



STATEMENTS OF FAITH

2021 CONFIRMATION CLASS
WILTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lily Archibald

Matthew Darien

Charlie Greene

Benjamin Mrakovic

Grace Ratcliffe

Aiden Sharp

Caleb Sharp

May 23, 2021

O Lord, uphold them by your Holy Spirit. Daily increase in them your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and wonder, the spirit joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

Lily Archibald

My name is Lily Archibald and over the course of this wonderful journey, I have discovered how I feel closest to God. This realization didn't come right away, but after reading scripture, learning the history of the bible, joining my fellow confirmands in prayer, and countless opportunities for giving back to the community, I felt close to God. Julie gave me the opportunity to go with her to drop off the activity bags that this great group put together during confirmation, and some games (for all ages) that I myself have been collecting for the Open Door shelter. Especially with Covid, it was more powerful for me to walk there in person and I'm grateful for that. As I was packing the last game to give to the Open Door shelter's children center, I admit, God wasn't my primary thought, however following my trip with Julie I had felt it. Now I can't quite describe it, but I felt God. The strongest I ever have. Now both big and small acts of service for my community not only makes me feel closest to God, but that I am showing love and gratitude in one of the best ways possible.

Proverbs Chapter 3, Verse 4 scripture says, "Let love and faithfulness never leave you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, then you will win favor and a good name, in the sight of God and man." As a Presbyterian, I will use this quote in the future to fuel my newfound love for giving back to the community. Personally, the love that I receive from my coteries and God alike provide me with the strength to want to give back. This is how I choose to carry myself in relation to Jesus. This is how I choose for my faith to be reflected in the way I live.

Feeling the presence of God not only when I give back to my community, but also when I forgive others have been such crucial parts of this journey for me. Despite not wanting to at times, the act of forgiveness has provoked the feeling of connection I have with God. In Matthew chapter 6 verse 14, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." This candid quote I believe is perfectly worded in saying that when you show mercy to a person (maybe a sibling, parent, friend, or coworker,) Christ forgives us too.

Now reviewing my experiences with God these past few weeks, as a Presbyterian I feel as though I am ready to be confirmed. I would love to become a member of the Wilton Presbyterian Church.

Mentor: Jessica Jones

Matthew Darien

Before I had ever gone, I thought church was going to be boring and well, it was sort of boring but not totally boring. I remember in the beginning I was very confused. Every Sunday I'd go with my family and my grandfather and I'd take part in Church School. In Church School I was able to get a better understanding of Jesus. I remember that we learned how much of a good person Jesus is. The one thing I really remember was hearing the Lord's Prayer being used over and over again and I never learned the words to it. I remember my mom telling me I had to do confirmation and it was something that would make my grandfather very happy because maybe it had a lot to do with him knowing that his grandson would know what it means to have faith.

When I entered confirmation, we were asked what the word God meant to us. To me, the word God represented a tall man standing up in the clouds with a white beard wanting to give you a big hug. I always had that vision in my head. I also always thought Jesus and God were one person. Church School helped me understand how they are related to ultimately be that one person within the Trinity. I have learned that Jesus led the way to teach us how to get to heaven. In my mind heaven looks like this place in the clouds and everything is all shiny and nice and that is a place I want to go.

I have a better understanding of God than I did a few years ago when I first started coming to church. Learning about Jesus and all of his good deeds and selfless acts play a role in how I treat other people by reminding me of Him. I still have questions that lead me to want to continue to learn about Jesus and therefore I am open to learning about Him and continue growing in my faith. Currently I feel closest to God whenever I'm at church. When I'm worshiping with everyone together I find it easiest to communicate with God because we're all doing it together.

If I were to do a service that I would feel the most happy is volunteering at an animal shelter because I love animals and because they can't take care of themselves. I remember doing something like this with one of my friends when I was in 5th grade at a basketball tournament where in between matches one of my friends and I would sell candy to people and all of the money we got was going to be donated to the ASPCA. I'm open to other services that I would enjoy going forward. I remember the feeling of knowing something I took part in is for a greater good.

