

Senior Reflection  
May 20, 2018  
High School Senior Sunday

Hadley Seymour  
First Presbyterian Church  
Lake Forest, Illinois

I consider high school youth group to be seven years of friendship. Even though seven years separates the seniors I met my freshman year from the freshman I have met this year, they have all taught me the importance of the Christian relationship. I saw God my freshman year when two Juniors reached out to me, a Freshman who felt so, so alone. Little did I know, God was walking beside me with these two friends, helping me find my way. Without these two, I don't know if I would have returned to the senior high youth group.

My sophomore year, I saw God through two homeowners that I got to meet on my first work day. Patty and Denver were some of the kindest people I have ever met. They were the kind of people who lived by "loving thy neighbor." In one of the rooms I was working in to install windows, Patty had written on her whiteboard, "It's a new day, let us rejoice and be glad!" I think of that verse every morning when I wake up, knowing that each day will bring new gifts, big and small.

My Junior year, I saw God through every member of this church. When times were tough, and it could have been easier to just sit back, everyone stood up and took the challenge upon themselves to use this opportunity to make this church stronger and more unified. I have gotten to experience this firsthand from my parents, who both inspire me every day to get the most out my experiences here in this amazing church community. This was the year where I understood my purpose as a follower of God.

This connects to the passage because we see God's promise with Jacob and how he promises to watch over him through his struggles, and gives him assurance that by following Him, he will reach the promised land. Because of the

past four years here at First Pres, I have recognized that God has always been there through the Christian relationships I have made without realizing it at times. While leaving my family and this church will bring its own challenges, I know that just as God promised Jacob, He won't leave my side.

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Kylie Murray  
First Presbyterian Church  
Lake Forest, Illinois

First Presbyterian Church has come to be an integral part of my life. At a young age, my parents strongly encouraged me to get involved at church and I could not be happier that they did. I have become friends with incredible people, been exposed to memorable experiences and discovered more about my own faith all because of this church.

My brother first influenced me to start attending youth group as he was a senior at the time. I was hesitant as I was a young freshman, but was quickly reassured as everyone was welcoming and excited to get to know one another. Youth group has become a place to escape every Sunday night. It is a place to reflect, have fun and relax with a unique and talented set of people who are all brought together by one thing: God. High School is a time where in my opinion you are your most vulnerable and having strong relationships with others is crucial. The connections I have formed through youth group have kept me sane throughout high school and are friendships that I know will last me a lifetime.

In addition to youth group, work trip is an experience that never fails to show me the light of God. It is a time where people of all ages from advisors to youth come together to learn new skills, aid a community and create unforgettable memories. It is extraordinary to see the impact that our work trip can have on one community. Last year, the local ice cream shop in Iberia Missouri gave contributions back to our church in gratitude for the business we gave them during our past working ice cream trips. The love that all the communities experience during work trip is infectious and reminds me that God is everywhere and can be found in the smallest of places.

The past eleven years here at First Pres have helped shaped me into who I am today. This church has allowed me to grow in my faith and create unbreakable friendships. Going into college I know that the lessons I have learned here will be carried throughout my life and I will always be reminded that God is with me wherever I go.

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Kyle Levin  
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Lake Forest, Illinois

Good morning, my name is Kyle Levin and I am a senior at Lake Forest High School. As I approach graduation I have had lots of time to reflect on some of the ways that I have seen God throughout my life. I became a member of this church with my family about twelve years ago, and I consider that the beginning of my faith journey. One of the main places that I have seen God at work is through the people of the church. The Sunday School teachers set the foundation for my faith and started me on my journey in the church. In Sunday School young curious minds can find answers to their questions about Christianity, and learn more about God and the Bible. The next step of my faith journey took place in the youth programs. During Middle School and High School I saw God in the friendships that were made in Youth Group, lock-ins, and various retreats. I made friends that are still very close to me today. Confirmation was one of the most influential experiences in my religious journey. Growing up I have always been very curious and equally as sceptical. This combination raised many questions in my head about God, the Bible, and how science and history fit into that puzzle. Having great youth pastors in Nick and Sean and great confirmation support helped me to answer those questions and form my own combination of beliefs.

Last year my faith underwent a test when I became a youth elder. I went from a student in the church to a leader in the church and I didn't feel like I was ready. However, all of the other members of session welcomed me in with open arms. The next place I saw God was in the way that session is able to keep the gears of the church turning. Even in a very hectic time in the church, the elders never lost their way and were able to handle the situations with patience and care. That experience taught me that there are road bumps on all of our faith journeys, but they are always big enough to be overcome through God.

The experiences that have had the most impact on my faith have been the work trips. I have gone on work trip three times and am looking forward to going on my fourth and final one this coming June. On these trips I have learned that going on a trip

surrounding by peers and providing genuine help to people who need it has been very influential on my faith. During this time, I notice God in the helpers around me, the bonds that are created, and even in the people that we are helping.

Work trip is full of helpers that have helped me to discover what selflessness really is. Each year we bring lots of parents and past work trippers who are more than happy to lead the youth on the sites and also do lots of work themselves. Work trip regulars like JJ and Jimmy May share their expertise and work trip wisdom with the rest of the group. I see God in the passion that all of these helpers have for helping others and doing God's work. This year was the first year where we did a tool training session before we leave so that all of the participants could be adequately prepared to wield power saws and hammer in nails without hitting their thumbs. We reached out to some past work trippers and participants and had over twenty people there eager to teach us all of the tricks of the trade. They were so willing to help because work trip had had an impact on them as well and they wanted to continue God's work in a different role.

Sometimes you are able to see God in connections between people, this is especially true on Work Trip. On the trip I have met many friends that I otherwise would not have. Service has a way of uniting people under a common goal. Every day we are put in a group of random people that we will be working at the site with. We don't get to choose to be with our friends and stay within our social groups that were established long before work trip. Instead we make new friends and talk with people who we may not have even known before the trip, whether that be the senior who has been on every one, or the freshman who just started coming to youth group. After a long days work we meet up in small groups that stay the same throughout the week. These groups are for more than just a recap of the day, we often answer questions such as "where did you see God today?" or "how has your experience affected your view of God?". Every group gets really deep into these questions, bringing up past experiences and connecting with each other so well that it sometimes results in crying. I see God in the bonds that strengthen every day on work trip and the friendships that last long after it.

Possibly where I see God the most on work trip is through the people that we are helping. The residents of the homes that we work on are usually victims of bad circumstances such as a bad injury or a terrible family situation. However, they are always welcoming and very grateful for our help. My sophomore year, we were installing windows at a home and Patty, the woman who lived there came outside with a pitcher of iced tea and a tray of homemade brownies. She had no obligation to do that, she did it out of the kindness of her heart. At that same site, we were having trouble taking down an old metal fence so Denver, Patty's husband, came out with his tractor, hooked it up to the fence, and took it down with us. He stayed out with us while we were working and told us some very interesting stories about his past. We came to the site to help them, but we ended up getting back much more than we gave. I saw God in them when they chose to open their house to complete strangers and help us with work that they could have sat back and watched.

It has been a long faith journey so far for me in the church and I have seen God in countless places. All of these experiences that I have had can be accredited to the people of this church. I'm thankful to them and to the church as a whole for making this journey possible for me and for everybody who can see God here every Sunday.