felker, Synod Council, Youth Representative and Member of Peace Lutheran Church in Oshkosh.