

Youth Testimonies
August 18, 2024

Hunter's Testimony

Intro-

- Good morning, I am Hunter Thiel—a sophomore attending Xavier High School. The Regional Youth Event was my second church youth trip, as last year I attended the mission trip in Cass Lake, Minnesota.

Statement-

- Being kind isn't just about being nice; it is also about mirroring and recreating God's love and compassion towards others. When practicing kindness, we engage in divine intervention. A simple smile and kind gesture can have a massive impact beyond what we are aware of. These small acts can uplift and change lives.
- Kindness is also a sign of respect. Through kindness, we can heal and comfort those who need it without many resources. By being kind, we honor and respect every person's inherent value.

Story-

Throughout the UCC Regional Youth Event, we were split into multiple groups, allowing us to learn about each other's experiences and beliefs. At first, sitting down with these random teens, it was difficult to start a conversation. But slowly, we opened up. One by one we began to grow closer to one another and share our life experiences.

Discussions in my group included mental health, sexism, and school dress codes.

Through these conversations, I was reminded that each person is truly unique. Each of us has value and if others are in a tough place we need to care for them. As part of our Christian faith, using our talents to serve others demonstrates their unique worth. When talking with other teens, views and beliefs were broadened due to us being exposed to kids who had traveled from all parts of the U.S. for the youth event in Illinois.

Body-

The story of our experiences at the Regional Youth Event shows how kindness acts as divine intervention and can lead to a deeper connection and mutual understanding with one another. Initially, many of us were nervous to start the conversations around sensitive and personal topics as we didn't know many of the people there. However, through compassion and kindness, we began to open up to one another.

During our discussions, my group came to the conclusion that everyone is unique and valuable which is shown through the Christian faith by serving others. By recognizing and valuing each person's individual worth, we understand that service is broader than helping others; it's about acknowledging the true value of each person we meet and serve. This realization is an act of divine intervention and drives us to act out of love and respect.

Through interacting with others on this trip, it expanded my understanding of the Christian mission. It made me realize our mission is beyond those already close to us such as our church community and our schools—God's idea of a more inclusive vision

is broader than just my family, my friends, my city of Appleton or my state of Wisconsin. Our mission is to ensure everyone belongs, regardless of where they come from.

Conclusion-

The Regional Youth Event taught me a lot about kindness, service, and mission as forms of divine help.

First, I learned that kindness helps us connect with others. Simple acts of kindness turned strangers into friends, showing how God's love works through us to build a caring community. Second, recognizing everyone's worth is a key part of serving which became clearer to me by going on this trip. By seeing the value in others, I am called to help with genuine care, which aligns with God's views. I plan to attend confirmation classes this fall, and I look forward to demonstrating compassion and kindness during our monthly service at Pillars. x

Finally, meeting people with different backgrounds opened my eyes to a wider mission. These mission trips reinforce that our mission isn't just about our local community of the Fox Cities but includes helping people everywhere, regardless of background or circumstance. This new understanding shows how divine help guides and expands our purpose. From our scripture today, "Live your life with love, following the example of Christ."

Thank you for your supporting the youth group to attend this Regional Youth Event near Chicago.

Cameron's Testimony

Good morning. My name is Cameron, and I recently experienced my first UCC Regional Youth Event at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL.

We believe kindness is a virtue, because God is kind. When we do acts of kindness we act according to God's will. Acts of kindness strengthen our connection to God and spread his goodness into the world. At Augustana and with God's message of kindness at heart, we prepared bags of supplies for unhoused people who lack basic necessities like toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant, and sanitary supplies like shampoo.

One of the most meaningful things we did at Augustana, in my opinion, was our discussion groups. Every day we would get into groups to discuss a topic, like injustice or inclusivity. My group liked to go off on tangents, which made for very deep and meaningful conversations. We talked about the problems we had, from not feeling accepted at school, to how unsure we all felt about the changing world around us. It was a kindness to have other people listen to us, and to listen to other people, which is what made the discussion so special.

