

I am a 29 year old social worker working in treatment foster care in Baltimore, Maryland. I am also a member of the ELCA. I attended the 2007 Young Adult Ecumenical Forum on Environmental Justice because I am deeply in awe of God's creation and am troubled about the deterioration of our environment. Although I give to several environmental organizations, I have often struggled with feelings of helplessness, and the sense that I wasn't really doing anything. I wanted to learn more about the issues and what could be done and most of all to connect with others who shared my concerns.

At YAEF I met other young adults from different faiths who are passionate about environmental issues, and are involved in social activism around a number of other related issues. We heard from an array of speakers who taught us how environmental justice issues are inextricably linked to issues of racism, poverty, and hunger. We heard from speakers who are working in environmental organizations and modeled for us how to get involved. Some speakers challenged us with new perspectives on the problem and the solutions, causing us to re-examine or strengthen our own beliefs. My personal favorite was the final speaker, Jacqueline Comito. She encouraged us to be mindful of and minister to our own need for wholeness in order to better meet the needs of others. And she emphasized a spirit of thanks, peace, and hope as we go forth to work for peace and justice in the world around us.

The small group experience at YAEF also yielded valuable lessons. My small group was composed of individuals from different faiths and sociocultural groups with disparate views. We started out unsure of each other and how we would function as a group. As the week progressed, we grew to accept the differences among us and to support and listen to one another. We had discussions in which people shared thoughtful concerns, wrestled with hard questions, and came to more fully understand one another. And finally, we exchanged contact information so that we could maintain connections with others for future activist endeavors.

I feel empowered and energized by my YAEF experience. I am encouraged that others share the same concerns and passion for the environment, and I feel inspired to join more fully in the effort. Gone is my sense of apathy--I believe that I can make a difference. Since returning from YAEF, I have connected with local organizations working on climate change issues and local conservation efforts, and it has strengthened my commitment to recycling. I am still watching to see the ways in which God is using the impact of this event in my life and work.