Following my year in confirmation I feel more confident than ever that God is definitely standing in the clouds waiting to give me a giant hug. I would like to become a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church and sit next to my family. I look forward to the day this happens so I can continue my conversations with God.

Mentor: Jock Wright

Charlie Greene

After many hours of thought, I have decided to become a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church through my confirmation. For most of my Confirmation year, I thought I was going to continue as a Seeker or Inquirer as I knew I had faith however I still was unsure about what that looked like for myself. After much introspection and conversation with family, I remembered my time spent within Church and within this Church community. Spending time participating in Rise Against Hunger and other service work opportunities was very important in my learning experience. I was thankful that I could volunteer and help others and I appreciate the opportunities the church has provided so I could have these kinds of experiences. I was disappointed that Midnight Run and the trip to Washington D.C. was cancelled due to the pandemic, but I look forward to more opportunities to serve in the future. I have heard how these experiences really help strengthen faith and personal growth as well as how it brought others closer to God.

I was able to build a strong connection with my mentor, Ralph Bernabei, and I hope he and I can go to NYC and DC to volunteer in the future.

My meetings with Nate Taylor and Julie Fowler helped me understand what faith and being a Presbyterian really means. Faith journeys are different for everyone. Some take a bit longer to develop and refine. My relationship with God has gotten stronger over the confirmation process through our meetings, conversations, dinners and more. I feel I have gotten to know what God is about and how He works within my life and I am committed to growing my relationship with Him. I believe He was with me all along as I spent time conflicted about my path.

The Bible passages we read over the year have taught me life lessons. I am grateful for our church family. So much is accomplished for the good of others within this church community. After all, I was baptized in this sanctuary! And, when my Grandfather, Howard Greene, died last year, Reverend White was the first person to come over to our house, sit outside in our masks, and pray with us. Becoming a member of this church will ensure I have the support, encouragement and opportunities needed to continue on in my faith journey.

I believe that this is the right decision for me to continue my faith journey within the community in which I have been raised and God will continue to guide me on the right path for life. For these reasons I wish to become a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church.

Mentor: Ralph Bernabei

Ben Mrakovcic

For years now, I have been attending church whenever my Mom would force me to go. Little did I know that it would take a global pandemic for me to truly find my own version of faith.

Back when I was younger, I didn't always enjoy going to church, but I still would try to absorb everything around me. Despite whether I enjoy something or not, I usually try to pay attention as it could help me further down the road. Luckily for me this turned out to be true. When all seemed lost and I wasn't able to hangout with friends or go outside, I started to pray. Although I didn't pray for much, I did feel like it got some of the stress and pressure off my back.

An important person in my faith journey was my Mom. My Mom would always sign my sister and I up for mission work or whatever was going on at the church. And for all of that I have to say, "Thank you." I think that interacting with the church all these years has really changed my beliefs and who I am as a person. Despite my lack of choice when I was younger, I am so grateful now that my Mom introduced me to WPC.

Another important part of my faith journey is the mission work I was able to be part of. Every autumn my family and I would help with Rise Against Hunger and Fall Rake n' Roll. Albeit I never got to attend a Midnight run, I think I understand why people enjoy it so much. Being able to help other people and see the smiles on their face is something hard to hate.

Something else I'm so grateful for in my faith journey is Julie and the confirmation class. It's disappointing that confirmation in 2020 was cut short, but I still think that we all learned a lot about other faiths. It was certainly interesting to see a display of faith in other religions, but it also proved to be some reassurance that I was going down the right path for me. Confirmation also taught us about the Holy Trinity and Bible. It is important to note that I don't use my Bible as often as I should, but I still think that some of the bible lessons have left a meaningful impact on me. Despite the fact that it's a classic parable, reviewing and going through the Good Samaritan parable was what left me with a meaningful impression. That people are too focused on themselves and their own appearance to realize that all men are created equal. It's this lesson that really inspired me to keep on doing mission work.

