

Lucky Thirteen – Stella Greenwald
October 29, 2023

Good morning, everyone! I am Stella Greenwald, and I am a senior in high school at Exeter Township. I have been coming to St Gabriel's since I was 5 years old and I started getting involved in Sunday school and it grew to a fundraising committee and going on the pilgrimage to Canada with the youth group. About a week ago I was given the chance to talk to you today with what I had learned through the 13 years of being at the church. Saying the number is crazy, 13 years of seeing new people, 13 years of meeting new people, 13 new opportunities. Through all of this I learn 13 new things that I didn't know before through the people and experiences at St Gabriel's.

Taylor Swift had a lucky number of 13, I found 13 to be my lucky number too with 13 years here at the church and getting the same amount of the opportunities and experiences I got to do and go through. I learned about growing relationships with the youth and the relationships that were built helped make the pilgrimage more comfortable and less nerves with going out of the country without my family. With Sunday School and Bible Studies with Fr Andrew, helped look at the world differently and see things that some people would ignore, shows us to have more gratitude for people who don't have the same community that I got to grow up in.

Growing up means that you have to be an adult one day and I got the opportunity after some classes, I got to confirm and look at the way I saw God in a different way. One year without leaving the country, The youth got to leave the state and head to Kaguna. Through building relationships, we have a little method on growing this and we call this Diner Day. Diner day provides the time to talk and learn more about each other that we didn't learn during the 13 years of knowing each other.

St Gabriel's provided me with leadership opportunities and helped teach me how to take charge with events. One example is the fundraising the youth did for the pilgrimage. I got to learn and plan an event and that was the babysitting event. Leadership also helped me to get more involved in being part of the service and being a crucifer. Even though it was supposed to be a lesson on turning stuff in on time, joining the fundraising committee provided teamwork opportunities and working with other people. With raising money at events, Bingo helped me and made me branch out to more people in the church.

One of them is the most impactful in my life today and grew more important today from when I was younger. Friendships and the meaning of being a good friend. I was looking in the bible and I got a quote from Ecclesiastes chapter 3 verse 1-5...It said.

“For everything there is a season , and a time for every matter under heaven;
a time to be born, a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill and a time to heal;
a time to break down and a time to build;

a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance;
A time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together....”

People who are true they would stay by you no matter what tough times you go through and celebrate with you through the good times. Here at St Gabriel's I learn that from being in the youth group and going on the pilgrimage with the youth. Through this time of year, people like me are applying to schools and preparing for their future. In movies, you see people saying goodbye and crying because they don't want to leave their friends and take a new adventure, through the 13 years I have been going here, it shows that no matter where I go or somebody else goes there is always a place I could come back too. In the quote it uses cause and effect and the cause is connecting with people that help in situations and the effect is you are part of another group of people to love you.

The youth group and I have gotten the opportunity to grow up with each other and learn lessons together like sharing jobs at the church but not just at the church but in real life too. Disclaimer to youth, this is a story of when we were younger. When I would go down to Sunday School in the preschool rooms, we would do a brief version of the service and then come back up to hear the other version. There would be an altar and a paper to sign up for jobs like readings or conducting the service, we would have a paper and people in the class would have to sign up for the job they want. The one that always went away was conducting the service. It was a trick and a treat at the same time with getting the pencil first. I usually got to conduct. I had to learn to share the role with the people in the Sunday School Class.

Through the opportunities of growing up with the youth, I also got to become more of a member of the St Gabriel's and learn to have more gratitude. When I or anybody was little, we had different versions of a household and a home to go back to. I have a house and live with my mom, dad and brother and that was my family through the eyes of when I was little. But having youth, who are people not related to me by blood, turned out to be my family after all. The lesson through the journey here is anybody can become family and my friends, and the community became like family.

At confirmation, I got a Bible and after the service, my family came over and highlighted verses in the bible that got them through the times of they needed God's help. I was looking for one and found one that was highlighted in Matthew(chapter 5 and verse 22),it said...

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek ,for they will inherit the earth...”

You might be asking what does this have to do with the lesson of friendship, Well if you have that one person in your life or the group of people who makes you happy and helps you through the rough times, that is what being blessed feels like. I have had 13 years with people who help me through the tough times with comfort. St Gabriel's provided me with the lesson of

knowing what a community is and what real friends are. A lot of people like us, are lucky to have an opportunity to inherit not the earth but at least one person who blessed us with their light.

I was told to write about things I have learned through the years at St Gabriel's and through the journeys I have experienced with the youth. Out of the thirteen reasons this reason is the one of the most important ones because through this I got to inherit another family and learn what a true friendship is. The main takeaway I would want people to know and hope they take the same thing from here as I did and that is, Meet new people and take a chance with that person or group of people cause you never know what you would miss if you don't. I'm glad I didn't miss the opportunity to grow up with the youth and learn the lessons of sharing and trust and doing the real work of Jesus and that is being a good friend.