

May 11, 2008, Confirmation Sunday
1 Corinthians 12
First Parish UCC, Brunswick
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On the Way

In the last meeting of the mentors and confirmands in April I gave everyone a paper and asked them to begin to put some of their faith ideas in words. On the paper there were three sentences to complete.

*God is.....
I walk in the Way of Jesus by...
The Church is important to me because...*

In the last couple of weeks, I've had the opportunity to meet with each of the confirmands and to talk with them about what they wrote. I want to share some of their thoughts with you.

God is...

First, a story I heard last week at the Installation of the Unitarian Universalist pastor that was here in our sanctuary last week.

A kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. One little girl was working diligently. The teacher asked the girl to tell her about what she was drawing. The girl replied, "I'm drawing God." The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like." Without missing a beat, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

I would love to see her picture.

Our group had many different ways of imagining God. Here are some:

- *The creator of life*
- *A good person that forgives you no matter what*
- *A hero*
- *The guidance counselor*
- *Not a person like us because God is everywhere*
- *Closest to me when I am outside and with nature*
- *Ineffable. Mysterious in all ways*
- *Like a great fire or energy that exists in everything and connects everything*
- *Powerful, wise, loving*

I walk in the Way of Jesus by...

In the early church, before people even called themselves a church, when most followers were still part of the Jewish community, they often referred to their group as people on the Way. This expression reminds us that faith is not a set of intellectual beliefs to which we give assent, although it is important to explore those beliefs. Faith is a way of life. Our confirmands understand that. Here are some of the ways they completed the sentence:

- *Trying to comprehend God's plan for me; I am searching for "a calling."*
- *Accepting people for who they are*
- *Praying*
- *Going to church*
- *Not doing things that make me feel bad about myself or others*

- *Treating everyone with the same amount of respect towards every soul*
- *Doing everyday things that are in the category of “walking with God”*
- *Showing tolerance for all people*

The Church is important to me...

I'm sure we've all heard, and maybe even thought sometimes ourselves, that we're not sure about church because it's just a bunch of hypocrites. Well, there is always room for one more. None of us is perfect. None of us lives us to our own ideals and convictions, which is exactly part of why we need each other. We need each other's compassion when we've messed things up. And we need each other's encouragement to continue on the Way.

Here are some things the confirmands said:

- *It is a way to communicate with God by praying and singing.*
- *It is a place where you pray as a community.*
- *There is a powerful feeling whenever I walk through the door.*
- *People at church accept me for who I am.*
- *Helps me with everyday life.*
- *God created us in God's own image.*
- *It gives me opportunities to reach out to others in need.*
- *Important to me because it is a community*
- *A place I can go and not feel things I need to worry about, like school*
- *It connects people who are all different and brings them together.*
- *It teaches me things in a different perspective that I may not have thought about before.*

- *It is a place where I reflect and learn about spirituality.*
- *There are wonderful people.*

You are wonderful people. And these confirmands are wonderful people.

Now some words for the confirmands. Along the Way, here are some words of encouragement I share with you on this special day. I'll do it in the top ten style of things.

Top Ten Words of Encouragement

#10 Listen to your life. * *It is an amazing gift. There are, and will be, mundane and difficult times as well as exhilarating and joyous times. Listen carefully to it all.*

#9 Live the questions: *Some day you may live your way into answers. However if someone tells you they have all the answers, run the other way.*

#8 Laugh a lot. *Don't take yourself too seriously.*

#7 Ask for help when you need it. *Christ calls us into community to share joys and sorrows.*

#6 Watch for the face of Christ *in those you meet. As Jesus said, “Whenever you welcome the least of these, you welcome me.”*

5 Do what love calls for – *not the easy thing or the popular thing, but the right thing.*

#4 Remember your body *is a temple of God. Treat your body with the care and respect it deserves. God's spirit dwells in you.*

*#3 **Let your light so shine** that God's gifts in you may flourish. The church and the world need the gifts you have been given.*

*#2 **Trust in God's presence**, even when you don't feel it. It is not our faith in God that gets us through. It is God who gets us through.*

*#1 **Know that you are loved.**
Know that your parents and families
and those here love you,
and most especially,
that God loves you,
now and forever.*

*Thanks to Frederick Buechner for this phrase.

Steve Davis and I originally wrote the Ten Words of Encouragement together, which I have since adapted.