



The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Confirmation 2013

A Collection of Faith Statements

and relevance

Greetings!

As you might already be aware, this is the year that your child may choose to be confirmed. Exciting times, indeed! I must say that I place great emphasis on the phrase, *your child may choose*; for confirmation is not for everybody, or at least, it may not be for everybody at this particular point in their lives. In the past, several of our youth have gone through the class only in the end to elect not to be confirmed. I respect that choice. Naturally, it is my hope that every child will seek to enter this affirming and life-giving church and religion, but I shall make no presumptions and will certainly not be a source of coercion. Hopefully, we will all be able to say the same.

To spare both time and paper, I only wish to further alert you about the Parents Expectations Meeting on September 30th which will be held after church at 11:15am in my office. Here we will discuss what will be taught and expected of both you and your children in terms of attendance and requirements. I would call this meeting mandatory, but I understand the dynamic and fluctuating nature of your calendars. Having said that, I strongly advise all parents to be present.

The last time I taught confirmation (now two years ago) I quite honestly had the best year of my life. Now, that may have had something to do with Anya coming into my existence, but I digress. But quite seriously, I think I can say with confidence that the kids learned a great deal and even had fun in the process. A great shock, I have been told. In the end, each youth wrote at least three pages for their Faith Statement, and several even wrote north of seven! Clearly, something rather interesting and perhaps somewhat engaging was happening throughout the year.

In faith, I know the same will be true for your children -- the 2013 Confirmation Class. Thank you, and truly, I can't wait to get started.

Most sincerely,

Brian Russo ---- brusso@chestnuthillpres.org



2013 Confirmation Curriculum

- Week One: What is Confirmation and Why Presbyterian?
- Week Two: God's Origin and Arguments For/Against Existence
- Week Three: God's Nature and the Problem of Evil
- Week Four: Intro to Scripture and Parallel Constructions
- Week Five: Mythological Narratives and Important Themes
- Week Six: OT History, Literature, and Ethics
- Week Seven: NT History, Literature, and Ethics
- Week Eight: The Biblical Jesus
- Week Nine: The Historical Jesus
- Week Ten: Revelation and History of the Church
- Week Eleven: Important Creeds, Doctrines and Heresies
- Week Twelve: Science and Religion; and Our Modern Call to Christian Living
- Week Thirteen: Confirmation Review and Faith Statement Workshop

My Faith Statement

When I first walked into confirmation class on January 13th, I was agnostic. I had no certain idea about what I did or did not believe in, and I knew very little about Christianity. I was so confused with where I stood that before the first class I could not even tell you who God was, or what I believed he had the power to do. At around the age of ten years old, I remember coming to Sunday services and always having many questions about what we learned. Due to the fact that my family had trouble fitting church into our Sunday morning schedules, this made me miss out on crucial education that caused me to feel uncomfortable because I did not know as much as the other children. I also missed out on becoming closer and more united with the church community, and this is one of the main reasons behind why I have chosen to get confirmed this year. At this point in the year I still am unsure about God, and several other areas of Christianity, but I do believe that there is some force above us that causes good things to happen, and I do believe in the teachings of Jesus. Although I am not a fundamentalist, and believe every word strictly from the Bible, I do follow the lessons and morals of being a good Christian.

The main reason why being a Presbyterian is so important to me is because we are allowed, and in some cases recommended, to have doubts and ask questions. This not only helps us discover our faith, but it also allows us to explore all angles of this religion and not be forced to believe and agree with things that we do not think are true. One extremely important area of Christianity that I learned in class, and one that I believe and follow the most out of all, is the care and forgiveness of Jesus. I used to not spend large amounts of time thinking about the people living in this world suffering each day from poverty, homelessness, and starvation, but because I have learned more about being a good Christian it has made me realize how important it is to help others. I have always known that I needed to do this before, but the level of importance of helping others has extremely increased because of the time that I have spent learning in church and in confirmation class.

This year, I have helped out with the gun violence program at church, worked at the spaghetti dinner, and I am also going to Belize this summer for the mission trip. These events and foundations have opened my eyes wider to the world around me and I am looking forward to more opportunities that present themselves to me as I get older. I also have gained more respect for people because I know and understand that everyone is struggling in their own ways, and it is our job, just like how Jesus taught us, to help those who need us most.

One thing that stuck out to me when learning about Jesus was that a good Christian helps others without needing recognition. This year for the mission trip I am going to Belize to help and provide for the poor because I want to do this for them more than I want to for myself. I would rather make them smile, and help to make their lives easier, than to get rewarded for going. That is not the point of a mission trip. The point is to do something that Jesus would want us to do, and that is by helping the less fortunate, just like he did with women, the poor, and the outcasts of society as he began to shape Christianity hundreds of years ago.

One story from the bible that expresses this idea is the "Good Samaritan." I like this story and also find it interesting because it highlights the exact beliefs of Jesus. As both the priest and the Levite, who are believed to help others and be empathetic, passed the wounded man, this symbolizes how people back then would treat those who they saw suffering. The Samaritan, who took pity on the man and went to help him, is symbolic of the teachings of Jesus, and the ways that he would encourage others to help people that are suffering. The Samaritan was not rewarded for helping the man, nor did he expect to be, because to truly help and look out for others you must be able to do it while the entire time staying humble. I look up to Jesus, and I especially admire his strength and courage to go against what has been accepted in society for decades, and to be able to throw that all away and stand up and say that he did not think it was right. Jesus changed the views of people across the world, and he helped us realize how precious and important it is to pay attention to the people that are suffering. He is the reason why I can proudly say that I am a Christian, and more importantly a Presbyterian, because although I do not believe everything from the Bible, I do believe in the teachings and ministry of Jesus.

One story that we discussed this year that made me question what this faith really meant to me was the Story of Job. We talked about this story after the third confirmation class, which was the discussion about the Problem of Evil and how God is believed to have four main qualities: all-powerful, all-knowing, all there, and all good. The reason that this story makes me ask questions and have doubts is because if God truly is each of those four qualities, then bad things would never happen to good people at all. There has to be some type of force or idea that is controlling these things to happen, and if it is not the person's fault then it must be somehow related back to God. There are instances in everyone's life, whether they happen to ourselves or to someone else, that make us all ask, "Why?". How is it possible that someone who has done nothing wrong in the world can be hurt and damaged? How is it right that bad things happen to good people? Who controls these things to happen to them? These are questions that I asked myself when first learning about the Book of Job, and I still continue to have questions on why these types of situations continue to occur in society.

A final area of Christianity that I still have several questions about is the topic of heaven and hell. At my age, the idea of death and possibly going to heaven or hell is a thought that I could never begin to comprehend. I am hopeful that after this life we will go on to live in a better place, but after thinking deeply about this topic I am not so sure about that anymore. My thoughts on heaven and hell now are that these places are merely just a description or motivation of your current life. If you are a constantly mad and upset person with an unhappy life then your life will become hell. If you are happy and surround yourself with good people then your life will become heaven. This relates to the saying, "Heaven is a place on Earth", because if you live a happy life then that is all you need to "reach" your heaven. This is a choice that you must make, not a place that you need to find or discover. Life has so much to offer to everyone, and if you can find a way to stay happy with the people around you and yourself then that is all you need to live in a life like heaven. There is no life better than a life in which you are happy.

Deciding to get confirmed this year was a big decision for me, as well as my family, and at this point in my life I can happily say that it was one of the best decisions that I have ever made. I may not be the most educated on the topic of Christianity, but coming to these classes and finally being able to understand and appreciate what being a good Christian is has truly made up for all of the things that I missed out on when I was younger. I will continue to learn and come to Sunday church services now because I have the confidence and interest in becoming more involved with the community, and I may even begin to read more of the Bible someday.

After I have been given a small look at the components that are included in this religion, I can finally, and confidently, say that I am happy to be a Presbyterian. I now come to services with much more knowledge and experience than I could have ever imagined having before, and I continue to look forward to my future with this church. I also know that since I am only fourteen years old that my faith will continue to change and shape itself as I get older, and I am willing to be open and aware to these changes. Though I still have agnostic tendencies and am unsure about certain elements of this faith, I do know that I am happy to be a Presbyterian where I can have these doubts, yet also pursue my beliefs in Jesus and his teachings. This is only the beginning to a long and exciting journey, and I cannot wait to see how much I grow within the remainder of this year. I have met many new friends, experienced new places, and learned more about myself, but most of all, I am looking forward to entering a community that respects me and allows me to have my own doubts.

I don't really know where to start. I have so many thoughts and questions about my faith and Christianity, that if I wrote them all, it would probably be longer than the Bible itself. My name is Frances Madeira. I have been at the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill since before I can remember. When I was younger, like most other children, I based my beliefs off of my parents. I went along with them to church to see my friends and do arts and crafts in church school. Although up until this year, I had not been baptized or thoroughly thought about my religion. There was no strict reasoning behind my adult baptism, except that my parents had just decided to wait. But, it actually was a beneficial experience for me. Being baptized in the middle of the confirmation process made me stop and think about what I was actually agreeing to in both my Baptism and my Confirmation.

Even before the start of our first confirmation class, many of my Catholic friends had already been confirmed. They had gone through classes, and listened to lectures. At first I had just thought I would go through confirmation because everyone else was doing it. My parents encouraged going to church, and it was the next step after years of going to church school each Sunday. I thought that confirmation class would be similar to what my Catholic friends had done. I was wrong. Our confirmation class was more of a basis of ideas given to you, and everyone in the class was able to ask questions, agree or disagree, and most importantly, have their own opinions. This, to me, is sort of a representation of the Presbyterian religion, our church in particular. PCCH embraces everyone, and accepts questions of all kind. I do not think I have listened to a sermon in our church that has *not* asked questions. I want to be confirmed into a church that I am comfortable in, and that is how PCCH makes me feel. Being a Presbyterian, you know you are not alone in asking questions. In church, these questions are welcomed and answered as best they can, to help in strengthening your relationship with God.

To put all of God's power into words, seems almost impossible. To me, it seems like God can be combined with the Big Bang, or nature and the science of it. There is no love in science, so where does the feeling come from, the love, and the hate? I want to believe there is a God, that some bigger force out there watches over us. People ask, *Why do we picture God as a "He" or as a human, if He existed thousands of years ago and is bigger than all of us?* And I wonder that myself too, but maybe it is not just because of our physical features, but humanity itself. I do not believe science gave us the good and evil. Maybe we got our human instinct and feelings from God which is why many people picture him similarly to a human. If this is the case, then I do not believe that God is benevolent. He works in ways that we cannot understand, and those ways may not always be good. God passing on our human instinct to us means that He would have given us the idea of hate as well. I do not think it is God's intention to have hate or evil, but without it, there would be no good. In my opinion, you cannot label God with the words benevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient because they are all connected.

The Question of Theodicy has no clear answer because there is no definite line of what He can and cannot do. 'God works in mysterious ways' is certainly an accurate statement. I believe that God, if He truly exists, is something much bigger than humans can comprehend. Even the idea of the death, and the afterlife is somewhat hard to comprehend. If we knew exactly what God was, it would take away from the faith we have. God wants us to have faith in Him even if we do not fully understand who or what He is. The idea that we have little proof that He exists, yet still have so much love for Him shows how true we are to Him. If everyone knew, and we could prove 100 percent that God exists, then where would our faith, our trust and confidence in Him be? Knowing that He is real would just be reassurance. But, there are always doubts in my mind.

How do I know that the idea of God wasn't just created to explain the ideas which science hasn't found an answer to yet? People used to believe that thunder and lightning meant that humans had sinned and a god was angry at them. Or some cultures believed that if a volcano erupted, it meant that the fire god was lonely and they would sacrifice a virgin girl into the volcano to be his wife to stop the eruption. What if our ideas of God today are just more modified versions of stories like these because we do not understand and need an explanation? Also, do people believe in God because they *want* something to believe in and be comforted by? Do they have faith because the idea of just living and dying and not having an afterlife is frightening? Even after all of these doubts, I still have a feeling that God is out there.

We learn of God's ways through stories in the Bible. Whether or not these stories are true, the majority teach good morals. In confirmation class, we learned how history in the past was thought of differently than history is thought of today. Since the main goal of history in the past was to teach people reading the stories a message, it makes me think whether or not those writing the Bible and recording stories wrote them in a different way, or exaggerated them. The stories in the Bible have many miracles and extraordinary occurrences in them, which makes me question their factuality. Although the stories are taken from a span of many years, they still seem to have quite a few bizarre signs from God. I do not know if people keep these sort of signs to themselves now, but it seems like there have been less major miracles or signs of God in the past couple hundreds of years. Why would God appear so much back then, and not as much now? It is probable that the stories in the Bible are historically less extreme, but they are made to be overstated so the moral stands out. For example, the story of Noah's Ark is that the whole world was flooded to get rid of all life on earth that did not believe in God. Evidence has been found that there was a flood around that time, but it most likely was not the whole earth and did not kill off every living creature except those on Noah's ark. The moral of Noah's ark was to believe in God, and have trust in him. Having the story be more powerful, made the moral more important. I do believe biblical stories like these, just not to their full extent.

