

# 2019 – 2020 Confirmation Faith Statements

## Statement 1:

I've always been intimidated by the idea of writing my faith statement. In all of the ones I've read, the author seemed so sure of what they believed, with factual statements of "I believe this," or "I believe that." For me, I have never been entirely sure of my faith. At the beginning of confirmation, I didn't know whether I was going to finish or not. Everything I concluded about my faith always had a giant question mark at the end. The only thing I was sure of was that I had never felt God's presence at church.

One of the places I have ever felt any divine presence has been in nature, standing in and observing the world around me. I have always loved hiking, biking, kayaking, and canoeing, anything that gives me an excuse to be present in the natural world and let me forget all of my worries. The fresh air fills me up with excitement and tranquility. Nature doesn't expect anything from you; it doesn't poke or pry; it lets you breathe, and gives you a break from everything else.

But nature is also a big reason I have had doubts about the presence of God. How would God let us destroy God's creation and our only home? In the old testament, it seemed as though God was sending down doves and floods and famines every other day, but now, it looks as though God has left us alone. Sometimes I consider all of the natural disasters, genocides, and even pandemics are signs for heaven to clean up our act, but it doesn't seem to be working. I wonder if anyone else feels as much guilt as I do when they realize how much harm we are doing to our earth. I hope they do.

Another space I know God is with us is wherever music is playing. Whether you're making it or listening to it, music has always been a sacred thing for me. Music brings people together, makes people feel happy, sad, hopeful, reflective, it's given me a way to express myself without having to say anything. Since I began playing the piano at five, I've loved music and have always enjoyed sharing that love with others.

Even though God is not accessible to me at church, I still love the energy, and the strong community Westminster has. I love being a part of the youth group and the choir. Without Westminster, I wouldn't have met some of my best friends. I love Westminster and can't wait to continue to be a part of the community.

## Faith Statement 2:

Throughout my life, my conception, space and awareness of faith has changed constantly. My faith isn't stagnant, and I feel that's the most important part of my discovery. What I think about and what I worry about, who and what I surround myself with, my physical and emotional being has changed in record speed in my first sixteen years. It should only make sense that my perception of the holy trinity changes with my growing knowledge and awareness. This constant adaptation was not shockingly based on the books, movies and trips I would envelop myself in. Art, butterflies, cathedrals, people and Ladybird are just pieces of what drove me in this statement of faith, and the list goes on and on.

My first concept of Jesus formed when I was probably three or four years old, at my church in San Antonio, where a large quilt with a deep blue sky set the scene for a giant, white robed man with long brown hair and a beard, with children at his feet, dressed in every color of the rainbow. As many first impressions, I've been able to build on this concept of Jesus, his place in the big three monotheistic religions and the history of it all. Learning the history of any situation gives me the strongest way to process information, and being able to connect the presence in others lives has helped show me that no matter his ancestry, he meant a lot to so many groups, and it's a revolutionary force of love and empathy that drove him. No matter what powers, no matter what skills, his voice and strength moved groups of people and helped form communities throughout people. In a universal and ever prevalent sense, this strength and compassion is what drives the justice in our church community and drives me to piece together those around me in a community of love.

For my third birthday, I insisted we celebrate on the theme of "pink butterflies" and have been an avid butterfly fan since day one. I've contemplated on what butterflies have to do with my faith for a long time, but in short, I think more than anything, my faith is a small glance at a collective faith. God, like butterflies, has different meaning to everyone, and at different times in your life can be pivotal or poignant. It's fleeting and difficult to conceptualize, it's untouchable nature is an energy that feels strong but still so fragile. While butterflies may be the creature that connects me most to my faith, it's built on the floods of monarchs that move together, and how important community and being with people, especially as an extrovert, is to me. I've found at the root of my strongest doubts and largest questions, that Westminster still fosters faith and continues to move as a group together, just like butterflies, despite the differences in beliefs and questions,

because above it all, love drives this church and justice is love in public. The way that a community aiming to feel connected to God can work against wrongs and build up each other with those who grow close to you is what I find in God, a power that motivates justice, but also motivates those to be better.

