

Faith Statement

By: Mayia Melchert

Hi, my name is Mayia Melchert. I am a 10th grader at the Eden Prairie High School. My journey through Christ has been an eye-opening adventure for me. I'm here today to talk about my story of being a follower of God.

So, I would like to take a moment to thank him. If you would all, please bow your heads and pray with me. Dear God, thank you so much for surrounding me with these great people. In a time of such great uncertainty, you are always there for us. You are someone to turn to when we can't see the path. Thank you for blessing us with the gift of your love. Help us spread it to the world especially here today with all of my other confirmands expressing their love towards you as well, Amen.

I believe that God always has a plan for us. Even if it isn't what makes sense to us in the moment, I feel like he always knows what he is doing. I try to keep in my head that we don't always know the whole story, but God does. God is doing what he knows is right for us. I feel so blessed to be a baptized child of God, especially being someone who was baptized here at Immanuel, and being baptized by Pastor Susan. Jesus willingly giving up his life for us is the most selfless thing anyone could have done. Today I choose to say yes to God because I realize that my life is better with him, and I want to help other people see the big change that they can have in their lives, if they open themselves up to God.

The verse I chose for my Confirmation is Job 12:7-8, it reads, "[b]ut ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you." I chose this verse because I really like how it inspires us to pay attention to nature and the things that were always there. I like how farmers, people who work at a zoo, or people who own pets can communicate with animals and read the environment. I've always loved going to the Minnesota Zoo with my friends and family. My parents brought me and my sister to the Zoo a lot, especially when we were younger. I have always been fascinated by animals and how the zookeepers take care of them. I am a volunteer at the Minnesota Zoo as well. I help out with the Summer Zoo Camp that the Minnesota Zoo holds for kids to explore nature. It is so cool to watch the kids as they observe the animals. It is like seeing pure fascination in their eyes. I think it is really important and interesting to learn more about animals. I think it is so cool how we can communicate with animals and the environment around us without having to speak the same language. This verse helps remind me that sometimes we need to just take a step back and see the different ways things or people go about different situations in their lives. This also helps me remember that two different paths can still lead to the same destination.

I grew up going to the Nursey at Immanuel. While my parents went to service, my sister Sofi went to Sunday School, and I went to the Nursery. I have always loved going to Immanuel programs, whether it be the Nursey, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, God Squad, Camp Onamia, Camp Wapo, or Confirmation. Personally, it took me a long time until I felt like I could actually connect with God. This isn't because I necessarily pushed him away or denied being one of his followers. It just took me a long time to realize how God works.

I was always expecting to physically hear God or come across this big moment or influential thing where I just knew that God had been a part of it. I had always heard it from other Christians that God was everywhere. As a younger kid, I didn't really understand what they were talking about. So, I would picture almost a holographic figure wearing a white cloak that for me, represented God and Jesus. I definitely liked to think about God in this way, like he was

a buddy of mine that appeared whenever I thought about him. But then, I would go through hard times in my life. Sometimes, I would feel like I was all alone. I would look around for someone to talk to, but it felt like no one was there. Later throughout my life, by just seeing some little things, I realized that even when I'm not really thinking about it, God is always watching over me.

One moment that made this really clear, happened just a couple years back sometime. This seems like kind of a silly thing to have my big God moment in, but it's what has helped me remind myself that God is with us. One day, I was cutting up a fruit or vegetable, I can't remember what it was, but I was cutting something up for my lunch. I was using a fairly large knife, and I was not too comfortable with that. I was feeling really hesitant, and I was just hoping so bad that I wouldn't cut myself. So far, I had done pretty good, I probably had 3 quarters of what I was cutting already chopped up. Then all of the sudden, the knife came down on my fingers, and mainly my left ring finger... hard. I was so scared, the knife hitting my finger hurt pretty bad. But, when I looked down at my hand, I wasn't bleeding. I wasn't cut, my hands looked normal, and I looked up to the sky and prayed to god, and I thanked him for keeping me safe, and for not letting the knife pierce my skin.

I know this seems like a relatively small thing for such a large realization to occur in, but this is the moment that helped me realize that God is in all those other little moments too. I started to see God's work throughout all the other things that I used to just think just happened because it did. I finally saw that God isn't only in the big moments. God is in all the little, big, and in between things that happens. Even if it seems like the littlest, or most minuscule event, he is with us.