Sometimes the Bible contradicts itself. This idea is hard for some fundamentalists to grasp considering they believe most everything about God and the Bible and have very little doubts. The Bible offers many wonderful stories and morals to focus on, but once again some are exaggerated. If you were to live by everything the Bible says, it would be extremely difficult. One of these reasons being that many of the books were written by different people. My belief is that the Bible focuses on different views of similar stories. Sometimes a story is told more than once, but altered or the perspective changes. They try to explain things like in the book of Job which explained that bad things happen to people who have done something wrong. This is not the case however because many good people have bad things happen to them.

In the New Testament, Jesus starts a revolution. I believe Jesus is the son of God in some sense. I do not know how Jesus could physically be the son of God, since God is not really physical that we know of. But through the spirit, Jesus is a part of God. This sounds like a powerful statement, but then again I believe everyone's spirit has part of God in it. If we do not completely understand the way God works, then it is unfair to state how Jesus is 100 percent God's son. I have another theory about Jesus and the Trinity which goes back to the idea that many of the stories in the Bible are morals or ways of thinking. If the Biblical stories are ways of thinking, and not just history, then why can't the Trinity be a way of thinking as well? The Trinity could be a metaphor for the idea that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have the same morals and represent the same idea of faith. How can we know they are one instead of being three separate beings that work similarly. The same idea works for the resurrection. Jesus could have in fact sacrificed himself for our sins and risen again, or metaphorically risen again. Jesus took on everyone else's sins, but was not appreciated until much later after he had died. After his death, people might have realized how significant his ideas were and then began to worship him. You could call people discovering his ways his "resurrection" from the dead. This was when Jesus began to be appreciated after all he had gone through for the people. I believe that Jesus existed, and that his teachings started the ways of Christianity.

My faith is something that will grow with me. I know my beliefs will change, and I will have more questions, some of which cannot be answered. This confirmation class has been an insightful experience in the journey of my own faith. It has opened me up to new ideas which I never would have thought of before. It made me realize how complex the whole idea of Christianity is. No one's faith is the same, but after the thirteen or so classes we had discussing these different ideas about Christianity and Presbyterianism, I know I want to be a part of this church. I am open to the new ideas it has, and I know going to church at PCCH will help me understand more. I want to go to church to further my faith, and to learn more about the morals within the Bible and how I can apply them to myself. Even after all of the doubts, I still believe in God. I can't explain my beliefs fully, even to myself, but I'm trying. I will still try to understand, even though I know it will be a lifelong process.

do not forget to
and only if things for
celebrate
service to
re-learn

1. ...
2. ...
3. ...
4. ...

Francis' Promise

Francis' Promise of the Gospel:

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What's the
point of
this?

→ to promise + carbon
- Tommy do real passage from John → down
- Term to do greeting + announcements?
do Affirmation of Faith

Carolyn and Paige's prayer:

Carolyn: Lord God, thank you for this gift of life. Thank you for diversity of our existence, for the wide spectrum of your kingdom in all its variations. We pray to make the most of this gift, to make the most of our lives, though accepting our limitations and realizing our potentials. Allow us to accept the things we cannot change and to be more determined in the things we can. In all that we do, guide each of us to be more faithful in our callings, and to encounter the Anointed One wherever we may. And may that Christ reveal himself to all who are in need. To all those who are suffering and alone. To all those who haven't found the luxuries of freedom that we find nearly every day. Be with them all - be with all who need you most.

2/15

Context for ...
Prayer for Illumination: Hannah C
First Lesson: Tommy
Psalm: Taylor B

For Next Year:

Paige: Lord, this morning, we come to you in humility and regret. For we are sorry for taking for granted this gift of life. And for not always making the most of our moments, nor trying to better the moments of our neighbors. We pray for your forgiveness and for the want and ability to always do better. Lord, in this moment then, we pray for ourselves, and for all of those who have fallen short of their potentials. Give us all the strength to be better disciples of life, and to be more earnest and genuine in our paths toward you. Help us to embody the life that was the Savior's. But if that ambition escapes us, then at least allow us live into his prayer, which he taught us to pray...
Saying together:

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven, give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not in temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen

For the past few weeks my time has been spent compiling my honest and true reflections about Christianity, these are my findings. I guess the one part I should get across now is that I do not believe in God, or at least in the way that you do. I do not- cannot believe in the trinity, nor resurrection, healings, and miracles. Now, probably you have written me off as an atheist, and are expecting a long speech about the faults of the bible; but that is where I must correct you, as I do not define myself in any way shape or form over my interpretation of religion. If your definition of a Christian is one who believes in God, the Son, the Holy Father, then I am not a Christian. If your definition of a Christian were one who attempts to follow Jesus' teachings, then I would be a Christian. But that is up to you, and I can tell you right now, your definition is different than the man's next you, the woman's down the street, and the person halfway across the globe.

This brings me to my first topic, God the creator, the all-knowing, being, powerful, and good. Surprisingly enough, all of these strike me true, all except good. Let me explain, most likely to you, God is man, maybe he's white, black, or perhaps even a woman, but he is a living, breathing, being. This strikes me as odd, we were made in the image of God, or that's supposedly how it goes. But then, what are all the other life forms that came before us made after? What of the horses, snakes, lions, plankton, bacteria, what of the hulking chunks of rock that smashed together to form our planet and so many others? Why us? What makes us so special? ... and to answer that, we just aren't. You call the origin of all things God, and you give it the form of man to ease your struggles of understanding it, and you may say that he formed the earth and all the stars above within seven days. But I cannot, God to me, in a way, is the supposed Higgs Boson, the debated particle in which all matter originated from. It is, in truth, all being, as all matter, life, and essence, originated from it. Is it not all knowing? Maybe not in the personified way we tend to give to God, but most certainly in the fact that all topics in which we, the human race, strive to gain knowledge in, originated from this particle. And so in a sense, Higgs Boson is a grand engineer of epic proportions. All powerful, that's pretty easy to understand, this itty bitty particle one day imploded, causing the beginning of all things, and is the ability to create not the most powerful of them all? But lastly, all good, benevolent, why? This is the one statement that perplexes me time and time again. Why would it care? A quote from David Garrold summarizes this concept pretty well: *"The secret of the universe is this: The universe doesn't care. That part of the job is yours."*

So I guess that is one way in which I differ, I cannot rely on the thing in which I place the title of creator to be a source of benevolent inspiration for us. I cannot rely on him to forgive, to redeem, or to cherish. Instead, I look to my friends, my family, my neighbors, my pets, the strangers, the folks with whom I have met only once before. You may think that this is the saddest part for me, that of believing that there is not some all-powerful divine looking out for me, but in truth, this is the greatest part. It sets me free, free of debt, free of inaction. It frees me to help others, to be good to my neighbor, to help anyone who needs it. Because with this discerning enlightenment comes the ability to understand. To understand that unless you take it up with your own two hands, nothing will ever get done. And maybe that's different for you, but to me, no amount of praying will solve my problems, and wishing them away will only sweep them under the rug. From a historical context, the reasoning behind why God was created makes all too much more sense than why God is, and creates. Why is it that almost every single god, ever, in the history of man, always reflects the culture of the people worshipping it? Why is it that God will be black when found in Africa, and white, when found in Europe? Why do the various gods who assert dominance over the world and all its beings never seem to have an actual influence outside the cultural boundaries of the nation that celebrates them? It just doesn't add up, or at least to me. It makes more sense, from my perspective, that mankind has always searched for answers. And when answers could not be found, answers were made. God is the reason that lightning strikes, why floods occur, why people die, and plague thrive. All of these were the unexplainable to the post-modern man, and so, in order to shut out the fear, to retain hope, a beacon was made, an answer for the unexplainable. God. But, is that a bad thing? Which brings me to my next topic-

The bible, a collection of stories, or history, depending on the reader. Again, the reasoning as to why the bible exists seems to make much more sense than the reasoning behind what it explains. And because of this, I cannot accept its' word for truth. When you look at the bible under the lens of modern thinking, reading only what is written on the page, you will find a story with magic and unexplainable feats----Of adventure and lessons learned, ending in betrayal. But in the end it will be just that, a story. You will close it and put it back

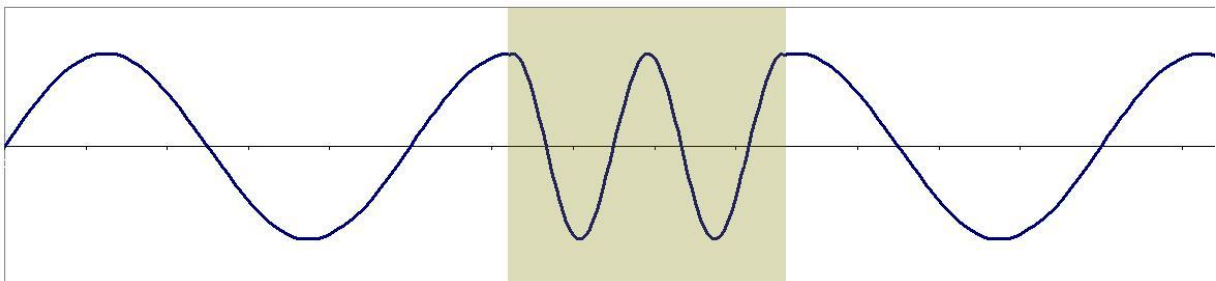
on your shelf, and there it will gather dust. This is not how it is meant to be read. Like any great literary novel, the bible should be interpreted far deeper than what is written on the page. Under the lens of a scholar, from ages long ago, the bible is the standard of a perfect citizen. Carefully layered in each story is a lesson on how to be the most morally straight person you can be, the lessons are hidden among great feats and abilities as to keep the readers attention. The bible is a book that reflects the thoughts of its' time period. But that's just it, of that time period. No more is it acceptable to own slaves, or to stone felons. I cannot rely on this thousand-year-old tomb to be my eyes of judgment. If I did this, I would be blind. Society has changed, the rules are different, and our mindsets have evolved. The ways in which we communicate and spread ideas have advanced exponentially from the days of writing books and dispersing them amongst the populace. And although the method, and some of the tenets of the bible have become outdated, there is one man with whom I can still agree with, one man whose teachings still hold true.

Jesus, the good Samaritan. The man, who, when faced with a social norm that made no apparent sense, questioned it. Jesus was a revolutionary, a great thinker, comparable to MLK, Abraham Lincoln, Roosevelt, Einstein, all of them. But among them, Jesus is probably the greatest, at least to me. I recognize Jesus the carpenter as a historical figure; he spent his time roaming the Middle East, taking the morals of the Bible, modernizing them, and spreading them. And for this I hold him in awe. Jesus is a revolutionary thinker, he changed the status quo so much that even today resonations of his teachings are still commonplace. Jesus took the time to question a broken system, and once he did, great change took place. The poor had no place in the world of pre C.E. They were the lowest of the low, stuck in a stranglehold of poverty and desperation. With not even a god to favor them and call them his own, they were left to their struggles and to wallow in self-pity. Jesus brought the word of a god, a god not favoring men, kings, nobles, merchants, and eldest brothers; A god favoring those with nothing, a god favoring the youngest sibling, the poor, the sick, meek, and old. Jesus was a beacon of shining light. Casting away the outdated concept that those who have been hurt have done wrong. Jesus presented hope to those afflicted by the ravages of poverty, disease and famine; and although I may not agree entirely with the method, or his reasoning behind this, I can say that because of his devotion to helping others, and the fact that in the end, his great sacrifices led to his demise, he is a man deserving of my reverence. I may not be getting down on my knees to pray to him, but I will be kneeling down to help pick up the gigantic burden that he placed on his shoulders. I will carry on his goal of bettering this world for all. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

I come before you today not to join your spiritual ranks. Not to pray to God, nor ask for his love and forgiveness. Rather, I see that this church has taken up Jesus' burden, and that is a burden that cannot be borne alone. I come to aid in this church's many undertakings, those of charity and kindness. And so, if you'll have me, I would love to come aboard. But on a final note, I will say this, if God does exist, if he is truly out there in all his grandeur, then he is doing a pretty good job. As when you do things right, people won't be entirely sure you've done anything at all . . .

Thank you.

