



Faith Statement Booklet

Confirmation Sunday

May 19, 2019

Brown Memorial Park Avenue

Presbyterian Church

Confirmation Class of 2019

Marcos Calderon

Aidan Connors

Sarah Egan

Will Egan

Luke Inglesby

Annalisa Jenkins

Lizzie Mills

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Confirmation Mentors

Michele Ward

Susan Stroupe

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Introduction

While the Presbyterian Church typically baptizes infants as a symbol of God's initiating, covenant love, the process of confirmation invites young people to reflect and respond to God and the Christian tradition on their own terms. The confirmation mentors and I encouraged our 8th and 9th graders to participate in this process to make informed decisions about their articulation of faith.

The guiding question of the year was "What does it mean to be a Christian in the world now?" We engaged this question several ways. We wrote journal entries and wrestled with the Bible. We visited Dickey Memorial Presbyterian Church, Bolton Street Synagogue, the Islamic Society of Baltimore, and an anti-hate rally at Maryland Presbyterian Church. We did a trust walk through the sanctuary, learned how the organ works, and explored 'the catacombs' of the church basement. We stretched our brains around concepts like the Trinity and atonement. We grappled with sin and grace. We talked about other religions, social justice, and suffering. It has been a joy to get to know them and explore the central tenets, traditions, and history of our faith.

Our hope is that we modeled the core truths that our faith is active, growing, and happens in community. Their faith statements certainly reflect those truths. They are analytical, thoughtful and genuine. They acknowledge doubt and a legitimate dose of skepticism. I celebrate these twelve students and their faith journeys. Confirmation is a decision point; it is a snapshot in God's much longer, unfolding story of faithful love. On behalf of Susan, Bill, and McKenna, I am sure I can say that it was an honor to be a part of this chapter. We cannot wait to see how the story progresses.

Rev. Michele Ward

May 19, 2019

Faith Statements

Marcos Calderon

Everyday Jesus leads me the way he wants me to go. It's like a path, I walk on the path with Jesus most of the time, but sometimes I take a few steps off the path, Jesus reminds me to get back on. When I look back and think about the bad decisions I make, I evoke and am reminded about how I recovered from them. I feel that is when I need God most. To remind me to step back on my path, and recover from my mistakes. Over the year in confirmation class, I have been learning about how to be reminded when God is helping me back on my path, and how to recognize it when he does.

I have been coming to church my whole life, it has had a huge influence on the way I think about my faith. When I was younger, it was just that thing on Sundays that I went to with my parents. As I get older I really start to think about why I come to church, and why I was baptised. Coming to church for me is a time to be around a community of people that have similar spiritual beliefs as I do. It is also a time to be reminded how God is helping me in my everyday life.

About a year ago I went to a Christian summer camp called Camp Haluwasa. I felt more in the presence of God than I ever have before. There was a kid there, named Andrew, who didn't even speak English. We talked to him over google translate the entire week. We learned he wasn't even Christian at all, he was actually Buddhist. Later that week, he asked the pastor if he could be baptised, knowing that there could be consequences when his parents found out.

This was one of the most powerful moments in my faith because going into the week, Andrew knew nothing about Christianity. But learning about what God and Jesus did for us, he was sure he wanted to be baptised. I feel like this is

when God started making his path for Andrew. Seeing God work with people first hand really changed the way I look at my faith, and helped me decide if I wanted to be confirmed.

Aidan Connors

If you'd asked me if I was going to get confirmed a few months ago, my answer would have been a resounding "no." Early in April, I had an experience which flipped my view of faith, God, and the church on its head.

April 9th, 2019, I visited Turnaround Tuesday as a part of a partnership with my school. Now, I'd never been, but I'd heard a lot about it. When your dad is clergy co-chair of BUILD and your mom founded and runs a non profit mission center in Baltimore City, you tend to hear about these kinds of things. Turnaround Tuesday, stationed in the basement of Zion Baptist, describes their mission as "To prepare 'returning' citizens and unemployed citizens to reenter the workforce and to lead in creating job opportunities in Baltimore." That April morning, I listened to Terrell Williams give a workshop, went to an orientation, and heard people tell their stories.

After the bulk of the morning, we reconvened into the larger group, and Pastor Prentice planned to end in prayer. He asked me if I'd oblige. He said something about my family- a powerhouse in the community organizing/liberal Christian/Baltimore City Christian world, it seems. I agreed. I don't remember exactly what I said, except that it was not a very good prayer, it was not very eloquent, and it was very short.

