

Saint Patrick's Youth Spiritual Retreat - 2019

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church
Broken Arrow, OK

St. Patrick's Youth (SPY) travelled to Colorado Springs, CO this year for our Spiritual Retreat. After our Civil Rights Pilgrimage last year, we turned our sights to prayer and reflection as we ventured out into the beautiful area of Colorado Springs. To aid our youth, gift bags were presented to each person that included items for the retreat; a journal, Daily Prayer Guide (for Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline), Who We Are (SPY's Rule of Life), a daily schedule, pens, pencils, colored pencils, stickers, gum (okay, so some things were just for fun) and the following reflection:



Observe the changing of scenery as we drive. Look for God's fingerprints in creation as we pass through the different terrains and landscapes. Enjoy the scenery, find the moments when you're the only person enjoying a specific scene, a tree, a cliff, a prairie, a cloud and recognize that God made all of it, including that moment, for you. How does that make you feel? Be aware of your interactions with others, reflect on what is said and, sometimes more importantly, what is not. How can we build on these relationships? Be more honest, be more loving, be more vulnerable. How can you encourage or affirm others? Look for God's image in each person that you encounter this week. Did you treat that person as if they were made in God's image? What would this look like if you did? Give thanks for the people around you, the people that enabled us to take this journey, the people who donated for this trip, our buses, our chaperones. Journal about all these items as you reflect on them. Write a poem about them or draw something that you see in creation. Reflect on these things. Reflection is the beginning of wisdom. May the fingerprints of God, strung across all of creation, awaken in us a love and peace that surpasses all understanding. And may we learn to share that love and peace with each person we encounter. May our retreat bring renewal and transformation.



We drove straight through from Broken Arrow to Colorado Springs on Sunday, July 28th. We opted for the longer and more scenic route on our drive there which took us through the panhandle, into New Mexico and entering CO from the south. If you've ever driven to CO from Oklahoma, you know the Kansas route has very little to offer except "oh look, another wind farm." (No offense, Jayhawks.) The beautiful drive took us about 13 hours. The youth were excited and energetic. Briley Schmeackle lovingly prepared (getting to know) questions for the two buses to help in us in our efforts to grow closer during our travels.

Around 9:00pm MST, we arrived at Grace & St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in downtown Colorado Springs, a beautiful church which offered plenty of space for our youth to spread out and enjoy our time together. We prepped our quarters for living together over the next four days and then gathered for our first time of journaling and discussion. We spent time reflecting and recording our thoughts each day. Each youth chose how they expressed themselves through this time either by journaling, sketching or maybe by writing a poem. Afterwards, we opened the floor for sharing and discussion. Someone would offer to share their thoughts from journaling, which would typically prompt discussion and/or recollection from a similar memory or event from the day. It was always an enjoyable discussion with good participation. We ended each night with Compline. The first night, we ventured into the nave at the church and found just enough lights (Thanks, Chuck!) to illuminate the altar area where we gathered in a circle for our closing time of the day. We brought our instruments so that we could enjoy playing and singing music during our retreat. Music is an important part of SPY, and we wanted this opportunity to make a joyful noise during our retreat. Compline was peaceful and the music joyful as we closed the evening and retreated to our beds, with the next day's activities dancing in our heads like sugar plums on Christmas Eve.



On Monday, July 29th, some rose early and enjoyed a priceless time of coffee and conversation. The youth slowly stirred around our daily wake up time of 8am and scooted towards breakfast like a zombie slinking towards its victim. Breakfast was served and energy drawn. We then gathered in the Children's Chapel area, located just off our sleeping quarters, that offered a serene worship space that was "ours" for the week. This is where our observance of Daily Prayer began.



The idea behind a “Spiritual Retreat” was to offer an example of “what does a life look like when daily prayer is a part.” We observed Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline, each prayer led by a different youth, on each day of our retreat. The youth had a Daily Prayer Guide that outlined the steps to lead each prayer and a schedule that allowed them to see when they would lead and who would read from scripture. The youth were encouraged to take some time before their turn to prepare and ask questions as needed. Father Shelby Scott mentored each youth, answering questions and offering guidance when needed during the prayers.