I think that I would be a very different person if I hadn't grown up within the church of Christ, and honestly, I don't think I would have really liked who I would have been in comparison to who I am. There have been many times when I have been annoyed by something or someone. I would get really mad, and the way I was taught to handle those situations was definitely in a Christian way. There were times when my sister and I would get really mad at each other, and when I say really mad at each other, I mean in like a four-year-old kind of way. So, nothing too bad, it just seemed bad in the moment. My sister and I were actually not usually mad at each other. We were lucky enough to get along with each other throughout our lives. Usually, if we were in a disagreement, it was because I was bothering her, or because we both wanted to do two different things.

My parents have definitely raised us with Christian values. One time, when Sofi and I were younger, we were mad at each other for whatever reason it was, and my Dad told us "[g]irls, give each other grace." In the moment, we didn't really think anything of it, and we kind of just said, "grace" at each other because of our spiteful attitudes. But that has been a reminder for me a lot when I have been mad at someone else. Other times, I would have trouble with people at school. I would come home and ask my Dad what I should do about it. Sometimes, I was angry because of someone being mean to me, or it was someone who felt annoying to me. We would discuss the different ways I could handle some hypothetical situations. In the end, he would tell me that if I came across a situation that I didn't know what to do about, I should always do the Christian thing. Thinking about this in my daily life has definitely helped stop me from making some bad decisions that could hurt someone else's feelings or cause more trouble.

I have had a lot of temptations come my way, but I've been kind of lucky that I've always been somewhat of a rule follower. I really don't like getting in trouble. When other people get mad at me, I tend to get really scared. My friends all kind of know me as a goody-two

shoes. Peer pressure does get to me at times. I try really hard to let it pass me by, but sometimes, if it's something insignificant, I give in. However, when it comes to something very important like safety, or something that I know is right, I will stand my ground. It definitely helps for me to think about what God would want me to do. This is kind of like a deal breaker for me, and it helps me pick what the best thing to do is.

I have had some really dark times in my life. And I used to try my best to try to hide my pain from other people. A lot of my friends know me as this happy-go-lucky kind of person. I know that many of my friends at school or other activities that I've been in have looked to me when they have been in rough times. They also sometimes look to me during the days, sometimes just to catch a laugh, or to help them get in a better attitude. I didn't want to let them down when I was going through rough times. So, I would try to fake being happy, and I would downplay what I had been going through. At home, I have always had people I could talk to, but I didn't always want to talk to them. Luckily, I tend to not really have a good filter. Which means that usually, the things I think inside my head end up coming out without me really thinking about the consequences, or how other people might take what I said. So, it usually isn't that hard for me to open up to the trusted people in my life.

One person that has always been there for me is my Dad. My Dad has always been open to me asking him questions about pretty much anything. He is really good at giving advice. Usually when he guides me in a certain direction, it ends up working out even better than I imagined it would. He is always there when I need to talk to someone. He has been there for me in some really rough times I've had in my life. He has really helped me through hard times by listening to my problems and talking me through them to help me out.

My sister Sofi has been there all the time for me as well. My parents got divorced when I was little. Since then, I have been living with each parent on an every other week schedule. This was really rough on Sofi and me. However, we are both really grateful that my parents worked so well together after they separated in order to help us still be able to see and deepen our relationships with both parents. Sofi and I would both go to one parent for one week and then to the other for the next week. Sofi was always with me when we would transition between houses. And she experienced the same things I did when it came to, dealing with what seemed like two different lives. She was also a great person to talk to as well. She just understood a lot of my troubles. And she would always try to help protect me from things that could harm me. And she helped teach me good values, and she would help me talk through my problems. I know she was really busy a lot of the time, so I really appreciate how she would drop some things to help me out. My Dad and Sofi mean so much to me, and I am so grateful for them being there for me all the time and whenever I need someone to talk to.

My Mom has also been there for me all the time too. She can sometimes be a little protective, but I think that's okay. She is really funny at times, and I don't think she really knows it. I like watching her with Sofi because usually, Sofi would be doing some dangerous thing, or making a big mess in the kitchen, and my Mom's eyes would just go huge, but she knew that once Sofi put her mind to something, there was no stopping her. My Mom has also been there a lot for me to help me see some pretty obvious things that most people would have realized on their own. She is actually really smart. She knows a lot about some pretty random topics, which is cool. She is also a hugger, which is nice a lot of the times, especially when I'm sad. When she's not stressed out, I know I can count on her to make me laugh. Then again, usually it's me laughing at her, after she reacts to me doing or saying something stupid, but it's still funny.

