

Reflection for Senior Sunday  
Graduating Senior Worship  
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When Kristie asked me to write this reflection for today, it took me a long time to come up with how I wanted to do this. I could start at the beginning, go backwards, or create a myriad of stories and anecdotes to share. In the end, I chose a combination of the former and the latter. So. The beginning. For everyone, the beginning of their church career is of course, their baptism. I, like many of this graduating class, was baptized right here by Reverend Swicegood with Mrs. Kreischer representing the Session. I was immediately welcomed into this Church community, and although I didn't know it at the time, the arms of this church are very long. Throughout my first 18 years, after several hours of thought, and coming up with a long list, the total came to 49 people. 49 members of our church family that have helped me become...well...me. Inside the church and in the broader community are teachers, Work Trip advisors, ministers, parents, and friends.

I however, would like to focus on the period of time since I've been a confirmed church member. Confirmation has become the rock on which I build my own faith. It wasn't so much the class, although Kristie and Mrs. Barnett did a fantastic job, it was my mentor who helped me grow. Mr. Eaton was my confirmation mentor... and how many people can say that they see their mentor at school everyday? Anyone? I didn't really think so. Aside from the big smile, warm greeting, and high-five or hug that I received each morning; I learned a lot about being a good Christian and how to react to curveballs that life throws at you. For all the lessons you've taught me, whether I learned them or not, thank you.

Work Trip, like many of the seniors up here has had the largest impact on my spiritual growth. After working at Higgins Lake, building at Wonderland Camp, and rehabbing Ocean Springs, it's really given me an insightful look into the character of my fellow Work Trippers, as well as the character of those we aid. Regardless of how any of the hundred Work Trip attendees act here, at home, we all turn into Christian saints while we're gone. I don't know if this is innately in us, or if we get filled with the Work

Trip spirit for one week. Personally, I believe that each of us has this capacity for goodness within us, and that once we can escape the distractions that surround us, we're set loose to accomplish deeds that we did not believe possible.

However, I do not think the high schoolers can do this by themselves, it starts with the advisors. These advisors take a whole week off from work and other distractions, going from businessmen to construction workers. Without you all, my summer would not be the same, and I am not exaggerating when I say that Work Trip is the highlight of my summer, not the concerts, sport camps, or my summer long trip to Montana. I know you all will be thanked a hundred times for coming over the next week, but I thought I would be the first. And Kristie, I know this is your fourth Work Trip as the chief planner, and I think you've done a fantastic job.

The sense of community in this church is amazing. For every activity ranging from Youth Group to Session, our church is tightly knit, and it even extends outside the Church functions themselves. After four years of Youth Group doing every activity from the Penny Hunt to the Ski Retreat, friendships and memories have been made that will last forever. During junior year, our Church Band; Eggs Benediction, was founded, and aside from having musical jam sessions at practice, driving down to CBS to record for a Christmas Eve showing of *Different Drummers* (which nobody watched anyways...because it came on at 5:30 on Christmas Eve morning...), or learning what "vox" means from Leslie, we all grew both spiritually and musically, with today being the culmination of our Eggs Benediction experience. I learned through Session, that aside from learning how church works, and the amount of work required to get anything done, I found out that the sense of community that surrounds truly stems from our elected leaders down. Finally, this sense of community extends outward beyond church functions themselves, to church activities. For the vast majority of my childhood, Scouting has been a large part of my life. I am astounded at the contributions that our Church has made to the Scouts. Aside from hosting my Troop, Troop 46, it seems as if our congregation sums up many of the Eagle Scouts my Troop produces.

I am fascinated at the amount of compassion that we show toward each other. It seems like every week I attend church, someone stands up during joys and concerns and shares how our congregation's prayers have helped them get through their crisis. Or the

celebrations we organized to celebrate Reverend Butcher's ministries. Or the week the entire building becomes filled with anything and everything that you could possibly imagine for Rummage? I think it is events like these that set our congregation apart from others. We are all involved with each other, a true Christian family. Every time anyone needs anything, and I do mean anything, there are often more people willing to serve than is needed, and that is impressive. Last November, as many of you know, my grandfather passed away. With my grandmother no longer mobile, the church came to Lake Forest Place to perform the funeral service. And...I didn't eat food cooked by my parents for almost three weeks. That is the kind of spirit our church community is filled with, a sort of Work Trip spirit of our own, such that anytime one of our Christian brothers or sisters slips, twenty or thirty hands reach out to help pick them up. Its that response toward suffering that makes me proud to say I attend First Presbyterian Church in Lake Forest. I hope that next year I, along with my graduating classmates, will be able to bring our optimism, hope, and enthusiasm for cheerful service to our respective schools and beyond.

I would like to close with a prayer:

Dear God, we thank you for the years you have thus far given us. Thank you for all the friendships, mentors, laughter, tears, sunny days, and sunsets over the past 18 years. We ask forgiveness for the fights we've had, arguments we've caused, drama we've created, and for the people we've hurt. Please keep us safe on our college journey, mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Prepare us for the future, so we might better serve you. Amen.