Reflection: ELCA Youth Gathering Theme Discernment Event

From April 22­24, a group of 15 leaders within the ELCA gathered at Camp Allen outside of Houston, TX to discern a theme for the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering. The participants represented a wide variety within the ELCA: ordained, lay, Gathering staff, seminary staff, high school students, longtime Gathering leaders, multicultural, native Houstonians, and leaders of ELCA­related non­profit organizations.

I was a part of the meeting in order to provide a voice to the discernment on behalf of the LOM Curriculum Committee, in hopes that we might be able to create a theme that could also be utilized for the 2018 LOM curriculum. In general, the idea of trying to make this happen was well recieved by Molly Beck­Dean, Director of the Gathering, and the rest of the participants of the event. There is certainly a recongition of the need to begin connecting and building upon the work that the many partners in youth and intergenerational ministy of the ELCA are doing.

Our goal was to leave the weekend with a concrete theme and theme verse for the 2018 gathering. We approached the work by recogniizing that the Gathering must be a “faith­formational” event ­ not just a gathering, not just a concert, and not just a learning event ­ but something that truly seeks to form the faith of the participants. Recongizing that this work that must go beyond five day

period of the Gathering in order to give life to more effective faith formation, I beleive it is imperative that LOM walks alongside the Gathering. Between the ministry of the Gathering and the ministry of LOM, we have an enormous opportunity to provide a meaningful faith formation experience in 2018 and beyond ­ not for the sake of LOM or the Gathering, but for the sake of the Church.

The time we spent discerning a theme was challenging, yet fruitful. The outcomes we approached our theme discernement with were:

1.) We want youth to know that they have: a.) Something to believe

b.) Somewhere to belong c.) Something to do

2.) We want youth to walk away from the Gathering

1. Empowered to embrace faith
2. Know their faith is good enough
3. Knowing that they are loved
4. That it matters that they were there, they are invovled in the Church, and in the world
5. They aren’t alone

I think its safe to say that these are many of the same outcomes we approach outdoor ministry with. I’m not allowed to reveal the theme we decided upon until it is announced by Gathering leadership on November 1, 2016, but I feel confident in saying that it is a theme that acheives our outcomes and will be a theme that will adapt well to the LOM curriculum and our sites. The

November 1 announcement will work with our curriculum development timeline, which will begin in December 2016 for the 2018 curriculum.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this discernment event, and I look forward to the continued work that LOM and the Gathering have the opportunity to be partners in.

* Jesse Weiss