

2000 ELCA Youth Gathering Executive Summary¹

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WHO ATTENDED

Based on the registration materials, 2,983 congregations sent at least one young person to the Gathering (G2K). The average number of youth was 10 per congregation and ranged from one to as many as 71. The median number per congregation was eight.

Sixteen percent of the youth attendees were from rural congregations; 23 percent from congregations in small towns of less than 10,000 persons; 18 percent from small cities of 10,000 to 50,000; 18 percent from cities of 50,000 to 250,000; eight percent from urban cities of 250,000 or more; 11 percent from suburbs within 10 miles of urban cities and seven percent from suburbs outside of 10 miles of urban cities.

Three percent of the youth attendees were from congregations with less than 175 baptized members; 12 percent from congregations with 175 to 350 members; 14 percent from congregations with 350 to 500 members; 17 percent from congregations with 500 to 700 members; 17 percent from congregations with 700 to 950 members; 19 percent from congregations with 950 to 1,500 members; and 17 percent from congregations with over 1,500 members.

THE SAMPLE AND RESPONSE RATE

The sample of youth and adults who received the G2K evaluation questionnaire was representative of the youth and adults participants by geographic region and gender as were the responses. From the original youth mailing of 1,008 questionnaires, 495 were returned for a response rate of 49 percent. From the original adult mailing of 859 questionnaires, 573 were returned for a response rate of 67 percent.

PLANNING FOR THE GATHERING

When comparing all of the Gathering preparation materials and suggestions, identifying and building relationships with mentors may have a stronger impact than the *Playbook* or G2K video. About 20 percent of adults and 42 percent of youth indicated that they participated in the mentoring preparation suggestion. Of those, more than 90 percent indicated that these

¹ While most of the findings throughout the reported are in percentages, it should be kept in mind that even small percentages can reflect a large number of Gathering (G2K) participants due to the overall size of the Gathering. For example, 10 percent represents approximately 2,900 youth.

relationships were “somewhat” to “very valuable.” This suggests that the Gathering planners may want to emphasize the importance and benefits of identifying and using mentors for Gathering preparation.

G2K AND HOTEL REGISTRATIONS

Adults were asked various questions regarding the registration processes for both the Gathering and the hotel. About 58 percent had contact with their synod coordinator. On average, their contact with the synod coordinator was only fairly helpful (2.6 on a five-point scale with “1” as “very helpful”). This suggests that the role and significance of the synod coordinator should be reevaluated by the Gathering organizers.

Almost 50 percent of the adults indicated that they encountered problems making their hotel reservations. Their comments suggest three major problem areas: the accuracy of hotel reservations, the quality of the hotel facilities, and transportation difficulties to and from the hotel. The comments suggest that hotel registration, in and of itself, was not the total issue.

HOTEL LIFE

The level of youth and adult participation at the various hotel life events was about the same. The most frequently attended event was Club G2K Nightlife. Of the youth who commented on hotel life in general, about one-third complained about the lack of hotel life at their particular hotel. This suggests that hotel life activities, if possible, should be more evenly dispersed among all hotel locations.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Evening mass gatherings and the Beat were the two most frequently attended activities at the Gathering and both adults and youth rated these activities as “somewhat” to “very valuable” (“1” or “2” on a five-point scale). The youth identified keynote speakers and musicians such as Desmond Tutu, Mike Yaconelli, Lost & Found, and Ken Medema as being highlights of their mass gathering experiences. Eighty-three percent of youth found meaning in the theme “Dancing at the Cross Roads.” This suggests that keynote speakers, musicians, and the theme have a major impact on the overall experience of the gathering.

G2K LEARNING

About 36 percent of youth and 49 percent of adults participated in a learning activity. The learning activities were designed to teach youth about faith practices and spiritual gifts. Fourteen percent of youth were able to identify a spiritual gift and 89 percent of the youth who identified a spiritual gift indicated that what they had learned was applicable to their lives. This suggests that gathering organizers may want to emphasize the benefits of identifying spiritual gifts in order to encourage more interest among the youth and adults in pursuing a learning activity.

SAFETY

Ensuring safety throughout the gathering has always been a priority. About 25 percent of adults and 17 percent of youth indicated that they felt concerned about their individual or group safety at

least once during the gathering. The most frequently mentioned concern was safety while using public transportation. This may be directly related to the fact that a very high percentage of youth at the gathering are from small and rural towns and cities.

DIVERSITY IN G2K EVENTS

The gathering strives to support the ELCA goals of racial, gender and disability inclusiveness and diversity in all gathering events and activities. About 90 percent of youth and adults indicated that the goals of diversity were met to a “great extent” or to a “very great extent.” Respondents who felt otherwise often commented on the lack of diversity among participants.

GROUP FINANCES

About 87 percent of adults stated that they would prefer that youth groups were kept together, even if that meant paying more for a room that is not filled to capacity. About 88 percent of the adults also indicated that they would prefer their counselor unit stay within walking distance of the gathering site even if it meant paying more for rooms.