Growing up with Christian friends has been a very important experience for me. I feel extra close to those friends because I know we share some of the same values. It's been really nice to get to know the other people in my small group. I knew almost all of them before Confirmation, but it has been such a huge experience for me to be able to get as close to them as I have. I had actually known one of my student leaders, Jeremy Porter, since I was a one-year-old. His parents are my God parents, so we got to hang out every now and then. I thought I knew a bit about most of the people in my group before I had Confirmation with them. But now that I have been able to be in a group with them, I have realized how much more there was to them as a person. We got to talk about some really hard things and also some lighter things. I'm going to admit, our group was definitely not the best at getting things done, but this definitely helped us feel relaxed around each other and build those quality friendships together through Christ.

One of my closest Christian friends is a girl I have been friends with since grade school. Her name is Marissa, and I love talking to her about faith. She doesn't go to Immanuel, but she is very involved in her church. We share many of the same Christian values and morals. I really like talking to other people about God and church. She always seems to understand what I'm talking about. She is really good at talking about church and other stuff too. I like how normal it is for us to talk about Christ. When we talk about our faith, it's not weird at all, and it's like any other topic for us. She is also a very nice and forgiving person. She always looks for the good in people, and she is really smart too. She doesn't know it, but she really inspires me to try to be a better person too because I really like who she is as a follower Christ as well. I love how we are both so comfortable about talking about God. I think it has been really important for me to have a close friend like her to talk to and share my faith stories with who can also share their faith stories back with me.

I feel like God always has a plan for each and every one of us. I am so thankful for what God had planned out for me when I was a baby. I was born in China, and I was left in a basket on the steps of a school as a newborn. I was brought to an orphanage that had many other babies and young kids. When I was about 9 months old, I was matched with my new family, John, Deb, and Sofi. My family and the orphanage both submitted a "package" with different personality traits and qualities that we have, and then we were matched together. When I was 13 months old, they came to pick me up from China. They brought me back to Minnesota, and we've been with each other ever since. I can't even imagine what my life would be like if I wasn't adopted, or if I wasn't given up for adoption. I am so thankful that God's plan brought me here to live with my family.

Once I got to be a little older, I realized that because I was Chinese, I did not have the same skin color as my family members. This made me feel out of place at school, during sports, and sometimes even in my own family. My sister Sofi looks so much like my Dad and my Mom, and I really didn't like how I looked different than them. A lot of people that I know would get embarrassed if you told them that they looked like their parents or their siblings, but I used to dream about looking like my family members. When Sofi and I were little, other kids would make fun of us because I was different. They would say that we weren't actually sisters, and that I didn't belong with my family. This really hurt my feelings. I know not every person looks like their family members, but I noticed how a lot of them at least had the same skin color as their family. People would see Sofi and me with our parents, and they would say to my parents, "Oh, is this your daughter?" or something like that. Then they would turn to me and ask, "Is this her friend?" That definitely hurts my feelings a lot when that happens. I know it's not their fault or

anything. It just hurts that to other people, from the outside, I don't look like I am a part of my family.

People would stop and stare at me with my parents. They would do double takes of me, and other kids would point and whisper about me to their parents. When my parents would come to my school concerts, or when they would come to pick me up, the other kids would see me with them, and they would look at us weird. Then they would say, "Wait... these are your parents?" and the other kids would ask why my parents were white and I was not. Sometimes, even at school conferences, my teacher would look at us a little funny when they first see me with my parents. I've always kind of wished that I was white, or that I looked like my family members, and this hurt my parents' feelings. My family would tell me that they loved me just the way I am, and that they wouldn't change a thing about me. They would tell me that they don't even think about my skin color or anything when they see me. My Dad and Mom have really helped me see that I don't have to look a certain way in order to be loved or cared for. They have helped me see that I do belong where I am, and that the people who love me could care less what color of skin I have. This has really helped me feel like I belong somewhere, and that I am important.

