

Testimonies of Lives Changed

Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory.

Memories of the heart, mind, and of friendships last a lifetime and become significant events of our personal history. Each year a momentous history is made in the lives of our youth as they attend the Gideons International Convention with their parents or grandparents. Read these testimonies of some of the youth from last year's convention in Michigan. See how their participation and involvement have played a crucial role in their moral framework.

Testimony One: My name is Katie Byrd and I am from Louisiana. I am currently part of the 18+ group at the Gideon Convention. This past year in Michigan marked my twelfth convention, which means I have been attending since I was six years old. *Looking back, I don't think six-year-old me could have ever imagined just how much this convention would come to mean in my life.*

Over the years, the Gideon Convention has been so much more than just a yearly event. It has been a place of growth, encouragement, and belonging. Each year has brought new memories, lessons, and friendships that I will carry with me forever. I've grown up here moving from a little girl simply excited to be part of it, to a young adult realizing how deeply this experience has shaped me. Not only has it helped me grow as a person, but it has also *prepared me as an adult*. It equipped me to leave the convention each year *ready to share my love for Christ with the world*, carrying with me the lessons I learned during that week.

What stands out most to me is the community. The people I've met through this convention have truly become like family. They have encouraged me, prayed for me, and walked alongside me through both joyful and difficult seasons. The Gideon Convention has given me *lifelong friendships and mentors who continually point me back to Christ* and remind me that I am never alone in my walk of faith. The people I've met here are the true embodiment of what it means to follow Christ, not to live perfectly, but to continually grow closer to Him and to help others do the same.

When I eventually age out of the program, I know I will look back with a full heart. This convention has given me incredible memories, but even more importantly, it has shaped the person I am becoming. My faith is stronger, my relationships are richer, and my love for God's people has grown because of the impact of this gathering. The Gideon Convention has truly been *a foundation in my life*, and I will always be grateful for the way it has helped mold me into who I am today.

Testimony Two: Hi, I'm Tirzah Schippers and I'm from the Netherlands. And this year's convention was my first time. It was also my first time in America. And I absolutely loved it! I loved the people and how different American culture is compared to Dutch culture. In the Netherlands, driving two hours to get somewhere feels like a long time, because you've already driven halfway across the country. But in America, it turns out that's perfectly normal!

We went to a zoo, two amusement parks, and a university. The amusement parks were so big, much bigger than in the Netherlands! The university was so much fun; it was exactly how I imagined it. I played some American games and ate mac and cheese for the first time!

The youth program has also strengthened my faith so much. We studied 1 Peter together, reading it verse by verse. We talked about how to share our faith with our friends and peers. Something that kept coming up is that we no longer live for ourselves, but for others; we want everyone to hear the gospel. Something we studied together was 1 Peter 5:8-9, and that really resonated with me. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." We, as youth, also need to stand firm in our faith, and despite being divided across the world, the same afflictions accompanied us.

I absolutely loved the convention and especially the youth program, I hope to see you all next year!

Testimony Three: My name is Dana Paola and I am from Mexico. So, when I was asked to write my testimony, I got super excited because I've always thought of ways I could show my gratefulness toward these people, but none of my ideas were enough to express my gratitude.

The International Gideons Convention, for me, is not only amazing but also a time of the highest quality. I mean, they really *take us to the best places*. I am in love with how much dedication and love people put into this. Since the moment we arrived at the airport, I told my parents, "*I have never felt more welcome.*" And although I had never been to Michigan before, being with these people made it feel just like home.

I had an amazing time with old and new friends. I got to hear the testimonies of so many people that I didn't know I could ever relate to. I had the best experiences and made new friends for life.

But it isn't only the activities that make this the trip I beg my parents to take me on every year; it's also the way *that week makes a huge difference in my spiritual life*: sometimes encouraging, sometimes exhorting, sometimes just God speaking to me. I can't thank them enough for this-it was probably the best time of the year.

I would definitely say that my favorite part is seeing so many people from so many different places in the world, some of whom I didn't even know existed, speaking so many languages, so different yet all worshipping and praising the same God. This is certainly a turning point in how I see life. Not only do I see this in my own life, but also in my parents, and in how it impacts my family and so many others. Being part of all of this makes me not only 100% sure, but also excited, and I can't wait to be an Auxiliary myself in the future.