

April 8, 2012

Brittany DeSantis

Good Morning, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Brittany DeSantis. I am an 18-year-old freshman at Syracuse University. A few weeks ago when Carrie first asked me to speak about my experience here at Centre Church I truly didn't know how I could possibly convey how greatly this church has helped to shape who I am today.

My parents have never been the type to force any sort of religion on me. In fact, I asked to go to church. What eight-year old asks to go to church? I guess, I thought it was another social event. When you are an only child you seek all the social events you can get your hands on. One of the greatest decisions my parents made was to fulfill their promise of baptism and bring me up in this church.

However, it wasn't sitting in these pews that I found my faith. In fact, I would sit in these pews many Sundays after I had requested to be here and wait patiently for the moment we could all run off to Sunday school. It was there that I learned many of the valuable stories of the bible through art, books, movies and skits. However it wasn't through Sunday school that I found faith either.

When I was in the 5th grade, my mom and I were sitting in the pews listening to parish news when Mrs. Langill got up and invited all youth in grades 5 through 12 to attend the first youth group meeting of the year. Sure enough, that evening my mother and I walked here, not knowing what to expect from Youth Group. It turned out to be the best way not to do homework on a Sunday night; we played games and got to know each other. From that day forward I was sold and for the next 8 years every Sunday night I would make my way down to youth group. I made countless friends and memories between regular meetings, outings, retreats and mission trips; we did it all. It was through youth group that I found my faith and my light due to the guidance of Jeff and Barbara Langill.

As Sandi shared with us last week, "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone". I reached the end of my comfort zone one cold Sunday night in February when I was a freshman. For the first time, in our own movie room, I learned about hunger. We were learning about an event that has grown near

and dear to my heart, The 30 Hour Famine. At first, it hurt my belief in God, like many I was angry. How could our God let 26,000 children die every day due to malnutrition? How could God let this happen to his children? I was confused and it drove me to want to do more. Eventually I found, like Sandi, the question changed. Now I was asking myself, “How could I let 26,000 children die every day from hunger?” Year after year of doing The Famine I began to become more and more involved. Finally, in my junior year after we finished The Famine, Mr. and Mrs. Langill encouraged me to apply for World Vision’s study tour, where each year 10 teenagers are selected to see firsthand where famine funds go. Never in a million years did I think I would be selected to travel thousands of miles into a poverty stricken country. But God gave me an opportunity to travel with World Vision and 9 other youth from across the country to Bolivia to see where the money I raised during The Famine was going. I was in utter disbelief. I was going to see how I was making a difference; I was going to see how I was answering the question.

Without a doubt, going to Bolivia changed my life but I couldn’t have done it alone. If it weren’t for the unconditional support from my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Langill, Reverend Bailey and every single one of you who reached out to me during that time I would never have had the strength to embark on the journey God had planned for me and I would not be the young woman I am today. It was high in the mountains of Bolivia, at the home of a little girl named Belin, that I truly found my faith. Belin set my heart on fire and I was able to spread that fire when I had the privilege to stand here a little over a year and a half ago and share my trip with all of you. I am now majoring in International Relations with the goal of someday being part of the solution that frees children like Belin from the limitations of poverty.

I stress that I couldn’t have done it without the support of this church. Dealing with hunger is never easy and it cannot be done alone. Often when I share my story, some will be quick to say that I cannot make a difference, that my impact is too small in a problem that is so large. It is hard to work towards an end when many want to deny you a beginning. However, never once have any of you ever doubted that my contribution is too small. In fact many of you have joined me in the fight against hunger. You may not realize it but you are a support system unlike any other. The unconditional support you offer gives me faith that I can succeed in the journey that God has chosen for me and nothing I could put into words would ever do it justice.

I would like to end with a popular nursery rhyme that I am sure you have all heard. ” Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and see all

the people.” It is the people of Centre Church that mean the world to me. You guided me to leave my comfort zone and you supported me every step of the way. A lot in my life has changed since I walked through those doors for the first time; I have lost loved ones, moved on from three schools, moved out of the home I grew up in and left for college. Through it all I have always been able to walk through those doors and find comfort on the other side.