

## **Alverno Girls Summit Makes Global Connections**

*By Sister Ruth Hoerig, Social Media Content Developer*

It's been said that when you educate a woman, you educate society. And when you engage young women and girls with community leaders beyond the classroom, you empower them to grow into effective leaders.

That is what the State of Wisconsin Girls Summit project is all about. The Girls Summit was initiated in 2018 at Alverno College, our sponsored ministry, by Dr. Jodi Eastberg, executive director of Academic Excellence and Women's Leadership.

"As a researcher, I believe it is important to hear from those who are represented in or impacted by research," Dr. Eastberg said. "We created the State of Wisconsin Girls Summit to bring girls and young women together to research the important role they play in civic life."

The goal of the first summit, which drew more than 300 girls, middle school and older, was to learn how to take on an issue and move it forward. Dr. Eastberg had hoped that future gatherings would allow for more engagement in conversation through breakout rooms and other means of creating dialogue. "Because of the pandemic, we had to re-imagine that format," she said.

Dr. Eastberg said the summit held on Saturday, October 10 had just over 70 participants. (Another 70 girls had participated in a digital version of the gathering in March.) "The pandemic definitely had an impact on our attendance," she said, "but we were able to do something new by including girls globally."

The theme for the most recent summit was civic engagement. Thought leaders, inspiring voices, and workshops focused on helping the participants respond effectively to the issues facing girls today.

"Our keynote speaker was Mari Copeny, a 13-year old girl from Flint, Michigan, who spoke passionately about the power that girls hold, and convinced the audience that every girl can make a difference just as she had," Dr. Eastberg said.

A panel discussion included representatives from PEARLS for Teen Girls, Youth Empowered in the Struggle, Teens Grow Greens, Green Card Voices, YES, and Voces de la Frontera.

"While we typically draw participants from Wisconsin, and largely from the Milwaukee metro area, this year was special," Dr. Eastberg said. "We had participants joining us from schools as far away as India and Japan. It really added to the event and allowed us to make it a proper celebration of the International Day of the Girl, which was celebrated on October 11."

Dr. Eastberg said the most challenging part of conducting an event like this virtually is ensuring that the audience is effectively engaged. The summit participants joined in via Zoom and could chat with Dr. Eastberg directly through that platform.

"It was a powerful experience to have our keynote speaker presenting from her home in Flint, Michigan, and answering questions from twelfth graders Devika Gautam and Salone Maheshwari from St. Francis Secondary School in India," Dr. Eastberg said. "I was so pleased to have students from India be able to ask questions and use their audio and video to join in the conversation. The 11-hour difference between

Milwaukee and Kanjikode required the girls from India to join us from their homes as late as 11:00 pm. Luckily, it wasn't a school night!"

The discussion made it clear that all participants are working to improve the lives of young women and all people – globally.

"I was incredibly impressed with the poise and courage of Devika and Salone, who repeatedly joined in the conversation," Dr. Eastberg said. "Others in the audience who were less confident, or wanted to remain anonymous, could ask their questions through an anonymous Q&A feature or in the chat."

"Engaging youth globally was the most unexpected opportunity for this year's summit," she said. "The announcement of the event, via the Alverno alumnae networks, spurred Sister Kathleen O'Brien, U.S. Provincial, to make the connection with Assisi English High Middle Secondary School in Kanjikode. The young women from India who joined us and engaged us in conversation made the event so much more meaningful."

"We were so happy to be part of the program and to interact with all the famous personalities," Devika said. "The program provided lots of knowledge, appreciation and encouragement which is essential to the well-rounded development of students."

"It was a wonderful experience for us and our girls," said Sister Anitha Attupuram, principal of Assisi School. "On behalf of our school and our students, I wholeheartedly thank the U.S. Provincial Team for their thoughtfulness to invite us to this webinar."

Sister Archana Akkarapattiekkal, principal of St. Francis School, sent a special note of thanks to Dr. Eastberg for her guidance, help, and encouragement in organizing such a wonderful event. Quoting from Proverbs 22:6, she said, "Train children the right way, and when they are old, they will not stray."

Dr. Eastberg said the Girls Summit project will seek to have even more global participation in the future. "Next year, I hope we can hire a student intern to focus specifically on developing the global component of this event," she said. "Having the global presence was a keen reminder that the world is bigger than ourselves, that people around the world are committed together in the work of justice, and that girls globally have powerful voices. It is important to remember that we are connected across the globe in our work of carrying out our mission to serve others."