God has been a huge importance in the ups and downs of my life. There have been a lot of times when I would wonder where God is in the hard times. I would think that God had left me because he was mad, or that he was trying to teach me a lesson. This brings me back to a poem we read in God Squad one Sunday. The poem was called "Footprints in the Sand." In short, "Footprints in the Sand" was about this man who walked with God. As he looked back at his memories, he noticed that he could see footprints behind him. He realized that in his good times, he would look back and see two pairs of footprints in the sand. These were his own footprints, and God's footprints too. But when the man went through hard times, he would look back and he would only see one pair of footprints in the sand. He asked God why he had left him during the dark and sad times in his life. God told him that every time the man had looked back and only saw one pair of footprints in the sand, it was because he had been carrying the man.

I have loved the message of the poem ever since I heard it. But because I was only in 5th or 6th grade, I couldn't remember all the parts of the poem, or even the name. For a year or two, I kind of forgot about it. Then, when I started Confirmation, talking about God helped me dig it back out of my memory. I tried to look it up, but because I didn't have much recollection of it, none of the search results matched with the story in my head. One day, I brought it up in Confirmation, and one of my leaders, Brad, reminded me right away that it was "Footprints in the Sand." The next week, he brought our entire small group copies of the poem, and that was super nice of him. "Footprints in the Sand" is a great way for me to remember that God is always there in our times of struggle. However dark it may seem, or even if it feels like he's not there, God is always with us.

My expression of faith is two footprints in the sand being washed into the ocean. When Sofi had her Confirmation three years ago, and I was able to look at her class' expressions of faith. And ever since, I have had this in mind as my expression of faith. To me, this represents us finding ourselves through God. It is also based off of the bible verse where the disciples are in a boat, and they see what they think is a ghost. As they get closer, they realize that it is Jesus standing on top of the water. They are very bewildered by the power Jesus has that enables him to do this. Jesus invites Peter out onto the water with him. So, Peter steps out of the boat and starts to walk towards Jesus. Peter was walking on top of the water, but as he looked around, he

saw the wind, and he was afraid. He began to sink, and he cried out to the Lord to save him. Jesus caught Peter and asked him why he had doubted him.

This reminds me of why we need to put our trust in God and Jesus. This situation also kind of reminds me of TV shows and movies. Usually in TV shows or movies, there are like 2-3 plots, and in the end, all of the plots seem to come together. Sometimes in TV shows or movies, especially in action genres, one character knows more about what is going on than the other characters. And when that one character comes to the characters that don't know the whole story or plan, the other characters are scared, and they don't know why the one character is telling them to do a certain thing, or why they are making odd decisions. Then the one character that knows more, will tell the other characters to just trust them, and then they run off, as they leave the other characters to do tasks that don't really seem to make that much sense to them. Somehow, it almost always works out in the end. The plans all come together, and the other characters all realize why the one character told them to do what they did.

This to me kind of symbolizes God and Jesus especially in really confusing times. Right now, the whole world has been in a very confused and somewhat panicked state. Covid-19 has brought very rough challenges that we continue to try to overcome. I know that many people ask themselves why God does what he does when it can create so much pain and havoc. I honestly do not know the answer, but I know that God does, and he always has a plan in the end. I like to think of God and Jesus as the characters who know the whole part of the plan, and we are sometimes the characters who don't know or see what the whole plan is. We are kind of just along for the ride sometimes, and God and Jesus are just asking us to trust them as we go through hard times like these. Even when there doesn't seem like there is any light on the other side of the tunnel, God and Jesus know what they are doing, and sometimes, we just have to put our trust in them and believe that they will help get us through hard times because they always have a plan.

Today I am here to say yes to Christ and to live with faith throughout my life. This is a commitment I certainly want to make. Looking back, I realize how much better my life is when I welcome God and Jesus into my life. I want to keep in touch with my Christian friends and continue learning about Christ even more in my new small group, and during worship. I am so grateful to my parents for bringing me into a Church of Christ, and for Immanuel for providing such an amazing place for me to grow in my faith.

Now, if you would all please bow your heads and pray with me. Dear God, thank you so much for bringing so much joy into my life with your presence and for always being there for me when I needed you. I am sorry for ever doubting you at times. Thank you for always having a plan for us, and for sending your only son to die for our sins. Thank you for giving us the technology to be here today both physically and virtually. Please bless the students here today and the ones in the future that will follow your light throughout their lives. Please also bless the adults in and out of this room too that are still following you throughout your faith. Especially in this time of great uncertainty, please be with everyone as we continue going through the challenges of Covid-19. Please help us as we go out into the world as we spread your love and good works, Amen.