- Riley Bakes, age 15



to the other question about religion, I was sad to read your
 You ask me my religious views: you know, I think, that
 eve in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of
 and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even
 est. All religions, that is, all mythologies to give them their
 r name are merely man's own invention—Christ as much
 ki. Primitive man found himself surrounded by all sorts of
 le things he didn't understand—thunder, pestilence, snakes
 era: what more natural than to suppose that these were ani-
 d by evil spirits trying to torture him. These he kept off by
 ing to them, singing songs and making sacrifices et cetera.
 ually from being mere nature-spirits these supposed being[s]
 elevated into more elaborate ideas, such as the old gods: and
 a man became more refined he pretended that these spirits
 good as well as powerful.
 hus religion, that is to say mythology grew up. Often,
 great men were regarded as gods after their death—such as
 cles or Odin: thus after the death of a Hebrew philosopher
 ua (whose name we have corrupted into Jesus) he became re-
 ed as a god, a cult sprang up, which was afterwards connected
 the ancient Hebrew Jahweh-worship, and so Christianity
 e into being—one mythology among many, but the one that
 appen to have been brought up in.
 low all this you must have heard before: it is the recognised
 itific account of the growth of religions. Superstition of course
 very age has held the common people, but in every age the
 ated and thinking ones have stood outside it, though usually
 vardly conceding to it for convenience. I had thought that
 were gradually being emancipated from the old beliefs, but if
 is not so, I hope we are too sensible to quarrel about abstract
 s. I must only add that one's views on religious subjects don't
 e any difference in morals, of course. A good member of so-
 r must of course try to be honest, chaste, truthful, kindly et

cetera: these are things we owe to our own manhood and digni
 and not to any imagined god or gods.

Of course, mind you, I am not laying down as a certainty th
 there is nothing outside the material world: considering the di
 coveries that are always being made, this would be foolish. An
 thing *may* exist: but until we know that it does, we can't make a
 assumptions. The universe is an absolute mystery: man has ma
 many guesses at it, but the answer is yet to seek. Whenever a
 new light can be got as to such matters, I will be glad to welcom
 it. In the meantime I am not going to go back to the bondage
 believing in any old (and already decaying) superstition.

by
 CS

Lewis.

(Always grow,
 always evolve)



My journey at PCCH, began when I was only 5 years old, at the pre-school. Though I don't remember learning about religion in school, I do remember those Sundays where I ran down the center aisle of the church to listen to Mrs. Fitch's children's moment. I loved to dress up for our godly plays, or write letters as if we were the Israelites following Moses through the desert. As grew I looked forward to playing manhunt and going laser tagging with my youth group. When I found out this year that I was going to be spending my Sunday nights at Confirmation Class, I wasn't too excited. I expected it to be like school, with books, and quizzes and exams, but I was very wrong. Every Sunday at 7 o'clock we would gather around Brian and his white board and talk about our topic for the night. It was a much more fun way to be learning about our religion. I entered the class as an agnostic. I strongly believed that the only way to prove God's existence was with physical proof or a miracle. As the weeks past I began to understand the possibilities of God, and I developed my own Presbyterian beliefs.

When I was little I imagined God as an old white man, sitting on a golden throne, watching over the earth. Now I know that he is much more than just a man in the clouds. The Bible states that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent. But if he is everywhere, why can't we see him? And if he is all powerful and all good, why is there still evil in the world? The fact of the matter is that we know little to nothing about God; all we know is what we come to believe with our minds and with our hearts. I believe that the reason we never see God is because he is an entity inside of all of us. The reason there is suffering is because he teaches us the value of life through pain and mistakes. Without evil, we wouldn't be able to appreciate the good lives we live. That is why humans were created with flaws, not because he wants to punish us but because he wants us to learn from our mistakes and grow into better people. Every person must learn to love their enemies, or their imperfections, to truly love God and thank him for the gifts he gave us. If you love God, he becomes a part of you and follows wherever you go with his power and his wisdom. Even the evil have God on their side, because he gives everyone a second chance. I have spent most of my life enveloped in my flaws, and in my mistakes, but now I know that he will love me even with my sins. The only way to live life to the fullest is to love our flaws, cherish our gifts, and most importantly love our God.

During the time of the New Testament it was believed that only the rich and the righteous were loved by God. The poor were spit upon, the lepers were thrown in ditches and left to die, and women were treated like property. Jesus himself was a poor man who understood faith and began preaching at a young age. His beliefs were radical for the time, but his views on society established the modern morals we have today. He represented the poor and the helpless and he gave them hope that life is worth living and that God loved them. My favorite story of Jesus is when he protected the prostitute who was about to get stoned. He intervened and drew a circle in the sand around her. He told the crowd, waiting with their stones, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." I admire how Jesus recognized that everyone has made mistakes, and that everyone has sinned. This story taught me not to mock others for their wrongdoings when I have done wrong as well.

The Apostles' Creed states "... I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary..." The story of virgin birth is common in many religions and in Greek mythology, which could explain why it was in our scripture. But the Gospel of Mark, which is theorized to be the most accurate because it was written in 67 A.D, doesn't talk about the virgin birth at all. I feel that the likelihood of immaculate conception, even with the work of God, is impossible. I support the heresy of Adoptionism, that as Jesus became a spiritual leader, God saw his benevolence and adopted him as his son, turning Jesus into the human form of God. I believe that God instructed Jesus to reform Judaism, and to throw away the ridiculous laws and rituals. Instead, Jesus preached two of the most important laws we have today, love your neighbor, and love your god.

One of the reasons I entered Confirmation as an agnostic is because of the Bible. I always thought that the bible was supposed to be a non-fiction book, and that it was claiming all the stories in the New and Old Testament were true. Even from a young age I doubted that radical stories like The Great Flood, and Creation, could be true. Through confirmation I discovered that, like Jesus, the Bible teaches through parables. Jesus taught through metaphors to see who his true followers were. The Bible uses anecdotes to teach the morals of Christianity. I realized that the Bible was just like my childhood picture books, each tale or passage taught a valuable moral to the reader who cared enough to decode it. Now I know that the Bible shouldn't be read like my history textbook; it should be read as if the stories were metaphors, trying to teach us about faith and love. My favorite story in the Old Testament is story of Samson and Delilah. The Philistines tempt Delilah with gold and jewels to discover the source of her love Samson's great strength. When she discovers that the secret to Samson's power is his seven braids of hair, she tells the Philistine guards and they capture Samson and cut off all of his hair. When he is imprisoned in a temple, he is forced to work as a slave and is mocked by the people visiting the temple. But Samson pushes on. Even without his strength, he was determined to defeat his enemies. One night he prays to God for the first time. He asks for strength and God answers, instructing him on what he must do. The next day Samson goes to the two main pillars of the temple, and with all of his strength he breaks the pillars. The temple collapses, bringing the Philistines and Samson down with it. Even without his braids, Samson was able to defeat his enemies using the strength he didn't even know he had. From reading this story, I understand that God would always be there for me to give me strength. This story taught me that if I sacrificed a little, I would be able to overcome my challenges and achieve my dreams.

I started coming to PCCH more and more as I entered middle school. It's a pleasant oasis from my busy teenage life. From playing manhunt, talking in Brian's office, or just listening to Cindy's sermons, being in the sanctuary of my church was always enjoyable for me. As I became more involved with service projects and charities through the church, I realized how much these experiences changed me for the better. I remember our first trip giving mattresses to people in need. I never knew how something as simple as a mattress could make someone so happy. I had never been in the poor areas of Philly before and it was astonishing how many people are living in need right in our own backyard. When I walked into the first house carrying a mattress, there was a woman and her children sitting around an open stove. At first I was thinking why someone would do that, but then I recognized what they were doing. They were sitting by the electric stove for heat because they couldn't afford heating or even a mattress. It was an epiphany for me. I had never thought about not having heat or not having a bed. Through the church, I was able to give back to my community and give back to myself. For so many years I've been ignorant to the suffering in the world, and now I know that I'm able to support those in need.

I want to join Chestnut Hill Presbyterian because in the years I've been here I was able to discover God, and I was able to discover myself. I learned so much from Brian and from the other members of PCCH. I've also made great friends from youth group and I can't wait to spend more time with them on next year's mission trip. Before confirmation I was agnostic because I thought the only way to confirm God was from actually seeing him, or witnessing a miracle. But now I know that you can't see God through your eyes, you have to see him with your heart and with your soul.

Faith Statement Reading Group for Session (2013)

- 5 boys
- 10 girls
- 3 par (5 groups)

cant split off by 5

Group One

- Jack Walker
- Ann Nottingham
- Carolyn White

Group Two

- Luke Brizzolara
- Ais Watson
- Paige Lambert

Group Three

- Peter Butler
- Jeni Brown
- Hannah Calistri

Group Four

- Malika Ebell
- Riley Bokes
- Frances Malina

Group Five

- Katie Asper
- Tommy Beedock
- Natch Nottingham



I can clearly remember that my first questions concerning the Bible began when I was in the second grade, at about the age of 7 years old. It's sometimes strange how certain incidents can stand out so vividly in your memory, while others just fade away into almost nothingness. I'm not sure why, but this was one event that stayed in my mind for several years, while others have been long forgotten. At the time, I did not doubt the Bible; I merely wondered about it. I was young then, and I believed everything I was told. I had been told that humankind began when God created Adam out of the earth, and then proceeded to craft Eve out of Adam's rib. So I believed this. Yet, during science class at school, I was also told that man evolved from apes. In my young and innocent age, I assumed both to be correct, though it didn't take me very long to realize that these two thoughts were somewhat conflicting. It sparked my curiosity, but it did not cause me to consider one of the beliefs as false. For some time, I was forced to be content with accepting while not understanding.

I did not doubt then, however it was only a few years later that I did begin to doubt. The more I learned, the more questions I developed. For example, school taught me that the world had formed extremely slowly, over a span of billions of years. Yet the Bible said that the entire universe, along with the earth and all creatures that lived upon it, had been created within no more than a week. The Bible also explained that Noah was able to place two of every species onto a single arc. Yet through school, I had discovered that millions of species inhabited the earth. How was it possible to situate such a large amount of organisms on such a small space? Many of my doubts stemmed from battles of faith versus science, such as these. However, my uncertainties were definitely not confined to just that.

Several of my questions resulted from hearing of the miracles performed throughout the Bible. For instance, how could Jesus have fed a crowd of five thousand people with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish? Or how was it possible that the entire Red Sea could part in half to allow Moses and the Israelites to escape the harsh rule of the Egyptians? What made it even more difficult to believe was the fact that I had never actually witnessed such a miraculous occurrence. Why would such extraordinary phenomena happen regularly hundreds of years ago, then cease to exist during my lifetime? Did God perhaps favor the people of the older days? But that didn't seem right, for hadn't the Bible said that God loved everyone equally? In addition, I began to come across contradictions within the Bible; verses in one section would completely deny what I had read in a different part of the Bible. How was I supposed to believe both?

After a while, I started to reject anything that was connected to religion. For many months, I was unable to make sense out of the Bible, so I therefore refused to believe it. It took me a while, but over the past couple of months, I think I have finally begun to understand. By learning to look at the Bible figuratively, rather than literally, I have slowly begun to comprehend more and more of it. Through Confirmation, I have recognized that the intent of the Bible is not to give an entirely precise account of past events. Instead, perhaps the real purpose of the Bible is to teach a lesson—to show the importance of caring and giving to others. Perhaps the stories were altered, simply because the fashion in which the world used to be viewed differed from how we view the world today. Most likely there never actually was a worldwide flood that resulted from forty days and nights of continuous rain. It is possible that the flood covered only a town. Yet to someone who rarely strayed far from his house, who never knew of anything past a few miles from home, that town was their whole world. I have also figured out that the contradictions between biblical stories are no more than the result of variations in viewpoints. Individuals of separate social classes, ages, and genders are likely to interpret, and therefore tell, the same event in a completely different manner. Additionally, stories were likely changed, and various details forgotten, as they were passed down through many generations before actually being written. Also through the course of Confirmation, I have recognized that portions of the Bible were most likely exaggerated, simply for the sake of producing a more exciting version. Realizing that the Bible is a story, rather than a historical document, has truly allowed me to accept it.

I have also recently begun to accept Jesus. It wasn't that I hadn't before; I had always appreciated the meaning of his teachings, so I had therefore accepted at least some part of Him. However, my inability at the time to trust the Bible made it more difficult for me to believe that Jesus had actually existed. In accepting the Bible, I have also been able to completely accept that Jesus was real. I now believe, without doubt, that there

definitely was a man named Jesus, who lived his life preaching God's word. As to whether or not he was the true son of God...I'm not quite sure yet.

My willingness to believe in Jesus being the son of God depends entirely on my willingness to believe in God himself. And at this particular moment in my life, I am still struggling with that, as I have been for quite some time. However, my reasons now differ from those I had a few years ago. Previously, I did not believe in God because of science. I was given ample evidence to support science, yet not God, so I believed in science, and not God. Since then, it has become clear to me that the two are not conflicting to each other. Trusting in one does not mean disregarding the other. I have also recently realized that lack of evidence is not necessarily an indication of falsehood. Some of the greatest and most important parts of our lives are things that cannot be seen, but rather things that must simply be trusted.

