



September 12, 2018

THANK YOU, HILLS CHURCH YOUTH AND FAMILIES!

Dearest Hills Church Family,

I had the gift of meeting many of our youngest members in Church School this past Rally Day Sunday. What a joy it was to be among our children and youth as they began this new season of their faith journeys! I was able to sing, dance, share stories, and pray with the children and the Church School teachers of our church family. I could not help but be in awe of their natural ability to lovingly welcome me in. The children and youth each greeted me with warm smiles and kind words. There was a lot of laughter upstairs in our Church School -- and I am sure God delights in the laughter of our children – I know I surely do. Amidst all the laughter, prayer, learning, and warm welcomes, I could not help but think of Charles Dickens who wrote, “It is not a slight thing, when they, who are so fresh from God, love us.”

One significant moment for me was being able to meet the Middle School and High School members of our Hills Church Family! I was able to join the Middle School youth in Church School and again later in the day during our 4:30 p.m. youth group gathering for a “get to know one another” time of fellowship. Our Middle School Youth Group is comprised of a wonderful group of playful, respectful and inquisitive young people. I was also able to meet our Senior High youth throughout the day and during our 7:00 p.m. youth group gathering. Many of our youth shared with me the ways in which they felt called to serve. As a matter of fact, one of the most profound moments for me as I was in conversation with our older teens, was this desire to explore their faith in different ways. Some of our teens mentioned that they wanted to focus on discussions around God and how God is at work in the world around them. Others wanted to play. And others wanted to serve. During Senior High Youth Group, as we experienced the process of meeting one another for the first time and trying to navigate what it means to be a “youth group,” we enjoyed a lot of “not so serious ice breaking moments.” Our youth did, however, step briefly (and bravely) into conversations about how they perceive God. For some, God was male and older. For some, God was surrounded by angels and sitting upon a throne. And for others, God was indescribable. Our older teens were able to articulate this in mature and wonderful ways as our younger high school students listened on.

In my experience in working with teens over many years, I have discovered that our teens in their early high school years are desperately in need of a place to gather among a community of supportive peers and loving adults to discuss matters of faith. It is my hope that our Youth Ministry programs will continue to provide a space where our older teens can question their faith, wrestle with the things they have learned as a child, and be supported as they try to find new ways to have their childhood faith fit into their new realities of becoming young adults. There is a great transition that occurs between Middle School and High School that alters the perspectives, understandings and confidence of our teens. Our Youth Group programs are focused on serving as wonderful

opportunities for our youth to grow in faith and gather in fellowship. However, it is our Confirmation Program that focuses on taking that childhood faith that has been grown in the hearts of our youth and invites our High School teens to claim it as young adults.

Our Confirmation Program is designed to help our young people explore their faith in mature ways. In offering our Confirmation Program to youth in 9th and 10th grades, we are ensuring that they are ready to take real responsibility for understanding their faith and its power in their lives. Our decision to offer our Confirmation Program to our High School teens (instead of our Middle School youth) is consistent with our understanding of the changes that take place in the lives of our teens during high school – and the related increase in their ability during these years to claim their faith as their own. For, when our teens see their church and their faith as something that belongs to them, it builds bonds that last and a faith that will serve them well into their early adult years.

We look forward to the start of our Confirmation Program this new church season. We invite our families with young adults in grades nine and ten to join us for a “Confirmation Dinner and Open House” on Wednesday, September 19, at 7:30 p.m. to learn more about the Confirmation journey and the program season ahead.

Peace and Joy,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anne Marie".

Anne Marie Holloway
Associate Minister for Youth and Families
annemarie@hillschurch.org