

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
High School Senior Sunday  
June 14, 2020  
Emily McGlynn and Kate Gendruschke

**Reflection by Emily McGlynn**

1 Corinthians 1: 10-17

Hi, my name is Emily McGlynn and I am Senior in High School and soon to be Freshman at Penn State University. If we look at the scriptures we just read, Paul the Apostle wrote Corinthians. At the time, there were massive problems happening in the Corinthian Church. He gets right to business and discusses divisions in the Church. Paul founded the church and still refers to the members as his brothers, his equals. He recognizes that all people have the same emotions and experienced similar things. Paul appeals to them to live together in unity, and he tells them three different ways that their unity needs to express itself: 1) They must be in agreement, 2) There must be no divisions, 3) They must be united in mind or understanding. So we must all be in agreement, huh? Not exactly. It is that kind of unity within diversity to which Paul is calling these Corinthian Christians. Christians who believe that divisions are acceptable will always be divided because there are so many things about which we might choose to disagree. But if Christians consider divisions unacceptable, they will become more flexible and considerate of the opinions of others. They will be more likely to approach each other in love and to work out differences in ways that bring harm to neither party. Essentially, Paul is not forcing us to agree on every issue but to be in agreement on the idea that everyone should be equal. Again, if we separate ourselves, our community will not be the best it can be. But if we become united, our community will be better. So, where have we seen divisions bring more hate and disaster? For example, the Rwandan Genocide. In Rwanda, there are two basic tribes, the Hutus and Tutsis. In 1994, the Interahamwe militia and other Hutu-led groups led the mass murder of the Tutsi tribe. There was absolute chaos for 100 days and over a million people died. After the UN Peacekeepers stopped the killings and started healing programs, Rwanda started to rebuild. According to the 2019 Global Peace Index, Rwanda has a high peace rating. Looking back at history, unity does make the world a better place.

Switching gears here, for my entire life, I have been a part of a religious community. Not only have I attended church and church functions regularly since I was three, but I have been going to a private, Catholic school. I went to the Academy of the Sacred Heart from the time I was in Kindergarten to 8th grade. I transferred to Marian High School for my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. For 13 years, I have gone to monthly masses and have fully examined Catholicism in Religion class. Every morning I put on my collared shirt with the Marian logo stitched over my heart and my plaid skirt that is supposed to come right above my knee. I am very thankful that I have been able to be in private education for the entirety of my educational career. My experiences have made me open my eyes to different ideas and different people. I would never trade that for the world. From most people I have met, they have said private schools kids and myself are snobby snots who use daddy's money. I can't tell you the number of times I have received dirty looks while grocery shopping wearing my skirt. This kind of reaction doesn't really affect me anymore and I have been able to grow and become more confident in myself. One thing that not a lot of people realize is that these types of judgments happen in a private school environment, even a Catholic one. I go to school with people that believe in "agreeing with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." However, if you own a Gucci belt, you are more elite. It's all about the car you drive, the number of figures your house has, and what boy you are dating over at Brother Rice. Catholic girls judge each other based on these factors – not very Christ-like to me. Judging based on my personal experiences, this is how most people

have judged me, but now in this community, we are being cracked down more than ever. Regardless of the things we have, or the people we surround ourselves with, we are all made in the image and likeness of none other than Jesus Christ himself. God was doing some thinking and said, “I need a ‘you’ in this world.” He worked some magic and now you are here. We are all here to fulfill God’s plan and to live according to the Gospel. If I were to get hit by a bus while crossing the road, what color am I going to bleed? If you were going to get hit by a bus while crossing the road, what color are you going to bleed? Red. We are all in this community and we need to take care of one another. Be more compassionate, understanding, and open-minded. I might wear a polyester, plaid skirt but I am just as messed up as the next guy. Let us be united in mind and in thought as we drink the same the Spirit gives to us.

### **Reflection by Kate Gendruschke**

Lamentations 3:21-25

It’s easy to lose track of what’s really important in our day-to-day lives. Every hour is jam-packed with distractions and bad news. Daily life can be overwhelming sometimes. In Lamentations 3 verses 21 through 23 we are given a reminder: “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

In other words, do not feel lonely, for God is love, do not be afraid, for God is trust, do not grieve, for God is hope.