My reasons for not believing in God are probably not the typical ones either. In my mind, the usual argument over God's omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence is more of a debate over God's intent or power than God's actual existence. Perhaps there is a God who sees everything, yet He chooses for us to endure hardships so that we can then be taught to value the good in our lives. Though allowing death on the context of teaching appreciation seems a little too harsh. So maybe it is possible that a God could exist, but perhaps not be powerful enough to correct the large amount of evil in our world.

Why, then, am I still doubtful of God's existence? My incredulity over God comes from the fact that religion in general is entirely man-made. Religion originated with the occurrence of natural events, such as a house catching fire due to lightning, or a hurricane that left entire cities in ruins. Thousands of years ago, with no other explanation, people turned to the belief that an almighty being was punishing them for their faults. In attempts to prevent such disasters, man created a system to worship this great being. Not to say that any man-made belief is untrue, because of course this is not the case. However, we now understand that lightning and hurricanes are not punishments, and are simply due to the forces of nature.

My other reason is not as strong of a cause for my disbelief, though it is something I have been pondering lately. Throughout the world, and throughout time, humans have believed in countless amounts of various gods. Yet why is our god the "real" one? What makes our deity more genuine than perhaps Buddha, or even Zeus? This question has passed through my mind over and over again, and I have not been able to venture anywhere near an answer.

I'm certainly not saying that I absolutely one-hundred-percent believe that there is no God. I'm simply saying that I'm not sure. At this particular moment in my journey through faith, there are still some things that don't quite make sense to me. And perhaps they never will make sense to me. Once again, as when I was seven years old, I am must be content with not understanding.

So why, then, go to church? Why wake up every Sunday morning to go worship someone I don't even know exists?

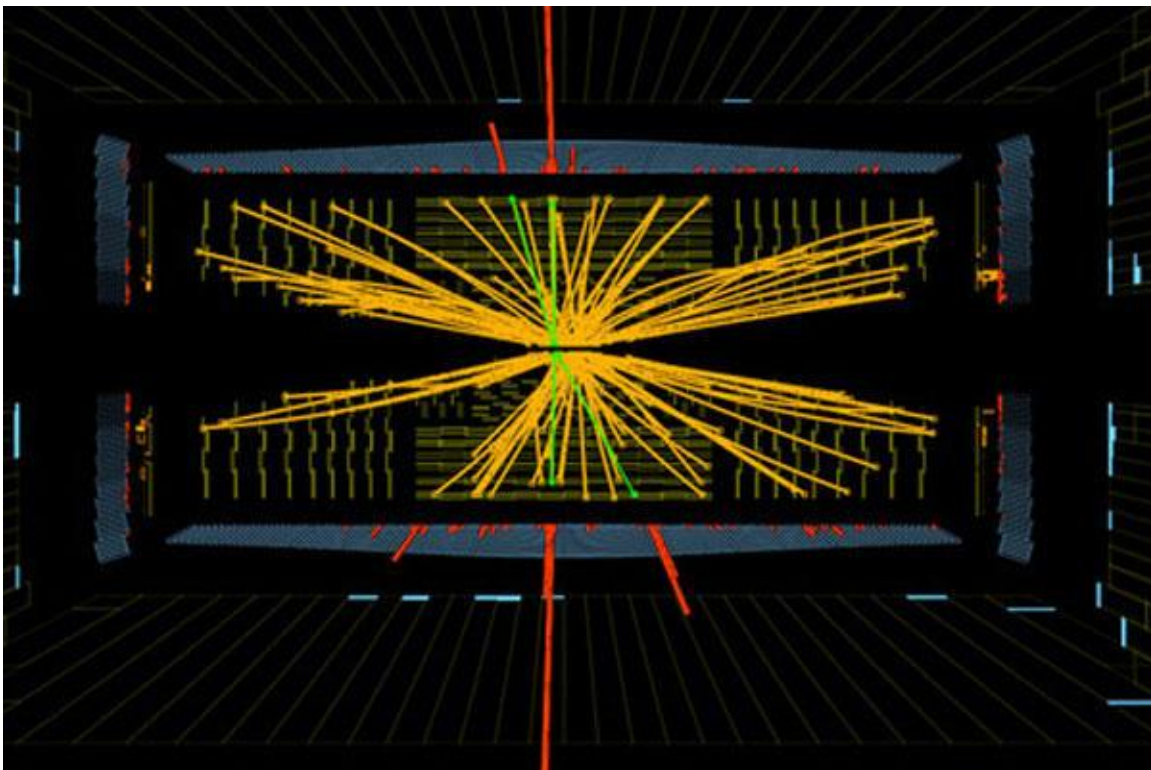
Probably the most important reason, in my opinion, is because of the values and life lessons taught through church and through the Bible. The belief in God is of little use if it is not accompanied by the understanding of what God and the Bible teach us. It is of even less use if we do not act according to how the Bible advises us to act. Through Christianity, we learn to be caring towards everyone. Because hatred fades as love grows, we learn that kindness is the best approach towards those we dislike. The Bible also teaches us to be giving, especially towards those in need, who require our help and guidance. In addition, it shows that everyone deserves fair treatment, despite age, gender, or ethnicity. Each of these morals taught through church is of tremendous importance throughout life.

While the values learned are of great significance, they are not the only reason to go to church. A few months ago, I came across a list that was titled "12 Things Happy People Do Differently." On this list, among advice such as "savor life's joys" and "cultivate optimism", was the caption "practice spirituality". Underneath, it

explained that “when we practice spirituality or religion, we recognize that life is bigger than us. We surrender the silly idea that we are the mightiest thing ever.” By practicing religion, we are able to realize that there is more in the world than what revolves around ourselves. We are able to abandon greed and selfishness, and by doing so, we learn to be grateful for what we have been given.

Though I still doubt whether a god actually exists, I nonetheless believe in the importance of church—especially the importance of the Presbyterian Church, because it allows me to doubt. It permits me to question, which has been extremely helpful to me, considering the amount of questions I have had, and the questions that I still have. And this is only the beginning. Most likely, the questions will never cease; though some will certainly be answered, it is certain that more will be revealed. It is all part of what I will inevitably encounter along my journey through faith. I know I have quite a long way left to go, though I know that I have certainly come far since the start of Confirmation.

- Natalia Nottingham, age 15



I am so lucky to be apart of this church. This is a place that is very special to me. I have been coming here my whole life and I have been taught the traditions of this church. I want to become a member of this church because I believe in what PCCCH has to offer and what it is trying to accomplish. I think that we are following what Jesus has taught and what we believe in. Everything that we do is what Jesus would want us to do and I believe that is very important. This church fits my needs. One main example is that I have the freedom to address my doubts and ask questions. I don't believe in everything in the Bible and in this church that is ok. I also have lots of questions about this religion and I have the ability to ask them.

During communion, we eat the bread representing Jesus body, and drink the juice representing his blood. By doing this, we remind ourselves that he died for us. He was our savoir.

How can God be all-powerful, all knowing, all there, and all good? That is a confusing question and it seems to me that there is no answer. I think that it is possible for God to be all knowing because he may know everything, but that doesn't mean he can influence bad situations. I think that if anything else he can be all there because he can be there with people on their deathbeds praying with them. Even though I think that he can be all there, I also disagree because it is just common sense that one person can't be in two places at once yet everywhere at once. If God is everywhere and all knowing then was God here when the Big Bang happened and if so, then shouldn't he know everything about it? Going even farther with this, if he is all powerful then did God create the Big Bang which led to the creation of the Earth? But then, God is supernatural and so it might be possible. I'm not sure if God is all powerful. If he is all powerful then he could change anything in this world. I'm not sure God is all good because bad things happen all of the time and evil does exist. In all, God may have some of these characteristics but I'm not sure that he has all of them.

As a kid, I used to think that God was just someone in the clouds and someone that we pray to. I used to think Jesus was someone else who didn't have much to do with God. I thought that Jesus was born in a manger and his parents were Mary and Joseph. I herd that Jesus was the Son of God and who was born to the Virgin Mary. It never really clicked to me that it wouldn't be possible for both of those situations to happen. As I grew older and more knowledgeable, I realized there was something that I was missing. Finally, I realized that Jesus was actually born to Mary and was the Son of God. I believe that Jesus and God existed in some way.

I believe God is comforting. I know that he is always there, especially through difficult times. For example, when my Grandfather died last June, I was very upset. This was the first family death that I had experienced and actually remembered in my life. I was not sure how to deal with this. But there was one thing I did know. I knew that my Grandpa was suffering and was going to be up in heaven safe with God. I had faith that my Grandpa was going to be in a better place with God who I trusted with my life. It was comforting to know that God was there fore me in a really important time in my life.

I have never read the whole Bible, but I have herd lots of bits and pieces from coming to Church. I understand some of it and then there are lots of other parts that I don't understand. I have learned to not take everything so literally and that has really helped my understanding. I believe that lots of the stories in the Bible may not have happened, but that they are in it because of the stories and their morals. I believe that some of the stories actually happened in real life too. I think that some of the stories in the Bible may not be all true because these stories have gotten passed down. As the stories got passed down, people exaggerate them to make them seem more interesting.

If it weren't for Jesus Christ, we wouldn't be sitting here tonight. He accomplished so much in his short life that we know of. Since we only have three important years of his life, I find it hard to believe that he could change so much in so little time. I wonder how we only have three important years of his life, yet he is probably one of the most important people in history. It doesn't make too much sense to me but I have faith that such an important man existed in history.

I believe in Jesus Christ. He had the courage to stand up for what he believed in and that takes a lot. Who knows where we would be in this world without him. He preached, "blessed are the poor and the meek", which

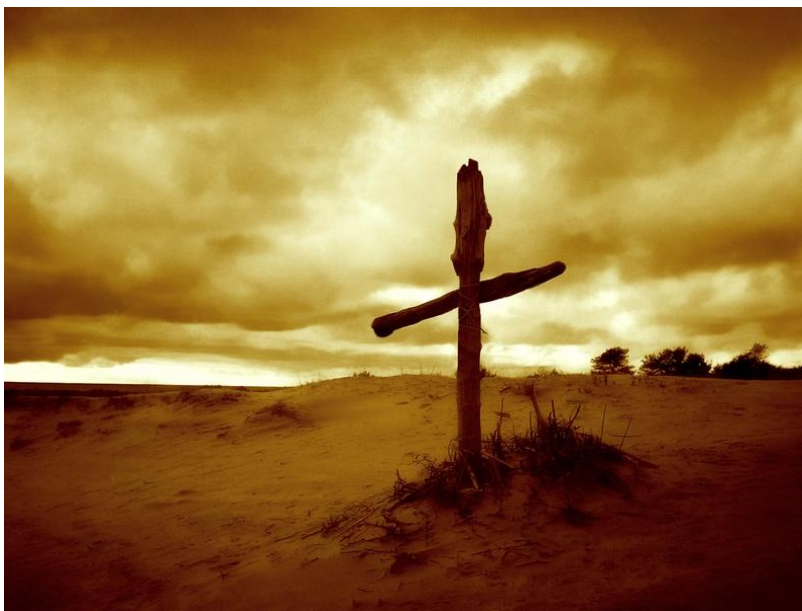
was unheard of in this time. He also gave hope to people like women, the poor, and the outcasts of society. That was crazy in his time because no one cared about them. If Jesus came from the lowest class in society and still managed to make these changes in the world, then we can too.

Jesus taught in parables to see whom his true followers were and if they understood his stories lessons or not. I think that is really important because most of Jesus's stories had a good lesson and it shows what kind of person understood them. I believe in his teachings and the message they are trying to get across. His two laws "love your neighbor" and "love your God" sum up a lot. I sometimes think that Jesus and God are the same person. If they are the same person, then I question why one of those laws state "love your God". That is basically saying love me. I think that Jesus didn't know that he was God when he was living; he only knew it when he rose into Heaven.

I believe in the Historical Jesus more than I believe in the Biblical Jesus. I believe that the Historical Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and followed him. That makes sense to me. But I'm not so sure if I believe in the Biblical Jesus as much because he was conceived by the Holy Ghost to the Virgin Mary. That doesn't make as much sense to me. No matter if I believe in it or not, I think that his teachings are important to live by. I have faith that Jesus can help me live a life that matters.

Right now is one of the many important chapters in my life. Getting confirmed is an important step to becoming a good Christian. I am getting confirmed because not only do my parents want me to get confirmed, but because I want to get confirmed. I want to become a member of this Church because I believe that it has a lot of good things to offer me and because I believe in the mission here. I also want to help others who are less fortunate than myself and this church can help me achieve that. It matters to me to help others and for myself to become a better person. I am not perfect and I don't always do the right thing, but I think that becoming a member to this church can help me get a step closer. I have a lot of faith and I know that will get me far in life.


