

FAITH STATEMENT – TIMOTHY SCHRAG

Like a lot of people around here, my faith story began at a very young age. For as long as I can remember, our family has been going to church every Sunday. This is when my faith began to be formed. Through Sunday school and Wednesday night church as a kid, I heard more and more stories about God and the Bible. A background of church throughout my life was a very helpful way to connect to God.

One major step in my faith formation was attending camp Mennoscah. I began attending camp in the third grade (I think), and it has always been a very meaningful experience. It's a place where you can get rid of distractions and focus solely on God. I've always felt like I can feel God's presence out here at camp, whether it's through the nature, the hymns with others, or through sitting at the campfire at night and watching the flames. Camp is probably the place where I first felt a true connection to God, and was where I decided I wanted to dig deeper into my connection with God. Throughout camp, my faith has grown a lot, and I'm so glad that I am going to be baptized here, in a place that is so meaningful to me.

Youth trips have also played a big part in my journey with God. Our youth trip to Chicago was a very meaningful experience to me. It opened my eyes and I was able to see a totally different lifestyle than I'm used to. There's trash all along the roads and lots of people who are in much worse situations than I am. It was a great feeling to be able to help those in need and to hear their appreciation for the little things that we did to help them. Chicago helped me to realize that I'm overthinking these problems in my life that don't even compare to what these people have to deal with. It was a great reminder for me to thank God every day for all of the gifts he's given me and to not take anything for granted.

My second youth trip was to Rocky Mountain Mennonite camp in Colorado. This was another meaningful full experience for many different reasons. For one, I got to help improve a place where others come to learn about God, which is super important to me because camp has been one of the most influential places in my life. Secondly, every morning in the youth trip me and some others would go on hikes up different mountains. On the peak of these mountains I was just taken back by the beauty of God's creation and it kind of put into perspective how great God is, and how small I really am. And to think that God knows me on a personal level, as well as everyone else in his creation is amazing.

Through all of these experiences, I've been brought closer to God and they have helped me to form my faith. I've tried to make a habit of praying daily and not only calling on God for help, but thanking him for everything he does for me. I know this is just the beginning of my faith journey, and I still have more to learn.

I have so many people to thank who have helped me along my faith Journey. Pastor Caleb and Pastor Lois have helped to form my faith, and have answered any questions I've had. They also led me and others through a faith exploration class, which helped with my decision to be baptized. I'd also like to thank Mom and Dad, although along with all of my other family members: Both sets of grandparents, Uncles and Aunts, cousins, and siblings. They've always been very supportive of me and have been there when I needed them. I'd also like to thank Bryant. I couldn't have asked for a better mentor to help me in my journey. He's always been there to support me and is someone I can look to if I have any questions about my faith.

I'm thankful for all of the meaningful faith forming experiences I've had so far in my life, and I know I wouldn't be the same without them. I know that God will always be with me through right and wrong, and I'm glad to have a church community that can help me in my faith journey. I'm excited to be baptized and to continue my journey with God through baptism.

FAITH STATEMENT – JACOB SCHRAG

Faith has always been a key part of my life. I grew up in a Christian family. I was surrounded by people with the same beliefs as me. God has always been in my life. But as I've grown, and experienced new things, my faith has grown and changed with me.

When I was little, going to church felt like a routine. It was just something we did every week. I considered myself a Christian, but it didn't mean too much to me then. I think this first began to change when I first went to Camp Menno'scah. I was surrounded by people my age who shared my beliefs. I was surrounded by God's nature. Whether I was sitting around a campfire, or singing as loud as I could, I started to feel God's presence with me. Sometimes, while singing, I found myself tearing up, and it was difficult to keep singing. I had never experienced something like that before. Camp was a place where I could be myself, and shut out any other distractions. Some of the times I have felt the closest to God have been right here where I'm standing.

As I moved into high school, I wasn't able to go to camp every summer anymore. However, I began to see God in other places. All the Bible stories I had been hearing for so many years started to really have meaning. I could relate to them. I could praise God when I was at a high, and I could look to him for answers when I was at a low.

My church community has been a big part of my journey as well. When you live in such a small town, you know almost everyone. The classmates and friends that I see everyday are some of the same people I see at church every Sunday. Learning about Jesus, and worshiping with these people has been so helpful for me. We all know each other so well, that it isn't really hard to open up.

The youth trip we took to Colorado this past summer was one another time where I feel I grew closer to God. I was surrounded by God's nature in a way that I had never experienced before. I wanted to wake up ever morning at 5 to go on a hike. I wanted to help out the camp much as I could. Even though it was hard work, it was always rewarding. I can kind of connect my faith journey to climbing up a mountain. Obviously it's not always easy. There are times when you feel like you're getting nowhere. But when you're at the top of a mountain, it is always worth it.

I know that I still have a long way to go. I have still have a lot to learn. I'm thankful to Caleb, Lois, and Ben for helping me get to this point. You have all taught me a lot. Going through our faith ex class was very helpful for me. I've always been thankful for my parents and my family, for setting such a great example to live up to. I feel that I'm ready to be baptized and take the next step in my faith journey. I know this isn't a final step. It's a first step. I'm excited for where this will lead me in the future.

FAITH STATEMENT – CAIDEN DUERKSEN

I have attended Alexanderwohl my entire life. It is where I was dedicated as a baby. And where I received my first bible in first grade. There never were and still aren't many Sunday's my parents decide not to go to church and they are a big reason I am where I am today. Going to church every week was

the first step. Going to church opened up many doors for me, whether it be from going to camp or going on service trips.

Camp Mennoscah was where I experienced God the most. Waking up every morning to the sound of the river rushing nearby just gave me a sense of peace that is hard to achieve elsewhere. Then in the evenings going to campfire and listening to the stories from various counselors. It was always a great experience and one that attributed greatly to my faith story.

A few years ago I went on my first service trip to Chicago. I experienced first hand how so many people were living. This made me appreciate this church more than ever, but it also showed how we are shielded from all the violence going on in our country. And just this past summer we went to Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp. From going on hikes in the morning to looking up and seeing the massive pine trees, it was a great chance to see God's creation from a different point of view.

I understand that this is just the beginning of my journey through Christ. And even though I will be leaving for college next year I will still be connected to the church through my past experiences.

FAITH STATEMENT – EDDIE GAEDDERT

God has always been a figure in my life. Growing up in rural Missouri, I didn't get the opportunities others received to attend church every Sunday, but that didn't stop me from experiencing everything God had to offer me. Every year my family would attend the Christmas Eve worship service at Faith Mennonite in Newton Kansas, or our very own Alexanderwohl Mennonite in Goessel Kansas.

I came from a Mennonite background, my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents attended Bethel Mennonite College in North Newton Kansas where I currently attend, and growing up, and in the eighth grade I moved to a little Mennonite town called Goessel Kansas, bringing me full circle.

I've had a lot of questions about my faith over the years, and I always love discussing them at youth group, or at faithex, and of course Camp Mennoscah, but I have never fallen out of my faith, and now because of my life experiences with God and those willing to teach me about God, I feel I am finally ready to begin the life long journey of growing my faith further by taking the first step of baptism. I would like to thank all members of the congregation and all my friends and family that have helped me make this decision in my life and I look forward to continuing my faith journey with all of you!