But afterwards, a man came up to me. And he said: "I've just gotten home after twenty-three years. I have a daughter. I'm going through a rough time. I'm going to need your whole family to pray for me." Man, that hit me. He was at a place in his life which I could not even comprehend. I've grown up in a privileged family, and I've never had to worry

about a place to live or about finding employment. This man was still hopeful. His life had been torn down to almost nothing, and he still put his faith in God. He could have been bitter. He could have been angry, angry at the world, angry at God, angry at the system which made it impossible for him to make a living, just because of a box he had to check on his job applications. But instead of lashing out at the world, he asked me and my family to pray for him. And then, he gave me a hug. He found a way to express compassion in a situation where compassion and hope seemed nearly impossible.

This year, in confirmation, we've discussed many things. A few that have stayed with me are the humanity of Jesus and social justice. Jesus' human aspect is a topic which has always fascinated me. Last summer, at Montreat, we were discussing Jesus and his comparison of the Canaanite woman and her community to dogs, and how she was able to teach Jesus something new. In small group, I brought up the possibility that maybe Jesus messed up. Maybe he was just being rude. Maybe that's where the story ends. My small group leader uncomfortably thanked me for my input, but continued on to teach the way in which Jesus was teaching this woman a lesson.

That night, the sermon was about Jesus' imperfection. Jesus' humanity. My small group leader apologized to me the next day, and told me what I'd said had really made her think. That is what Jesus is about to me. Growth, learning, and imperfection. The fact that Jesus is not perfect, that Jesus is human, allows us to connect with and empathize with his story on a level which we cannot with God. That is part of what has drawn me to Christianity. God is a concept which is hard to understand. God in the Old Testament seems to almost relish war, seems to solve God's problems with violence. That is hard for me to understand, and still something I struggle with. Jesus, on Earth, human, yet not human, reaching into the lives of

those which society had marginalized, is something which I can respect. Something which I can understand. Something which I can use to guide myself in my own choices throughout life.

That April morning at Turnaround Tuesday, I realized something. I might have no idea what God really is. And that *doesn't matter*. I could enjoy theological discussions- I love philosophy- but I had never felt God in the way so many people around me seemed to feel. Now, I'm attempting to find a balance between the emotional spirituality which I am finding is crucial to my faith, and the intellectual theology which helps me to try to understand faith. This balance is something which I want to find in my life, in my faith journey. This balance is something which I would like the church to find as well. To, perhaps, allow ourselves to feel without worrying about what it means, about where it come froms. To experience that raw, emotional, spiritual feeling, and still bring up the important theological issues which we are so good at discussing.

I'm still figuring out who God is, but Jesus' message, God's message, is something which I have always been able to agree with. I used to say I'd never felt God before. Now, I can say that I have. In the basement of a church on North Caroline Street, and in the words of a man returning home after twenty three years.

Sarah Egan

Faith to me is a belief that God is always loving and understanding us. While loving and understanding God is to do so for one another. I've grown up in this church and have always found comfort in the community. Just like Jesus taught us, they've loved and opened their hearts to every person that walks through these doors. They've taught me to do the same. Everyone born in the image of God is loved and worshipping at Brown has shown me this so clearly. Knowing that God

loves and understands me has helped me to love and understand myself so much more easily.

I recall a Sunday where we learned about and wrote our own parables. My parable was the Kingdom of God as a toolbox. The Kingdom is always being repaired and built up again. The construction of our faith has never been easy to fully understand and understanding God has never been an easy journey either. I feel like growing up, mainstream media tells you to believe there is only one acceptable image of God. Brown has taught me that this is simply not true. God loves you unconditionally, but however you choose to envision God is your choice. How I've come to think about God is that I know who God is, and no single image represents that.

We are taught in Confirmation that sin is a misstep, but something to be forgiven. I haven't always seen God as an ever-forgiving being, because of what society, again, tells us to think. "God loves you, but at your worst, when you sin, you may not be forgiven." Sure, God teaches us to love and forgive, but I feel like we aren't told enough that when you believe in God, you can believe and forgive yourself. Our missteps are to be used as moments of thought and reflection, while many times, they are used as moments of shame.

