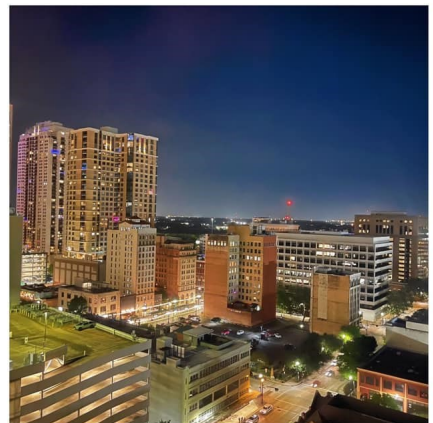
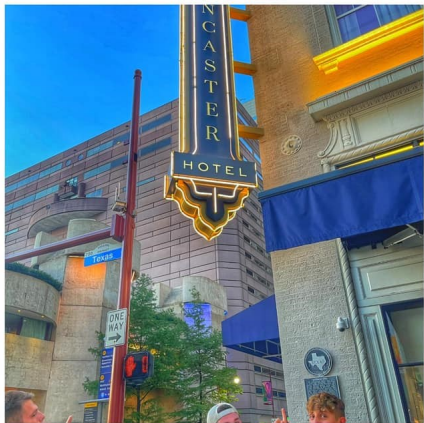




LCMS-NYG 2022 Houston, Texas



¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16-17



in all things

JULY 9-13, 2022

LCMS YOUTH GATHERING



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Colossians 1:16-17



Nick Krupa

My experience at the 2022 youth gathering was one of the best experiences in my life. I am so blessed to be a part of a 20,000 person family that came to Houston. I went to the youth convention in 2019 in Minneapolis and that was an life time experience and I made many memories with the last crew but since they went off the college and aren't around a much I was one of the remaining crew members besides Dana that went to the last convention. It was truly a blessing to get to know these young adults and truly get to see their different personalities. The best part was making lifetime memories with these people and I am looking forward to making more memories with this group. It was also an amazing experience to make friendships with people my age all around the country. The convention itself I thought was well thought out and the Bible sessions were well planned out that were about our faith and with some problems teens face in times now a days.



I really felt touched with the main theme which was "in all things" which we were mostly in the book of Colossians and it was repeated throughout the Bible. After we sometimes push God out of our lives and tend to be distant from Him in our busy lives but since God loves us so much he sent his own son Jesus Christ to die for our selfish sins and God is always waiting for us to become closer to Him no matter what our background is. We also tend to put events that happen in our life in different "sections" like sports, family, friends, school, etc... Then we tend to put our faith life in a section that is distant from the others but in reality all of those "sections" should be all in one big section with God being #1 since nothing comes before him. Which reminds me another main topic we all went over is that life likes to draw us into a trap to make us distant from God and making other things in our life more important than God. We all need to remember what God did for all of us and what he is still doing for us since we are all selfish about ourselves, when really we can't do anything without him and he's my #1.

Then the mass event with the 20,000 kids was breathtaking with mostly a while baseball stadium is full of people with the same faith as me with all different backgrounds. The songs that the band sang were truly remarkable and sent a chill down my back. How great thou art was my favorite song and listening to all the people singing that song was truly remarkable. The final day of the convention with the mass church service was overall pretty amazing.

I am sad that we have to leave but this isn't the end since we can bring everything that we learned from the convention back home with us and spread it through out the church and the rest of the community who needs to know Gods word. I wanna really thank Dana, Pastor, and Tony for being amazing leaders contributing something different throughout the trip. But I really wanna thank Dana for getting us to where we needed to be with all of the different events that we had go to and being on time, she is truly an amazing leader and truly inspired by her and I have to give her a lot of credit. Houston was awesome but my mind is now focused on New Orleans in 2025.



Nick Krupa here. Yesterday was an amazing day and another day that I felt a closer connection with my convention family and more importantly God. I went to a session yesterday talking about the struggle athletes have to balance sports life, student life, and faith life. There tends to be more stress factors in life that can make a person collapse instead of succeeding. The biggest thing that we athletes and mostly everyone else deals with is suffering, like training for your job and sport, contributing to your team, and so much more. One of the biggest challenges we athletes face is our sports tend to push us away from our faith life. We kept on talking about how powerful compassion was for people's relationships that were distant from God ...but down the road God waits everyday for us to be by his side and still loves us for who we are. Another big take was this saying "Suffering sinners need suffering saviors". God helps us out with many things to keep us close with him like: God gives us an identity since we are all His children. God gives us a place to belong which is within His community. Also God gives us a purpose to impact the world.