- Paige Lawton, age 13



Confirmation Midterms



1. Name two ways Presbyterianism is different than Catholicism:
2. What are the 4 attributes typically ascribed to God?
3. What are the 4 main threads/stories to know in Genesis?
4. Whose anti-religion letter did we read, who then became a famous Christian author/apologist?
5. What is Brian's favorite show on television; Circle One: (LOST; Breaking Bad; Game of Thrones; Seinfeld or Mad Men?)
6. Describe the Problem of Evil – why is it a problem?
7. If you open your Bible to about the middle, what book should you find?
8. What are the 4 gospels in the New Testament?
9. What is the argument of "Infinite Regress"?
10. What is the difference between fundamentalism and liberalism?
11. Define Agnostic vs. Atheism vs. Theism
12. Which book in the Bible attempts to say that bad things can happen to good people?
13. Explain the difference between Free Will vs. Determinism
14. What is Brian's favorite Ancient Seven Wonder? Circle One: (The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, The Pyramids at Giza, Mausoleum at Helicarnassus, The Temple of Artemis, Colossus of Rhodes, Lighthouse of Alexandria, Statue of Zeus at Olympia)

Not to be graded. Stop Worrying! 

“The opposite of faith isn’t doubt, its certainty”

I have never been certain about my faith. Some days I am more willing to learn more than others, and some I am able to accept more than others. One thing that I have always been certain of is my commitment to this church. I’ve grown up in this church. I know it backwards and forwards, and I am proud to be a member of this Church. Letting it all go was never an option, not because my mother wouldn’t let me, or because fear of sin, but because I have a special connection with this Church that no one can alter. I am lucky and fortunate to have grown up in a Church where it is ok to ask questions and to doubt. Where I felt like I was, in fact, in a sanctuary where no judgment would be passed; only the help of others to guide me through.

The hardest part of this process was figuring out what I needed and wanted. What I accepted to be true in my faith, and what I struggle to tolerate. Rather than what other people want and accept me to believe. I think that the two people who have influenced me the most were my parents and my Gran. My parents were brought up in a Catholic tradition, as where I was baptized. My Mom grew up with her two sisters, brother, mother, and father. My Grandfather is no longer with us. Despite my Mom’s Dad dying her faith is still incredibly strong. When I was younger she practiced the art of “dragging your child out of bed” to go to church. Similar like many other things, once I was out the door, and in the moment, I was glad that I had gotten up. For my Dad, he attended Church with his mother, father, and brother in Ireland, where he grew up. My Uncle and Grandmother are no longer with us anymore. My Grandfather did get remarried to a lovely woman who could never replace the whole that was where my grand-mom Marie was supposed to be, but she still meant the world to me, thus bringing me to my second influence. My Gran had several health issues over the years, and no one really knew how long she would last. In spite of all her hardships her faith was still incredibly strong. She was and still is, truly inspiring even from her grave. To think of how proud she would be.. I can’t even describe. Still my influences are not me they do not feel what I feel, think what I think, and simply they are just not me. And it would be unfair for them and for me if I didn’t express what I believe.

When I was in 4th grade I took it upon myself to announce that I was an atheist, also horrifying my Italian aunt. That was five years ago. Since then I have graduated from my primary school, moved to my new school (Go PC), made new friends, graduated middle school, gone to high school, made even more friends, lost some friends, struggled, succeeded, failed, triumphed, my point is a lot can happen in five years. Especially for me, I know that I am physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually not the same person that I was then. Knowing that, here is what I currently believe. I like to believe that there is a higher spirit (God), and that there was a man who people call the Messiah of that same spirit (Jesus). I do not believe in most of what the Bible perceives as “The heroic, not explainable messiah, who walked across the water.” I believe in the historical prophet who spoke to those who needed a leader, and listened to those who needed someone to hear them. That being said, I find it harder and harder to believe in that every day. With current events, science, and even society it seems like there are more things pointing towards doubt then belief. That is the ugly, and also beauty in faith. The idea that you have to reach for something that you cannot grasp, look for something that isn’t visible, and listen for a call that might not ever come, but accepting that.

Leviticus, states that one must not touch the skin of pigs, talk to a woman menstruating, or wear the clothes of more than one fabric. It also says not to shave, and that anyone who has a flat nose, is blind, is lame cannot enter the house of God. Deuteronomy states that anyone who professes against God or tries to convince others that there is not a God, must die. Deuteronomy also states that anyone of another religion must die, including someone in your family. Now, these rules were written over 2,000 thousand years ago, and a lot can happen in that space of time. That doesn’t mean that these rules still weren’t written. That’s the argument that a lot of people make when ever they try and defend the horrible thing(s) that they are doing. Murderers say that they were just “defending their religion” by killing innocent people. Or when homophobic people say that “Gay people are sinners”. The whole point that Jesus tried to teach, those 2,000 thousand and some odd years ago, was not to judge other people, and love your neighbor like you love yourself. Two ideals, and the majority of the religion has forgotten them. Still I ask myself this question almost every day: “Do I want to be part of a religion that states the awful and ridiculous rules?” In which the whole point of them is to bully others in order to feel powerful. It’s a really tough question, and I have to remind myself that not everyone who is a Christian

(Cross where passages start, not where they end)

Passages for Bibles 2017

to highlight for each

Left ←

Genesis 32:22 →
 1 John 4 --
 Romans 12:2 --
~~John~~
 Mark 9:37
~~Samuel 9~~
 Ecclesiastes 2:12
 John 20:24
 Mark 12:31
 Matt 5:21

detach
not

Right ←

Proverbs 3:13 →
 Matthew 5:12 →
 Ecclesiastes 7 →
 Luke 11:33 →
~~Isaiah 53~~
~~Psalm~~
 Colossians 2:11
 " " 6:27
 Hebrews 13:1

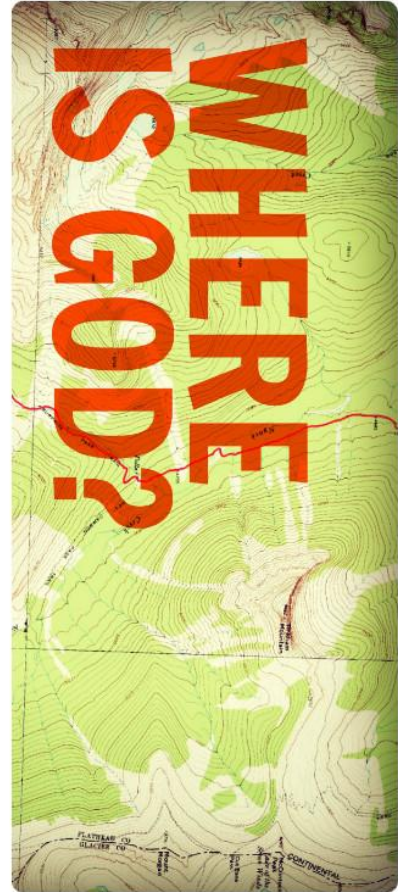
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~~12/22/11 11:17~~
~~9 0 3 5~~
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* make sure to put bible back in same order
 back in folder when done otherwise you'll have a
 mess & who?

* list with complete to keep



It is very important for me to be confirmed into this church. I believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ and his good deeds. However, I do not want to be confirmed into just any church. I want to be confirmed into the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill. During confirmation class, we discussed the differences between our church and other churches. I agree with this church because here, anyone can be a minister, we don't pray to idols, material is taken more figuratively, and we are allowed to question. In the beginning of confirmation class I had many questions.

Many stories in the Bible didn't make logical sense to me nor didn't seem possible. I now understand that these stories should be taken more figuratively instead of literally. The story is important for the message or moral that it portrays, instead of the literal content. I must also keep in mind that the writers were men from a very long time ago. Back then, things were different causing their perspective to be very different from ours today. A good example is Noah's Ark. As we know in the story, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights causing the whole world to be flooded. This was a punishment from God. In actuality, it was most likely a region flood. Back then it probably looked like a world flood since there was water as far as the eye could see. Also, they must have assumed that the flood was a punishment because they had no other knowledge or explanation. I have learned that if one takes the stories in the Bible for the moral lessons it will make more sense.

I also had other questions. It is said that God is benevolent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. If God has all of these qualities, then what is the explanation behind evil and bad in this world? I do not believe that God completely has all of these assets. However, I believe that God has a little bit of each. I don't believe God is completely omnipresent because I don't understand the idea of God being everywhere at the same time. Therefore, since he is not completely omnipresent, he cannot completely be omniscient, or all knowing. I

believe God is powerful but perhaps not as powerful as we may perceive Him to be. This could be the explanation for why bad still happens in this world. I do believe that God is benevolent, or all good. I believe the explanation for evil is free will.

The actions of human beings cause evil, not God.

This idea is portrayed well in the book of Job. Job states that bad things can happen to good people for no reason at all. The book of Job tells of a good man who loses all of his possessions even though he has done nothing wrong. The book tried to change the mindset that if something bad happened to a person, they must have deserved it as punishment. I believe God always has good intentions. I believe He is always willing, but not always able to prevent all evil.

In my opinion, God was here from the beginning. The Big Bang and religion may be interconnected after all. When there was nothing, I believe God created the first thing which then led to the Big Bang and eventually created life. This I believe is how God played a role in creating this world. I also believe in the scientific research that the world evolved over millions of years. God started the initial reaction and then science and free will helped to develop the world today as we know it.

I believe praying to God does help. Since He is benevolent, He will listen and give help to those who ask. An additional belief I have is that there is only one God. Even though other religions call their God by a different name, I believe that all religions worship the one and same God whom Christians worship.

I do not believe the Bible is 100% historically accurate. However, I also don't think the bible is completely inaccurate historically either. From a historical standpoint, I believe the accuracy is somewhere in between. I also must remember that during the time of Jesus, history was different. The message and story component was considered more important than the actual facts. Out of the four gospels, I probably agree most with Mark. Coming first, the gospel of Mark was closer to the time of Jesus. Mark also does not mention the virgin birth. I believe that God adopted Jesus as his son. Jesus was very different from most people during his time. Jesus flipped the social classes and had very different and radical views. Jesus taught ideas such as compassion and forgiveness. He also blessed the poor and the less fortunate in society. Jesus went out of his way to give women, children, slaves, and outcasts hope, all of whom were looked down upon and treated poorly. Jesus was a very good man who taught to love everyone around you even if they are your enemy. He started a revolution in religion and flipped the beliefs and teachings of society at the time. I believe God witnessed Jesus's good deeds and realized that Jesus was a great man. I believe that God agreed with the beliefs of Jesus and adopted him as his own son. I want to believe in a God like this, who helps and supports the less fortunate. I also believe that God will adopt anyone as His children if they are good and kind like Jesus. After all, we are commonly referred to as the "Children of God."

This is my faith and what I believe thus far at 15 years of age. This is my interpretation and understanding of God so far. My faith is still constantly growing and changing and I am still willing to learn more.

- Ana Nottingham, age 15

(ΚΑΤΑ ΛΟΥΚΑΝ)

Kol 4,14 Phm 24
2Τ4,11

¹ **1** Ἐπειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγη-
σιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων,
2 καθὼς παρέδωκαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπ-
ηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, **3** ἔδοξεν κάμοι παρηκολου-
θηκῶτι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κρά-
τιστε Θεόφιλε, **4** ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων
τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.

Act 1,1s
IK 11,21 · Act 1,21b
J15,27 H 2,3 J11,33
Act 6,4 · 5,11 Mc 2,2
Act 18,25! · Act 11,4
Act 24,3!
Act 1,1 | Act 18,25
IK 14,19 G 6,6

5 Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου [†] βασιλέως τῆς
Ἰουδαίας ἱερεὺς τις ὀνόματι Ζαχαρίας ἐξ ἑφημερίας
Ἀβιά, καὶ γυνὴ αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρῶν καὶ τὸ
ὄνομα αὐτῆς Ἐλισάβητ. **6** ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἀμότεροι ἔν-
αντίον τοῦ θεοῦ, πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς
καὶ δικαιομασιν τοῦ κυρίου ἀμειπτοι. **7** καὶ οὐκ ἦν αὐ-
τοῖς τέκνον, καθότι ἦν ὁ Ἐλισάβητ στειρα, καὶ ἀμφό-
τεροι προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν ἦσαν.