Jesus welcomes and helps all is something we hear many times as young kids. Yet, Jesus even as our Savior made mistakes. Just as a person, he took a misstep or two. We as Christians welcome one another, and that's something Jesus did well. He always showed that he was available, while he also took time to reflect. It's important to do so when you really need it. That is what I've learned the past 14 years of my life. That patience and perseverance are things we all need, and as I go along in my faith journey, I know they'll be keys to unlock new ideas in my life. Confirmation to me is about learning to be a leader in your faith, while also being a follower of Jesus Christ.

Before I came into confirmation, I assumed that it would just be an intense form of traditional Sunday School class, but I've learned it's not. I've learned so much about what it means to be a Christian. I've always seen loving others along with yourself as a priority, and I know now that some people of faith didn't always follow that exact teaching. Unfortunately, many Christians, even today, use God's teachings as a form of dismissal to those different to them. I've come to believe that instead, they should think about what being a Christian means now. My experience as a Christian today is being able to recognize the original principles of Christianity, such as welcoming others and being your true self, while also embracing current issues and the evolution of our faith. We've come so far by breaking down barriers and acknowledging the smallest changes on this Earth, but in turn some of us have strayed away from that principle of being our true selves.

When I was young, I didn't completely understand what faith meant. I went to church on Sundays without question. I didn't feel forced, but I felt like I would always have some connection to God, no matter where I was in life. Plenty of people identify as Christians, but I've always wanted to know what they believe faith is, and how they feel connected to God. I feel God is a protector, who loves and always keeps us on our toes. How I view God and I view myself is a story that life can rewrite, and that change is an extremely powerful thing.

Will Egan

Throughout my life, faith has been a question that I haven't always had an answer to. As a younger child, faith wasn't a concept I could easily grasp or even think about often. For me, faith is a journey that takes time and your beliefs may change through your life, based on events and situations you

experience. One large part of my journey of faith has been Sunday school and confirmation class, both having changed and expanded my ideas on God and the Christian religion. My understanding of God is complex and from childhood to teen hood has developed more. In early Sunday school years, to me, God was just a man in the sky who had created and watched over the Earth. There's a lot more to God--the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit--than I had originally thought.

The Church has always been a welcoming place for me, everyone there is loving and accepting of all kinds of people no matter their differences. The teachings of Jesus to his disciples has been an important lesson for me throughout my life, because it has taught me to love others for who they are and to help them when I can. In my understanding, to hurt someone is to sin, and in Matthew 5:39 Jesus says, "But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also." Loving and understanding other people is important and to do differently isn't right. The congregation of Brown Memorial church, my family, and my friends have all had an influence on my faith, but having an individual understanding is the most important. To me, faith is a tree and there are many branches that extend from it. Like all trees, they start as a seed and grow, and my faith has grown from a seed as a child.

Beliefs in Christianity such as death have been important for me. Jesus was crucified and died on the cross and rose again. When my uncle died, I understood that he wasn't living anymore, but I've always wondered if he's watching over my family and I. Reading about God watching over people comforts me in a way, knowing that someone is there or the thought of a presence. Thessalonians 3:3 "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one." This Bible verse reminds me that when I'm in a dark place or feel threatened, I don't have to fear as much.

Brown Memorial has shown me that if you're in a place where you can help someone who needs it, you should take action. Making care packages for the homeless in Sunday school was one of many ways our congregation has been able to help the community. Visiting the synagogue and Islamic Society were both important to me, because it helped me understand my faith better. I was able to make connections between our religions and the bible and see how they are different. I think it's important to understand these differences, because you can learn more about other religions. Knowing more about another religion helps me know how to respect their faith too.

God is now more of an important figure in my life. To me, God is a being who loves all and guides us to do right in our world. I hope to connect with God in my life, whether in a time of prayer or in a time of need. I hope that my journey of faith will take me places throughout my life. My journey of faith has been a very important part of my life and will continue to grow in importance as I get to understand my beliefs more.

Luke Inglesby

At the beginning of my confirmation journey I knew some of the basics about God and the Bible but I have not spent a lot of time thinking and talking about it.

I learned that Presbyterians used the Bible as a guide to life not a rigid rules of life. I really liked how in a Presbyterian church everyone is welcome no matter how they define themselves. Brown especially has a very open community that includes everyone, which is really wonderful because people like to feel like they belong.

