

A yellow spotlight graphic with a grey handle at the top left, shining down on the text.

## Northern Great Lakes Synod Youth Ministry Spotlight

### **Building Community** – a story about Matthew

Matthew Schlemm loves the outdoors and being in God’s creation. He enjoys camping and noticing the intricate details found in nature. Matthew appreciates the way things in nature work together to create harmonious ecosystems and symbiotic relationships, and uses nature as inspiration on how communities and people can work together to make a positive difference in the world.

Matthew grew up at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Harvey, MI and some of his first memories there are coloring and spending time in the children’s nursery. As he grew older, he became a nursery helper and mentor to other kids at Prince of Peace. His involvement in the church gave him the opportunity to travel beyond the U.P. with other youth from the Northern Great Lakes Synod to participate in the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering, Quake, and a mission trip to North Carolina. He credits these experiences with not just growing his faith, but growing his sense of self and his sense of community.

When Matthew signed up to go on the mission trip to North Carolina, he thought he’d be spending most of his

time doing physical labor to help with hurricane clean-up, but he discovered that building relationships and immersing himself in a new community were just as needed as hauling debris and painting.



The bonds Matthew formed with members of the community he served in North Carolina, as well as the other youth on the trip, left a lasting impression on him. One of the lessons he learned is the importance of being patient, and getting to know someone’s full story to better understand them. Even though someone may be different from you, they have a story to share and are loved by God.

Matthew recalls the hospitality and warm welcome he felt when traveling to North Carolina and encourages others to participate in a mission trip, if given the chance. You never know what kind of community you’ll find!