

Making a **D**IFFERENCE
NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

SERVANTS

Synod youth event rocks Bremwood

The Northeastern Iowa Lutheran Youth Organization invited residents of Bremwood Lutheran Home, Waverly, to its spring assembly, and both groups still talk about the moving experience. It included a spellbinding 45 minutes by an inner city rapper, a praise band concert with youth performers, a meal that mixed Bremwood and synod youth, and riveting conversation as youth felt free to bare their souls and witness.

Youth say the event bears repeating on the congregation level.

Let's touch lives

This year, the youth board shortened its assembly.

Northeastern Iowa and Bremwood youth hear a rap speaker and praise band concert in Bremwood's gymnasium in Waverly. Then, youth split into two groups for what they say is the most meaningful part of the experience—listening to each other's stories.



BREMWOOD PHOTOS



LIVES are touched as Bremwood and synod youth (above) warm up with music and inspirational rap by Leslie Hunter, leader of Holy Family Lutheran Church's Boys in the Hood ministry at Cabrini-Green housing development in Chicago.



ANDERSON



BAUER

“We know the Churchwide Youth Assembly in Atlanta is stretching congregations financially,” said Rev. Mark Anderson, synod ministry specialist, who works with the youth board, “so the youth board planned an overnight assembly in Waverly, keeping costs down”

Registration numbers surprised everyone.

“We were pleased,” Anderson said. “More than 100 youth and 35 adults registered. I suggested a service project next door at Bremwood—paint a wall, something like that. However, board members looked deeper at Jesus’ mandate to serve. They wanted to touch the lives of Bremwood students.”

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Editor Elaine Main

Bremwood is a psychiatric residential treatment center for troubled youth.

“The synod brought a well-chaperoned crowd,” said Rev. Dennis Bauer, Bremwood chaplain. “It was a great experience.”

Emily Soeder, Redeemer, Waverly, president of the Northeastern Iowa Youth Organization, explained.



SOEDER

“This year the Lutheran Youth Organization board decided to go further than painting houses and cleaning churches; we decided to meet and learn about the students at Bremwood,” Soeder said. “Now, we feel that through this experience many lives have been changed and the kids at the assembly have a better appreciation for all the little things in life that they had taken for granted.”

Share your story

The youth took a good speaker and a band, shared a meal, and then talked—and listened. The talk—girls and boys separately—came from the heart.

Bremwood youth described events that brought them to Bremwood. A girl admitted that drugs had put her on a path that crossed boundaries, then got her in even more trouble.



“If I weren’t here, I’d be dead now,” she said.

“She needed someone to hold her accountable,” Bauer said, “and it was powerful for her to say what she did and for others to hear it.”

“They felt comfortable

BREMWOOD STUDENTS are full of smiles as Northeastern Iowa youth share hugs, stories, gripes, histories, and deep things, such as faith, as part of the synod’s 10th annual youth assembly.



'CONGREGATIONS can share ministry at Bremwood,' said Rev. Dennis Bauer (center), Bremwood chaplain. 'Expand your ministry by reaching out here.'

sharing their stories,” said Amy Olson, Ridgeway Parish, Ridgeway, “and I was surprised that most of them were open about where they are in their faith lives.”

Listening as service

Group conversations were memorable.

“The girls’ discussion gave me a lot to think about after I left,” Olson said. “It helped me realize that I have things pretty well in my life. The girls had been through some pretty rough times—things we can’t begin to comprehend.”

“An audience is important,” Bauer said. “When you’re able to tell your story to others, you tend to be able to do something about it.”

During worship service sermons, Bauer incorporates dialogue.

“A half dozen times, kids have a chance to respond,” Bauer said. “For example, during Lent, residents of a cottage portrayed



OLSON

Jesus' trial before Pilate. I asked how many had met a judge or had stood before a judge. All hands went up. We talked about how it feels to be standing before someone who is making a determination for your life and how Jesus might have felt."

Bauer calls it *mike time* and says that's only one means of expression Bremwood offers to help its students tell their stories. It uses the arts, interviews, drama, and worship.

Explain a youth group

Youth group visits help Bremwood students feel less isolated.

Bauer said, "They learn what happens in congregations. For some, these experiences are their first with the church. When high school kids reach out and invite Bremwood students to share, ministry happens.

"Bremwood students are curious about churches. They wonder what happens in youth groups, what youth do in congregations, about camping and trips. The Lutheran Youth Organization crossed bridges when it came. Bremwood youth sensed the youth were bringing something they were excited about. They watched youth lead and take ownership in what happened. Bremwood youth need to see that."

Bauer said Bremwood students are "the type of kids who could be overlooked. They should remind us of others who need a warm reception in our congregations."

