

Partners in Peace Experience (P.I.P.E)

In July of last year, three young adults from Penn Central Conference - Marissa Willson from St. Johns UCC in Boalsburg, Samantha Nocheck from Hamilton Park UCC in Lancaster, and Trista Arrowood from Zion Reformed Church in Chambersburg - traveled to Germany for two weeks where they participated in the Partners in Peace Experience. Hosted by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, and the Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg, they were joined by young adults from Germany, Namibia, and the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. During their time there they toured parts of Germany, visited Parliament, attended Peace Rallies, met with organizations that assist refugees, and participated in numerous workshops that examined peace and justice issues. It's was once in a life time opportunity for these young adults that they will never forget.

The following are portions of the reflections from our three participants:

Trista: *The Partners in Peace Experience 2018 trip to Germany was a wonderful experience that I am so happy I was able to participate in. While in Germany, we learned of the many different actions groups in Germany are taking in order to achieve peace. For example, one youth group was going to document the route refugees take on land to raise awareness of the dangers and hardships refugees face. Another group of young adults help to save refugees in the Mediterranean Sea who have a high chance of drowning, but receive no help from the coastal countries or the U.N. There is also a group of churches that assist refugees already in Germany achieve sanctuary. On another note, the partners in peace group interacted very well together. We all felt very close to each other and were able to have deep conversations in and out of group discussion. We breached all manner of topics, such as LGBT issues, what is peace, how the world is being kept from peace, and each other's personal issues. Overall, the trip to Germany taught me many different perspectives and solutions I could use for peace.*

Samantha: *I've been thinking about the trip and it really did change the way I see the world. The hardest part of the trip was coming back and not having that excitement/feeling that of "what I am doing is going to change the world" type thing. Especially upon hearing the news of Toni's late husband. I'm still not sure how to react. Here - almost a month after returning. I want that realm of godliness and adventure and hope to be the change to continue, in all of us. I want there to be a way that we can continue this mission. What options do we have? I would love to get something going to Namibia in the upcoming years.*

I loved meeting with the refugees. Long shot here - is there a way to invite a group of refugees to go along on the next one or spend a few days with instead of just a few hours?! Even doing more mission work at a refugee church would have been really neat.

I also loved our morning/evening devotions (I plan to tie them in when I organize a service at my church later this month)!

I cannot pick just a few highlights. There's way too many.

Finally, if there is a chance that we can come to the national UCC Conference and have a panel or something to discuss awareness of youth being involved with Partners in Peace Experience and possible growing the program- let me know and I would LOVE to help and be a part of.

Marissa: Being able to participate in partners in peace was amazing. I got to talk, meet and experience the lives of people who I would've probably never gotten the chance to in my lifetime. Before this trip I had just got done with a trip to China where I got to see a non-western culture and society. It taught me a lot about how other people live, see the world, and about myself as well. This trip did the exact same thing but with giving me three times exposure by having people from Germany, Namibia, and from my own country on the Lakota Native American reservation in South Dakota. Each of these three groups of people had different languages, different ways, different ceremonies and denominations.

A big theme with our discussions and activities was that we all have a desire and want for peace, both as who we were and within our religions and their ethics and morals they taught us.

I can only speak on what I learned and took away. This trip allowed me to see how others also worked for peace and that the world is full of good people fighting the good fight. It also taught me that if we come together and talk and share across borders and languages and cultures that reaching peace will become a whole lot easier.

Personally, some of my favorite parts of this trip were the individual conversations we got to have amongst one another, as those are the ones that stay in my heart now that the trip is over, and that I will carry with me throughout my life. However some more of my favorite parts included getting to see the parliament building of Germany, preparing meals together from each of our home countries, and exploring Germany and the countryside itself.

Before going on this trip I had no idea to what to expect, had very little details, but had trust and faith that this was the right thing. I am so thankful and blessed to have been able to participate in this amazing opportunity.

This was third PIPE adventure, the first being in Pennsylvania in 2013 and again on the Cheyenne River Reservation in 2016, but hopefully it will not be its last! Discussions will soon begin to plan the next Partners in Peace Experience, that will possibly take place in the year 2021. If you'd like to be a part of the planning process, please contact Peter Emig at solomonsucc@embarqmail.com

Peace!