A recent read of mine was *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, and while reading it, I found the most accurate description of the holy spirit to me I could think of. Jim Casy, an ex-preacher, said that “Maybe it’s all men an’ all women we love; maybe that’s the Holy [Spirit]—the human [spirit]—the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of’. Now I sat there thinkin’ it, an’ all of a sudden—I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it”. When coming down to it, I feel that every single person is woven together in the Holy Spirit, and the heart and soul of it can be found in any beautiful thing. The holy spirit was arguably my strongest connection to any of the holy trinity since day one, although it’s the most abstract, there’s space for interpretation. While visiting Temple Israel with the confirmation class, I felt the holy spirit in a new way, we all were strangers in a new and unfamiliar place, and yet every person we encountered treated us with kindness, and we felt connected as a group, but as well as with a new group. Going to the basilica brought back memories of trekking through european cathedrals and places of worship, my absolute favorites being the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence and the Royal Alcazar of Seville. Although every one was different, there was the exact same feeling inside and around these buildings, a deafening energy that surrounded me and a thorough appreciation for these spaces, in both an artistic and theological sense. It’s the same feeling I get when I am in nature, when I can spend time with those I love and the exact feeling that flooded the Lizzo concert I went to last October. These moments are just snapshots of the holy spirits meaning to me, but it’s inclusion and kindness in a spirit form that finishes the Holy Trinity for me.

Westminster is an abundant place of energy and obvious care. When I joined Westminster, every person I talked with wanted to get to know my family and I, make sure we felt welcome and would come back next Sunday. The halls are filled with memories of times together, and despite being apart, it’s clear the same energy stays and connects all who have even entered the building or watched a service. Westminster feels as though it’s already shaped me, and by joining, I hope that growth both spiritual and personal will continue, and I can spend time with those who feel the same. In a time of constant solitude while in quarantine, I’ve been able to understand my

place in the church, a small piece of the collective community, that adds a new space to the congregation. In a church where our presence can't be felt in person, I have to rely on my small ways of getting involved and my acts of kindness that add to the congregation's well-being. Taking part in a congregation gives me opportunities to meet new people, discuss ideas and step outside of a comfort zone, and overall, it gives me the autonomy of my theology as well as a theological community to love and pray with.

### **Faith Statement 3**

**God** - God is, quite honestly, a hard concept to grasp. The truth is that I struggle to put words to what God is to me because I believe in science and in evolution, and so often had felt as though God and science could not go hand in hand. However, I now believe that one can believe in science and still connect to a higher power. One can still believe that we are here on Earth for a reason and that we serve a purpose here. One can still in times of loss or isolation somehow not feel alone, but instead in the presence of a higher power, whatever that may be. While this may not paint a clear image of God, it does reveal the truth that I continue to deepen and shift my understanding of what God means to me.

**Jesus** - I have come to view Jesus as a role model more than anything else. He is human, just like any of us, but he followed the word of God. He was made up of all the same stuff as we are, but he found ways to pursue justice and love his neighbor. His actions in the bible model to us all the ways one can put faith into action. He didn't always do what was thought to be "right" in the times he lived, but always found ways to look out for the overlooked, correct the unjust, and speak about what mattered to him. Through this, I don't see a flawless or almighty being, but instead a man we should all strive to be like.

**Holy Spirit** - The Holy Spirit is the element of the trinity I have felt for the longest time. I don't think of the Holy Spirit as something that is in all of us, all the time, but instead as something that visits us in our moments of joy and human connection. As I walk through church and wave at people I know, as I hug an old friend, or as a group erupts into laughter, there is a sense of a spirit of joy that has momentarily gone through all of us. That joy comes and goes and brings people together. I can't help but feel like there is something greater behind that - a spirit that goes through us all in those significant and meaningful moments.

**Community** - Growing up, Sunday school and Sunday service was something I attended every week. However, it wasn't until the past few years when I finally began to feel a stronger connection to the community at Westminster. Connecting with kids in day camp, meeting adults in the church I know I can look up to and reach out to, and meeting friends in the youth group I know will be some of my most cherished friendships, the church has become another family to me. In recent years, thanks to the people at Westminster, church has become a priority opposed to an obligation in my mind. The work Westminster does for social justice has also been a key element that has drawn me to the church. Finding ways to connect the community outside the church with that inside, and using our resources as a church to further educate and provide for our community are two things I especially appreciate about our church. As I get older and move away, I will look for the strong sense of community and attention to social justice in other places as they are some of the most significant aspects drawing me to the church and bringing me closer to my faith.