NORTHEAST IOWA YOUTH led the Bremwood event—arranging, introducing, making music, sharing talent, thanking. 'Bremwood youth learn from seeing their peers organize and lead,' said Rev. Dennis Bauer, Bremwood chaplain.





MILLER



BOEVERS

Yes, of course...no problem

Would you welcome young people like Bremwood youth into your congregation? Sure, say board members.

“Some Bremwood students go to my school,” said Paul Miller, Redeemer, Waverly, “but I hadn’t talked to them much. This event made me realize that Bremwood youth are more than a group you see around town or in school. They are real people with great views. Now, some are my friends at school.”

“They aren’t much different than me,” said Lindsay Boevers, St. John (Crane Creek), Tripoli.

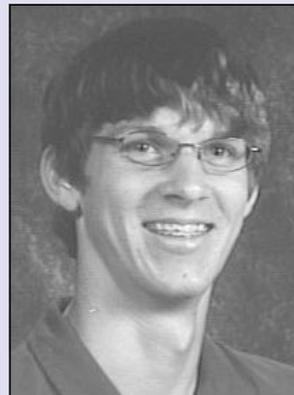
Erin Olsen, First Evangelical, McGregor, added, “Personality-wise, they’re people I’d probably hang out with.”

A Bremwood boy found a listener in Jesse Piehl, Redeemer, Waverly.

“He dragged me around everywhere, even showed me his room,” Piehl said.



OLSEN



PIEHL

Bremwood Lutheran Children's Home

offers a worship service for its students each Sunday afternoon at four o'clock. Groups are invited to worship with Bremwood students, tour the campus, share their talent, eat with Bremwood students, and talk with residents in a Bremwood cottage.

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Bremwood was established in 1864 in Andrew, Iowa, as a home for children orphaned by the Civil War. In 1900, the Home moved to Waverly, where it continued its outreach to orphaned and vulnerable children. Bremwood Lutheran Children's Home became Iowa's first accredited psychiatric residential treatment center for troubled youth in 1953. In April, Bremwood and Lutheran Social Service of Iowa announced their integration into Lutheran Services in Iowa with this mission—Lutheran Services in Iowa responds to the love of Jesus Christ through acts of service to all.

Come!

Bauer said that Bremwood youth learn about faith from those who visit.

“Bremwood youth want to know what faith in Jesus does in your life,” he said. “They want to hear how faith gets you through tough times. They benefit from hearing about positive family experiences. We need some grandparents to share their faith and tell how God made a difference in their lives. Bremwood students haven't heard that.”

Anderson agreed. “Here's an opportunity to proclaim Christ to people who are predominantly unchurched.”

“A congregation could visit on a regular basis and build great relationships,” suggested Adrian Walter, EWALU, Strawberry Point, a Lutheran Youth Organization adviser.

Bremwood students have already appreciated visits from Fredsville, Cedar Falls, and Zion, West Union.

“I'd highly recommend that all youth groups in the synod visit Bremwood,” said Olson. “It's a wonderful place that does great ministry with teenagers.”

Our Savior's, Osage, youth, wrote a thank you—

The focus of the weekend was Nothing can separate us

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from the love of God.
Many of us know that, but it was awesome to share that with kids who either haven't realized it or have never known it.

Our time at Bremwood was a true eye opener. Many of us came back feeling a new compassion for others and also a new understanding for not only the strangers we met but for our families here at home.

And, to be honest, we had more fun than we ever thought we could!

Bauer said, "Bremwood would love to have a Sunday afternoon visit from your youth group. Tour the facility, worship with us at four o'clock, eat with us, and share your talent. Most of all, let's talk together. Your youth and Bremwood youth have a lot to share."

—Elaine Main, editor

FOR I AM
CONVINCED
THAT NOTHING CAN
SEPARATE US FROM
THE LOVE OF GOD
THAT IS IN
JESUS CHRIST.
ROMANS 8:35-39

AMY OLSON

THE NORTHEASTERN Iowa Lutheran Youth Organization demonstrates its drive to serve others by using the theme above to share its 10th assembly with Bremwood students.

Northeastern Iowa Lutheran Youth Organization

- Shares **news** and **information** at <www.neiasynod.org/youth>
- Coordinates a web **unified youth ministry calendar** with events, concerts, leadership training, music and athletic events
- Offers an annual **synod youth assembly** with Bible study, worship, information, business, lots of fun
- Researches and develops youth ministry **resources**
- Helps congregations and conferences **vision** and **assess needs**

Your contributions to the Northeastern Iowa Synod help its youth organization serve youth and congregations.

Questions?

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