

My name's Marit, I'm a sophomore at Eden Prairie High School. I'm an artist and a daydreamer with my head in the clouds, which might just be a fancy way of saying I have a very hard time paying attention. I'm going to start off by saying a quick prayer before I get started. "Dear God, thank you for this opportunity to speak about my own faith and my own ideas, and for the love and the support you have for me."

Firstly I just want to say what I believe. I don't really know how to explain what I believe. I believe in God, I believe in heaven and hell, and beyond that- I'm still trying to figure out for myself. This past year and a half has ended up making me take apart my own faith, I lost a great deal of my faith as I gave into fear and anxiety about things I don't understand. I'm not all the way back and I doubt I ever will be, but I've been able to recover and even grow. Faith doesn't come naturally to me, and I've finally realized that and been able to deal with it. Not everything is going to make sense to me, and I can live with that. The main person I discuss with is my father, and my own understanding of religion and God is through those conversations. God has made me and claimed me and now I just need to figure out what I'm doing. I understand that I'm a child of God, and I understand that I'm loved. Even if I don't really know what I'm doing, or what I plan on doing. My life is up in the air and I want to have God by my side while I'm trying to figure out what I want to do. Beyond that, God already knows who I am. He knows how I work, he knows my flaws, and he knows my struggles. And yet, he still says yes to me. He sees the ways that I am broken and strange and he still decides to say yes, and surround me in his love. When I question my faith and turn from him, he helps guide me back.

Most of how my faith just comes from the people around me. God shows himself in the people around him time and time again, through my conversations with my friends, through the love of my family members, and even through the loose network of connections surrounding me. God shows his love for me in the people in my life, in the beautiful, loving, and sometimes messy relationships I have with the people around me. A direct connection with God, me trying to comprehend him and what he wants for me, has never been my own way of connecting with him. Singing songs around a campfire, calling late into the night to hear my friend's voices, playing video games with my brother, that has been my way of connecting with God. Sharing love with the people around me and receiving it back is how God shows his love for me. Even in my lowest points, the thing that always brings me back has been the love and care of my family and friends. I fell apart, a few years back in sixth grade. My mental health tanked and I collapsed

in on myself in self loathing. Even when I was convinced I was unlovable, my friends stayed by me and helped me heal. Their love taught me to love myself again, and I still consider myself indebted to them. For the love, for the support, and for the compassion. I have been saved time and time again by love, love that should have been conditional but absolutely wasn't. God's light in my darkest moments was going out on my friend's trampoline and pretending to be a dinosaur for a few hours. When stress threatens to drive me insane, God's light is a picnic and a hike with the greatest person I know. The love of god is a huge part of my life, even if it doesn't look divine or magnificent.

I want to share that light and learn to understand it better. The mission trips have touched me so much over my years, and I have never forgotten the power they had. I don't think the little girl who painted my face grey green a few years ago probably didn't realize she had touched my life, but she very much had. Sharing love and light, be it through art, through service, or through kindness. I don't have any great plans before me in fulfilling my confirmation promises, and I'm looking for ways to keep spirituality in my life once I inevitably end up out of my parent's hands. I'm hoping to find ways to stay a member of the church and stay close with my friends. Above all else, I want to guide others. I am not a strong person, I am not organized, nor strong willed, nor especially charming, but I have my own kindness and compassion. This is why I picked to be a student leader. Because of the incredible impact my confirmation group has had on me. I want to pass on that joy and happiness onto the new children, in the exact same place I was only a few years ago. I want to guide them, and give them the same, powerful experience I had.

With that, my Bible verse is Jeremiah, 29:11. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." I chose this one because I keep forgetting about it, forgetting that God has a plan for me. Fear about my future and what I'm going to do are getting worse and worse as I get closer and closer to graduating and... I need to remember that I have a purpose. Even if I don't know what it is yet. I'm in good hands, and he won't lead me astray. I tried to reflect this in my expression of faith as well, combining the idea of the community and campfires as well as the path. I tried to show the idea of being guided and having a plan with the path in the darkness, with a somewhat hard to see dove as a guide. The path is coming from the smoke of the campfire, which has been something of a symbol for my own faith journey. Onamia and the

Wapo, the Retreats, even just the occasions where we'd make them at my grandparent's cabins. Around a fire, watching the sun set, being in the water, being outside with my loved ones has been my place closest to God. It's not as polished and pretty as I would like, but I'm fond of it nonetheless. Artwork has been one of God's greatest gifts to me, the ability to translate my own thoughts and feelings into things I can see before me.

I want to close with a prayer as well. "Dear God, thank you for the strength you have given me in order to speak, to help me to be confident in my words. Please bless me throughout this year, and help me to grow in my faith and in my love for your creation. Amen."