The Community I grew up with here at St. Paul’s is made up of some of the most loving people I have ever met. Not only did you all love me for being me; you taught me life lessons that shaped me to become the person I am today.

Throughout my life at St. Paul's, one lesson I learned extremely well was acting as the hands and feet of Christ. I learned how to help people and put their needs before my own. The thirty hour famine was my first experience where I truly felt like I made a difference; not only did I help those in need, I felt what it was like to be the people I was helping. Learning how to be the hands and feet of God taught me many important lessons in life; through this I was also able to grow closer to God. Learning the story of creation in Godly Play is where I first remember creating my faith. This story taught me about all the good and beautiful things that were created by God and to this day his creations continue to amaze me and make me wonder.

After my first Sunday school classes in Godly Play my faith continued to grow stronger as “I wondered” about God, and during this time the people in my St. Paul's family presented me with opportunities to develop my faith. Participating in Youth Group activities such as overnights at church and at Camp Washington, camping in Rhode Island and the Urban Adventure in NYC allowed me to strengthen my faith as I was able to experience the diversity that God created among us, as well as appreciating his works … which I’ve grown to know well. Participating in Mission Trips to Maine, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, where we would work with others from around the country with the goal of improving the homes of other people really made me appreciate that I could make a difference in someone’s life. Seeing their joy at the end of the week filled me with a sense of pride that lasted weeks after my return home. Going on Pilgrimage I was able to experience God in a whole new way. In Colorado, I saw the mountains and valleys that God created as well as the beautiful nature, especially the hummingbirds. I remember standing at the top of Pikes Peak being engulfed in clouds and thinking there is no way anyone but God could have created this, because this was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen.

The most important lesson St Paul’s has taught me was how to step outside my comfort zone. I’m sure you have all heard the quote “ life begins at the end of your comfort zone”. I never truly understood what this meant until I participated in the opportunities St Paul's offered me. Whether it was feeding the homeless in Bushnell Park during the 30 Hour Famine or eating Rocky Mountain oysters in Colorodo; I experienced life in a whole new and exciting way. Stepping outside of my comfort zone also allowed me to feel God in a new way. Being outside of my comfort zone I learned God was in everyplace. If it wasn’t for the community here at St. Paul’s I never would have ventured out of my comfort zone; never felt God in the way I did. In a few weeks I will graduate from High School and in a few more weeks I will begin a new chapter of my life at James Madison University in Virginia, and be once again outside of my comfort zone. If it wasn't for St. Paul’s, I would begin this chapter of my life nervous and afraid but because I grew up in such a loving environment, I will know it is ok to be outside of my comfort zone and that God will be with me. After 17 years in this wonderful place, I truly know that I am Holy, Wonderful, and Blessed. Now I challenge all of you to step outside of your comfort zone …. you may be surprised with the outcome.

AMEN