

Isaiah 41:10 says, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” For the past eight years, St. Peter’s has been that right hand. It is often said that a church is not the building itself, but the people who inhabit it. The love and support that have been poured out during my time as a member here have been never-ending; whether it was Mr. Dan and Ms. Liz bribing me with Starburst to answer questions in middle school Sunday School or Tommy Purvis asking me to play golf, this entire church has been a community that is simply indescribable.

My relationship with St. Peter’s is reminiscent of that of the little boy and the tree in Shel Silverstein’s The Giving Tree. When the little boy is young, the tree provides the boy with fun and adventure while also teaching him how to be loved on multiple levels. As the boy grows up, he thinks that he doesn’t need the tree as much. However, as he matures, he realizes just how much he needs the tree and how he can’t live without her. Every time the boy needed her for something, she would give everything she had to support him and care for him in any way possible. St. Peter’s has been that tree for me. St. Peter’s has made me into the person I am today.

The only other communities I have experienced that are as strong as St. Peter’s are Camp Weed and Happening. Camp has been a place to renew friendships and climb back up to the peak of the spiritual mountaintop from which we may have descended since our last visit to Camp. It has been a way to rejuvenate my relationship

with God in fun and creative ways that don't seem like the way one rebuilds their faith, and yet it works, every single time.

Happening, on the other hand, while still incredibly fun, is just ineffable as a whole, and nothing has worked more wonders on my faith than the six weekends at which I have been present. It has opened my eyes to something I never thought I would enjoy: being a servant. While I don't want to say working teams has been rewarding, I don't think I have experienced anything more incredible than watching candidates become closer to Christ, and watching team members grow through their service of Him.

There have been no two greater influences on my life than Ms. Lorraine Corbett and Happening. Ms. Lorraine was a constant source of encouragement, both in playing guitar and in my faith in general. She always told me that it didn't matter how I thought I sounded, because I wasn't playing for myself, but for the only person that truly mattered. It is said that when you sing, you pray twice, and Ms. Lorraine re-iterated that to me time and time again. If it hadn't been for her, I would never have had the confidence to apply for my first Happening music team, and without that team, I have no idea where I would be today.

It was her influence that prompted me to apply for rector for the last Happening I was eligible to work. While I had applied for leadership positions in the past, and served as Head of Music for the Happening in September, there had never been the sentimental pull that there was when I filled out the application for Happening 117. While I doubted that it wasn't meant for me to be rector, I heard Ms. Lorraine's words of encouragement in the back of my head every time

I thought about it. Although I may have been uncomfortable with them at first, there's no doubt that without Ms. Lorraine's lovable pushes I would have participated in some of the things I have, both in leadership roles and Happening in general.

Happening has enabled me to create bonds with people that I believe will last a lifetime, because not only do we share a love for each other, but also a love for our Lord, and that is something that clearly cannot be rivaled. In April, I will be serving as rector of Happening 117, with two of my best friends serving on core team with me.

As big a part of my life as Happening is, it would not have been possible without the help of many people at St. Peter's. Although Brian Moody is no longer our youth leader, he still provides daily words of wisdom and supports us in every way possible. He is one of the most loving, caring, and gracious people I know.

Nancy Carpenter is the woman who taught me the inner workings of the church. As my confirmation mentor, she showed me ways to always have fun while still praising God, and to be kind no matter what the circumstances.

My grandmother has been a steadfast example in my life since the day I realized we had the same hair, and she has continued to accept me for who I am and who I am becoming with each passing day.

My parents are my two pillars. They have been there through thick and thin, through the terrible two's and the awful middle school years, and they continue to want only the best for me. They have set unparalleled examples, both in my studies and in my walk with

Christ, and have showed me that being a Christian doesn't necessarily mean you have to be perfect. They are the epitome of St. Francis of Assisi's famous words: "Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words." I constantly find myself looking to them in wonder and amazement; both at the dedication and the unending care they give to others.

I owe everything to St. Peter's and the people who make this church community as extraordinary as it is. Acts 2:42 is the best way I could find to sum up this community: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to prayer." Although next year will be full of nerves and new experiences, I know I can always call Jesus my Lord, the people here His righteous right hand, and St. Peter's my home.