Have you ever observed Daily Prayer four days (or more) in a row? Could you lead each prayer with little to no guidance? It is a wonderful experience that I had never done myself, and it was a joy to be a part of this accomplishment with our youth. They did an outstanding job of leading the prayers and moved forward with courage and confidence. The group was supportive and affirming with applause after each time a new person completed their turn leading prayer. Let’s be honest; leading a prayer is not just a grab-and-go kind of process. It takes time, learning the rubrics, locating the readings, the collect, the language (“joo-bih-latte”) and so many other things. It is intimidating! And to boot, the week’s readings (Proper 12) were found in 2 Samuel, which is basically comparable to holding a week of Olympic games for your mouth. It’s difficult stuff and yet, our youth read and led with poise, courage and gracefulness. I am extremely proud of you SPY. Well done!

Prayer	Leaders	Reader 1	Reader 2
Monday Morning	Briley	Chance	Ben
Monday Noonday	Arctic		
Monday Evening	Katie	Zoe	
Monday Compline	William		
Tuesday Morning	Caleb	Sydney	Mauryn
Tuesday Noonday	Abby		
Tuesday Evening	Erica	Savannah	
Tuesday Compline	Jack		
Wednesday Morning	Emma	Tristan	William
Wednesday Noonday	Tristan		
Wednesday Evening	Savannah	Jack	
Wednesday Compline	Mauryn		
Thursday Morning	Sydney	Erica	Abby
Thursday Noonday	Zoe		
Thursday Evening	Ben	Caleb	
Thursday Compline	Chance		

A prayer life is not observed in a vacuum, so, just as in our regular lives, we ventured out into the world each day. We had activities planned that allowed us to experience creation and all it had to offer in its glory and beauty.

Monday – We travelled to the Garden of the Gods, a public park that houses sandstone rock formations that have pivoted upright over millions of years to present a breathtaking “garden” of red rocks. The garden rests in the shadow of Pike’s Peak (which can be seen in the background of the picture below). SPY hiked from the visitor’s center into the garden and made our way around the heart of the garden area. The formations towered over us as we watched climbers scale the rocks in all their beauty (careful, if you climb over 10ft without a permit, it’s a hefty \$600 fine, yikes!). Our hike took us right up next to many of the gargantuan rocks that are a testament to the beauty we find on our island home. A reminder of how, in our royal priesthood, we must care and preserve this earth with great love.

<https://gardenofgods.com/>



Tuesday – We travelled to a couple of different locations on this day, beginning at Red Rock Open Space. Red Rock is also a public space that offers 800 acres of trails and beautiful landscapes. We hiked the Contemplative Trail that offered some slight ups and downs along the way, as well as benches in the shade throughout the trail inviting us to contemplation, rest and sight-seeing. Pike’s Peak, the Garden of the Gods and more of the Rocky Mountain range were all in view while traversing this beautiful trail. We stopped at a shaded location that offered us an opportunity for Noonday Prayer (to lighten the weight of our backpacks, we did not pack in our prayer books but instead used www.prayerhaven.com for Noonday Prayer). After Noonday Prayer, we rounded back and headed down a series of trails that led us back to the parking area. This is the place for hikers interested in challenging terrain or the contemplative wanderer looking for God to speak to them through the beauty of creation.