Here were ways that we can stay closer with God for when we feel distant:

- 1) We should dwell daily on God's word NO EXCUSES.
- 2) We pray everyday in every circumstance whether it's with your family, friends, and teammates.
- 3) We can study the scriptures weekly with peers; it's like the same feeling getting ready for game day. 4) Worship with people in person as much as possible.
- 5) We need to take advantage of the "offseason" and lean into Jesus.
- 6) Seek out other people who want to spread God's word like your teacher, coach, older peers, youth leaders, etc...

After the session we went to the mass event which was amazing overall and I truly felt a deeper connection with my 20,000 person faith family as we talked about the different statistics people our age have to deal with throughout their lives. The one that really hit me was that 100% of our peers grew up with constantly hearing about school shootings. After that the concert was amazing and the band had an amazing song collection. That's how my day went thank you for reading all of this

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Emma Kabel

LCMS Youth Gathering 2022

the most memorable moment from the convention would be in bible study about the third day when Rev. Dr. Gerard Bolling was saying that God chooses to stay with his creation. Ive never looked at it like that before and it really changed how i think and look up to god. God chose to sacrifice his only son for his creation. He made the world for his creation and with it the love and peace of his teachings. Also, Ive made bonds with people over this 2022 Youth Gathering week that ive never thought would be possible. This trip has created such strong bonds with everyone and i can't imagine how i'm going to wake up in the morning without Paige yelling at me to turn my alarm off. Im going to miss my new favorite person, Aleigha and how she makes me laugh every second of the day, I'll even miss Ava, who has become like an annoying little sister to me. It's going to be hard being away from the people who ive grown to know as family but it will just make our bonds stronger



But he was pierced for
our transgressions, he was
crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that
brought us peace was on
him, and by his
wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5



Branden Purpura

At the convention i realized no matter the life you live you will always have a place with god. some relationships are only for a little amount of time but a relationship with god is forever. Being at the convention also made me realize I should not be afraid to show how i feel because there is tons of people like us. The people at the convention are only a small part of the people like us.



And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Amen.

Matthew 28:20

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9

Paige Coffed

The best part of the convention for me was honestly the little moments. The time when Emma fell at the Aquarium. All the little fights about who is going to shower first. Timmy and Alex wrestling in the hotel room. This convention taught me the importance of how much we need our faith family and how much we need to stick by each other.



²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—

Hebrews 10:24-25

Gaige Hughey

This convention was very life changing. There were many aspects where it helped me to grow in my faith and as a person. Many of the people on this trip I was already close with them but this drew us even closer. My favorite part of the convention is hard to pick out but there was many. The mass events were amazing. Seeing that many people around us all there for one this to worship god and Jesus. The part that was most hitting and really had the biggest effect on me was when they went over all the people that should've been at the convention but they went to early and wernt able to join us there. It really made me think that we need to make the best of our life before we go up to heaven. The best part of the trip was becoming closer to Jesus and becoming closer to everyone around me. This trip was definitely a blessing and there is definitely a reason everyone of us were at this convention

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
John 14:2



THE OLD
96 
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Ava Purpura

This week has been amazing. i learned so many new things and made so many new relationships with the youth and people from different states. My favorite part from this convention was the mass events. The music was great. I have made a stronger relationship with mainly the girls. They have become more like sisters to me. This 3 years is gonna fly. This is was such a great first experience and i can't wait to make more relationships and become stronger with God.



"A sweet friendship
refreshes the soul."

Proverbs 27:9

Timmy Keohane

Houston was fun and hot! I liked traveling with my friends. Pastor and I had a great time trading movie quotes too. It was awesome seeing all the other kids who believe the same things I do. I want to thank the whole congregation for sending me to Houston! I'm excited for New Orleans three years from now!

"We were filled
with laughter, and
we sang for joy."

Psalms 126:2



"A glad
heart
makes a
happy
face..."

Proverbs 15:13

Brothers
don't shake
hands...
Brothers
gotta HUG!



Aleigha Sharpe

Before I start I want to say thank you to the congregation for this trip. I will also highly recommend every youth of St. John's to go on a LCMS trip. After 8 copies of trying to write what the impact of this trip, I realized I need to share the my full story. For 7 months I've struggled with who I am. I would wake up each day not knowing where I fit in with the path God gave me. I built my identity of a "student body Vice President, straight A, 3 sport athlete". I was nothing with out that. Taking the athlete part away with a sudden knee injury put me in a position of grief and sadness. Even though my path was decided by our savior, it felt like he was trying to break me into pieces. Broken was the definition of what I was during this stage. I would continuously put on a fake smile on when I go to practice or games to support my team.

