

Confirmation Class of 2011
Washington DC Trip
March 11-14, 2011

The combined Confirmation Class of 2011 had the opportunity to travel to THE JEWISH INSTITUTE FOR LEADERSHIP AND VALUES this year. The program they attended was called Panim el Panim (face to face). They joined 50 other students from across the country for a three day SHABBATON. Our students led the Friday night Shabbat services. They attended Saturday morning prayer and celebrated Havdalah. The program included speakers from the National Coalition for the Homeless and meeting members of the homeless community in "Street Torah." Round table discussions included Middle East Policy, Zionist Organization for America, and Americans for Peace Now. Each of our students received recognition for 10 hours of community service from Friends of Sligo Creek. The last session provided the class with the opportunity to lobby on Capitol Hill.

Special thanks to the Greater Altoona Jewish Federation and all its members for making the confirmation trip possible.

PANIM EL PANIM

Panim el Panim was an interesting, engaging, and eye-opening experience. First, I learned that I am capable of much more than I thought. I learned more, did more, and expressed more in four days than I felt I had done in weeks or even months at home. I learned how to effectively communicate with members of Congress about issues that I am passionate about. I learned how to research and share facts, not opinions. I learned how to fully respect others and to understand the term "pluralism"; I learned how this term relates to Judaism. I learned how to lead a Friday night Shabbat service. I learned how to touch the lives of the homeless and show them that I cared. I learned that homeless people are people, too. But most of all, I learned even more about myself. The Panim el Panim Shabbaton experience was great.

Reflections of Sarah Lipitz.

I enjoyed Panim very much. One of the first presentations we saw after we arrived in Bethesda was about Homeless people. This talk also happened to be my favorite. Two men came in to speak with us about their lives and their experiences of being homeless. Both speakers were funny and I enjoyed listening to their stories. My next favorite part about Panim, and I know Falon would completely disagree, was the creek clean-up. Although I did not agree with their reasoning: that plants cause more pollution than trash; I had a good time looking at the different plants and cleaning up the weeds. Now I know why my mom "loves" to weed around our house so much. I will admit one thing: I went to this Shabbaton partly for the food, but, as it turns out, the best food I had there was the Georgetown Cupcakes. Overall it was a wonderful Jewish experience that I am glad I was able to share with my Confirmation class.

Reflections of Ginger Glass.

For me, Panim el Panim was an extremely enjoyable experience. Growing up in Altoona, our Jewish youth is not exposed to very much of the culture and values of being a Jewish teen due to our small Jewish population. Getting to spend a weekend with a group of kids my own age that share my faith was very special. I met other kids from all over the country from New Jersey to California, and they were all Jewish! Even though we came from different parts, many of the tunes and practices we used over the weekend were similar. It was an extremely special experience and I had the chance to reflect on my own Jewish values and beliefs as well as learn about others.

Reflections of Carly Port.

For me, Panim el Panim was a life changing experience. Considering the town I live in, it was so great to interact with other Jewish kids my age. But above that, was when I was able to engage in conversation with people suffering from homelessness. I learned that a large number of these people weren't just on drugs or mentally handicapped, but suffered from abandonment, or accidents. By interacting with people in that situation, I gained a whole new respect for their tragedies; also learning that they are still strong and intelligent people. Back at the hotel where we stayed, we had discussions on Israel and Zionism. I learned things that I hadn't even talked about before, such as simply reading into Israeli and Palestinian political cartoons. On Saturday morning I went to a conservative synagogue, which is something I love doing. After the trip I was able to take home with me many life lessons about advocacy and Zionism and use them in my daily life.

Reflections of Ian Bilofsky.

My time spent down in D.C. for the Panim el Panim seminar, I found very worthwhile and meaningful. The staff at Panim introduced various topics about homelessness, Israel & Palestinian relations, the art of lobbying, and the legislative process. Something I will never forget is when the Panim brought in two guest speakers who talked about their experiences dealing with homelessness. I cannot believe they held their composure when they described the brutal obstacles they had overcome. One man had been homeless for years and is now a big executive working for homeless legislation. The homelessness in D.C. is outrageous, they are growing by thousands each year. My favorite moment of the Panim trip was by far Street Torah. Street Torah was when we the students went out into the public to just treat the homeless like normal every day people, which is very rare to them. At the end of each conversation we offered them everyday items to get them through the day. Through all in all, I really did enjoy this once in a lifetime experience with my confirmation classmates and all the new friends I made through Panim. I will never forget what happened there, and I plan to strive to help out those in need. I hope we could do something like this again in the future.

Reflections of Noah Scheinberg