



## Victoria Pannullo: Youth Ministry

### **Tell us a little about the summer theology program you participated in recently.**

I participated in a two week program called YeTI, Youth Theological Institute. The program was based at Pfeiffer University in North Carolina. During the first week of the program all 20 youth participants lived at Pfeiffer. Our day included a Bible study class, a class where we analyzed the hero journey pattern in literature and in ourselves, twice a day small group devotions, connecting with the nearby community through service projects, and fellowship activities. The second week we broke up into three small groups to learn and serve in different cities. My group went to Washington, DC where we took classes and learned about social justice work, and the importance of being a politically aware citizen.

### **What led you to sign up for the program and what did you hope to get out of the experience?**

Our former Youth Pastor Nick knew about the program, and he encouraged me to look into it. I then looked on the YeTI social media pages, and it seemed like a program I would be interested in participating in. I hoped to learn new perspectives about service and scripture.

### **Share with us some highlights of your time there. Was there anything that surprised you or was unexpected?**

It was really fun to meet other youth who are also interested in learning about faith, justice, and service. Many of the youth are very involved in their churches as well, and I liked hearing how they live out their faith at home. One of the days we worshipped with a community of people who have disabilities. It was a lot of fun. Everyone was really enthusiastic during the service. We sang lots of songs. I was surprised and inspired to see people singing and dancing with so much energy during a church service. They were comfortable singing off key, clapping off beat and dancing in the aisle. A few days after the service a leader in the YeTI program mentioned that praising the Lord is about making a joyful noise, it's not about making a good noise.

### **Did what you learn or experience during those two weeks change how you feel about living out your faith life now that you are back home?**

One day during class, our instructor asked us to say what we do, our churches do, and our families do to help end poverty. We all shouted out lots of things; food drives, hospitality kits, shower ministries, backpack drives, Operation Christmas Child, and more. The instructor wrote them all down the left hand side of a big piece of paper. Then she asked us, "What causes poverty?" We listed lack of education, corrupt governments, expensive health needs, lack of resources, discrimination, and more. She wrote these down on the right hand side of the paper. We then realized that the work we do to fight poverty is more like a bandaid fix, not a long term solution. She told us it is called mercy work, which is important to do, but it is also important to do justice work. Justice work, she explained, is working to end what causes poverty. She then explained that as Christians we are supposed to do justice, referencing Micah 6:8. Now that I am home from the trip, I am interested in how I, and we as a church, can do the right balance of mercy work and justice work.

### **This summer program aside, what's been an important moment in your own faith journey?**

It has been important for me to attend Sunday School. I have learned so much from all of my Sunday school teachers. They have helped shape and develop my faith. Over the course of two Sunday school lessons when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, one of my teachers explained to us his interpretation of Christianity and God's plan. He took out a large white board and drew a horizontal line across it, a timeline. He drew the Garden of Eden on the far left, and God's desired Earth for humans on the far right, Heaven on Earth. He explained how God's plan for us is to move toward the Heaven on Earth side of the timeline, but humans had separated themselves from God through sin. To represent this he drew a jagged line vertically down the timeline. He then explained how Jesus came to show us how to live so we can reunite with God and achieve heaven on Earth. The visual representation was helpful for me to understand the big picture and the point of Christianity.

### **Any thoughts on how BUMC could work to improve how we engage youth and help them grow in their faith?**

I think it is important to keep youth group fun. This allows us to bond with each other and deepen our friendships. After we are familiar with each other, I think we become more comfortable talking about faith.

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