



## ***Telling Our Stories***

October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011

First of all, I would like to say that First Church has affected my life in many ways. How could it not? My First Church career started about 13 years ago when I stepped in the church doors to attend my first nursery school class. After years of Sunday school, confirmation, and youth group, perhaps you could say I'm a First Church veteran. Quite simply, it would take way too long to describe how important this place has been to me, just how many ways it has had an influence in shaping the person I am today. So I would like to share just one experience that I have found meaningful.

It actually took place right where I am standing now. It was Confirmation Sunday, and I was a nervous young Confirmand sharing what exactly I had gotten out of the Confirmation process. Unfortunately, as one of many consequences of adolescence, when I hit the word disciple in my speech, my voice cracked, and shot up a good two octaves. My friends still find this funny to this day. Sometimes they will pass me in the hallway at school and intentionally say "di-SCI-ples" as they pass by, but it's all in good fun. However, the truly meaningful part of the day for me came after the speech, when we were huddled down in Palmer Hall awaiting our bibles. A man I did not recognize approached me. He pulled me to the side and told me that he was new to Simsbury. His family had just moved and they were trying out different churches trying to gage a sense of the community. Then he shook my hand and thanked me. He said that my experiences had made him feel better about his choice to move here. He said that this was a place he would feel comfortable sending his kids. In that moment I realized the true power of this place. I see that through all the projects and missions and committees we have here, we all have the power to spread God's words not through judgment or fear but with open arms. Frankly, among many youth today, religion has a bad reputation. After what we see in the media, religion sometimes leaves a sour taste in people's mouths. But I want to point those people here to this place: A place where no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here; a place where I hope people can find as much meaning as I have.

Thank you.  
Ryan Goss