After a while I felt numb because I got used to faking it. It felt like the same day, everyday. I slowly started backing away from church going once to twice a month, and almost backed out of this trip. During May, Pastor interviewed me for conformation. I was so close to not going through with that as well because I was in a rough time, I felt like my relationship



with God wasn't strong enough. But I realized this path was sent from him. I continued building and then July came around and there was a week till the trip. I didn't fit in with the community of church due to starting around 5th grade. I had no bonds so a few days before the flight to Houston I was also having my doubts. I was scared I would have the longest week ever. I was dreading it. Wednesday night rough, saying goodbye to my family, scared for the adventure ahead. With in the first day of being in Houston I knew my place. The place that I was looking for; for 7 full months I found in a day. I found a knew identity in a community that will always surround me in good and bad. I knew that no matter what would happen in life that the bonds we made this week will never be forgotten. Family is what all 11 of them are. The con-



vention had three main parts; starting with bible studies, then sessions, and ending with mass events. Bible studies was the start of your day. It was a lesson with in the bible with each day focusing on a new topic. A main lesson was that we look at our faith on Sunday Church service and separate our father from the rest of our lives. Good wants us to make himself known in all things. Focus on life with him being in it will make it easier and less lonely. If we think about every time someone uses us, we feel pain. You use God every day. You turn to him only in the bad times because you think of him as a savior and someone who can fix your problems for you. You think about our father, our savior as just someone you can use for when you are in bad situations. To gain a relationship with God, to make him have faith in you, you need to build your faith with him. God is in your every day life. In bible study, sessions and mass events it teaches you're not alone during any times. Shows you that our savior will protect and forgive no matter how big or small and makes you realize he's in all things. By the end of the week I built the relationship with our Father and what I call my family now. Day 7, was the realiza-

Aleigha Sharpe Continued...

tion. I remember us youth sitting in the room talking that we aren't the future. The future is our kids and our kids kids; but we are the present. We talked about what we can bring to the table to help and serve St. John's. This then brought us into our little high & low talk, and our last prayer together this trip. The Hyatt Place Downtown was definitely filled with emotions. Every one of us were in pain some type of way. God brought us together to heal each other. By the end of LCMS 22' I have an annoying little sister Ava; an older, supportive, smart, encouraging older sister Paige; and a friend, no, best friend who no matter what would always make me laugh and was like life support Emma. The boys were like brothers. 5 very different brothers. Timmy was definitely the fun, always doing something to make you laugh. Branden being the caring, loving, and helpful one... and the cleanest. Alex being the funny, comfortable, "I will do it even if it's not smart" one. Gaige being the annoying, funny, and caring one. And lastly Nick, the person who is a role model, caring, and a person I wouldn't expect to bond with as much as I did. Even with the small fights we had over who gets to shower first or when the boys thought I was on the practice football tackle team or the simple stupid fights, we are family. We are like a puzzle, we simply fit perfectly together. I will honestly miss waking up and then being there. Then going to sleep and them being there. I can promise this though sure we weren't the beginning but we aren't the future. We are the present. We will continue to be for each other and for the church. This was what we needed, and it's a new chapter for us. Now we wait for New Orleans in 2025 to bring the younger youth in to show them their path. But until then, we go home and be the present.



For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11



Alex Krupa

From the moment I woke up in my own bed and when I got to the Buffalo Airport, I knew this was going to be special. The feeling I got on the airplane, knowing I'm going to have the time of my life and make memories that'll last a life time, was the best. And it all came true. Day 1 we were introduced to a big city with scorching heat. It was great getting settled in. After that we had some delicious food at shake shack, then from there went to the really cool aquarium that they had. Fast forward 2 days, we went to the Houston Space museum, and it was amazing. Learned a lot more about space after going there. Then the night after we went to Minute Maid



Park, I remember

looking at the crowd in the beginning and thinking to my self "hm, not a lot of people here". Then, about 10 minutes passed by and I saw people flood into the stadium. I was just amazed by how much people were just like me

and this youth group. Day after, we went to Bible study and went through certain Bible verses and took it all in with 5 thousand other kids, and felt touched by Jesus when we did some of the things at Bible study. After it ended we went to the convention center and had a blast, I was doing some crazy fun activities with people just like me. After some fun, me, Nick, Brandon, Gaige, and Timmy went up to a session called "calling for all athletes". I

learned a lot from that session. It was about how Sports interfere with Faith, and how to adjust sports so you could fit it in with putting your faith as your #1. Then that night went to a really good BBQ Place and I got some awesome Ribs and



