

## **Johnsonburg's First Annual Social Justice Summit**

God's creative energy was certainly at work, opening a way when there seemed no way after the Presbyterian Youth Triennium was unexpectedly cancelled. This national conference, held every three years in Indiana with over 5000 participants, just was not possible in 2022 given the realities of the pandemic. This disappointing news came just as excitement was starting to build. At Johnsonburg, we felt such disappointment, knowing how much our youth and churches would lose in not attending such an awesome event. But hearing this, just our high school Social Justice Cohort was meeting, led us to consider offering a conference-style program in its place. And so was born the Social Justice Summit.

The Summit was comprised of youth from four geographical presbyteries and the non-geographical Eastern Korean American Presbytery. Participants arrived on Sunday to COVID tests and icebreakers, and left on Wednesday with a group picture and heartfelt goodbyes. In between, we had two keynote speakers, worship services, and a variety of workshops led by a diverse group of leaders. A good time was had all around, enjoying Johnsonburg's amenities like the pool and the zip line, as well as time for fellowship and relationship building. Special thanks to Highlands Presbytery's own Rev. Robin Ray (a former Jburg camper!) for being a chaperone, and Laura Choi for being a workshop leader.

From my point of view, maybe the most impressive thing was the participants' eagerness and capability to engage with a number of high-level concepts. We were led to explore the identity of God, and consequently our identity in relationship to God. Names and ways of being, like "Elohim," "Ruach," and "I am" (or "I will be"), were shared in and out of the worship experience. One very powerful message focused on Moses encountering the burning bush. As the Hebrew words in Exodus 3:14 were shared, attendees were cued in to how the language sounds. "Listen to it: it sounds like our breath. Breathe in. Breathe out. Every time you do this, you whisper the name of God."

In other contexts, this message might have been totally lost as soon as a Hebrew word was introduced. For our Social Justice Summit participants, that wasn't the case. They came hungry to engage their faith and scripture alongside a strong desire to see that faith lived out in their communities and across our nation. Whether talking about racism, gender issues, the church's positions on social justice issues, or representations of Jesus across history, the whole event was marked by energy and enthusiasm for the work of the Gospel. In worshipping, swimming, eating, and hanging out with these youth, I am convinced that our next generation of leaders is ready for the challenges that we face today and will face tomorrow.

We are grateful for the Presbytery of the Highlands for supporting this program. Thank you for doing the work of the church, supporting our youth and promoting healing and reconciliation locally, nationally, and globally. The Social Justice Summit was a big success due in no small part to your partnership; participants called it the highlight of their summer.

Thank you, and we look forward to hosting it again next year.

Tommy Campbell  
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