

Lutheran group travels to New Orleans for gathering

Written by Chris Lee

A trip to New Orleans, La. but it wasn't for Mardi Gras. Although they did take the Mardi Gras tour, they were there for something completely different.

Nine students and four chaperones from Zion Lutheran Church in Holyoke traveled to New Orleans, La. July 15-22 for the National Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) Youth Gathering. They were part of 25,000 other people from across the United States and other countries.

"We Believe" served as the theme for the 2010 gathering. Three years ago the event was held in Orlando, Fla. when 22 Holyoke youth and adults attended.

Those attending this year were Sydney Nelson, Kaylee Groshans, Jordan Bernard, Rebecca Weaver, Brian DeBoer, Erin Vieselmeyer, Heather Duester, Broc Pelle and Alyssa Roll. Laura Roll, Kim Young and Karla and Jeremy DeBoer all attended as adult chaperones.

The group arrived a couple days before the gathering began to do some sightseeing among other things. Some of the tours they took included the Katrina, Mardi Gras and French Quarter tours.

When the gathering began July 17, there was no shortage of events.

Everyone agreed the mass gatherings was one of the favorite parts. The sight of 25,000 people packed into the Superdome, where many residents of New Orleans called home after Katrina, was something they said they will never forget.

"The energy and excitement from everyone at the mass events was a big rush," Laura Roll said.

The group also spent some time helping out people who are still in need after Hurricane Katrina. The off-site servant events or service projects benefitted churches, schools, parks, cemeteries, summer camp programs and other service organizations.

Lutheran group travels to New Orleans for gathering

Written by Chris Lee

Projects included painting, sanding and picking stuff up for people around the city. The Holyoke group all agreed the Ninth Ward is in the worst shape compared to the rest of the city. It is the area that borders the Mississippi River.

Groshans said people not involved with the gathering were really grateful they were there.

Holyoke members split up and worked in two different areas of the neighborhood, painting and cleaning up around the houses. Roll said it was interesting to talk with the residents and hear how the hurricane affected them.

Fundraising for the gathering is always occurring for LITE. Bake sales, garage sales and more are held throughout the year to help raise money.

“There is no way we could have done it without our fundraising and generous donations from our congregation,” Groshans said.

While in New Orleans, walking was the main mode of transportation and they weren't the only ones. With 25,000 people in town for the same thing, they were bound to run into others from the gathering.

All of the 25,000 people were decked out in the same kind of shirt, so when walking down the streets it wasn't uncommon to hear “Hey, I like your shirt.” High-fives and free hugs were also commonly exchanged.

All 25,000 youth and adults were issued a neon green backpack to carry Bibles and Bible study materials, snacks, water bottles and anything else they needed to carry.

Roll said the streets of New Orleans were glowing green for five days with the mass of green backpacks.

Lutheran group travels to New Orleans for gathering

Written by Chris Lee

A small-world occurrence happened when someone noticed Brian DeBoer's shirt which had Marissa Smith's name on it. The person was from Illinois and knew the name since Smith's mom, Rhonda, is from Illinois.

It was estimated the gathering contributed \$42 million to local New Orleans revenues. On top of that were the thousands of items that were donated to residents and organizations.

Each church group took non-perishables with them to donate. The Holyoke group took some food, diapers, blankets and baby clothes just to name a few.

Another interesting part of the trip included the processional cross used during the mass gatherings. The cross used was crafted by members of Bethany Lutheran Church, Slidell, La. youth group, using salvaged stained glass from a church and wrought iron from a home on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Both buildings were in Slidell and were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and its aftereffects.

The cross was given to the 2010 National LCMS Youth Gathering, and will be displayed at the LCMS International Center in St. Louis, Mo. following the gathering.

Laura Roll said if given the opportunity, the group probably would've stayed as no one really wanted to come home.

The 2013 trip is scheduled to be held in San Antonio, Texas.