Mac and Cheese and fries. The night after that we went back to Minute Maid Park and had another awesome time, singing, dancing, and of course praising the Lord. It was amazing seeing everyone in there

neon apparel and glow equipment. Seeing everyone spread love and faith was just breathtaking. It was awesome. Then there was a concert with some amazing people singing about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And the message that they sent out about women's rights, was just awesome. Then we had to get back at 12:30am. Had to hit the hay as soon as we got back. Next day was an early one. Had to get up and head to the final service at Minute Maid Park. It was great. Everything that I thought needed to get covered, got covered. I thought that for the most part it was pretty similar, they just

worded stuff a little differently. Then after that we were all done with going to services. And after that we had an amazing walk through Downtown Houston in the blazing sun trying to find a restaurant. And when we found one, it was a good one. Then after that we went back to the room to chill and wind down for a little bit. Then all together, wearing nice clothes, went to a BBQ place and had some amazing Texas BBQ. After that we went back for the Hotel Lobby to break down what was going on, and doing highs and lows. And shared some awesome stuff. And that was the final day.



Mrs. Dana

For in him all things were created. That was the theme and message we heard. What a blessing we have been given in each other. I'm SO thankful for all the adults who took the time to invest in me. It is an honor to be able to give back. This isn't my first convention. So, unlike some of our youth, Tony and Pastor, I find myself reflecting on our youth ministry and the convention experience.

One thing I've noticed over the years is that the age gap seems to close as we grow older. The difference in a couple years when you are younger is a BIG deal. But, the older you get the decades seem to fade together. In youth ministry, I get such an amazing opportunity to watch so many grow and can't wait to see all that God has planned for each and every one of them. They all make me proud! Each of us is a gift. God wants us to know and love one another, to support and guide each other, to laugh with and at times cry with and comfort one another. I can tell you that each convention is wrapped with all of these feelings and in the end builds powerful connections..

Our youth never cease to amaze me. I am so honored to journey along with them. I hope they each know what a special place they hold in my heart. I find this part peculiar in a way. Often, as adults, we try to be role models for our youth, to teach and guide them, to care for and support

them. But, all too often and although they may not realize it, they are teaching us a thing or two about life (if we let them). Each and every one is unique and I couldn't be prouder. They stand apart, but stand together. They make quite a team and convention I attend proves that. The time they invest in another forms bonds that they have never experienced fore. I've watched this happen over and over again. They come a family and can't escape one another. And best of they make me laugh!

So, that brings me to my reflection. Reflecting is a pre-important part of life. At the convention, I am always so moved by the Bible studies, mass events, and our kids. This time I also got to participate in some amazing sessions for adult leaders. I have stated so many times that the youth our future. Well, I stand corrected. The youth are our present. One session I tended focused on the future of the church. Passing the keys turned out to be a topic and was very well presented. Sometimes, we aren't ready for this. But, as congregation, we have the opportunity to invest in each and every one of our youth no matter how big or how small. It is up to us to "pass the keys" and share all there is to know about our faith and our St. John's. Life is short, too short! We won't be here forever. But, I hope our church is. We need to take every opportunity to provide our youth the knowledge and history that we hold. Without it, they will not know and things will be forgotten. They are the church. Investing in them through the convention, conversation, opportunities to lead and serve or other ways to be connected is key. The Holy Spirit is working through each of us. We have opportunities to show grace, share our challenges, and our joys. On our last night before heading home, we met together to share our highs and lows. It was quite a remarkable and moving experience. We laughed, we cried, we prayed. It was more than any one of us expected. In addition, our youth were asked again to look inside themselves and find an area of ministry that they would like to participate in and give back to our church. They each selected a ministry and promised to hold each other accountable. That brings



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Mrs. Dana

us back home and we are ready to get them started in their new journey. As they step up, please step in and encourage them. Show them the ropes. In addition, I'd like to invite you into our Sunday School classroom when we share our highs and lows for the week as a way to support one another. I'd love for our adults to share their journey, how God has worked through you in your life, your career, whatever you choose to share with our youth. It would be such a neat opportunity for our "guest" adult and our youth. I promise you, the reward in investing in our youth is unlike any other.

