

Lilly's Testimony

I guess the easiest way to start would be with my name. I'm Lilly Worthy, I just turned sixteen, and today I am getting confirmed. Religion has always been in my life, I grew up going to Springfield Lutheran from preschool and attended church regularly for years. It's during that time I believe my foundation in Christ was set. It was set in the curriculum I was exposed to, it was set in my baptism, it was set in the hymns I still find myself humming now, and most importantly, it was set in the friends that have now grown to become my family. This journey was a long one, and it's only just begun. And today, I'd like to attempt sharing it with you, hopefully, it doesn't run *too* long.

After 8 years at Springfield Lutheran, I left after 4th grade. For the first time ever I began questioning my faith. I was surrounded by people who believed in something different than me and only it took a year after that for me to stop believing in God entirely. Then of course Covid happened. That was the push that the downward spiral of my life needed to start.

It began when my 7th grade year should've started. I chose to do online school. Every day seemed to be a repeat of the last. The same routine every day. I would wake up, open my Chromebook, stare at my grades, and then give up; spending the rest of my day locked in my room while my parents were at work and my brother was at school. Depression grew on me like an unwanted weed, the thoughts of self-loathing and meaningless anxieties swarmed my head. I did nothing all the time and began failing my classes for the first time. During that time, God didn't once cross my mind, my Bible probably lost in some obscure bag in some obscure closet.

A life-changing opportunity arose when after a semester of feeling nothing I had the opportunity to return to my childhood school and finish out middle school there. At first, I was

going to say no. At first I wanted nothing to do with SLS. At first it was the last thing I wanted to do. At first I thought that I could never fit in there again. But then I stepped back and looked at myself. I thought back to how some of my happiest memories took place in that building.

Soon enough Christmas break ended and I was walking up those same SLS steps once more. I remember the ceilings feeling a little lower and the walls being painted a little brighter, but the smell of the hallways was the same. The comforting atmosphere of my childhood was the same. Most importantly, the people were the same. My life up until that point felt like it had been everything but familiar and there I was, standing in Mrs. Schmidt's classroom, as if I had never left.

My depression was still present and my head was still in the gutter, but now I had a new distraction. At the time it felt like my religion classes were being shoved down my throat, like they weren't meant for me. I was so hellbent on believing I was undeserving of "the redemption of Christ" everyone kept talking about. I was confused, but I didn't care. I finally felt happy, I had friends at school and a family at home who I knew cared about me and that was enough for me. In my head, making sure I belonged in this place was the only thing that mattered.

7th grade ended and then I attended Camp Chi Rho for the first time. I experienced the highest highs and the lowest lows all in one week. There is one night that stands out most to me when I look back on that year. It was time for evening devotion and my cabin had already begun walking to campfire. I was too busy crying in the bathrooms to be walking with them though. I remember feeling so alone, so mad at myself, so confused.

But I wasn't alone, because the moment I opened my eyes Hannah Hayden was right

there. She hugged me and talked to me the entire walk to campfire. She told me how much she loved me, how much my friends loved me, how much God loves me. She told me how God had a plan for me and how I would go on to do amazing things.

That night it was sprinkling. We didn't have the guitars, we didn't have the songbooks, and the fire had died down into pulsing embers. We ended up singing "Father I Adore You". It was silent besides our voices and the steady patter of raindrops on the benches we sat on. I remember being surprised I knew the lyrics. My heart swelled and I felt full. For that moment I felt complete, for that moment I believed in God.

After camp ended I started going to church, telling my parents I wanted to hang out with my friends and play games. 8th grade began and theology suddenly became intriguing. I applied myself in my confirmation classes and tried praying again for the first time since 4th grade. I ended that year with my class of ten, with my best friends.

So much has happened since then, youth retreats, lock-ins, camps, the National Youth Gathering. Everything I did seemed to point to God.

This past year at Camp Chi Rho has been the most memorable. Before the week started my depression was at an all-time high. My anxiety seemed to be the only thing on my mind. I was juggling school, God, and suicidal thoughts all at once. Once camp started I was relieved, I was in my happy place once again. I had opened up to my friends on staff about how I didn't know how to pray. How I couldn't remember the last time someone prayed over me *for* me. Marilyn Haldiman came over to me and I began crying as she began praying. It was then I truly knew I believed in God once more.

The last thing I'd like to talk about is Camp Okoboji. It was an experience I'll always

hold on tight to. Every small group, Bible study, and camp wide activity helped me learn so much about myself and those around me. I've made friends that I'll never forget, and the relationships between me and the rest of our youth group have grown stronger than I ever thought they could. I cried, laughed, screamed, sang, and explored so many emotions that I had never thought I'd experience again.

I'll always remember waking up at 6 am every morning to watch the sunrise, playing nine square before breakfast, being thrown into a mucky lake with all of my clothes on, and singing in a talent show I didn't even want to be a part of. I'll always remember praying and crying every night with the people I've come to know as my best friends, the loud, crowded van ride that never seemed to end, and singing songs that made me begin to understand my outlook on faith and friendship. It was in Iowa that I finally opened up about my suicidal thoughts. It was in Iowa that I realized there are people in my life who truly care for me. I found a piece of myself at that camp, and since then I feel like my relationship with God has been solidified.

My parents and I have since begun talking about my thoughts and feelings and they are working with me hand in hand to make steps toward becoming better. Their never-ending support of me and my beliefs has been one of the most substantial factors in the person I am today. I could not be more grateful for them.

God coming back into my life has been nothing short of a miracle. Returning to my faith has led me to look forward to the life ahead of me rather than being scared of it. I know God has a plan for me, so I shouldn't cut it short. His amazing love and saving hands have been working in my life even when I refused to believe they were. He has completed me through His grace and through the people he's put in my life. And I know that's true now more than ever. So today,

as I stand in front of all of you, I could not be happier proclaiming my faith to God. My journey is far from over, but I know that it will continue to be great. Because God will be with me every step of the way.

Psalm 23:1-5,

“The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.”