Mt 2,1
1Chr 24,10 2Chr 31,2
Neh 12,4,17
Ex 6,23 8 | 2,25;
23,47! 50 Mt 1,19-21
20,26 24,19 Act 7,30
Gn 26,5 Dt 4,40 Ex 15,2
36,27 · Ph 3,6 | Gn 31,35
36 Gn 11,30; 25,26
29,31 Jdc 13,2s 15,2
H 11,11

8 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ ἱερατεύειν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ τάξει τῆς
ἐφημερίας αὐτοῦ ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ, **9** κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τῆς
ἱερατείας ἔλαχεν τοῦ θυμιᾶσαι εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸν ναὸν
τοῦ κυρίου, **10** καὶ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος ἦν τοῦ λαοῦ προσευ-
χόμενον ἔξω τῆ ὥρα τοῦ θυμιάματος. **11** ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ
ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐστῶς ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ
θυμιάματος. **12** καὶ ἐταράχθη Ζαχαρίας ἰδὼν καὶ φόβος
ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ' αὐτόν. **13** εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν ὁ ἄγγελος [†]

6 |
Ex 30,7s
Dn 9,21 | 2,9; 22,40-41
6,12 etc Mt 1,20
29; 24,38 · 65; 28-32
7,16; 8,37; 21,26
2,43! | 13: 30s Jdc 13,2s

Inscriptio: 'ευαγγελιον κατα Λουκαν A^c D K L W Γ Δ Θ Ξ Ψ 33. 565. 700. 892. 1424. 2542 M lat sa^{ms} bo^{pl} | το κατα Λουκαν αγιον ευαγγελιον 209. 579 | αρχη του κατα Λουκαν ευαγγελιου 1241 | - **κ*** A* B* | *lxi* κ¹ B¹ vgst bo^{ms}
¶ **1,5** [†] του A C D K P Γ Δ Θ *f*^{1,13} 33. 565. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424. 2542. / 844. / 2211 M sa (bo) | *lxi* κ B L W Ξ Ψ • **6** [†] ενωπιον A C³ D K L P W Γ Δ Θ Ξ *f*^{1,13} 33. 565. 700. 1424. 2542 M | *lxi* κ B C* Ψ 579. 892. 1241. / 844. / 2211; Irlat^{vid} • **7** ° B W *f*¹³ 1424 • **9** [†] θεου C* D Ψ 579. 1424. 2542 • **13** [†] κυριου Θ 700 c ff² l sa^{ms}



What is my faith statement? As with most questions I have these days, I started my search with Google. I soon discovered that even dictionary.com was not going to provide me with the answer. My faith statement was going to have to be mine, not something that I found on a website. Faith, I found, is personal. It comes from a collection of experiences, beliefs and behaviors. Everybody's faith is different. I guess my faith statement is simply — I believe that by trying to do the right thing, everyday in every situation and for every person is what God wants. If I work to accomplish that, then I think I have lived my faith and hopefully done a little to make the world a nicer place.

But, I guess I need to expand on that a little, so here is my personal faith journey. Truth is, I didn't have a choice to come to church for most of my life. I didn't choose to be baptized, or to be raised Christian, or to attend church. My family was already here and they raised me here and made this a second home to me. I came to church school, sat through services and participated in activities because that's what they did. But recently, that's changed. We've reached the end of our confirmation class and now it is my choice to leave or become a part of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill (PCCH). During this past year, the choice became clear to me. I belong here.

I want to be a Presbyterian because it makes me strive to be the best person I can be. PCCH offers many opportunities for me to grow in my faith both in and out of church. I helped rebuild the church school and the Center on the Hill, places where kids and adults come to learn. I've also been able to help people in Montana and New Mexico by going on church mission trips with my family. Through church I've come to appreciate the importance of giving back. As a member, I want to take more opportunities to be helpful in the community and far away.

While growing up in church and going to church school, my thoughts and beliefs have evolved. I'm sure they will continue to transform through life. It seems that PCCH continues to grow and develop too, so I feel comfortable exploring my faith freely. I like how Presbyterians leave the cross empty because I think it's a symbol that everybody moves and progresses, kind of like my faith. I also believe that men and women are equal and being a Presbyterian can help express that because either can be a church leader or minister. This is the kind of place where my faith can grow.

I don't know a whole lot about the Bible, but I would like to read it sometime in the near future. I don't take the Bible literally and that helps me understand it better by thinking more about the themes and lessons that it contains. What I have read of the Bible is interesting and I believe that reading it will make me be a better person by understanding the significance of helping others and will answer some of my questions about my faith. I believe that the Bible does have some historical accuracy and that the stories are based on some true accounts. I would like to know more about Jesus and if he made mistakes and what happened during the gaps in the stories.

I believe that God and Jesus are two different things. I think God is more of a force or power and Jesus is a man that made the world the way God wanted it. I would like to know more about God, but I do believe that God is all good, all present and all knowing. I do not think God is all power, because it makes me understand why evil and bad things exist. I do believe there is a God and it does make me feel comfortable and blessed that he is watching over me.

I believe that Jesus became the son of God and was not born the son of God because Jesus did great things. I think Jesus represents many things and that if you do or try to do these things that you have done what God wants you to do. Jesus helped the people that were poor and in need and treated everybody equally. I believe that if you follow those principles that you have done the most important thing to being a Presbyterian.

I do believe that there is a heaven and hell, but it's not a place, but rather it's a state of mind and peacefulness, or uneasy and uncomfortable. If you do good things and follow the principles of treating everybody equally and helping the people that do not have as much as you, you will rest peacefully. If you are selfish and conceited then you will be in discomfort. I believe that you cannot just ask for forgiveness rather you have to make up for it by helping and thinking of others.

A quote that I was introduced to on the mission trip to New Mexico has stuck with me and I've been able to relate to it many times.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

—Oscar Romero

I'd like to think that my faith connects to this quote because it means that every little thing you do, no matter how big or small, is part of something bigger and that you can never be done helping others. Becoming a member of this church will allow me to act on my faith.

So for me, it really is simple—strive to do the right things every day. I know that my faith statement is just the beginning. I want to continue to develop it as a Christian at PCCH. Thanks to Brian for making religion easier to understand and for providing a comfortable atmosphere to talk about faith.

- Luke Brzozowski, age 14

My definition of a Christian is someone who tries to follow the teachings of Jesus in his or her daily life. Jesus taught people to help those less fortunate than themselves, and to be kind, and to embrace all different types of people. I think that it doesn't matter if you can recite scripture or if you know every section of the bible, because being a Christian is more than that. Being a Christian isn't about your knowledge of theology, but is about your actions, morals, and possibly a little bit of your faith. I like the Presbyterian Church because it doesn't try and tell me what I have to believe in, and because it is tolerant of all kinds of people. I want to be confirmed at PCCH because I want to be a part of the community here.

When I think of god, I don't think of some big man sitting up on a fluffy cloud in the sky. I don't think that god resembles any human or animal that we have ever seen before. I think of god as sort of a very special particle, that is everywhere and inside of everything in the universe. There are four ideas of god: that god is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and benevolent. Although I believe that god is a particle of types, I still believe that god is omniscient and omnipresent. I believe that god is all knowing, and sees everything, because I believe god is everywhere. Because I think that god is a particle in everything, I definitely believe that god is omnipresent. I'm not so sure that god is benevolent, and I don't think god is omnipotent. In confirmation class, we talked about why bad things happen to good people. I think the explanation for this is that the bad things that happen to people are random occurrences that can't be controlled. Although god may be all good, I don't think that he is all powerful. If god was all powerful, I don't think that god would have people go through the suffering that some experience in a lifetime.

I don't really know what I believe about the bible. I don't think it's possible that it's some great historical record, because it was written hundreds of years after Jesus died. Some of the morals in the bible are good, but I believe that almost none of the stories in the bible happened the way that they are told. I think that most of the bible stories have some kernel of truth to them, then got exaggerated and exaggerated. I don't believe in the creation story of Adam and Eve, and I don't believe in the immaculate conception story. The only story in the bible I think seems accurate would be the last supper and how Jesus was crucified on the cross.

The way that I see god, I believe that everyone is a son or daughter of god, so it's very hard for me to just think of Jesus as the "son of god". I know that Jesus existed, but I don't think he was really sent to earth as sort of a version of god. I have two ideas of what I think could be explanations of Jesus that seem more logical to me. One of these ideas is that Jesus was just a regular guy, who had really revolutionary ideas and was very progressive for his time. The other idea is one of the Heretical ideas called Adoptionism, which is that Jesus lived such an amazing life and was such a good guy that god adopted him. The idea that I lean towards more is the notion that Jesus was a regular guy who was just a revolutionary for his time. Because of that, I'm not really sure I believe that Jesus was resurrected after he died on the cross. There's this thing called the Holy Trinity, which is the belief that god and Jesus and the holy spirit are all one thing, yet different. I'm unsure about that idea, because I both believe that and don't believe that. I think of god as a particle that is everywhere in everything, and Jesus as a really spectacular man who has died, and I think of the holy spirit as an emotion that one can feel inside. However, my idea of god is that it is a particle inside of everything, so it would have been inside of Jesus, and could be a part of the holy spirit feeling. The holy trinity idea is hard to grasp for me and I don't think I'll ever truly understand it. I find some aspects of the Christian religion a little contradictory, which confuses me. For example, the classification of Christianity as a monotheistic religion: If the Holy Trinity were true, it would be saying that god and Jesus are somehow different things, although they are also the same. If they were different, and both powerful and divine, and both forms of god, then wouldn't Christianity technically be polytheistic, even though it is taught that there is only one god? I grapple with many aspects of traditional Christianity because it's tough for me to decide which contradictions I can accept and which I cannot.

I don't believe in hell, or the devil, or even really heaven. Instead of heaven, I like to believe in the idea of reincarnation. Some Christians believe that even if you do a lot of bad stuff in your lifetime, all you have to do is regret it and apologize at the end of your life, and you will be forgiven. All though that idea is comforting, I believe in accountability. That is why I believe in reincarnation. In reincarnation, your actions and morals from

your previous life determine what you will be in your next. I also like the idea of reincarnation because it means that you have multiple chances to get things right, and that you don't just get one shot at life on earth.

I am only fifteen years old, and I'm sure that my ideas about religion will change as I mature. I realize that I have some unconventional notions, and that what I believe isn't strictly just from the Christian faith. However, this is another reason why I am being confirmed at PCCH; because I can have doubts and ask questions and not believe what everyone else does, and I am still accepted.

I look forward to becoming a member of the church.

Thank you.

- Jenni Bown, age 15



I am 14 years old. I started coming to this church when I moved here from Long Island. As a little girl, I never really used to pay any attention to what was going on during church service. To be honest, I don't think I really started to pay attention until I was in fifth or sixth grade, and even then, we couldn't make it to church that often as a family. This year, we started to go to church more regularly. I knew that this was a priority over everything else because we started confirmation class.

In confirmation class, we started talking about a lot of bible stories that I had never heard of. I learned that since I had not gone to church too often as a child, I was going to really have to pay attention during this.

In the beginning of confirmation class, we were asked what being Presbyterian meant to us. At first, Presbyterian was just a word that had no meaning to me. As we learned more and more about the differences between being Presbyterian rather than catholic, the next thing we talked about was why we wanted to be a member of a Presbyterian church. Why we wanted to commit to this church, instead of any other ones. I have come here now wanting to be a member so I am able to learn what my family believes in. I have come here so I could be a part of something, and to help to do good things for our community. Even now, there are so many people who I have met at this church that I have come to know and that make me feel at home here. I had a choice of what I wanted to do, and I chose to stay here with all the friends that I have made, and to keep learning the good things that this church teaches me. I will be able to give back to this church for all the things it has given me, in addition to help others who are in need. The next question that we were asked was "what do you believe in?" I didn't know what to say, and today I am not sure that I have found that answer. After that, we started to look at the bible.

One of the first stories we read was not from the Bible, but from the infancy gospel of Thomas. It was a story about Jesus pushing a young boy off the roof. Brian then explained to us that stories like these are not something that you are supposed to take 100% seriously. A bible story that is better known is the story of Noah's Ark. It talks about a worldwide flood happening, and Noah building a boat and surviving with his family and two animals of each species. I think that the message that you should get from this is that even in tough situations, if you stick together with those you love you can get through it. Never the less, there are parts that are real stories, and parts when things are exaggerated to get a point across. I think that although the bible can be taken as stories just to teach a moral, many people read it as a historically correct story. Whether they are taken literally or figuratively, all of the stories in the bible have something to teach you, but if you learn from them or not is up to you. This came in when I was listening to the sermons that Cindy would preach, knowing that they can be figurative and also realizing that the lesson that one person may take from what she says can be completely different than yours and that is okay.

When we started to talk about god, one of the first things that Brian told us is that god is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and benevolent. These words describe him as all knowing, all-powerful, all present, and all good. We thought about that for a little, but then he said, "If god is all these things, then why do bad things happen?" I guess no one really knows the answer to this question, but it took a while for me to wrap my mind around it. I thought that if he wasn't all of these, could he possibly be a few of them? And if he is all of them, then in the world today why do terrible things still happen? Maybe it's not that bad things happen because god isn't all these things, but because the people who bad things happen to have not found a way to involve god into their life.

