

“The experience of a lifetime!”  
Pittsburgh’s Campus Mission  
Goes to Sweden for International Summer Youth Conference

On 21 June, we arrived in Stockholm. Along with my family, five students from four different schools made the trip for Lutheran Student Fellowship of Pittsburgh (LSF): Kaila Barker, a junior at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt); Hanna Spittel, a freshman at the University of Louisville; Stephanie Vituccio, a junior at Chatham University; Trista Polaski, a recent graduate of and part-time grad student at Pitt; and Matthew Marge, a Ph.D. student at Carnegie Mellon University. The trip was made possible and affordable through the pooling of some grant monies, along with student contributions and the incredibly low cost of lodging and conference.

While in Stockholm we enjoyed the native cuisine, a short boat tour of the world-famous archipelago, a beautiful midsummer’s eve in the outdoor museum of *Skansen* (with flower-wreaths for the ladies, traditional dancing around the maypole, performance by folkdancers, games, food, etc., late into the sunny night), the changing of the guard at the royal palace, window shopping in mesmerizing Old Town, city hall (where the Nobel Prize dinner is held), etc.

On 24 June we drove to charming Varberg, an hour south of Gothenburg on the North Sea coast. There we attended the fourth annual conference of Corpus Christi ([www.CorpusChristi.se](http://www.CorpusChristi.se)), a youth organization modeled after the LCMS’s own Higher Things. Its chairman, Rev. Jakob Appell, earned his STM degree at our seminary in Ft. Wayne. Approximately 200 youth and leaders from at least nine different nations attended, including Canada, the U.S., Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, England, and Germany. The groups from the latter two countries also included students from Mexico and South Africa. The intensive schedule consisted of several kinds of seminars, varying in depth and topics and languages (with translation provided), as well as prayer offices and Divine Services which sought to increase the appreciation of and give more insights in Lutheran worship, and, of course, time for leisure on the beach or in town (e.g., at the impressive fortress). The conference’s theme was “Come, Holy Spirit.” Canadian author and pastor, Rev. Kurt Reinhardt, was the plenary speaker. During the conference I participated – in English and Swedish – by giving a lecture on prayer to three different audiences, by providing a meditation one evening, and by hearing private confession.

Our American contingent raved about the trip and the conference. Matthew said it was “amazing, the experience of a lifetime.” All students were “thankful for all of the wonderful people [we] got to meet before, during and after the conference” (Trista). Indeed, the long drive from Stockholm to Varberg provided our own LSF students “some time to talk and have a lively discussion about our own beliefs and values” (Stephanie). And as Hanna put it about the students from around the world at the conference: I loved “communicating with people around my age and learning more about their culture, their beliefs, and how they are similar and differ from my own. I think that experience alone truly made me a more well-rounded and accepting individual. [God] put people of all diverse backgrounds in front of me to show me that they all have one thing in common - they love God and are his children, just as I am.”

Several remarked about a renewed appreciation for the place and importance of prayer, both corporate and personal. Matthew told me that “Corpus Christi taught me all about prayer – I never prayed more in my life (formally, 4 times per day) at the conference, but it helped me better understand the goals of each prayer; and that the purpose of each prayer (Laudes, Matins, Vespers, Compline) is different.”

The time in Sweden also served as a mission trip. Matthew comments: “During one of the breaks of the conference, I helped spread the Word of God by giving pamphlets to folks in the city. I hope that my effort has made a positive impact on the Varberg community.” And the impact lasts upon returning home: “The Corpus Christi conference helped me gain a closer understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit. To show my thanks, I hope that describing my experience to others (like friends and family) helps them gain a better understanding of the goals of Christianity. I know there is still much more we can do to help non-believers understand what it means to be a Christian” (Matthew).

The impact on the students’ faith was obvious. Kaila remarked that the experience “strengthened my faith” and has even inspired her to think about church work after college. Hanna said that “all of the different seminars, bible studies, discussions, and sermons all held a special purpose - to make me ask more questions, get more answers, and reflect on how it all relates to my everyday life. This trip helped me to grow in faith toward God as I learned more about myself and it taught me to love others as my brothers and sisters in Christ.” Stephanie added that for her it was “a time of personal growth in terms of faith and thought. Coming to the conference as a Catholic, I really got to hear more from other students and clergy members about Lutheranism. It has even prompted me to think about conversion.”

The quality of the conference in seminars and worship was non-parallel; the universal, age-old, world-wide, race-and-ethnic-bridging, one, holy, Christian and apostolic church was truly and wonderfully manifested among the people and in the sanctuary; small group discussion and short dramas allowed for significant student input and participation; and the encouragement that the Swedes – living in an almost godless society – received from seeing so many come so far was irreplaceable; and we even had very good weather: all this added up to a deeply meaningful conference and a simply outstanding trip for all involved. Hanna summed it all up: “I am truly thankful to God for giving me such a once in a lifetime opportunity.”