

A homily by Vivi Reeves
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I have vivid memories of my friends complaining about having to go to church in middle school. They whined about the boring mass and dreading CCD class. In contrast, church was something I always looked forward to. It offered security in a time where I was navigating the person I wanted to become. After a week of stress from school, a week of seeing constant negativity and hatred in the daily news, Sundays at First Pres provided a feeling of hope. It assured me that good still existed. But my countless Sunday mornings spent here did not only act as a safe space in an uncertain world. They reminded me that I was a child of God, as well as what that meant.

My earliest memories of First Pres are that, within these walls, I was allowed and encouraged to be a child. After Sunday School, my siblings and I, along with several other kids, spent the next hour or so on an exploration of the church. This building was a playground for our unbounded imaginations. Every room and gadget we discovered added to our narrative that a secret tunnel system existed under the ground. We were even given our own designated headquarters - "The Kids Office." From the very beginning, First Pres always endorsed fun and creativity. Sunday School was not a time of strict indoctrination of the Bible. We rather played games, sang songs, or did crafts that, in turn, revealed the message of Christianity. Choir gave us an opportunity to sing out the words "Jesus loves me" and affirm their truth. The seasons of advent and lent were magical for me as a child here as we held the Christmas Pageant and rode into the sanctuary on a toy donkey, so that we, the children, could truly understand the wonder of the Christmas and Easter stories.

As I've grown older, and passed the age of Sunday School, I no longer get to do arts and crafts at church. I now get to participate in service trips and meetings where I can share my ideas of how to run this church. But every time I sing a hymn, or engage in fellowship, I am reminded of the joy First Pres brought me during my childhood.

It's because of the fact that this congregation loves its children, that I learned to be loved, and learned that I was loved by God. First Pres loves its children in the way children should be loved: by allowing them to harmlessly run around, by allowing them to use their voices, by allowing them to be themselves and telling them that being your true self does not come at the cost of exclusion from God's love. As I head off to college, and as my family moves out of Connecticut, thanks to First Pres, I will never fail to remember that I am a child of God - which means I am loved and so are you.