**Journey** - I have really struggled in the past to put words to my beliefs and take charge of my faith journey due to the stereotypes often associated with saying I am Christian. I must admit, I, myself, am guilty of subconsciously thinking these stereotypes at times. When I tell friends I am going to church, the looks on their faces change and I can see the judgement they have. They sometimes go as far as to openly express how problematic they think Christianity can be. I used to really take this to heart and it distanced me from my faith. However, I soon came to

realize that they never were given the opportunity to experience the positive nature and connectedness that comes with church. Their judgement was simply based on the things they see on the news and read in books or online. As I became more involved in church, I came to realize how far from these things Westminster really is. Now, when people make off-hand comments to me about attending church I simply say "that has never been my experience." It is important to take into consideration the problematic behavior some of those associated with the church have had, but I have come to realize over time that church is an entirely different experience to me than many on the outside may think. I don't go to church to justify telling certain people they are "lesser than." I don't go to church to tell people that I am inherently "better" by believing in one religion over another or believing in religion at all. I go to church to take part in an important community to me. I go to church to make some of my best friends. I go to church to work for justice and love my neighbors and church is now a very important place to me. I know my faith journey will be hard and I know it is something I will continue to wrestle with, but Westminster will always be an important place to me.

#### **Faith Statement 4:**

God:

I believe in God as someone who feels deep, varied emotions, same as us, and this is what makes me feel a connection with God. God is not love; God feels love. God is not joy; God feels joy. God is not sorrow; God feels sorrow. These emotions are how I know that I can depend on God, as they are what make me sure that I can connect and feel safe with God as a human being. I believe in order to be wise and to be a guide to many people, there must have been a time when one was not wise. There must have been an experience or experiences that made one wise. I know I can trust God because I trust in the process of learning from your emotions and experiences, which is exactly what I do on a daily basis. I believe God has also learned and evolved, and I believe that God is still learning and evolving. God will never be finished with that process, just as I never will be in my lifetime. This is how I know God is someone I can depend on and someone I can trust. Change is a natural part of humanity, and I believe that God has gone through change as well, making him someone I can connect with whenever and wherever I need.

Jesus:

I believe Jesus to be a human reflection of God's love and light. Jesus displays God's qualities in a human way. Jesus had his own life and his own experiences, and he still changed the lives of many people around him, and even the world. His life is an example of the momentous impact any single life can have. His life shows me one lifetime is not too short to help heal this world, and that sustains my hope that this world will still change and evolve for the better. He helps me sustain hope in myself that I can be a part of that change, and the people around me can be a part of that change likewise. I still always like to remember that Jesus had his own personal life as well. He had his own experiences, relationships, and emotions. He also encountered those things that go hand in hand with humanity, and I think a lot of times one doesn't hear about that as much. Jesus was God's son and he was Christ, but he also was human. I'm not sure he was completely aware of the world-changing impact his life was going to have. He was just living his life the way God guided him to, and the way he felt drawn to. This teaches

and reminds me to have faith in God the way Jesus did: To guide his life in a steady direction of change, without worrying too much about where he was going.

Holy Spirit:

I believe that the Holy Spirit is what connects everything in this world to each other. It is an energy that binds and creates strong and lasting connections between humans, animals, objects, and more. The Holy Spirit is God's presence, wrapping and connecting the entire world in an energy that one can feel wherever one goes. The Holy Spirit is not God, rather it is God's energy, love, and strength. I believe that it grows stronger during times of struggle and has the ability to unite people as long as they can feel it and look for it. It's the reason I feel certain unexplainable connections to people, things, experiences, and places. The Holy Spirit has the ability to guide me to the things I love, and bring me back from the things that have harmed me. It will guide me back to God when I am in need, and it will be there immediately when I search for it. Its energy is God's will, and the Holy Spirit is God's way.

