

October 22, 2017 Faith Statements

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 45:1-7, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15-22

Ideas from Diana Butler Base's 2012 book: Christianity After Religion,
and her Huffington Post article from 4/07/12 called A Resurrected Christianity?

Grace to you, and peace. Amen.

This morning we have the privilege of experiencing a baptism as well as confirmation faith statements.
Reid will be baptized later in the service.

Talking with his folks, I asked how they think about baptism and what it means.

They spoke of baptism as a welcome into a loving God-family

And as a starting place in a spiritual journey that stretches over our lifetime.

So, jump ahead a bit in that lifetime journey... to confirmation.

Here at University Lutheran Church of Hope, confirmation is a two-year process:

Students participate in Sunday morning activities and monthly mini-retreats.

They make a commitment to serving within the congregation—perhaps helping with Sunday School,
ushering, acolyting, or doing communion clean up.

They have intentional conversations with a confirmation mentor.

Finally they have the opportunity to create a statement of faith and to be confirmed.

This year four students are at this stage: Ian, Josh, Nicke, and Jazmyne.

Today they'll share their faith statements and next week they'll be confirmed.

In talking with our students and, indeed, in talking with a number of you of many ages, many
stages, I've been reminded of the need for a profound refocus.

Diana Butler Bass speaks about the 3Bs—Believing, Behaving, and Belonging.

Over the centuries we've often placed Believing first in the line up, as in you must believe X in order to
belong to Y community.

Confirmation has traditionally fit this pattern, belief comes first.

Trouble is that developmentally teenagers (and probably a lot of us) aren't wired to move first to belief.

We're full of questions, we don't want to be seen as hypocrites, we want our words and our actions to
have integrity, authenticity.

Through her study, Diana Butler Bass suggests that the church does better to place belonging first.

Not belonging like simply membership, but belonging in that deeper, rooted sense.

As I've talked with some of our students this sense of belonging resonated strongly.

Confirmation is still a choice, and it's their choice, not my choice, not their parents' choice.

You'll hear in some of their statements the way they are choosing to be confirmed and how they are leaning into belonging more than the traditional believing.

I respect their desires and lift up their sense of integrity—and I trust you will as well.

I value their honesty and vulnerability, the sense that faith is a work in progress, God's work, a snapshot in time—belief grows by the grace of God.

Where they are today, I expect is different than where they'll be when they are 23, or 48 or 66 or 96.

I trust that you hear that this is not a test, but rather a chance to articulate their experience of holy mystery, the power of belonging, and the mercy of God.

Baptism and confirmation take a village.

On behalf of these confirmation students and all the rest, thanks first to

Their families: especially their parents and grandparents—examples of faith.

And thanks to: Kirsten Mebust who has taught the Sunday morning component the last two years,

To our former youth minister Jim Vitale who was my co-teacher in the mini retreats,

To our Minister of Faith in Community Nick Tangen,

To the confirmation mentors Jack Dant for Ian, Karen Westwood for Josh, Jim Vitale and then Nick Tangen for Nicke, and Ann Beane for Jazmyne.

And thanks to the Sunday School teachers and the whole congregation—guides along the way.

[Here is an introduction for each student.]

Today, after most of the sharing, we'll respond with the short song: Take, Oh, Take Me As I Am, hymn #814.

After a prayer, we'll sing it once through to begin.

Let us pray. Gracious Spirit, you bring us together into community, claim us as your own, and nurture our faith. Take, oh, take us as we are, for we trust that you are at work in baby Reid, in Ian, Josh, Nicke, and Jazmyne, and that you are at work in each of us, and in this community. We give you bold thanks. Amen.