I started attending this church when I was just six years old. It has always been a constant in my life growing up. In elementary school, I would look forward to choir practice, and playing DS with my friends while we waited for it to start. In middle school, I would look forward to going up to the youth room Sunday mornings and eating bagels while playing games and learning new Bible stories. In high school, I looked forward to Sunday nights spent in the youth room with old friends, hearing about their weeks, going through bible lessons, and if the weather was nice enough, getting ice cream together afterward. In my 12 years at this church, I have changed a lot: I have matured, grown more than a couple of inches, and developed my beliefs and values. But the church remains the same for me. A place of never-ending support. Refuge at the end of a hard week. A place to laugh, to cry, to play, to pray. I have met the most amazing people in this church, people who have grown with me and learned alongside me; people who have already lived and learned and helped to lead me on my way. People I can talk to without fear of judgment, people that I look forward to seeing, people that have seen me at my worst and at my best. People that I love. That is what it all comes down to: Love. I have found an abundance of it in this church and I will carry that with me for the rest of my life. Not only have I learned verses and prayers in these halls, I have also learned what it means to love others and welcome them with open arms. God is love.

In 2018, my mom, sister, and I decided that we would go on the church’s Mexico mission trip that summer. I was really excited to go, but as the date of departure got closer, anxiety and doubt set in. I was worried. Worried that I wasn’t strong enough or in good enough shape to work a long day helping build the university, worried about helping to lead VBS for the kids when I don’t speak any Spanish, worried about sleeping in a hammock and being able to get a good night’s rest, worried that I would forget that I can’t drink the tap water and take a big swig of it causing me to spend the rest of the day on the toilet. I had so many scenarios in my head of how it could all go wrong – some were realistic but others were just plain ridiculous. The fated day finally arrived and we met up in the church parking lot at three in the morning. I had barely slept all night. I was

a bundle of nerves. The second we all got onto the bus to go to the airport, I let everything go. All the doubts in my mind. This was it, no turning back. I had to trust that everything would go as planned, trust that I would have an amazing time, and be able to make a difference. I can't even begin to describe how incredible the trip was, all my fears seemed so silly once I got there, and I was able to give my all and enjoy the experience to its fullest. I learned so much, both about myself and about the Mexican culture. I also learned to let go of my fears and simply trust that everything will turn out ok. There is no point in always thinking the worst, life is too short for that; God is trust.

I can't believe I'm about to say this out loud because it's a bit embarrassing, but in my sophomore year, my parents started to question me about college. Every single time they brought it up I would cry until they stopped talking about it. I was scared of change and only able to see the negative: what if I choose the wrong college and regret it for the rest of my life? I have no idea what I want to do, what if I am never able to choose a major? What if I finally am able to choose a major and I end up hating it and regret it for the rest of my life? I don't know if it's just me but I'm sensing a bit of a theme here. It took awhile for me to be confident in my decision to pursue a creative career. I always knew I loved art and everything about it, but the uncertainty of working in the arts terrified me. The cliché of the starving artist was always present in my head. One day I was painting, and I had a bit of a realization. Nothing makes me happier than art. Hours fly by as if they are mere minutes. Art is what I am meant to do. I just had to trust in myself, and let go of all the fears I had around being an artist. Thanks to the love and support of my friends and community, especially that of my wonderful parents, I felt immediately at ease with my decision. It felt as if a weight had been taken off of my chest and I could see clearer. I now had a goal, I could look into the future and see something bright and amazing, compared to earlier when I would just think about the negative.

Now that I knew what I wanted to do, I had to decide where to do it. I toured so many schools, and was faced with the same question every time: "Can I see myself here?" And I could. I saw myself at every school. I applied to five schools junior year and had toured four of them. I was fairly sure I would get into four of them, but the fifth one was a bit of a reach for me. The University of Michigan. I hadn't toured it yet because I didn't want to get my hopes up in case I didn't get in. Slowly but surely decisions started coming. I got into four schools, I was just waiting for UofM. Eventually, I get an email notification from the school. I open the email and before I can read a word, yellow and blue confetti starts streaming on my phone's screen. I just start crying. I got in. Through all the uncertainty I remained hopeful, and it paid off. I went on to tour the school, and a wave of emotions flowed through me. Somehow it was completely different from any of the schools I had toured before. Walking around the campus just felt so right. Yes, I could see myself here, but more than that I could see myself loving it here. I could see a future here. I had hope for a future here. God is hope.

We need to go out and live our lives knowing God is love and there is always a home for us in the church. We must do what we can to spread this sense of love and belonging throughout all aspects of our lives. We must remind ourselves that God is trust and life is easier when we let go of our fears. We must remember that God is hope, even in our most uncertain moments.