

NYG Testimony

To be completely honest, the National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis, Minnesota this year was an event in my life that I was reluctant to pursue. For one thing, I was older than all the other St. Luke youth that were participating. As a junior in college I worried that the focus of most of the topics would not particularly resonate with my more “mature” concerns compared to high school students (i.e. graduating, career development, dating and marriage beyond college... all of the scary stuff). However, at the gathering, I was taught how to *learn* and *grow* with Christ. I hadn’t realized how easily I settled for surface-level explanations to my own questions, not truly comprehending God’s Word as I read it, or getting deeper in passages that I just took for granted or at face value. I was not properly engaging myself in prayer as I ought... just to name a few. It became apparent to me that I wasn’t learning or growing in the ways that I needed to. The gathering truly helped open my eyes in ways I did not foresee. My time there, allowed me to become more comfortable having those deep, meaningful conversations about Christ. Gathering with 25,000 other believers has given me more courage and being together served as a reminder that I am not alone in my apprehension and has helped appease my fears about openly evangelizing and sharing the Gospel.

Christ promises me that I will forever be a child of His through baptism, but I will forever be a *student* of God as well. This was a concept that was not as clear to me, until attending the NYG. That is, my age and experiences will never graduate me beyond some stage of my faith, nor will I ever receive a diploma for studying the Bible as a seminary professor might. People of ALL ages attended this conference, and I believe that EVERYONE learned many new ideas and ways to engage themselves. Beyond mere head knowledge, there is learning how to live a more devoted Christian life of service and evangelism also. When you are among thousands and thousands of people who share your religious beliefs, it isn’t difficult to talk about your faith and beliefs. Quite the opposite of setting foot on a public university campus, per say. But hearing different speakers has provided me with a deeper understanding of Christian arguments on heavy topics like Creation vs. Evolution, premarital sex, suicide, abortion, etc., students and professors often times won’t listen to you or worse yet, dismiss your beliefs as wrong and closed-minded (ironically).

I always have an end-goal in mind, or a finish line, if you will, for the various things that I undertake. Whether that be completing schoolwork or drinking a cup of coffee, I intend to finish what I start. I realized through this trip, however, that my intentional times set aside to spend with Christ don’t have an “end” or stopping point. Engaging in the Word daily, joining in fellowship via Bible studies, or discipling one-on-one with college students are endeavors that I now view as learning journeys that God has intended me to begin or be a part of, but not necessarily finish. They build up and develop my character and strengthen my faith, but “I” am not the end goal. It’s about the relationships. I am ecstatic to share many of the lectures and look forward to biblically rooted conversations regarding my experiences at the gathering with my friends and peers back at the University, both in and beyond of my campus ministry group. Thank you for investing in me St Luke!

~ Brooke Arner