

Telling Our Stories

December 6, 2011

My name is Tanner Gleason and I am a senior at Simsbury High School. Here at first church, I am a member of PF and a teen Confirmation leader. I was raised going to Sunday School here at First Church, but when I was in fifth grade my family moved to Pennsylvania because of a Job change my dad had. While we were there, we joined the local Methodist Church, where I went through the Confirmation process and became a member of the youth group. After a few years, my dad's job changed again and we came back to Simsbury. A funny side story that I think you'll enjoy: Kevin was doing youth ministry in the same town and at the same time I was in Pennsylvania – he was actually in the church down the street from my Methodist Church, but we never ran into each other until we both ended up in Simsbury. Anyway, as I reflect back, I never truly felt spiritually attached to that church in Pennsylvania. Nothing against it, I guess the message just didn't click. Looking back, I realize that the confirmation process here focuses mainly on "the questions" and exploring them. At the church in Pennsylvania, our confirmation classes were more about going over the "answers" to those questions. I prefer the approach we take here at First Church.

If I'm honest, at first I came to PF here at First Church when we moved back because a lot of my friends were going. But during that first year in PF I went to soup kitchens, tutored in Hartford, and spent my Sunday nights discussing topics that actually seemed relevant in my life and PF became a big part of my life as well. That was 2009, my sophomore year of high school, and it was then when for the first time, I actually felt myself developing "faith" and actually feeling connected with God.

By the time my junior year came around, I was very eager to find more ways to get involved with the church. Lucky enough, Kevin called and asked me to be a teen confirmation leader, which I of course said yes to. Throughout that year, I worked with a group of 8th grade guys and had some of the deepest and most heartfelt discussions about faith, religion and God I have ever had. By the time the end of the year rolled around and I watched them get Confirmed, I really felt almost as if I was getting confirmed again.

As I've reflected on why First Church is the best fit for me, I've come to the conclusion that it is the way we view faith here. Faith here is not seen only as a list of rules, but as inspiration to carry out Jesus' message in our daily lives. For me, this has meant learning to have compassion for people in the shelters we have served, doing mission through an event like

Dance for Change, gaining perspective by tutoring in Hartford, and talking about stuff that means something to me on Sunday nights. First Church is about learning to accept everyone for who they are, knowing that God loves everyone, no exceptions. I pray that this church might continue to impact our current group of confirmands as it has impacted me. Thank you.

- Tanner Gleason