

FaithBIT



Jesus, Justice & Jazz

Reflection by Kelly Meyers (pictured third from the right)

We each have experiences that have left a lasting impression on us. One of mine was attending the 2009 ELCA National Youth Gathering in New Orleans as a chaperone.

Our congregation at that time hadn't attended a National Youth Gathering and was skeptical of its value. We had decades of commitment to summer mission trips and the gathering was more expensive and seemed to be more about entertainment. Wow. Were we wrong!

The gathering was about faith – personal faith growth, faith in action, and faith in community. With 30,000 youth from around the country (and some from around the world!) we worshipped, we spent time in study, we served, and yes, we had fun!

The theme for the 2009 gathering was "Jesus, Justice, Jazz." Each day was a different focus. One day was our 'Jesus' day – time in devotion, study & prayer in small group sessions. A second day was our 'Justice' day – serving in the community of New Orleans (Even 4 years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city – there were thousands of opportunities for service and connecting with the people of that beautiful city). A third day was our 'Jazz' day – interactive exhibits, hands-on activities learning about the ministries of the ELCA around the world, and ELCA bishops & staff available for conversation and photos.

Each evening we had a mass gathering at the Superdome. Think of your favorite concert – this was SO MUCH MORE. Powerful, thought-provoking speakers. LARGE group games, and awesome Christian bands. The final morning all 30,000 of us worshipped & shared communion together in the Superdome. That worship service was creative, powerful, and connected all of us in ways I cannot describe.

That week we walked (A LOT!), discussed, prayed, learned, celebrated, served. Our kids made friends with youth from around the country. But most importantly the gathering gave us a bigger vision of the church – primarily the ELCA – in action, and our place in it. We looked beyond our congregation and saw a church making a difference in big and really small ways. Our youth came back inspired to learn, serve, and lead. And to share Jesus, Justice & Jazz.

I am thrilled for the opportunity to send my daughter to the 2022 gathering in Minneapolis! And I look forward to Immanuel supporting its youth, getting them to the gathering, and celebrating their faith on fire afterward!