

FaithBIT



The Dallas Club

National Youth Gathering Memories

Reflection by Marc Beyer

Since joining Immanuel over 15 years ago, I've always been impressed by the number of mission trips, backpacking trips, retreats, and other opportunities for our youth. But one thing has stood out to me. We don't attend the National Youth Gathering. I went when I was a youth, and it was the highlight of my years growing up in the church. I'm so glad to hear that Immanuel will be sending a group to the 2022 National Youth Gathering!

I attended the 1991 National Youth Gathering in Dallas, Texas. Not long after the 1988 Gathering in San Antonio concluded, the "Dallas Club" was formed. Those kids attending the Gathering mowed lawns, raked leaves, shoveled snow, and yes, bailed hay as a way to earn money for the trip. This allowed us to not only fundraise, but to form a bond with the other kids who would be going on the trip with us.

The trip itself was an amazing experience. Growing up in a small town in northeastern Wisconsin, flying to Dallas, Texas was a big deal. I was just a few weeks away from my 16th birthday, and didn't have much experience traveling across the country without my parents. We were all a little out of our comfort zone and didn't quite know what to expect.

30,000 Lutheran youth descended upon Dallas in July. Needless to say, it was hot. We were split into two arenas – the Dallas Convention Center and Reunion Arena. Speakers included Dr. Tony Campolo and Maya Angelou who spoke on the theme of the Gathering - "Called to Freedom." The Jay Beach Band provided the music.

The youth took over the hotels in Dallas. A highlight was definitely the opportunity to meet other Lutheran kids from across the Country and the hotel experience itself. We had large group sessions in the arenas, but also had opportunities to grow our faith in smaller sessions back at the hotels.

Looking back, it is hard to fully capture the experience in words. Some of the details are admittedly foggy more than 30 years later. It's one of those things that you just have to experience.

But I do remember this: A few years later I was a student at St. Olaf College. I met another student who was a transfer student from a small college in Arizona. I didn't know anything about her and doubted that we'd have much in common. Somehow, though, it came up in conversation that we had both attended the National Youth Gathering in Dallas. That told me all I needed to know. Because we had shared that common experience, I felt like I knew her even though we had just met. My thinking was that if you attended the National Youth Gathering, too, then you are my kind of person. Indeed, we remain good friends to this day.

So, I encourage all eligible Immanuel youth to attend the National Youth Gathering. You won't regret it!