<https://redrockcanyonopenspace.org/>



After Red Rock, we enjoyed some lunch and ventured over to the Fine Arts Museum at Colorado College. The beauty in this world is not only made by God but through the gifts God bestows upon his children who dare to be creative. We embarked on their Visual Voyages tour which *“emphasizes visual literacy skills, including art vocabulary (elements and principles) so that students learn how to read and find meaning in imagery, allowing them to better understand our 21st century, visually-orientated society. Students will discover a diversity of cultures and ideas, making connections to themselves, others, and the broader world.”* We viewed pieces and discussed what we saw in them and what we felt the artist was attempting to portray. The Wearable Art collection was also currently on view at the museum and I’ve decided to wear one of the pieces during VBS for next year. HA! There were some paintings in the museum that depicted the current climate of our world and voiced the artist’s opinion for or against our culture’s current struggles. The beauty of creation offers no argument and chooses no side but is available to all without bias. In art, the artist sometimes chooses to speak on behalf of God, reflecting to the world God’s image and character, through the vision of those who speak through color, shape and imagination.





Wednesday – We travelled south of Colorado Springs to witness the awe-inspiring and breathtaking sight of the Royal Gorge. The gorge is a 1250' canyon that is known as the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas River. The bridge, built in 1929, allows visitors to walk across the gorge. To say the gorge is *breathtaking* is a literal statement. While standing in the middle of the bridge, gazing down hundreds of feet to the river flowing chaotically below it, you can easily have a hard time finding the next breath. This is also a place of deep spirituality, as I assume there have been some very serious prayers said as visitors walk across that bridge. The gorge is a powerful site in God's rolodex of miraculous creations in our world. The bravery of some of the youth and chaperones was worth the trip itself. Every single attendee crossed the bridge, not once, but twice. Some even rode the gondolas back across the gorge, yikes! Fears were overcome that day. Amazing how courageous we can be in community. A new light on life and what can be accomplished set its place into the minds of some of us eternally that day. We are thankful for such exquisite and powerful sites we get to witness on this giant ball hurtling through space.



Thursday – We visited the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs. This is no ordinary zoo. This zoo is carved into the side of the Cheyenne Mountain and makes for a fun adventure. I know we all hit our step counts and succeeded in our floor counts on our Fitbits today, because it was an uphill climb from the beginning. The views at the zoo are gorgeous. And, while the animals were fun, the Sky Ride took the cake. They have a sky ride that travels halfway up the mountain to a small area that has an overlook over all of Colorado Springs. We enjoyed the best day of weather on our trip while seeing these exotic (and some say “cuddly”) animals.



Between daily prayer and our outings, we found time for rest, improvised jam sessions, sardines (reverse hide-n-seek game played in the dark) and Ga Ga Ball! The church had a Ga Ga Ball Pit, and the youth had a crazy and enjoyable time playing well into the evening (to the point where I thought we might have the police show up at one point with all the yelling and screaming). We had our lunches out at various fast-casual restaurants each day (anyone want any more Subway?!) and dinner was prepared by teams of youth each evening. To prepare a meal for others is a holy act, and our youth prepared and presented the meals each evening (Yes, moms, they CAN cook!) with quality and taste that would silence Gordon Ramsey.





On our last evening, we enjoyed some local pizza and played Pictionary as a group (more yelling and screaming--we seem to do that a lot). We were joined by the Youth Minister and a few youths from Grace & St. Stephen's, and we had a blast. After our last Evening Prayer, we headed out to a local ice cream shop for a final sweet treat. Arriving back at the church, we gathered for our final journaling and discussion time. It was a very sweet and emotional moment as youth shared what the week meant to them. This week of intentional time we get each year is a great blessing and it catapults our relationships and love for one another to a new level. We are grateful for all who support our trips and the youth of St. Patrick's. We could not embark on these trips without donations, support and prayer. Nor could we do this without our wonderful chaperones; Bricelyn Schmeackle, Alix Means and Father Shelby Scott. Thank you all!

The love that was shown on our retreat is encouraging and contagious. My hope is that our world catches on to the love these youth have for one another through their example. The grace extended, the forgiveness offered and the love... It is an honor to travel with the youth of Saint Patrick's and I always wake up the day after we get home and think, "let's do it again!" May our retreat continue to bring renewal in the lives of every youth and chaperone that attended. May we reflect on our time of prayer and adventure as we work to transform the world as we have been transformed through love. May we do this in order that all of creation and humanity may experience a world of grace, mercy and love.

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