After learning about the Question of Theodicy, we talked about the book of Job, a story about a great man who loses everything that he has. Back then, this story was written because the people believed that if something bad happened to you, no matter what it was, you must have done something to deserve it. It was a great example to help me understand that bad things do not only happen to bad people.

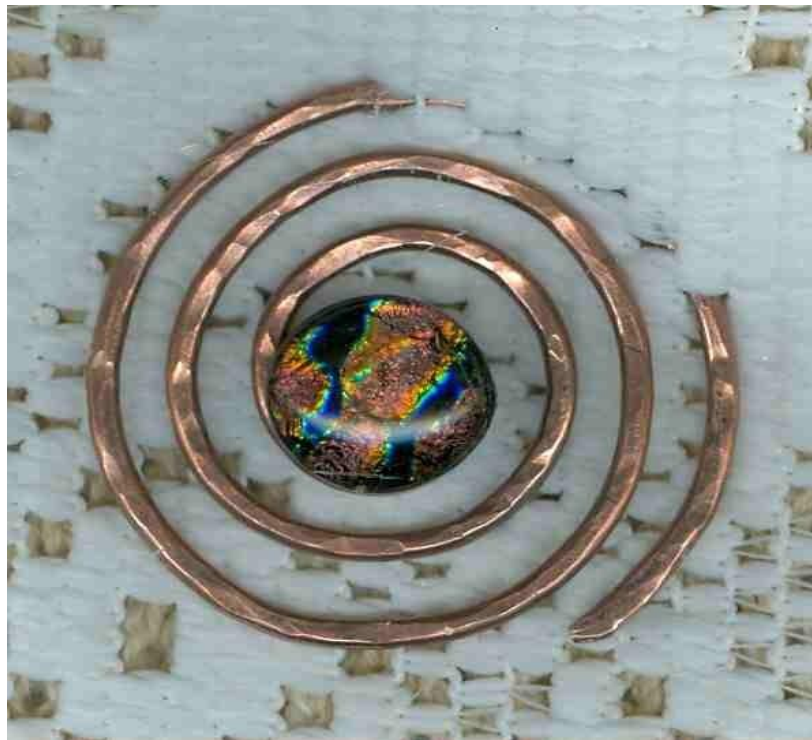
It is said that the world was started with the big bang, but what I don't understand is if god had anything to do with that, whether it was related to religion or if it was just a natural phenomenon. Even if he had something to do with that, how could it be? Was he the force that started the big bang? or is he just a person – or GOD? Personally, I believe every person has their own vision of what god is, what he looks like and what he does.

Everyone says that god is a boy, and it is presumed to be that way, but could god be a girl? I think that people have this idea of god being male because for so long their were no women's right's here, and in addition to that, there was racism, so a white male was the one person that everyone thought to be "okay."

Relating to this, we also talked about the trinity. That God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all one person/being/power. The example used to explain this was H₂O, and how it was water, ice, and vapor in three different forms but it ends up being just one element. At first, this didn't make sense to me, and now I am beginning to believe against it. In the apostle's creed, it says, "He ascended into heaven and "sitteth" on the right hand of god the father almighty." When I hear this, it makes me think that Jesus, the Son, sitting on the right hand of God, the Father, makes god sound more powerful, but if in fact they were the same person, why would God have more power then Jesus?

A story that we spent a lot of time on with Jesus is the story of the Good Samaritan. This is the story of Jesus helping a bleeding man in a ditch, when no one else would. After that, we talked a lot about how Jesus tended to care more for the least wanted people, such as the poor, the second born child, and people like that. The messages that Jesus sent were things like "love your enemy as you love yourself" and "blessed are the poor and the meek, not the rich and the strong." I think that there is a reason that Jesus is the one that we look up too, and why we all strive to be like him and act like his disciples. He is welcoming to everyone, and by showing that love, humility, compassion, and forgiveness are important, believing in him can truly change the way we are for the better.

- Katie Asper, age 14



The Bible can be confusing. In Leviticus 18:22, it says homosexuality is a sin. In Leviticus 11:7, it says I can't play football because touching the skin of a dead pig is a sin. In Exodus 21:7 the Bible says it's ok to sell your daughter into slavery and later, in 35:2, it says if any of you do any work today it is punishable by death! But then later on, there are these guys, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who quote Jesus saying things like: "love God with all your heart, soul and mind and after that love your neighbor as you love yourself," Mark 12:29-31. And then John says the Lord loves me so much that he gave his only son to us and if we believe in him we will have eternal life. In John 11:25-26 Jesus states he is the resurrection and the life and if I believe in him, though I die, I will live....and then he asks if I believe this?

I'm not sure yet, and that's the beauty of it, I don't have to be sure yet. I want to be, but there are things in this world that you just can't explain. Things that you wish you had the answer to, but honestly you might go through your whole life not knowing the answer. Personally, I think that's just fine, because if there's no way to find an answer, then I don't think we're meant to know it. Now, going back to what I said before, with football and homosexuality, God put us on this earth for a reason, as hard as that is to believe, it's true. You may not think your being has much importance, but to someone it does. If God truly didn't want people to play football or for people to be gay, then he wouldn't have given humanity an option to do so in the first place. You could say, "Oh no, that's where you're wrong, God cannot affect free will." And maybe they're right, maybe he can't, but he loves all his children.

So again you ask me what I believe in, and again I'll say I'm not sure. I can tell you right now that I believe in football. I believe in love, I believe in friendship. I believe in not judging people because I am not perfect, and honestly I don't think I would want to be, because perfect to me might be awful to you. It truly is all in how you look at things. That's why I'm not 100% on what I believe in. I try my best to believe in the Lord and in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, (who I also think are three completely different beings, which goes against the Apostles Creed) but I also believe that Adoptionism is something that could be very true. The reason I like this theory so much is because it shows that Jesus was just a normal man who loved the Lord and did the right thing. It shows that you don't have to be a being sent from god, you can just be a normal person, there didn't have to be any immaculate conception or anything like that. If you go back to the Apostles Creed, and you match it up with the conception, it would make absolutely no sense because it would mean that the Lord sent himself down as the Holy Ghost conceived himself as Jesus in the Virgin Mary.

So those of you who are listening to me up here are probably thinking "Oh Lord, where's this kid going with this?" Well, here's your answer.

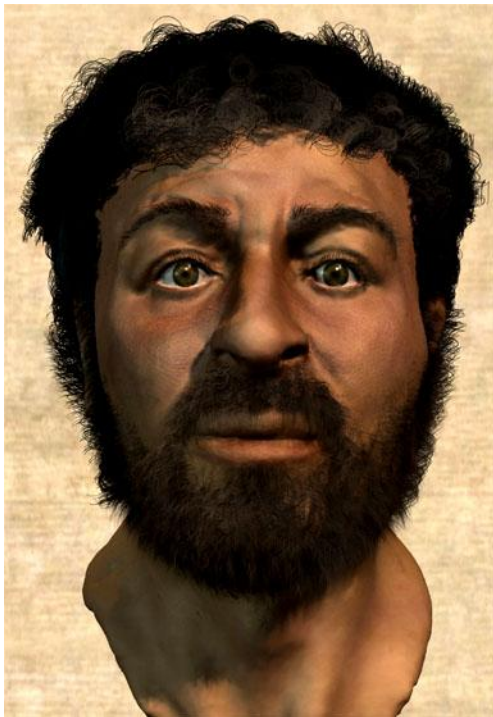
I believe that some of the stories in the bible were told to help people understand. For example, in the movie Life of Pi, some of you may have seen it or read it some may have not, but by the end of the story the author is telling his story and the reporters who are listening to the story don't believe that he survived that long on a lifeboat, with a Bengali tiger no less, so he had to retell the story so that they would be able to understand and believe. Even though the second story wasn't true. That's how I think the bible is. I also think the bible exaggerates many stories to make them seem more amazing because honestly, are you going to want to believe in someone who died on a cross and that was it? Or, would you rather have the amazing happen and have that same man, who died, come back and talk to the people who doubted. Unfortunately, I think that if that story hadn't been told, not many people would have listened. But maybe that did happen.

As I sit here and think about what I believe in, I try to narrow it down to one main belief and I just can't. I, too, think of all the amazing things that were told in the bible; His conception, the resurrection, the creation story, Adam and Eve, so many amazing stories, none of which I believe 100%. But here's the other thing, maybe all these things did happen and the reason many of us don't believe, and maybe some of you do, is because we all try to rationalize the bible. We all try to make sense of it, but we can't, it just doesn't work like that. We can't make sense of it because we weren't there and nothing like that happens today. Things, maybe less worldly known, but just as amazing do.

For example; the miracle of birth. Perhaps some of you were struggling with your beliefs with the lord and then along came an amazing moment, that moment when you held your newborn baby girl or boy, and at that moment you knew that the lord was with you, that he helped you and helped bring this little child into the world. Then I look at my grandparents and parents and siblings and friends and I know there must be a heaven. The reason I know is because when “the time” comes for these amazing people in my life, the ones that I'm so lucky to have met and to have loved, I'll know that they are going to heaven. It's a constant battle between wanting to believe and finding myself back to this point of not knowing and yet still wanting to. Personally, I don't think I'll need a miracle to get me to truly believe, I think once I accept the idea of not knowing, then I will truly believe.

My Name is Jack Walker and I believe that all men and women are equal, I believe in friendship, I believe in love, I want to believe in God and I believe in football. Thank you.

- Jack Walker, age 14



The definition of Faith is a complete trust or confidence in someone or something. I would be able to tell all of you right now that I can strongly agree with that. In faith, you do not have to believe in a specific thing. I think faith is something that you believe. I do not believe that faith is something that you are forced to believe in. It is something that you as an individual think of something and the details that you believe in. As for me, I believe that there is a greater force watching over us. However, I do not believe in many stories in the bible. This is one of the reasons of why I love being a Presbyterian. Presbyterians are open to change not just as a whole, but also as an individual. We all do not have to believe in the same thing. We can all believe in whatever we want to.

I want to join this church because we are allowed to have our own opinion on faith. We are never forced to believe in something that we don't want to. Our church is a very nice community because nobody is ever judged and we don't have to hide what we believe in and be scared to admit it. I can really feel comfortable when I am at church and I feel like I can come to anyone here with any of my problems.

I believe in a greater force, but I do not believe in all the stories that are told in the bible. For example, when god speaks to Moses from a burning bush, I believe that a message could have been taught or given to him to tell him or prove to him that he had to be the one to rescue the miserable Hebrews in Egypt, but I do not believe that a bush was actually on fire and god, or the greater force, was speaking to him that way.

I do not think god is all-powerful, all knowing, and all good. I do not think god is omnipotent. I do not think he is omnipotent because you can never force someone to do something. I think god is benevolent because even though bad things happen to people, it can be to prove a point or to show people that we need good which in a way is a positive outcome. I think that god is aware of all this and knows that this world would not be able to function for too long if everything was all good. I think god knows that if he does everything for us that we will be very dependent on god and not know how to take care of ourselves when the time came that something bad came.

When the world was created, I do not think that god was here at the beginning. I do not think he existed at the beginning because if he didn't then who did? I think that this is where the science comes in. I am not sure how god was created, but I think the earth is a mixture of all the particles in space, and we are too. I do not know how god was created, but I do not think it was science. I think that in a way, we created god. I think that we believed in a greater force and came up with a god. We aren't the only religion. I think that god might just be a reason or an excuse for the past. Something we can use to explain to people how the world was created and how the first people alive lived. I could be wrong, because I am not totally sure of what I think about god and how he was created.

I think that god can come in many forms, like the trinity. God could be father, son, or Holy Spirit, but I think that god could just be energy, or a motivation. God could be a motivation or a reason for all of us to do what we feel like we need to do. Without god maybe we wouldn't feel the need to make a stand. I do not think that praying to god works. I do not think that you can send a message directly to god. I do not believe in that because if god is taking care of all of these people, and he is omnipresent, how does he have time to answer a prayer? Of all the people in the world, there are probably many that are praying to him at the same time, and he can't answer all of them. I think that god will answer prayers, but you have to have a good reason for it because there are plenty of people in his hands that have needs. I think that the reason why a lot of people believe in god is because it comforts them. If they are alone, they feel like they have someone to talk to, and someone to fix all of their problems.

I do not think that the bible is 100% accurate or 0%. I think that it is in between. I think that it is in between because the bible is not totally historically accurate, but the point, or the moral, of it is true. I think that everything they put into it is symbolic in some way. When Jesus is thought of as this king on a stallion, he comes in riding a donkey, and he is a shepherd. This makes a point, even though every detail could not be accurate. This is symbolic because it shows that people that are even the lowest can make a difference. Many stories are most likely exaggerated, but the moral or the point of the story stays the same. I believe that why

they made it so extreme is to also get us to be more interested and pay attention more, and that the stories will be more memorable that way.