So, in closing, what made this convention so different? What was it about Houston? HOT! Houston is HOT! That is one thing we will never forget. We may forget some of the details of our trip, but I know we will not forget the impact this convention (no matter where the location) has during, immediately following, and for years to come. Along the way, I always wonder, are they getting it? In the end, God works in all of us. And yes, it happens each and every time! We have bonds that cannot be broken and some memories that cannot be erased. Thank you Pastor for putting this book together for our youth to reminisce in and for our congregation to gain an appreciation for what the youth convention does for our kids. Thank you to our amazing and supportive congregation for helping to make this opportunity a reality for these lucky youth. They know it wouldn't have been possible without you. We are so blessed to have one another. In good times and in bad, I want our youth to know they have a safe place to come and a congregation who truly cares about each and every one of them. I also pray that the little impact that I have had turns out to make a great impact someday. I pray the legacy we all leave behind teaches our youth the importance of our faith and leading as Jesus did. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve. It truly is a rewarding experience and the pleasure is mine. I am honored to serve and blessed to call St. John's my own.

Youth Group & Youth Leaders (past, present & future).... God doesn't make mistakes. You are a gift to me, to our congregation and to one another. Thank you for being a part of my journey, for loving me, guiding me, and pushing me to be and give more. But, most of all, thank you for just being you! You each have a very special place in my heart, make my soul happy, and bring a smile to my face.



Mr. Tony

The blessings and opportunities we have been given to go on this amazing trip could not have been possible if not for the Grace of God and our Church Family. From the very first morning at the airport to our return flight back to Buffalo and arriving after 1:00am was filled with laughter and love the entire time. Bonds and friendships that were made and strengthened, gathering together for prayer and breaking bread together every day, touring around Houston, conversations and so much more added something that is difficult to put into words to explain. In Colossians 3:16, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Each morning, our day started with breaking of bread at breakfast, our team slowly making their way down and Timmy quoting comedy shows to hugs that greeted each other. The smiles, laughter, conversations and good coffee made our day start out perfectly. As we headed over to our morning bible group, although already hot in the early morning, this did not deter anyone's mission of getting to class and praising God.

The room was filled with over 5000 youth and adults that all crave the word of God and waited anxiously as we all prepared for the day.

Each bible study started with song, leading into worship. I glanced over many times to

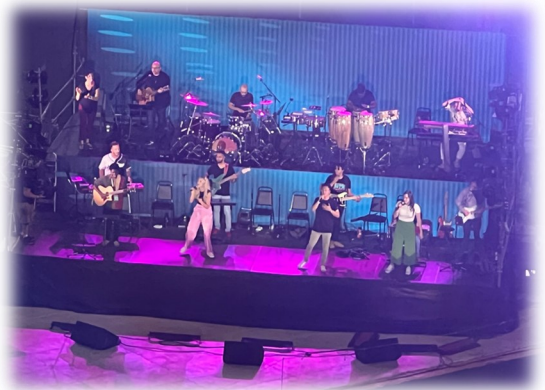
see the reactions of our youth and they looked

on with an intensity and a sense of anticipation. Breaking out into song, you could feel the energy in the room and how blessed we were to be with so many of our faith. Clapping, to laughing, to singing and even crying provided this conduit amongst all of us that even though we may not have known the other youth groups by name, we are all one family, brothers, and sisters in Christ.

As each day would pass, we all gathered to talk about the day and what it meant to each other. Sharing information about what class we all attended, to the recreation area in the convention center. The classes were very informative and we had met so many new people to each night at the Ball Diamond for song and worship.

Over 20,000 people, youth and adults singing praise. Although loud you never walked away not able to hear. Each song woke up parts of our spirit that lifted all of us above all else. For the time we are we all gathered in one place, we were able to completely forget the world and focus on God and our faith. At times, the band had everyone jumping and you could feel the floor move but more importantly, you can feel the Holy Spirit move through all of us at one time.

When it came time for dinner, Gaige was our guide. Quickly jumping to the task, locating a place, calling for reservations and kept us all informed of what was happening. The look on Gaige's face when we were at dinner and his steak dinner was presented was priceless. Timmy immediately jumped in and quoted from the movie "The Great Outdoors", there it is the 96'er. We all broke out into laughter. Pastor went to work quickly with this opportunity and created the best photo of Gaige and the Ole 96'er.



Mr. Tony

Each day always provided strength, energy and direction of our faith however, the last day while we all in the lobby reflecting on our experiences, offered something that has no words. As we went around the room each of us talked about our time here in Houston. Each word selected that had a power of faith behind it. The emotions of each of us from laughter to tears moved us all in a way that was directed by the Holy Spirit and you could feel God's presence.

Alegha's prayer, topped everything off. We all cried hearing this not of sad tears but rejoicing and happiness. This time offered so much and how proud and honored we are to have such amazing young adults. Our faith is strong, our bond is indestructible and our God is Mighty and Merciful.

A special thank you to Dana. Your countless hours of preparation, to frustration provided something we will never forget and always hold dearly in our lives. We cannot thank you enough for this time and how blessed we are to have such an amazing Youth Director.

