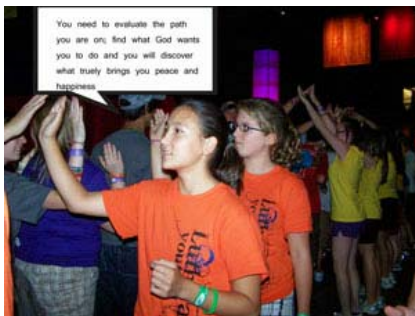


## Local Lutheran Church sends 6 to 2009 Youth Gathering of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

On Wednesday, July 22, a sea of buses bearing 26,500 Lutheran youth wearing orange tee shirts, plus 10,000 adult chaperones arrived in New Orleans for a series of service events. From the first gathering on the 22<sup>nd</sup> in the Superdome, to the last prayer service and goodbyes on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the young people and their chaperones kept busy from 6:00 a.m. until far into each night. Among other events, they worked with 11 organizations building homes; donated their services at 21 community centers and 7 public parks; collected 1,023 units of blood; 300 youth donated their hair for chemotherapy patients; donated 100,000 children's books; and collected \$154,000 in change for World Hunger. In all, they contributed over 200,000 volunteer service hours!

Lucy, a news anchor from New Orleans, said on the Regis and Kathy show recently, "A month ago about 30,000 Lutheran youth came to town to help us out. They were wonderful." New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin called them "our orange rainbow".

Grace & Glory Lutheran Church in Palmyra, VA sent 4 young people, ranging in age from 14 to 17, with 2 adult chaperones to this stirring service event. High school senior Paul Duffau



said, "An act of kindness bringing a smile to somebody's face changes you. Now that I have a taste of it, I want to do more." His sister Sarah learned the true meaning of happiness and success: "You need to evaluate the path you are on; find what God wants you to do, and you'll discover what truly brings you peace and happiness." Amanda Downs loved the phrase she heard at the gathering: 'Don't preach God, show God'. "Action, not words," says Amanda. "Showing people what God's word means through acts of service, kindness, caring, is a much more powerful way

to teach people why you're a Christian." Tamara Shifflett, focusing on two speakers at the gathering (one of whom was unconventional in appearance), whose lives of service to ex-convicts, prostitutes, drug addicts and others in the lower reaches of society inspired her to say, "Don't judge a book by its cover. It's the content of the individual, not the appearance, that matters."



The parent chaperones from Grace & Glory Lutheran were Lynette Kacmarcik and Ken Duffau. At the end of each day, the group discussed the day's high and low points, all in the context of a particular bible passage. Matthew 25:35-36, relates Jesus' words to his disciples, thanking them

for feeding, clothing, visiting and caring for him. But the 'him' is not Jesus, for Jesus continues to say in subsequent verses that whenever we help the needy, we are actually helping him. “Powerful stuff, and it defined for us why we had to be in New Orleans” they said..

Donald Miller, author of *Blue Like Jazz*, spoke to the gathering about the commercialization of Christianity, and his concern that too many Christians rely on check writing to fulfill their need to 'do something'. Miller acknowledged that, while finances are important, we also need dirty hands. In other words, Christians need to get more directly involved. “I thought about this a lot,” said Ken, “especially in the context of Grace and Glory's service and outreach work. Could we do more? Maybe, but I know that without congregational support, this trip would have been very difficult to undertake. Our mantra is time, talent, treasure. We have a nice balance of all three.”



Ken summed up: “There's something inspirational about 26,500 teenagers who so openly express their faith, and who so overwhelmingly want to help others, that it makes you step back and re-evaluate your own faith so you can meet their standards. I was a chaperone, but I wonder, who taught whom?”