Me and the Church:

The Church has turned into a place with some of my closest friends and best experiences. Through confirmation, I've gradually grown to see the Church as a loving community to which I can come to any time. It's a place outside of my school life and sports life, with its own people and memories. For me, the Church is a place I feel comfortable relaxing in, laughing in, grieving in, hurting in, and talking in. It is also a place I feel a deep connection with God, and that bond is strengthened with the openness of the people there. The people of the church have become a great importance in my life, as even though I don't know them all personally, I have grown to feel the same bond with each and every one of them because we both share the same community. The building itself, Westminster, is a place I grew up in since kindergarten, and a special kind of connection comes from that. The building is the reason this community of people ever had a place to commune together, and its feeling of permanence is something I cherish. Even though things change within, the building itself stays the same, and to me that is an

example of the permanence of the community inside. Westminster is a community that will always be in my mind, body, and spirit, and it will always be somewhere I feel I can come back to anytime.

### Faith Statement 5:

**God** : I believe in God as the heavenly father, the almighty. I believe that God watches over me, my family, and my friends and keeps them safe and away from harm. I believe that God does everything for a reason. When it may seem like things go south, there is always a lesson or a purpose for what has happened. I often pray to God at night or when I'm going through a tough situation. I feel most connected to God when I'm in nature, because I'm so in awe of his creation. I can escape from my anxiety and my stress when I'm outside. The chirping of the birds and the whistling of the wind brings me a sense of calm and makes me feel warm. Currently, with the world experiencing so much conflict, I feel more connected to God because during this year I have more time to spend with my family and friends. I do have faith in God that he will guide things in a different direction away from the pandemic and racial injustices. I believe God loves every human on this planet no matter what they have done. God will forgive you if you are willing to forgive yourself.

**Jesus** : I believe that Jesus, the son of God, died on the cross to save humanity from their sins, was resurrected and rose to heaven. I understand that Jesus was not a white male. Instead, wherever he went he embodied the culture and people of that region. I learned that Jesus helped the poor and healed the sick. Jesus was put on Earth to brighten it, guide people to lead a good life and to gain their spot in heaven. Heaven is not all about making life dedicated to good works and the ten commandments but also to have a faith in God and Jesus Christ. Jesus' crucifixion was not fair because the human race could not accept Jesus for who he was, nor could believe that he actually had the power to change the world.

**Holy Spirit** : I have always experienced the holy spirit as an "essence" that brings us all together. A little while ago my Great Grandma passed away. During the funeral, I felt this incredibly strong pull that brought everyone together in the room. Ever since that day I have felt a lot more connected to God and to my family. This never really occurred to me as The Holy Spirit until a couple of weeks ago when I was talking about it in a small group. Since then, I realized that this "essence" is at work every day through our emotions. When we feel compassion for a person that has been going through a rough time, it would be an example of how The Holy Spirit works.

**Church** : The definition of the word church has changed for me over the past couple of years. When I was younger, church felt like a place we had to go to every week to worship God. As I have gotten older and have been involved in more activities, I have realized that church is not just a single space or a building with a cross on it. What makes up a church is the community that worships together. A church could be

anywhere as long as you have people that gather around you that are loving, kind and willing to grow spiritually together.

**My Faith Journey** : When I first went to church as a young boy, I didn't really understand the purpose of church or how it would help me in the future. I felt like I had to go because my parents went. As I have grown older, my thoughts about church and worship have changed significantly. I also didn't really feel connected to God at all during my younger years. I never prayed much or thought about how my actions could affect others. Now, I feel closer to God, and I feel like he is a major part of my life. I find myself praying to God for people across the world that are not as fortunate as me. Confirmation has been such an amazing experience for me and has taught me the importance of having strong connections with people. The church has taught me to be a more thoughtful and caring person and to always think about how my actions could affect others.

### Faith Statement 6:

When I first tried to write this I didn't have the slightest clue what to make it about. But I guess when it boils down to it, to me God loves above all else. He loves us when we screw up. He loves us when we do good. His love cannot be broken, taken away, or faked. Love isn't necessarily hugs and kisses all the time though. Sometimes love is having a hard conversation with a friend. Sometimes it's taking a stand. Often it's sacrifice. Love is caring for others even when it means personal loss. Love is selflessness. We are His hands on this earth and as such we must extend that love to everyone the way God intended.