When something bad happens to me, and people tell me over and over about karma, I disagree very strongly with them. I do not believe in karma. I don't believe in karma because just because you did something bad or made a mistake earlier, It doesn't mean something bad gets done to you. I think that it is just important to learn from your mistakes and to move on. When you think about it, it is hard to go through your life without some disappointment or bad things to happen to you. It might just be something that happens out of the ordinary, for no reason. It does not mean you did something wrong. In the book of Job, Even though Job loses everything, it's no because he did something bad, it's just a lesson of life. Sometimes you just can't stop things, not necessarily bad things, from happening to you.

In the New Testament, we caught a glimpse of the last three years of Jesus's life. Though we only caught a glimpse of a couple years, Jesus seemed to make a big difference that still affects us today. He taught many people what it was like to take a stand, and had us put ourselves in other people's shoes. When he saw a very wounded man lying on the side of the street, he did not ignore him and keep on walking like everyone else did, for they believed that if they touched someone who was dirty, they were dirty. He went up to the man to help him. Not only did he put himself in the man's shoes, he also stood up to everyone else saying that we have to respect each other, and help those who need it, because that is what being a good person is all about. You shouldn't expect anything back, you get the pleasure of helping someone else, and their gratefulness should be enough.

I favor many of Jesus's teachings. Jesus seemed to bring sense into the world. He taught us that we need to help the less fortunate, like the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus did not focus on blessing the fortunate and the needy, he focused on the women, the outcast, the poor, and all in all the less fortunate. He focused on what was right to do; he made us see to worry about others, to hear for their cry of help, even though it may be silent. He taught us that forgiveness is many times the better choice. Forgiving is a great thing that we have benefitted from a lot in the past. He taught us to look past the conflicts and the hate into a happier and better future, which also helped to make us see the beauty in helping others and the less fortunate, because it's not just for ourselves, it's also for others and their future, too. Jesus brought courage into our world. He wasn't afraid of what was going to happen to him, as long as it was for others. He put everyone in front of himself, to help all of us, and it still makes an impact today. All of his messages still run through my head everyday, even at school, like help the outcasts, and forgiving others. The most important one to me is that even though people try to bring us down, we still need to stand up. For the people that are scared, we need to be brave and face the world, because I hope to make even the tiniest impact so that I can learn more from Jesus and spy from his point of view.

I am where I am now, to get confirmed, because I want to show everyone that I am more than what they see. I can make a change, be the difference, and help others. I can prove myself to everyone. By writing this paper, I have learned more about faith and myself than I ever have before. I'm only fourteen years old, and I can't guarantee that I will believe in the same things when I'm sixteen, or eighteen, or twenty. Right here is a good place to start. I am learning not only more about my religion, but also more about myself, as an individual.

- Maddie Elwell, age 13

From John the Baptist to Nicea: Stages in the development of the early Christian tradition

1-30 c.e.

John the Baptist,
the precursor and mentor of Jesus
(died about 27 c.e.)

Jesus of Nazareth,
traveling sage and worker of miracles
(died about 30 c.e.)

30-60 c.e.

Paul of Tarsus,
chief founder of gentile Christianity
(letters written about 50-60 c.e.)

Sayings Gospel Q
(first edition, about 50 c.e.)

Gospel of Thomas
(first edition, about 50 c.e.)

60-80 c.e.

Signs Gospel
(eventually incorporated into Mark)

Gospel of Mark,
the first narrative gospel
(first edition, about 70 c.e.)

Didache, first believers' code
(first edition)

80-100 c.e.

Gospel of Matthew,
incorporating Mark and Q
(about 80 c.e.)

Gospel of Luke,
incorporating Mark and Q
(about 90 c.e.)

Dialogue of the Savior
(first edition, probably 50-100 c.e.)

Gospel of Peter
(first edition, probably 50-100 c.e.)

80-100 c.e., cont.

Egerton Gospel
(probably 50-100 c.e.)

Gospel of John,
incorporating the Signs Gospel
(first edition, about 90 c.e.)

Mark, canonical edition
(first edition, about 100 c.e.)

100-150 c.e.

Gospel of John, third edition
(with revisions and additions)

Gospel of James, first edition
(Nag Hammadi)

Gospel of Philip (Nag Hammadi)

Other gospels (including Gnostic gospels
with ecstatic quotations)

Mark, second edition
(with additions)

Mark, third edition
(with additions)

Fragment of Gospel of John
(P66)

Other fragments of Egerton Gospel
(P45, P75, P90, P104, P115, P130, P158, P199, P207, P243, P266, P293, P322, P347, P366, P392, P400, P422, P452, P461, P480, P492, P509, P520, P531, P559, P569, P590, P600, P609, P620, P630, P640, P650, P660, P670, P680, P690, P700, P710, P720, P730, P740, P750, P760, P770, P780, P790, P800, P810, P820, P830, P840, P850, P860, P870, P880, P890, P900, P910, P920, P930, P940, P950, P960, P970, P980, P990)

150-300 c.e.

Emergence of four "recognized" gospels
(Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

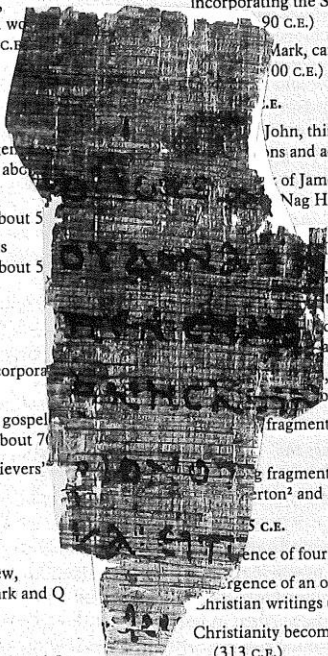
Emergence of an official collection of
Christian writings ("New Testament")

Christianity becomes a legal religion
(313 c.e.)

Council of Nicea
(325 c.e.)

First official creeds

First surviving copies of "Bibles"
(about 325-350 c.e.)



The Bible is a big fishing story. Stories can be told how they originally happened or they can be told in a more interesting exaggerated way. Like how people tell stories about the 50-pound trout they caught when in reality it was 10 pounds, but the story about the 50-pound trout would sure be more interesting to hear. The point being that in both cases, the fish was caught, regardless of its weight. This is how I think the Bible was written and how it was supposed to be interpreted.

One of the main narratives that illustrates how the stories in the Bible are exaggerated is Noah's ark. In Noah's ark the Bible states that Noah was told that there was going to be a 'worldwide' flood and was told to build an ark (a large wooden boat) to save the animals. It was said that he brought two of every single species that had existed in the world onto this boat. There is around 8.7 million species in the world today. So by taking a male and female of every species onto this boat, Noah would have had to take over 17 million animals onto this boat! Now in reality did this happen probably not, but that is not the point of the story. The point of the story is there was a large flood, and since the people back then didn't know that a world existed beyond what they could see, and all they could see was water, it was assumed that it was a worldwide flood. In this story my belief is that Noah probably got two of every species of animal he could find, so say he got 500 species. Thus, he thought he had gotten all the species in the world, because those were all the species he could find.

On a more different but similar note there is my question about the issue of god being Omnipotent (all-powerful), Omniscient (all knowing), Omnipresent (everywhere), and Benevolent (all good). If all of these things are true then how can bad things happen to good people? This is an issue that I really struggle with because my uncle was an amazing person but for around the last 8 years of his life he was an alcoholic, and sadly he has passed. But before those last few years of his life he was an amazing powerful person. Now if god is these four things then how could this have happened? If good was all knowing and benevolent then how could he have let this happen? How could he let my uncle go without helping him? On the same note my cousin has now passed from random heart failure at the young age 27. How could this be? God should have seen him at that moment and helped him through all of that and he should still be on this earth and being a great cousin or brother or son. I think then that god is perhaps limited to being just Omnipresent and benevolent, because good is said to be in and around all of us, and that goodness is there helping everyone of us in our daily lives get through struggles and hardships; but he only has so much power that he can use to help us, and like everyone he makes mistakes too, even though he is benevolent.

There are also things that I am not too sure of like the Trinity: Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit being all one person. This doesn't make sense to me because the bible says that Jesus is the Son of God. How could this make sense if they are all one person? If they are all the same person then did Jesus give birth to himself? On the same note where did god and the Holy Spirit come from? How were they made before Jesus, even though they are the same person as Jesus and therefore made at the same time? This is why I like heresies. Sometimes they make sense to me especially the "Adoptionism" of Jesus. This heresy states that after God noticed the supreme and enlightened nature of Jesus when he was already grown that God then adopted him as his son. All that being said one creation story that does make sense to me is the story of creation itself; even though I still believe the Big Bang Theory. The way I believe both of these things simultaneously is that far enough back there had to be something to create something. And how was that created scientists don't really know. This is where I think god came in and created the cosmos before and through the bang. Because there had be something many years ago to create that something that started the big bang.

In conclusion I believe in many things, probably more than I have mentioned here but I have questions on certain things and will always have questions. But I am a person that likes to ask questions and likes to find a way to answer them. And even though that for some of my questions, no matter how hard I work at them, I will never find an answer, it gives me comfort that this church would welcome my questioning mind and unsure faith. And that is why I hope to get confirmed into this church. For even though we all might believe slightly different things, we still all come together and everyone is accepted.

As I grew up, I began to question whether God could truly exist with all the science surrounding things like creation and why things happen. However, I think I've come up with a reasonable way both science and religion can combine without impeding one another.

What it means to me to be Presbyterian, is that I do not uphold the extra sacraments such as marriage, and the rules such as women cannot be in positions of power. Women have just as much right to power as men do, and the whole "annulment of marriage" deal Catholics have seems a bit ridiculous to me. As for this particular church, I choose here because this is where my friends are, and I can feel separated from the life I lead outside these walls, things like homework, cleaning up after the dog, (I trust you know what that means), and boredom.

In terms of God, I'm not sure He's the perfect being we may be led to believe. I think it is possible for Him to not be all powerful, though all knowing and omnipresent, and most likely, beneficial. Ever heard the phrase, "God works in mysterious ways?" I think that He does, that He is more of a catalyst, rather than all powerful. He, I think, is limited to being able to start a process, but cannot control what happens afterward. What that means in terms of evil, is He used his limitless knowledge to weigh the good and bad of mankind, and deemed the good more powerful than the bad, and created the Big Bang, and started evolution. He cannot control the choices we make, but He believed when he evolved the first primate, that we would overall do more good than bad, and whether this is true or not remains to be seen.

As for Jesus, I go back to the idea of being a catalyst. I believe that for the most part, things the Bible says Jesus did may have actually happened. One possibility I've been tossing around is that he may have been a form of superhuman, another result of God's hand, but instead of (in some cases, it seems the disciples figured it out) praising him, we put him to death, destroying God's handiwork. I do believe in the Resurrection, but as one of his abilities as superhuman, he became like energy, and transformed from one phase of being to another, into a more otherworldly, spectral form, and actually conversed with Mary and the disciples. I therefore also believe in the Virgin Birth, but seeing as explaining it would be too graphic, I'm just going to assume you understand I would continue to say something along the lines of using his abnormal abilities.

Now we come to what I think may be a very important aspect of humanity-The Holy Spirit. I believe, still going with the catalyst thing, that the Holy Spirit represents the potential energy we all have to become beyond what evolution made us today, to become super beings. However, it isn't just snap, you did something nice and you are suddenly extraordinary. God tried that in a trial run with Christ, and he was crucified. So it needs to be subtle, and be given to someone selfless, like movies make them seem to be, because one wrong move and the hero is now the villain, we're all dead, and no going back. That, I believe, is why evil is allowed to exist, because there are too many bystanders, too many neutrals, and not enough good to conquer the bad. Through this theory, I believe theology is possible, and can be achieved through non-spiritual means.

I know this all sounds like something out of a fairy tale, that eventually God will step in and make everything all happy dandy, but I believe it is beyond His power and within ours. The first step is to, as a race, learn to be more accepting of people who are different than ourselves. We need to become more selfless, more caring, and less violent. I'm not saying we have to completely drop things like violence, just senseless killing, abuse, things that are negative and aren't necessary. If the Good Samaritan from Jesus's parables can do, there's no reason we can't. We are, after all, a far more developed and intelligent race. This is another particular aspect of this church that I am fond of- its willingness to help others. This is something we must, as a community, further embed into the footprint the human race leaves on this Earth. It's the only one we have (until, of course, another is located, as I am sure we will), and we'd best make the most of it for everyone. My only question is, who will join me in my noble quest?

- Tommy Rebeck, age 14

2013 Confirmation Class

Katie Asper

Riley Bakes

Jenni Bown

Luke Brzozowski

Peter Butler

Hannah Calistri

Maddie Elwell

Paige Lawton

Frances Madeira

Ana Nottingham

Natalia Nottingham

Tommy Rebeck

Jack Walker

Ali Watson

Carolyn Wilde