To Pastor, thank you for always being right there. Providing insight, prayer and writing each day of our experiences to our church family. An extra thank you for being roommates for the week. How blessed we are to have you as our Pastor here at St. John's and attending this trip with us.

Thank you to Nick, Alex, Timmy, Ava, Branden, Emma, Aleigha, Gaige and Paige for the time we all spent together. The conversations we had, to the hugs we shared. I am not an emotional person however, you all brought me to tears to see you all engaged in your faith and how we get to join you in your journey. I have not laughed that hard in years and I never felt the Spirit move through me as much as I did standing and singing with all of you.

Although our time in Houston has passed, our faith continues to grow and strengthen every day. Thank you for amazing trip of a life time and may God continue to enrich you in the faith and bless you everyday.



Pastor's Daily Website Blog

Day 1

Well.... We made it! Not a delay! Not a cancellation! We literally flew smoothly. GOD IS GOOD and God is in all things. Thanks be to God for his presence and his protection as the 12 of us traveled across the country to Houston. Today was a rather quiet day. We arrived at the airport and loaded into the shuttle; a 15 minute ride to our hotel. The kids were ready to check in and all of us were ready for a nap too! We grabbed lunch at a place called "Shake Burger" and then naps became our reality.... We needed it! The rains came for a bit (it rained hard... we thought an ark might appear)! As I understand there as been a dry spell for some time in Houston. The rain was needed! In God's good time it stopped and turned out to be a BEAUTIFUL evening! When the rain subsided we were able to head out for dinner.... Authentic Texas tacos (highly recommended... just ask Gaige) Then it was off to the Houston Aquarium. Our night concluded with some good conversation on the 16th floor (a beautiful spot overlooking the city of Houston). The youth shared with Pastor, Dana and Tony some thoughts in regards to the future of the church and their role in the life and ministry St. John's. God is truly good! Looking forward to what the Spirit will work in all of us as we grow, bond and see more of Jesus!



Day 2

Our day started out with a wonderful spread put on by our hotel staff and they we joined in a time of sharing and Devotion. Connecting with our Lutheran heritage after hearing God's Word from the book of Colossians we prayed together Luther's Morning Prayer. This readied us for the day and an exciting one it was! from exploring Houston's tunnels, to riding in a Cadillac Escalade to get the one fantastic BBQ pit, to quoting Tommy Boy movie quotes (Timmy could probably quote every line from the movie); checking in to the convention and being greeted by a highly energetic "orange nation" all the same it was a great day! A great day to be together and a great day to explore this remarkable city. The only down side to the day... it could have been a bit warmer. It only reached the equivalent of 105 degrees with 88% humidity... and they said it was a dry heat lol!! In all seriousness what an amazing opportunity this is for our young people and adult leaders! blessings in worship this weekend! You are in the great care of Rod Lorenz. Until the next post. Peace be with you all!



Pastor's Daily Website Blog

Day 3

With the Lord begin your task... morning, evening, and at night Jesus will be near you.... "What a beautiful hymn to begin Sunday worship (yes we were watching all the way from Texas) and what an important reminder on how we should begin our every day; with our Jesus who is our guide and who is IN ALL THINGS. Indeed, this is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Well... DAY 3 here in Houston! Wow! but, "Houston we have a problem!" Alright, no problems at all but a quote from the movie Apollo 13 is only fitting after a day at the Houston Space Museum. What an awesome time it was to experience the so many exhibits. So much to see. So much to consider. So much learned. It is truly amazing to think how awesome our God is to create such an amazing and large space. "How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!" (Psalm 92) And what is equally great is to know that we have a God who gives to us the wisdom to study and explore this remarkable universe! While our trip to the Space Center was certainly a highlight, it compared in no way to the opening mass event last evening at Minute Maid Field. Our God is an awesome God! What an amazing experience for all of us! To sing praise with 20,000 Lutherans to pray and to ponder our God who is in all things- in every one of our stories and who blesses us to be a part of the best story of all... His story! What an amazing truth! And how our God never ever leaves us, but gives to us our Jesus who is before all things and above all things! Our Jesus "who has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins...." Our restoring Jesus who continues to shape our thoughts and our lives as we so often feel the tug of so many things. A much needed message for all of us. A great way to start our youth gathering! How blessed we are! We hope you have a remarkable day- this the Lord's day- May Jesus guide you this day in all things! Peace.