What I take away from the Bible is that it is a book of stories that is meant to give people a guide to life. Some of the Bible stories I believe, some I don't. Some of the stories seemed

beyond imaginable almost as if they were something that you could dream. Dreams are something I enjoy, but I always wake up from them.

Some Bible stories depicted God as a cruel being, which made me doubt whether they were true. I didn't want to see God as someone that performed bad deeds; but deep down I knew God wasn't perfect because if He/She was perfect, why do bad things happen? Or maybe God let these things happen for a reason? Although I do not understand what reasons would justify letting people die, I trust that God knows what he or she is doing. I do question why God does some things. I do wonder where was he or she when devastation hit Puerto Rico? I know that God is not perfect, no one is. What I wonder is why he or she can't do something to prevent these horrible things from happening. I think that God makes mistakes just like humans do; his/her mistakes affect a lot more people. I prefer to focus on the Jesus or the God that performs the miracles and the good actions- that gives me confidence in the world.

I originally thought of God as some powerful being looking down at the earth from somewhere up high, someone distant. After I realized that this did not seem possible I thought of God as a person, someone I could picture in my head, like Jesus and also as a spirit to believe in. I see God as a loving and forgiving figure. I see God in my life when the good things happen. I am thankful everyday when I wake up. I believe if I do good work, that it will inspire others to do good work. I think it is useful to share faith through my actions.

To me faith is being able to have trust in something big or small. I think that faith can also be a form of hope. I know there is no physical proof that God is real but, when I see or hear of miracles happening how else could they happen if not for God? How is love real if not for God? How is our earth the way it is if not for God? My faith in God is an important part

of me, it makes me feel good to know that there is someone always watching over me, always looking out for me. To me, God is not only a figure to our spiritual beliefs but God is a symbol of hope. I have entered the beginning of my faith journey and hope to learn more about it in the years to come.

Annalisa Jenkins

This year during confirmation, I have found myself spending a lot of time considering what my spiritual beliefs are, a topic that I have not thought much about in the past. We talked about many aspects of christianity throughout our classes, and, while my understanding of the history of church has expanded, I have not yet solidified my beliefs. I still don't know if I believe in God, or if I think of myself as a spiritual person. Early on in the year, we were asked to think about what images of God resonate within is, a question that I found very interesting.

While I am not sure exactly how I imagine God, or if I even believe in God, I know I do not believe in God as the old white man with a beard sitting on a cloud, an image often featured in children's books. When I see God, I visualize a galaxy like shape, full of colors, and hovering throughout space. However, when I think of God, I see a genderless, spiritual force presiding over the world. I do not think of God as humanoid, reaching into our lives to control what we do, or what happens, but merely keeping watch over us, and loving us.

Another aspect of Christianity that we discussed early on in the year was our interpretations of the Bible. I see the Bible as a collection of stories with ethical messages, teaching its readers and followers how to live. I think that the metaphors within the Bible help people to grapple with existential questions in a more graspable way. People use the Bible to connect with each other, learn about how to live morally, and

think about what they can do to help in the world. It can often be used to connect oneself with your community and the natural world. I do not, however, think of it as the direct word of God, explaining exactly what happened when. I see the Bible as an important book that can, in the right context, be used to spread messages of love and peace

Another topic that we discussed a lot in confirmation is our role in the modern world. For centuries, Christianity has been a religion, that has, in practice, been exclusionary of women, lgbtq+ people, and people of color. It also has a long history of going into non-Western regions, telling the people what they need, forcing it upon them, and converting them. I find it ironic how the church has so often used the Bible to enforce oppressive acts, while Jesus himself preaches equity and justice for all people. I think that in places like Brown that are using their power and influence to right these long endured wrongs. I view it as my obligation as a straight, white, well off woman to use my privilege to change systems that have favored me and my ancestors, and I think that the church has these same duties. Brown does a good job of using its wealth and privilege to connect with people, partner with them, and work together to help achieve goals.

Another aspect of Christianity that I have had to wrestle with is its relationship with science. I have always been a strong supporter and believer of climate change and evolution, and I want to go into science as a profession. I have noticed that many people think of all Christians as the anti-science extremists that always hear about on the news. It has been fairly hard for me trying to figure out how to identify myself with a religion that, in so many people's eyes, goes against some of my most core beliefs. After talking with my family, the way I have found to reconcile this is that the Bible is a set of powerful metaphors, not the law.