It's because of this, all my experiences, that I decided I would like to continue helping others and developing as a Christian through new experiences. I also enjoyed spending so much time with my mentor, Steve Connor. Mr. Connor went to all of the events with me, and took me out for some great meals and

conversations. We have a lot in common, and it was great to talk to an adult who shares some of my same beliefs and values. We talked about a lot of things: sports, politics, our families, and what God and church has meant to Mr. Connor in his own life. He's been through a lot of really challenging things, and he shared those with me. I think that took a lot of courage. He explained how God, his faith, and this church helped him and his family through it all. As a result I would like to continue my faith journey as a Christian through being a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church.

Mentor: Steve Connor

Grace Ratcliffe

Ever since I was a young child, and began attending church school, we've been told God is our father, and we were to believe He is the creator of the universe and everything in it. Perhaps this is why I've always felt He was someone I could turn to. I knew that like my parents, God would always be a constant in my life, He would always be there even if never realized it. But to put my past beliefs aside, I never really understood why or how God could always be there for everyone, even the wicked and cruel, until I began confirmation. Over the past year, I've come to realize that God will protect, defend, comfort, strengthen, teach, discipline, love, and give me the best, whether I like it or not. He would be there for everyone whether they like it or not.

On many occasions, my classmates and I have been asked the question "When or where do you feel close to God?" The complexity of the question is hidden within the fact that truthfully, God is always here. It is hard to locate a time or place you feel close, because He never leaves. In a way, it relates to the fact that you don't have to pray just in church, but can anywhere. People all around us need our help, and we don't always see that truth, but when we pray we are bringing hope to them. So perhaps my awareness of God may increase when in the presence of someone in need, or a struggling friend or family member, because I'll send a prayer their way. But my closeness to God, still does not increase in the eyes of others suffering, because In those moments, I only wish for God to be close to them.

When God created us, He gifted us his same loving nature. He has given us the ability to feel compassion, and want the best for others. We all have the capability to receive love, reciprocate love, and the need to do both. God made us to love, so maybe within that is where I have found we are the closest.

The point I'm making here is that I don't feel any closer to God than I already am when I'm in a certain place, or seeing a certain person. I feel that God is closest to me, in the feeling of love. Whether it be the love God feels for all His people, or the love His people feel for others, I can't help but associate the feeling with Him. Perhaps my belief has to do with the fact that we people need love to help us sometimes, just as we need God to help us. He is no different than a neighbor taking care of your pets, an officer helping you cross the street, or a family member helping you when you fall down and scrape your knee. God gave us the ability to help others, to want to help others. So truthfully there is no place I feel closer to God than within the natural essence that is love. At Church I feel that love as well and therefore I would like to be confirmed as a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church.

Mentor: Berta Hull

Aiden Sharp

Questions about God have stirred in my head all year. As I have reflected on this, it brought about many other questions like what does it really mean to be a Christian and what role will the Church have in my life as I get older? While I certainly don't have all the answers to my questions at this point, I feel like I have been able to move in the right direction to have a better understanding.

Church school has evolved a great deal throughout my life. My family joined the Church about eight years ago when I was in kindergarten. I remember being nervous about going off to Church school in the beginning, but Molly Hoch warmly greeted me and my brother, putting us at ease. However, this school year is when the change in Church school became more apparent because the conversations delved deeper into more personal topics. It is also during this time that I was able to meet my mentor, Ralph Bernabei.