Day 4

What a day! The first "real" full day of youth convention activity. The kids were in session by 10am and didn't end up back at the hotel until 10pm. our day started out with a remark left Bible study led by Pr. Bowling (a pastor from St. Lois) and Mrs. Sarah (a teacher from Nevada). It was great to dive into the word; considering the meaning of our theme passage from Colossians! We learned that God didn't just create at the beginning of time but continues to create through Jesus who uses us in our various vocations. After Bible study everyone made their way to the convention center and experienced for the first time the interaction center! So many vendors! So many activities.... From volleyball to learning how to laso a cow. From a bounce contraption that can trip you up if you aren't careful to making duct tape wallets and purses. Food trucks galore and enough buttons to cover their backpacks. Throughout the day the youth and adults can select from various breakout sessions dealing with very relevant topics impacting our lives. It was a bit of a challenge as many of these sessions were full throughout the day, but the kids made efforts on their own to get into sessions that spoke specifically to them. The youth set time aside to participate in a servant event. In life we take things for granted and assume that diapers are available for every baby. Of course, this isn't the case. There are many families that can't afford diapers on their own. Our youth cut and sewed fabrics

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diapers for babies in need. They entered the mission field but also came to understand the needs of others and their role in being the hands of Jesus to them. At dinner time all the Eastern district congregations gathered together at the "Gallagher Suite" in Minute made park for a buffet and some fellowship. We were able to connect up with some friends (previous St. John's member Matt Tichy and friend of St. John's, Bruce Sutherland).

Our day ended with a mass gathering.... 20,000 of us together to sing praise to God and to grow together. We sang praise songs but some pretty familiar hymns too (how great thou art, crown him with many crowns and more) The evening was powerful; our emcees helped us to see that we know the end of the story and it is very good! As we live life here we experience lots of good too, but we also know the challenges. Things like anxiety, depression, loneliness, even death and the devil are MIDDLE WORDS. They don't. Life wins with Jesus always.... Now and forever. This time also included a powerful depiction and scene of "the place Jesus prepared just for us" (Jn 14:1-6) and a remembrance of the youth and leaders who were planning to come to gathering but passed away. Powerful.... Emotional.... Hard to hold back tears. This time concluded with a beautiful song of praise pointing to the new life they now have.... Check it out on the LCMS youth gathering page. All in all and awesome day! We finalized our day with sharing "highs and lows" and we went to bed in the peace of our Lord. Wow. Just wow.

Day 5

See Nick Krupa's second reflection on pg. 5



Day 6

The Youth Gathering is winding down. Yesterday was a busy day just as the others. We started out with an amazing final Bible Study, reminding us that Jesus is the King of Kings, he is with us, and he has power even over the things we can't control.

We were encouraged to crutch on him, but also to keep connected to the church where he comes to us very personally, but where he also connects us to one other. How desperately we need each other.

After morning Bible study, we took a break and sat together sharing highs and lows and discussing the theme of the Bible study.

The youth and adults broke off from there and headed to their various breakout sessions and enjoyed time together in the interaction area.

Before we made our way over for the final Mass Gathering, we stopped for dinner at a very nice Italian restaurant. The food was great and the service was amazing. Thank God for all of the good folks in Houston who have been so hospitable to such a large group of people.

The Mass gathering was powerful and touching personal stories were shared on how God makes strong the broken. He is the mighty warrior, and through baptism we are warriors too; given the power to fight through. We were also reminded that we are never alone and never need to feel that we have to hide behind our brokenness.

A journey into the humidity after the even led us back to the hotel for the night... an early morning tomorrow, for closing worship.

Day 7

"Give thanks to the LORD for he is good and his steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 136

Give thanks to the Lord. Amen to that! Without Him none of this would be possible! What a remarkable week it has been. Life changing for sure. These young people from our Youth have been touched by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit is certainly resting in their hearts. This was my first youth gathering not just as a pastor, but as a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. I didn't

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Day 7 Continued



know what to expect, and I'm not going to lie, I wondered through out the week what kind of impact it was having. Last night and the time we had to share with the kids; hearing their reflections got me right out of the way! This has truly been an unbelievable experience for them... they have bonded, they have been impacted, touched by love and the goodness of our Savior who is with them in all things. They have been connected. And the same goes for me, Tony, and Dana. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good! He has been good to us this week. And his goodness has been in all things!

Today is the end of our journey, but as we chatted last night, we reminded each other that the one constant that we have in our life; amidst change and disappointments is our faith, God's love for us, his power and the new beginnings he is creating..... in all things...



As we prepare to leave Houston it is our faith and God's love that we carry with us. This experience will always be a part of us

and the love of God will continue to abide in us; uniting us, shaping us, connecting us! It is truly a remarkable

thing to think about.

