

Allegheny Synod Youth Gathering Alternative

An Interview with Hanna Weimer, Allegheny Synod

By Reverend Ellen S. Lundie, Christian Education Network of the ELCA

How did you learn about the alternate Youth Gathering and plan to attend?

When the National Youth Gathering was cancelled, a group of pastors, youth leaders, and myself from the Allegheny Synod got together to plan an event. We did not want the youth to completely miss out on a trip experience.

Describe the event, the themes and the daily activities, service learning.

Twenty-one youth and 7 adults attended our trip. We started our trip in Washington DC. We visited the National Cathedral, saw the White House, the Washington Monument, the World War II Memorial, the Reflecting Pool, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Vietnam Memorial. We went to the Holocaust Museum and to the National Museum of African American History and Culture.



We gathered as a group at The Lutheran Church of the Reformation behind Capitol Hill to hear from Dr. Kristin Witte who works with the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. We rode on the Metro, a first for most youth from rural Pennsylvania. A part of our group went to the White House for a tour and another group was able to have a private tour of the National Archives. We saw a document that had just been declassified that day and saw the Declaration of Independence in the Rotunda before the public arrived. There were other visits to Smithsonian museums throughout our time in the city.



From the city, we traveled to Fort Valley to stay at Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp and Retreat Center. We went from the hustle and bustle of the city to the quiet setting of Caroline Furnace surrounded by nature. While at camp, we canoed, swam, played games, hiked, and had an outdoor picnic. We worshipped together at one of the outdoor spaces at camp before packing up and heading back to Pennsylvania.

What were the growth areas for the youth and the challenges of the event?

Once we were at Caroline Furnace, we shared in bible study together and talked about the persecution and struggle in modern history and current times that we learned about at the museums. We reflected on what we can do to make a difference in a world that is filled with such trauma. We reflected on positive attributes in ourselves and how we

could use our own gifts to change the world for the better, even if it is just a little bit at a time.

What stands out for your group and what were some of your significant learnings?

This was the first time to Washington DC for most of the youth on this trip. For some, this was the first time visiting a major city like Washington DC. Youth were able to take in sights of memorials, museums, and cultures that were all new to them. Visiting the Holocaust Museum and the Museum of African American History and Culture and hearing from Dr. Witte gave us all the opportunity to begin having conversations about the persecution and struggles that have taken place in modern history and what we are currently living through. We were able to facilitate these conversations through bible study and worship together.



Pastor Amanda McCaffery, one of the pastors on the trip shared, “The trip was hopefully a memorable one for our kids. The goal of this trip was to provide Allegheny Synod youth with an experience outside of a setting they know and to broaden their horizons to a world bigger than the Allegheny Synod.”