### **Faith Statement 7:**

To me, my spirituality has always been a large part of my life, but for a while it felt as though I was just going through the motions of being a Christian; going to church on Sundays, repeating the same prayer every night, and saying my highs and lows during youth group. This hesitation to fully let go and trust in God seemed to stem from the feeling of uncertainty that is rooted deep

within these times. I felt myself wondering how this loving God that I have always been told about would leave His creation to be left all alone, poisoned by the coronavirus pandemic, and an even greater pandemic of hatred, racism, xenophobia, and war. But I have come to realize that these questions cannot be answered. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, I try to search for an all telling apple, and epiphany of answers and understanding. But part of this journey that I am just beginning is understanding that there are unknowns that I can't understand, and that even so, I will continue to place my trust in God, knowing that the Holy Trinity loves each and every member of this creation.

The Father is often acknowledged as the 'big man in the sky' who watches over all of us from the clouds. To me, the Father is the creator of our world, and created each and every one of us in his own image. I can sense the Creator when I look around at his beautiful creation, and view all of the wildlife and animals, along with all of the gorgeous and matriculate features they have. The Father created the basis and backbone of our lives and our world, but gave us the ability to evolve and mature to become our own selves. The phrase 'God's Plan' often comes to my mind in discussions about the Father and his role in our lives. Although I struggle with the idea of my whole life already being planned and set in stone before I have lived it, and that all the choices I make have already been made for me, I do believe that God has a path for each of us that will guide us throughout our lives.

Jesus Christ, to me, is the pinnacle of what it means to be a Christian. I have always believed that if you act like and embody Jesus, you're doing it right. The main message of Jesus that resonates with me is simply the amount of love he had for everyone around him. To me, Christianity in its core is about love and acceptance of all. As Jesus stated in John 15;12, "this is my commandment to you, love each other just as I have loved you." This is the golden rule

that I have grown up always striving to apply to my life and my spirituality. Jesus, both fully God and fully human, sets the standard not only for Christians, but for all of humanity as a whole. His life on earth proves that our god in Christianity is caring, loving, and nurturing, enough that Jesus would sacrifice his own life to show us how much we matter, and that we should be just as selfless for one another. An important fact to point out while talking about Jesus, is that not only can we use him as a model for how to behave as humans, but that we can also see ourselves in him. Jesus is often portrayed as this white, bearded, angelic man that did no wrong, only associated himself with 'good Christians' and only loved his followers. I have found it incredibly interesting to explore Jesus' human identity, and found that I can relate to him much more than I had realized before. It is relatively well known and concluded that Jesus was a Middle Eastern man, a member of multiple minority groups, who befriended prostitutes and underprivileged individuals, and was publicly crucified for protesting the government of the time. I believe Jesus to have been both fully human and fully God, he's the perfect example of what it means to be Christian, proves that God's way is the way of love and acceptance, and sacrificed himself to show his abundant love and forgiveness for all of us.

The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity that I relate to the most and that I feel the strongest connection to. This is largely because, in this era, our experiences with God are often subdued and seem rare. I can see the invisible Holy Spirit in a beautiful sunset or the breeze flowing through a garden, rather than experiencing God through prophets, miracles, or through Jesus Christ himself. The Holy Spirit, to me, feels like the most present part of the Trinity, and serves as a constant. I can always rely on God to be present through the Holy Spirit, surrounding me and within me, within every living being to the air that we all breathe. I also view the Holy Spirit as the force that drives us humans to create and invent new things, bringing us creativity and knowledge to act on our own accord, yet still being influenced by God. I sense the Holy Spirit moving through and inspiring humans in art, literature, and even technology, granting us the ability to use our god-given talents and abilities to form and model our own creations and identities. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that God created a path for each and everyone of us, and the Holy Spirit guides us along it; always present and always caring.

I feel that through the church, and specifically Westminster, I am able to connect deeper to God

and the larger Christian community. Through small moments with other members of Westminster, as well as the activities and mission work that Westminster has made possible to me, I feel a much stronger connection to God and all of God's creation. I believe that my connection to the church allows me to express myself and live mindfully of God's scripture and message, but also holds me accountable. This connection reminds me that choices I make affect a larger community than just myself, and that I must work to try to make sure that all I do is reflects God's scripture, inspired by the way Jesus lived, guided by the Holy Spirit, and representative of the church. I am excited to continue this journey in faith alongside all of my fellow classmates and the rest of the Westminster community.