Although I have found a way to think about this that works for me, and I don't broadcast my Christianity with people that I have just met to avoid having people assume that I am a creationist homophobe. I often hear awful things on the news about the church that really sadden me. However, when I think about the way that churches like Brown use the Bible to carry out good in the world, I am a little more hopeful about the Church. It is things like our partnership with Eutaw Marshburn, the El Salvador trip, lunches educating the church on lgbtq+ issues, and all-gendered restrooms that make me believe the church has a bright future.

I have often found myself being skeptical of the complex rituals and rules surrounding Christianity. It seems that, at many churches, people are caught up in practicing in an exact and specific way, that we lose track of what it all means, and forget to think about what we actually believe. I think that this is one reason that a class like confirmation is so important. It allowed me to really examine how I feel about the rituals that have been engrained upon me since I was a little kid.

Throughout my childhood, I have been exposed to various sects of christianity, and I have found that different parts have worked for me in different ways. One version of faith that I have found particularly meaningful is Quakerism. Since Kindergarten, I have been attending a Quaker school here in Baltimore. Quaker beliefs are centered around simplicity and the idea that there is "that of God in everyone". I have always found myself drawn to this idea of respect and love for everyone. Although for years I found the long periods of often unbroken silence boring and unnecessary, I have come to value Meeting for Worship. I like that Quakerism is focused on internal contemplations and connection to God, allowing room for differing values and ways of honoring spirituality. Once every other week, we have what is called "alternative

meeting for worship” where you can choose to walk, knit, draw, read, sing, or do a variety of activities instead of the traditional Meeting for Worship. I like that this allows you to find your spirituality with what works for you, instead of adhering to a specific set of rituals that are planned out.

While I may not have quite figured out my specific religious beliefs, but I know that I really value being a part of the church community. It was immediately clear to me when I came to Brown in 4th grade, that this was a tight knit community that I wanted to be a part of. This has been backed up time and time again. I love that this is a place where people of all ages can come together as friends. Most recently, I noticed the strength of this community as my grandmother was going the cancer treatment. It seemed that everyday we were getting new notes of support. People I know, and those that I don't, were emailing my parents, and sending us letters. The love and care that I have found here is core to what Christianity means to me. I know that wherever I end up in my life, I will crave this sense of belonging and community that I feel at Brown. It is for this community, and the way Church makes me struggle with difficult contemporary issues, that I want to get confirmed.

Lizzie Mills

Before confirmation, I had a hard time figuring out how God affected me and what role he played in my life. Now, after going through confirmation, I am starting to understand how God positively affects my everyday experiences. Confirmation helped me because I was able to listen to my teachers and have other classmates who would share their opinion on the Bible and God. Throughout the year, we have learned much about the early church and how it affected our beliefs in church today. I believe my outlook on God has changed. I used to wonder why people believed in God, and

how he would actually help people when he was not a living person on earth. I then realized how important he was to me.

Even though God is not a tangible or physical person, he does many things for me during my everyday life experiences. He helps me when I am in need of extra support and comfort through a hard time. He allows me to have amazing opportunities, and most importantly, allows me to succeed. God also allows me to feel comforted when I am getting ready for a big sports game or tryout or taking an important school test, he is always there for me when I need to support. God allows me to have many opportunities such as allowing me to go to such an amazing school, surrounds me with loving friends and family, and even things as simple as clothes on my body, a roof over my head and food on the table. During a championship basketball game in the winter, there was just under one minute left in the game and my time was winning. After a timeout, we were back on the court and ready to play. I was super nervous and thought to myself, all I need to do is put in all of my effort, go after every loose ball, pass the ball and shoot if I had an open shot and just after I thought about this, I thought of God watching over me and giving me the confidence I needed to win the game. I finished out the game, and my twin won. After experiencing this, I realized God allows me to succeed in everything I do. Everytime I do something I know that if I do my best, God will always give me the best outcome possible.

Even though I always have times where fall, mess up or make a mistake, God makes sure to help me have confidence to get back up and keep trying and I would not have learned this without going through confirmation.

