

“Senior Reflection”
1 Timothy 4: 1-16
June 7, 2009

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When Kristie asked me to speak at church today, I was nervous. What would I say? How could I live up to my brother, Joey’s, speech from two years ago? It has me stumped. So I started thinking about all my memories I’ve had in this church.

Dressing me up in cute little dresses and bows was my mother’s favorite part of Sunday School as a youngster. I, on the other hand, did not quite enjoy the tights as much as she did. I can remember I would sprint to my room when we would get home after church to get out of my nice clothes. As I got older, I came to appreciate Sunday School more—for the animal crackers. 😊 But in all seriousness, I enjoyed going to Sunday School. From learning about Joseph, to Adam and Eve, to Jesus, I got the basics of my faith from a very early age.

I started choir when I returned from Tokyo at the age of 4. I still cannot believe Mrs. Hunt has put up with me for fourteen years. From choir, to the plays every year, I participated through eighth grade. Choir not only taught me to appreciate my voice, but to understand the importance of my faith. Every year the choir took the play that we had learned and performed it at Westmoreland. I will never forget looking at their faces and seeing how excited they were that we had come to visit them, and sing for them. Even now, I can still see their faces light up in my mind.

I started the Youth Bell Choir at Church in 4th Grade, when bell practice still took place in what is now Mrs. Hunt’s office. I stuck with bells throughout my high school career. As I started bells in High School, I joined a group of fantastic adults, from Mrs. Hunt, who has been a constant in my life; to the amazing ladies I got to practice with every Tuesday night. We have had so many great times, and I have felt my faith be instilled as I learn the patience

needed to play a song over and over again until we got it right. When we would finally get it right, as we would all smile and encourage each other, I knew that God was watching us, and smiling too.

Youth Group is one of the great things about our church. From 6th Grade Soup Kitchens to High School Penny Hunts, Youth Group has connected me ever more fervently to this church. Having gone to Lake Forest Academy, it has allowed me to stay in touch with people from the High School, and still participate at church. I can't thank Kristie enough for that. Kristie was there for me when I needed someone the most, even when I didn't want to admit that I needed someone. She has been the compass in my life, guiding me when I went astray.

Confirmation brought about lots of new learning experiences for me. From learning how our church operates, to understanding the real meanings behind "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" I got a better understanding of my faith, and a deeper love for church. Confirmation taught me the importance of our faith, and also why our church has had such a successful community. I have always been a strong believer in our church community, and when my grandparents passed away, the church was right there, with a helping hand and a prayer, waiting and willing to help. I don't think I've ever had more food at my house that wasn't cooked by my family.

Caroline Johnson and I taught Sunday School for I think a grand total of 5 years. In that time, we saw kids grow older, just as we did, and each time we were amazed by how smart kids were. I will never forget our first lesson was with first graders, and we were teaching games at that point. We had a jumbled sentence that they needed to put back together, and when we tried to do it, we found it took us a while. Of course, the first graders got it in about 2 seconds. I learned so much in Sunday School, and I learned so much from Amy Pagliarella, who came to our church only a short time ago, but has

already showed me how much I have left to learn, and I only hope one day to be as good a role model as she has been for me.

One experience I know I will never forget is when Liz and I decided to help with Rummage for the 6-10am shift. Wow. For those of you who haven't been there when the doors open, I suggest you go once. It is amazing to see people lined up down the street to get into our church. The people you meet are so happy to see you helping them, and it makes me proud to know our church helps people with Rummage, and then gives our profits to other people in need. The Rummage sale our church puts on twice a year brings hope to hundreds of people who come, as well as to those faces we don't see, who profit from the money earned from the sale. Our church's willingness to help others as Christ helps makes me proud to be a member, and I just hope to one day that I can contribute more.

Work Trip is hard to explain unless you have been. It gives you a sense of community, a sense of hope, a sense of pride. I have never felt so exhausted or happy before at the end of a day. There is nothing like knowing you are physically helping to make someone's life better. I will never forget my freshmen year when we went to Ocean Springs, and driving through the desecration of New Orleans. I still can't believe all the horrendous destruction my eyes witnessed, and yet I know it is true. It makes me proud to know our church did its part in helping to put the pieces of Katrina's wake back together. That year we all slept in a gymnasium, and I will never forget hearing the story of a couple we helped who had to cut a hole in their ceiling so that they could breathe when they stood on their counter because there was so much water. The bonds we form on Work Trip run so deep, and that "Work Trip Spirit" that everyone talks about, well, it's really there.

This year, I was lucky enough to be a Youth Deacon. Boy, I don't think I know a nicer group of people. They embraced me right away, encouraging me to speak in conversations, and to help in our activities like the Blood Drive

and the Christmas Tea. Yet our monthly meetings I looked forward to the most, when I knew that I would have the chance to hear updates on the goings-on at church, and to talk with my new Deacon friends, listening to what was going on in their life, as they eagerly asked what was going on in mine. As I accepted that I was moving on to college, along with other questions in my life that brought, the Deacons were there with open arms just waiting to help me in my time of need. At our last meeting, when I became a 'retired' Deacon, I was already very sad to be leaving the group, as they helped to define and shape my life in ways that they will never know, but I almost started crying when they gave me a going away package. I will never forget their kindness and the thoughtfulness of my church over the past eighteen years of my life. This amount of kindness that First Presbyterian in Lake Forest is overflowing with and our passion for Christ is what makes me proud to say I go to church here. I hope that this cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and compassion that we have been taught over the past 18 years will continue with us next year at our respective colleges and for the rest of our lives.