At first, the idea of conveying my beliefs with an adult seemed to make me feel uneasy, but I remember working with Mr. Bernabei for the Midnight Run several times. He is a very easy person to open up to. After getting to know him, I discovered that we share similar interests. We met in person and had Zoom calls throughout the year. We discussed the Bible. Although the Bible can be confusing, Mr. Bernabei has helped me to see the bigger picture. Like I have heard my entire life, I focused on the message that Jesus is love. He is kind and selfless. Overall, with Mr. Bernabei's guidance, I feel like I have grown to appreciate the importance of faith and understanding of the value of the stories in the Bible. Through the Bible I have learned more about Jesus and his ministry. Mr. Bernabei leads Midnight Run, a service mission helping to feed the homeless on the streets of NYC. Jesus modeled his life through service and it is through His example I wish to continue to pursue my faith and actions. Mr. Bernabei provides an opportunity for me through Midnight Run to serve as Jesus did.

Music provides a conduit to my faith. This year, I am in the process of auditioning with violin for the Pre-College program at Juilliard. For a long time now, I have dedicated several hours a day to practicing. Although I can see the end coming soon, it is hard to stay motivated in the last few days. In Jeremiah 29:11, it is written, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Even though I know that with all my hard work, my chances for success aren't guaranteed, this verse gives me solace and helps me push forward. This scripture verse lends support and comfort in uncertain times and in kind I would like to be that support and comfort for others when

needed. Having faith is more than hoping for myself, it is the offering of myself through my relationship with God for the betterment of someone else.

This Church and the congregation mean a lot to me. We have much in common through our faith. I look forward to taking part in mission trips and volunteer work and would be honored to become a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church.

Mentor: Ralph Bernabei

Caleb Sharp

Faith is a difficult concept to understand. I used to believe faith was going to Church on Sundays and reading the Bible. But as I grew older, I realized that faith had a much broader meaning than that. I understood that praying to God and performing acts of kindness are also displays of faith. Now, as a young adult, I find myself having more questions about my own relationship with God, the Bible, and Church.

I believe that prayer is not the only form of connection with God. When I was six years old, I had my first cello lesson. The deep, resonant sound of the cello amazed me. Playing the cello is my way of communicating, through emotions and passion. I have come to understand this is a form of prayer time I have with God, because it allows me to show what is in my heart that only God can understand. I have enjoyed this spiritual connection for a long time.

I am an avid reader of many types of literature. A couple of years ago I decided to do some reading from the Bible on my own, so I picked Genesis and Luke. The story of Genesis always fascinated me, because in it, Moses retells the creation story in a very simplified way that is easy to understand. When I was a little kid, I could not figure out how exactly the universe could be created in those six days, but later I was able to understand it as the basis for the big picture of God as the Creator of the universe. The book of Luke had such a starkly different tone. God, in the form of a man named Jesus, was more personal. He lived among regular people, teaching God's love. I felt the overall theme was about love for each other and God while showing acts of kindness to those who might not be as fortunate.

Acts of kindness and love have always been an important part of Wilton Presbyterian Church. I really enjoyed volunteering to help prepare the food and supplies for Midnight Run. Now that I will be a high-schooler next year, I will be able to go help distribute the items in New York. My mentor, Mr. Gabrielson, volunteered his time to teach me and my brother Latin this year. I know that he loves to share his passion for languages and teaching with others such as high schoolers who are interested in learning Greek on their own. It inspired me to do something similar with my life helping others. I have also seen how the congregation comes together to help support families in need. This is the type of community I want to be close to throughout my life.

I am grateful for the Church's love and generosity as I journeyed through my faith, and I believe that the Church has an important role in my life. Continuing my life with the Church's support is a wonderful opportunity. I would like to become a member of Wilton Presbyterian Church.

Mentor: Max Gabrielson

Today, seven of our confirmed candidates completed a year-long process of spiritual exploration and self-discovery that was designed for them to find their authentic and unique voice of faith within our faith community.

Thank you to the mentors, who helped to shepherd our Confirmands along the way.

Ralph Bernabei

Stephen Connor

Max Gabrielson

Berta Hull

Jessica Jones

Nate Taylor

Nicole Volavka-Close

Jock Wright

Thank you to **Julie Fowler** and **Nate Taylor** for providing spiritual guidance and mentoring during this stage of their journey!