Nellie Mills

Faith to me is believing in what you want to believe in and practicing the religion that supports the person you believe

in. Since I have been little, I was usually forced to go to church or Sunday School. I never thought anything of it. I have started to realize why going to Sunday School and church is important. I am starting to have my own ideas of God and my faith. I especially have realized that God is just a person, he can affect the way you live and what you believe in. I have also spent more time thinking about God and learning about who he is.

I enjoy learning about the history and what God is and how he affects our world. After exploring other faiths and religions, I learned a lot about myself and God himself. I have learned so much in confirmation, not only about the history but, sin, the Holy Spirit, and interpretation. I remember when we learned about the monks and many other important people who lived and affected religion. I think learning about the monks and the other people, showed what the beginning of our religion was like and the different ways people believe in God.

My faith and God affects me in multiple ways. I think being so blessed with the life I live and everything else that comes along with life has been affected by God. Life is not always enjoyable and sometimes negative, but I think that is always gonna be there. Learning and recognizing the positive things in life is more important. I hope my idea of faith and God keeps improving and changing as I change as a person.

Amalie Nohe-Moren

I am an uncertain person. I have hard times making decisions and I like to have unanswered questions in my life. I still believe in things but I always question what I believe in. I personally do not agree with the idea of one divine creator. If we were to believe in God I think that it would be more of a connection than a magic person. I think that polytheism seems

more interesting to me on a level of amazing creativity and story behind each human/animal esque representation of something that exists in our world. But, I don't really believe that those beings exist and they are waiting in some other world for you or are controlling your world.

I don't exactly mind the stereotypical Christian God of the person in the clouds it's just not something I see as being a part of my life. I believe that it can be so influential and in some ways that are good but it can often go sour. I think that it is all how you see things and often religion becomes less about a way to encourage people to be loving and kind and somehow is twisted to give people an excuse to treat others and yourself poorly. I think that there is just value in thinking of others and wishing them well even if no one hears it. I wouldn't say I believe in a God it's more like a special light or experience that you see in the world. I don't think it comes from a God it's more of the individuality and amazing power and potential that people or a place have that give off something that you can't really describe. But I don't think that thing belongs to God but maybe it's just something that you feel.

I believe that the world is such an abstract but it is also so simple. The whole universe is only made of a few different small pieces and I guess that in itself makes us all connected and all joined together by that at least. I think that there is some kind of beautiful mystery in the universe. Sometimes you just go somewhere that is so grand. It makes you enjoy how weird it is that we even exist in the first place. I feel like I don't need anything to explain it or any hope for the future because living now is so strange and valuable. I think that everything is so strange and out of our understanding, it is best if we learn to take something a little less seriously.

I believe that the most meaningful thing and the ever-present thing in life is change. Change is everything and being comfortable can always be helpful but once it gets to a

certain point you are taking yourself away from chances to experience things that are new and meaningful that can challenge you and keep you motivated. Even the smallest changes like finding a new favorite song or meeting a new friend can affect you in ways that you can't always understand. All of this makes me think that life is so bizarre that I have learned to have fun with it and enjoy all that I have to access. But it also makes me believe that things are connected by something unexplainable and that there is something that makes me think that there is some strange force in the universe. But I'm not sure that believing that makes me religious. I think that is more of a view on some strange power that lots of religions focus on like the holy spirit.

I think that the best part of religion is being in a community. Being in a community of people who want to take care of you during hard times is comfortable and helps many. It is a good place to go and know that there is hope and you will be forgiven. But, for me I don't really need forgiveness or hope. I think the best part about it is just being in a group of people who should be loving and supportive. For me that is the most important part of being in one of these communities.

When I go to Quaker camp each summer I always have a group of loving people waiting for me. They are all kind and being away from the world to just enjoy some simplicity and the forest while also being with great friends and a loving community is amazing and I think that that experience exemplifies what a wonderful semi-religious environment should be like. No one is too forceful most of the rules are just to be kind and not fight. That is what I think a religion should be: a calm place you visit once and a while where people care for you and you can all sit in a circle and sing songs.

Annie Obrecht

God is a light, something mysterious and something divine. She is beyond my understanding, but I feel that He has the qualities of love, peace, and wisdom. As much as I believe this, I also wonder if all of the world religions are simply made up to make sense of our lives. Doubt and questioning have always been a huge part of my faith and I can't say that I have more clarity today than I did when I started the confirmation process. However, I now feel more comfortable with the uncertainty and mystery of God.

