



Dana Grabenhorst

# Knowledge I will continue to use

by Lucy Bowman

**I**t all began at 3 a.m. I'm not a huge fan of early morning excursions, particularly if those adventures include time in a metal tube above the clouds. But, as I watched streaks of sun paint the sky outside the plane window, I could already feel the magic of our trip setting in.

On April 22, I departed from the Wichita airport with eight of my peers and three advisors. We joined another small group of students in Washington, D.C., for this year's Christian Citizenship Seminar (CCS).

The youth group at McPherson Church of the Brethren has been studying climate change and the impact that global warming has on communities around the world. We took this knowledge with us to D.C. as we learned more about how these issues impact agriculture and food security. With the seminar topic of "Hot and Hungry," we were able to meet with elected officials.

The CCS highlights included speakers from the USDA, Heifer International, and Creation Justice Ministries. To conclude the week, we met with senators and representatives from our home states to advocate for change in the upcoming farm bill. The federal farm bill dictates much of the agricultural practices in the United States, and our

group advocated for the inclusion of climate-friendly farming techniques.

Although our meeting with Kansas Sen. Roger "Doc" Marshall was less than productive, we learned how to work with representatives on Capitol Hill and how to advocate for sustainable change. As a social justice and advocacy major at McPherson College, I was able to learn more about the political atmosphere at the federal level. This is knowledge that I will continue to use as I move forward with my studies.

We also learned about Brethren Volunteer Service opportunities and met with people currently serving in BVS positions across the United States. I learned a lot



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Lucy Bowman and her mother, Becki Bowman, attended the 2023 Christian Citizenship Seminar with the youth group from McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren. A high school student, Lucy Bowman also is taking courses at McPherson College and is on the staff of the college newspaper. Becki Bowman is a communications professor at the college.

about the program that I want to join after graduation, and made important connections that I hope to build on in years to come.

After the sessions, our group explored D.C. and spent time walking around the city. I wasn't surprised to discover that we walked an average of seven miles per day.

Despite the CCS group being small (only 14 students this year!), our time together was filled with energy and laughter. Some of my favorite memories include late-night adventurous excursions to the Washington Monument (where we frequently got lost), visiting the Smithsonian museums (and the gift shops), and meeting Church of the Brethren youth and advisors from across the country. It was amazing how much we were able to do in such a small amount of time.

As the trip came to a close, I realized how lucky we were to be able to participate in this conference.

Throughout the week, we were surrounded by beautiful monuments, perfect weather, and exciting opportunities. I already miss D.C., and I can certainly say the 3 a.m. mornings were worth it. 



## Lighting a fire for advocacy

by Becki Bowman

**T**here are 742 new photos on my phone. It's a ridiculous number of photos for a six-day trip to Washington, D.C.

I agreed to go to CCS on a whim. My daughter was attending and was agreeable to me tagging along as a sponsor. Parents of teens know that's a rarity, and I took advantage. Adults often are told how important it is to support youth activities because our youth are tomorrow's leaders and the next generation of the church.

Adults who work with youth may think they're giving selflessly of their time but, really, you find out that sponsoring a youth activity is one of the most selfish things you can do. Spending six days traveling with these teenagers through their learning sessions and city tours was a gift to me. I learned about the farm bill, but I also learned about human nuances from the youth. And my photos document it all.

Teenagers can be surprisingly loud and obnoxious—not all of them and not all the time. But often their deafening

hollers and thunderous runs drew embarrassing attention in public, and I would cringe under the stares of others, especially when I was tired from starting our travels at 3 a.m.

Sometimes, however, they are surprisingly respectful, surprisingly mature, and surprisingly astute at finding opportunities to connect with others. It was especially surprising when they sat through a very uncomfortable session with a senator who berated and belittled them because he disagreed with values for which they advocated. I watched our young people become the definition of dignity and represent the church and their community with exemplary class, even as insults were hurled at them.

I felt the power that was ignited in that room. The youth politely pointed out where their thinking differed and thanked the senator for his time. I suspect he thinks he quieted them, but I saw that he lit a fire that is going to fuel more and stronger advocacy as they walk into the future.

Teenagers can find humor in everything—even things that probably aren't that funny. Some giggled through worship at the National Cathedral or laughed going through security at a government building.

But then, I saw one stepping back and looking up at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial with pride because there's a monument to someone who looks like him. A student walking back from a learning session slowed his pace to ask questions about why people wouldn't want to support what's good for others. Youth talked with me about the inequalities of food distribution, drug use in their high schools, college plans, family trauma, and past abuse. There is great depth in their thinking. There is wisdom developing.

Spending time with these youth transformed me. I didn't get nearly enough sleep, but I'm so glad I didn't—I wouldn't have wanted to miss out on a minute of the experience. And, at least for now, I am selfishly keeping all 742 photos. 