

Reflection by Ben Quint

While I was down in New Orleans, I learned an important lesson about being a disciple of Christ. I learned that our lives should be in service to others. That we are called by God to serve and help others less fortunate than ourselves.

All of our speakers in the Superdome had one thing in common. They all said one thing. That thing was "You can make a difference." Now I thought about what they said. I mean when they say "you" who are they talking to? Are they talking to me individually or the entire church? But I realized they were talking about many different levels of "you". They meant you as an individual who can help an elderly neighbor carry groceries to their car. They were talking about you as the youth group that can start a fundraiser to fight world hunger. They were talking about you as a church who can help your youth group raise money. And they were talking about the community that can recycle a little more than they throw away. But they were also talking about us-youth and adult leaders who can go to New Orleans to help rebuild it a little more.

I have learned that our lives are lives of service to one another. And that you, we, all of us, make a difference. From mowing a neighbor's yard to raising thousands for charities- we make the world better through acts of service.

Reflection by Trenton Weaver

We had been asked the question of what does it mean to be a disciple of Christ. For me it meant that I am here to spread God's word and to help and serve. At first I wasn't going on the trip because I wanted to go to Hawaii with the band instead but little did I know God had different plans for me. It was a little over a month before we left for New Orleans when Pastor Stacy had come up to me and asked if I was still interested in going to New Orleans it wasn't really a question it was a plan for me being fulfilled because Lori Bass who was going on the trip had to cancel because of work and so that left a spot open for me and I said yes. So being called by God to go to this LYO gathering, I packed and supposedly it was more than the girls packed or so they say.

The ride was around 20 hours long with all the stops we had taken we were all cranky and tired when we had gotten there, we checked in and headed up to our rooms and collapsed on the bed. At six we walked to the Superdome and found our spots and sat down and stayed there because we were still really tired. The house band started playing and somehow in some sense it recharged us and brought us back to life. That night they had a few speakers one of them were the Kielburger brothers that are with Free the Children Organization. They told us about their organization and how it has built over 500 schools worldwide. The second speaker was Liz McCartney. McCartney came to New Orleans right after Katrina hit to be God's disciple and to help the people of New Orleans. She was so moved by the devastation and knew that she hadn't finished what she wanted yet so she moved down to New Orleans and in 2008 she was voted CNN Hero.

Her story really meant the most to me because she didn't have to move down to New Orleans and keep working to rebuild but she did. When she had told us about her being a CNN Hero it really jumped out at me that a hero is sort of a disciple in some ways. A hero is someone that is looked up to and does everything right and spreads whatever they are the hero at around and disciples are just the same because we all want to be good disciples and to spread our talents or in other words God's word around.

I think we are all heroes in our own way and some have already found it but many of us like me I know that it takes time and hard work and God will show me the rest of the way.

Reflection by Molly Eversoll

When I look back on the past week at the National Youth Gathering it seems like a crazy blurred mess of happenings. There are a few that stand out in my mind whether it be our servant project or our awesome dinner at Emeril's for Tom's birthday, but Friday night at the Superdome meant the most to me.

There were two speakers that night, Spencer West and Michel Chikwanine. These two were immensely different in every way and yet they shared the ability to overcome great obstacles in their lives. Spencer West was born with a genetic disability and lost both of his legs. Besides losing both his legs Spencer West was bullied and stereotyped throughout his life. Michel Chikwanine was a former child soldier in the Democratic republic of Congo. He faced poverty and being forced by the militia to shoot his best friend at the age of five years old. Today they are taking part in free the children to educate and help the world.

It made me think about just how lucky and privileged most of us are to just have our legs or not face the threat of our children being put through such horrors. We complain about the small things in our lives but overlook the huge blessings that God has given us. Even if we don't think we have any talents to change things, every one of us does. It makes you think about how much we actually take for granted and how little we think about those who suffer so much more than us.

The fact is that most of us start out with a lot easier lives than these two and yet we don't see our full potential. Today they are changing the world by helping others and by just being there to speak and inspire all 37,000 of us Lutheran teens. We have the ability to change the world also. They are not letting their disabilities get in the way our sitting around feeling sorry for themselves because they have gone through difficult times. They are changing their disabilities to abilities.

I thought about how much trust in God the two of them must have had. That when times were tough they didn't just abandon all hope, but they must have turned to God to find strength. So in order for all of us to find our place as disciples of God we must find the strength to abandon all of our disabilities or life circumstances. We can find our courage in God because he will show us the way if we just listen. All of us can truly and honestly make this world a better place for all of us to live peacefully in if we just have the courage to abandon our disabilities and try.

Reflection by Noel Molin

Tattoos on houses, windows broken, people living on the streets. Before I went down to New Orleans, I thought that's all New Orleans was about. but then I learned that it wasn't just about all of that its about a community coming together to rebuild... even though its 4 years after people still are going down there to help out because it's not all done yet... the people down there have the biggest hearts. Once you go to New Orleans you don't want to come back... it's an amazing experience and I am very grateful that I got the chance to go down there. You meet some cool people and hear some amazing stories, being able to go down there to help change the world can really change your life.

Reflection by Brittney Klein

A story was shared with us about a high school boy in Sierra Leone. The rebel army came into the school and took out all the teachers into the back and executed them because they were known as wisdom keepers. Then after all the teachers were dead the rebel commander came into the auditorium and said you have two choices one is they would cut you and then put brown brown a mixture of gun powder and cocaine in their wound. This would make you unstable and then you would go to your house and violently kill your parents, causing you to have nowhere to go other than the army. The second choice is they would cut your right hand off so that you would not be able to pull a trigger of a gun to kill any of the rebel army.

After Santos heard his two choices he stood up and said "I'm the student body president and I'm in charge now. I'm coming on stage. When he got up there he said my school believes in peace." He smacked his right hand down the rebel commander asked him whether he wanted long sleeve or short sleeve (to determine where to cut off Santos' arm). Then he took out a dull machete on purpose and cut his arm off.

Santos walked down the aisle with his hand up to stop some of the bleeding. Santos continued to walk to the border where the U.N. soldiers helped him. He got two blood transfusions and lived. He later returned to school and attended college by selling his art that he made.

Because of general amnesty in his country, Santos later met the same rebel commander that cut his arm off. Santos put his left hand out to shake the hand of the commander and said "I forgive you."

As I heard this story I wondered if I would be able to offer my hand to someone who has hurt me even if I did would I be able to reach out to people that have hurt me. All throughout the week we were told to find Christ in those around us. Santos showed me that there is forgiveness in this world and also challenged me to work on forgiveness for those major things that have changed my life and who I am today.

Reflection by Tony Hurlburt

This past week I went down to New Orleans for the ELCA National Youth Gathering. It was really fun they had speakers every night but one of the speakers stories got to me the most his story was about this village in Africa that was about to be taken over by the rebels.

The rebels went into the school and told to students to go outside and sit on the ground. The rebels were telling the kids that they were going to take them with them. But then the student council leader stood up and walked over to the leader and said This Village believes in Peace and slammed his hand into the table. The Rebel leader was so shocked that he didn't say anything until he asked the student where he would like his arm to be chopped off.

When Pastor Stacy told the group that we had to speak about being Disciples of Christ I thought about how he died on the cross for us and all the pain and suffering he had to go through so we could have forgiveness of sins and live in happiness. And then the speaker told us the end of the story that the student had to shake hands with the rebel who cut his arm off. This is like Christ forgiving our sins even though they are really bad that is why he give his life for us to forgive are sins and have eternal life.