The version of God as a bearded man sitting in the clouds watching and keeping track of what I do, right or wrong, doesn't resonate with me. Rather, I believe that God is in and around me- in my heart, the wind in the trees, and the air I breathe. When I spend time outdoors, particularly doing things I love like hiking mountains, swimming in a lake or kayaking, I experience a sense of being a part of something greater than me. I feel a deep love and connection to myself and to others, and this is God.

I am a Christian because my parents are Christian and this is the way I have been raised. I believe in Jesus as God's Son and learning from his preachings. However, I don't believe that one religion is better than another; instead, there are different versions of the Truth that can impart wisdom and help us learn more about our own tradition of faith. I think it is important to allow for the diversity of religions and through this realization that we are all one in the mystery of God.

My faith is a lifelong journey of seeking through asking questions and often not having the answers. Learning to be comfortable with the mystery of faith hasn't been easy for me and I still struggle with it. The confirmation process has been a chance to dig deeper into my thoughts, my Presbyterian religion, and my doubts. As I become a member of the church, I believe that God is absolute love and deep connection.

Max Palmer

Eight months ago, I had no idea about what God was and how I felt about God. My family had never been religious and we went to church only on Christmas Eve and the occasional Easter Sunday. I had never had a moment where I felt like I had truly connected with God and I had many questions about what God was. Eight months ago if you would have asked me, I would have told you that I was atheist and I didn't even imagine the possibility of getting confirmed in May. I would have simply told you that I was only attending the Confirmation classes because my mom was making me. Even now, eight months later, I still have a lot of questions about God and the place of God in my life. I also have a lot of different beliefs than most Christians have and I am learning that that is okay. I believe that it is okay for everyone to have different beliefs about what God is, even in the same branch of religion.

My mother and I had a long talk in the car about how God could be viewed so differently by different religions. I remember thinking that God couldn't fit all of the descriptions that different religions perceived God was. I am now understanding that God is not a correct answer. God can be whatever you want it to be and that is just fine. I believe that that is where I have grown the most over this year of studying God and it is the reason that I now feel comfortable getting confirmed now and fully joining the church community.

Another obstacle that I have had trouble overcoming is the fact that I am not yet baptized and that I am the only one in my Confirmation Class that hasn't been baptized. I thought that it would be awkward getting confirmed without being baptized, but I have now been reassured that it is perfectly normal. Before beginning this process of Confirmation, I had mixed beliefs about the whole idea of Confirmation and the idea of devoting myself to God.

Originally, I had perceived that baptism was your parents giving God the thumbs up to begin to nurture you and then thirteen years later, after all of God's training, you will become a member of your community and the faith. I struggled a lot with wondering if I would ready to be confirmed without the thirteen years of "training" that my fellow confirmands went through and knowing that I would still be accepted by God. I think now that it is okay if I have more questions or don't know as much about God as my fellow Confirmands and that I will still serve God in the community equally as well. I am not afraid to admit that I probably don't know as much as my fellow Confirmands and I believe that God will accept me and allow me to be Confirmed just the way I am. I believe that God also knows that I will continue to strengthen my beliefs of God and Christianity and that I will continue to be a learner in the Christian faith.

Another part of Christianity that I have learned a lot about throughout this process is the Holy Spirit. I feel like as my understanding of God has grown, I have been able to connect more with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit to me is the feeling of connection with God and the church community.

Another reason that I want to get confirmed is to be a part of a community. The church community, especially in the Sunday School, is so tight knit and is something I want to be apart of. What I like about our church's community is that you don't need to agree on beliefs. I don't want to be a part of the community not necessarily because of God, but because it is full of awesome people that I share common beliefs with. In the end, I went from atheist to agnostic in mid-April to wanting to be confirmed today and I would not be getting confirmed if not for my Sunday School teachers, my fellow confirmands, and that conversation in the car with my mom that confirmed my belief in God. Now, I do believe that God

exists one way or another and that I want to be confirmed as a member of the Christian faith.

Alex Reichelt

After going through my confirmation journey, I have had different experience that have helped me create my faith statement. This statement of faith is not permanent but a snapshot of my current beliefs. During confirmation classes we discussed and experienced different things that I used to help create my faith statement. One of the most important things I think we learned is what the Bible is. As a kid I always always thought the Bible was some weird book that people use in church, but now I know it is a compilation of stories that can create a very interesting book. I have realized that the Bible isn't some boring church book but it is an interesting compilation of stories. It is a story of adventure and excitement. Jesus is going on a journey to spread the word of God. I think with this mindset the Bible can be viewed differently than most kids view it. Instead of being a boring book it can be quite exciting.