It's a mixed bag of emotion here this morning in the Hyatt Down Houston, but one thing that is for certain, is that the love of God will continue to touch our lives and draw us together in remarkable and extraordinary ways; just as he did these last seven days.

It has truly been a mountain top experience, but like the disciples of the transfiguration, come down from the mountain we must.... To the valley-the day to day again. But changed. Empowered. Touched by the hand of Jesus. Touched by one another. And it doesn't get any better than that, my friends.

Bags are getting packed now.... Socks are being paired... wrappers picked up off the floor.... Air fresheners sprayed in the boys room (ok maybe not literally, but



there is a good chance the Hyatt is going to have to call in Houston Emergency Services Haz-mat team) In all seriousness, God is Good. Thanks be to him, to Dana, to Tony, and to all of you back home for making this possible for our youth!

Houston, we are out! As they say down here, See ya'll.

It's been good, no it's

been great! But there is work to do now. And we know God is going to do remarkable things through these young people who make up the tapestry of our awesome faith family; not only at St. John's but in the greater church with Christ leading the way!

Keep us in your prayers today as we travel.

We head out from the hotel about 1:30 and depart from Houston at 5pm. We have a layover in Detroit and should be back in Buffalo around midnight.

Holy Angels protect us good Lord. See you all Sunday.



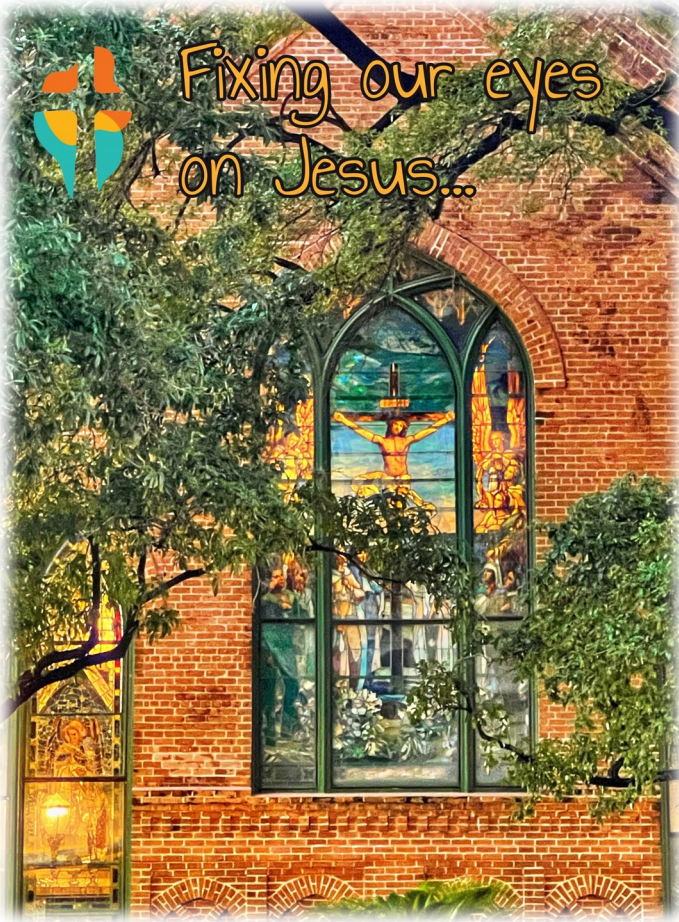
Closing Prayer

Dear Father,

we thank you for the amazing week we had together. Thank you for the bonds we grew and built over the past week. the safe flight here, protecting us on the busy streets, the food you put on our tables, the dancing, singing, the giggles and smiles we had over the week, the many lessons we learned, including learning we really don't like the pew-pewing of Timmy's laser, the sessions, bible studies, and the many more things. Not only are we beyond grateful for the people who put together the gathering but putting the three amazing people, pastor, Tony and Dana in our lives who lead us through the week who dealt with 9 very different, energetic, and some times difficult teens. We are thankful that we built our relationship with not only each other but with you our savior. Thank you for showing us your way this week, we understand your in all things, and we see Your hand in every part of every day - good or bad. We are sorry for our complaining of the beautiful weather you gave us, and any other complaining we did. We ask you to guide the families of the people who couldn't make to the convention though the hard times of loss and grief. We also ask you to guide the people who are suffering. We ask to guide each of us through our next steps in our lives and with our faith, and never allow what we have together to end. Lord we ask to keep us from all harm and protect us on our way home. Guide us through the rest of the trip, and continue guiding us with our way with you.

- Aleigha Sharpe





May our eyes be
fixed on Jesus **IN**
ALL THINGS and
the bonds
developed
continue in our
worship and
fellowship.

Counting the days until.