A phrase from scripture which feels very fitting for our time at Augustana is: "we believe that each person is unique and valuable." While at Augustana, we touched the lives of so many different people. We met people like ourselves; kids who came to this camp

with the desire to meet new people and learn more about God. We met people like Flamy Grant, a drag queen and a woman who is passionately declaring her path, regardless of whether or not people think she is right. We met pastors and people of faith, who, despite going to the same kind of church as us, saw the world in very different ways. Every person we met was different, and their uniqueness made our time at Augustana so much better.

Another phrase from scripture that I feel fits our time at Augustana is: "We believe that each person is on a spiritual journey." I am on my own spiritual journey right now, and it was through the kindness of the congregation in buying Kwik Trip cards that I was able to go on this trip. I felt the connection with God, and with the people I met, because of your generosity.

Our time at Augustana was defined by the kindness we showed each other. From meeting and learning to accept new people, to helping those less fortunate than ourselves, it was our acts of kindness that brought us close to God.

Henry's Testimony

Good morning, my name is Henry. I'm going to be a junior and the regional youth event was my second youth trip.

I go on these mission trips in hopes of meeting new people and trying new things to make a lasting impact on people's lives. And let me tell you I met many different kinds of people, which led to very interesting conversations about our religion and just how we go about our days. These conversations broadened my view on the church and its many different members and beliefs. I mean the last thing I was expecting to do on a youth mission trip was listen to a concert put on by a drag queen, but I guess there's a first for everything. A theme from the event that I connected with was Love is greater than fear. The way I viewed this theme was to love unconditionally and not be afraid to be myself and to do God's work in the world.

Anyway, attending this event was a great experience and allowed me to become closer to the church. Seeing all different kinds of people getting along was a good change of pace and learning about their beliefs about the Christian church and comparing them with mine changed my point of view. I think this was God's way of telling me to branch out more and learn about others instead of focusing on myself and my own beliefs.

This experience has allowed me to get closer to the youth from our church and our great mentors, and of course, get a lot closer to God. My advice to all of you is to explore the world and see what's out there. Thank you.

Lauren's Testimony

Good morning, my name is Lauren Aaholm, I am a graduated senior, and this FCUCC youth trip was my second trip with our church. Our youth group spent two days in Chicago, and then headed down to Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. The purpose of our trip was to spread God's love, and grow our relationship with God, as well as others around us. At this event there were many others with a mix of different ages and backgrounds, coming from other parts of the country, but by the end of the first day, we already felt like one big family.

One part of the scripture that really spoke to me today was, "Live your life with love, following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us." In a world that often seems overwhelmed with conflicts, and competition, kindness and love stand as powerful antidotes to the negativity and isolation that pervade our societies. These human qualities are not merely sentimental, but crucial for fostering healthy relationships, vibrant communities, and a compassionate world. Understanding and practicing love and kindness can transform lives and will simply make someone's day.

Our schedule was packed with various activities designed to challenge us spiritually, and emotionally. One of the activities that displayed this was through our Holy Disruptions. Essentially what this is, is a moment in time that highlights more of a negative side of an event. One of the examples of this is when we used the word vulnerability, and how that affects each and every one of our lives. We were assigned groups, and we would all sit around tables and ask the questions of "How would our lives look if we didn't experience vulnerability?" "Can it be a good thing? If so, how?" Our holy disruptions occur every day, but we typically don't stop to think about them. These were the most impactful moments for me during our time spent at this event. It allowed me to further analyze my spirituality and change my perspectives on many different things. It was incredibly moving to hear the stories of my peers—stories of faith, doubt, hope, resilience, and where they are on their spiritual journey. This level of openness created a safe space where we could support and uplift one another.

By the end of the trip, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Not only had I deepened my relationships with the other members of our youth group, but I also had a renewed sense of purpose in my own spiritual life. The experiences we shared and the lessons we learned have stayed with me, and this youth trip was more than just a break from routine—it was a pivotal moment in my spiritual journey. It reminded me of the power of community, the importance of serving others, and the beauty of growing together in faith. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of it, and I look forward to many more experiences like this in the future.

Thank you once again to all of you who have donated and supported our youth program!