The next thing that greatly influenced me is learning about the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity consists of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. God I view as the person that makes everything happen. He is telling people and things to do the stuff that he thinks is best. Still, sometimes this doesn't work out. As a young child I expected God to fix everything and make my life perfect but that didn't always happen. I specifically remember when my mom talked about someone getting shot in Baltimore, I thought to myself, "Why would God let this happen." The best example I can think of to explain this is a baseball coach. The baseball coach tells the team what to do but it doesn't always work out. Sometimes you lose games or somethings goes very bad.

Next, there is Jesus. I believe Jesus is a human embodiment of God. As God's son I think he embodies who God is. He is spreading the word of God but at the same time representing him. I think the parts in the Bible where Jesus gets mad or does something wrong are most important because those are the times that make Jesus seem more human and shows how God and Jesus isn't perfect.

Lastly, there is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can be tricky because it is not human and it is very unclear what it is. I believe the Holy Spirit is a very strong force that is intertwined in you and God. I feel as if it is always available to you and God whenever it is needed. The Holy Spirit is so complicated it is a trouble to give an example of what it exactly is. The best I could think of was "the force" from Star Wars. I don't mean you can use it to throw things around or choke someone, but instead, I feel it is what connects you, God, Jesus and everything else together as a complicated spider web. It is an extremely subtle power that is always there for me and everyone else.

I would like to talk about God in the modern world. For me as a teenager, it is important for me to incorporate my faith and God into my social life and my life at school. Many of my friends don't go to church so I sometimes have to explain why church and worship is important to me. Every time I have a sleepover Saturday nights my friends are surprised I go to church every Sunday morning. I explain how my parents started me on the tradition of going to church every Sunday, and I continue this tradition because it is a time I connect with God. I explain how important it is for me to have that time in church every Sunday. I feel as if it is a time to touch base with God after he has such an influence in my life and the world around me. These discoveries have helped me to decide to get confirmed as a member of this church.

Affirmation of Faith

Please join in for the parts marked “All.”

All: In life and in death we belong to God.

God is a light, something mysterious and something divine. (Annie)

When I see God, I visualize a galaxy like shape, full of colors, and hovering throughout space. I see a genderless, spiritual force presiding over the world. (Annalisa)

God is a being who loves all and guides us to do right in our world. (Will)

God affects the way you live and what you believe in. (Nellie)

All: But we rebel against God.

Sin is a misstep, but something to be forgiven. Our missteps are to be used as moments of thought and reflection, while many times, they are used as moments of shame. (Sarah)

When I look back and think about the bad decisions I make, I am reminded about how I

recovered from them. I feel that is when I need God most. To remind me to step back on my path, and recover from my mistakes. (Marcos)

**All: God acts with justice and mercy
to redeem creation.
We trust in Jesus Christ,
fully human, fully God.**

Even though I always have times where fall, mess up or make a mistake, God makes sure to help me have confidence to get back up and keep trying. (Lizzie)

I see God as a loving and forgiving figure. I see God in my life when the good things happen. I am thankful everyday when I wake up. (Luke)

Jesus is not perfect; Jesus is human, and that allows us to connect with and empathize with his story on a level which we cannot with God. Jesus, on Earth, human, yet not human, reaching into the lives of those which society had marginalized. (Aidan)

**All: We trust in God,
the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver
and renewer of life.**

The Holy Spirit to me is the feeling of connection with God and the church community. (Max)

I believe the Holy Spirit is a very strong force that is intertwined in you and God. I feel as if it is always available to you and God whenever it is needed. (Alex)

The best part of religion is being in a community. Being in a community of people who want to take care of you during hard times is comfortable and helps many. It is a good place to go and know that there is hope and you will be forgiven. (Amalie)

**All: With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing can
separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

This affirmation of faith was crafted using the confirmands' faith statements, with the unison parts taken from the PC(USA)'s Brief Affirmation of Faith.

The cover art is a piece by United Methodist minister Jan Richardson titled “Mapping the Mysteries.” It speaks to the process of faith being like a journey that we are all on together as a community.



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