

First
Place

Maddi Swip

Ursuline Academy

Immaculate Conception Parish Columbia, IL

Mrs. Kathleen Stinehart

kshinehart@ursulinesl.org

The Story of How My Faith Changed Forever

My priest changed the way I looked at God. When I first met him he was a Deacon, fresh out of the Seminary. Fr. Nick always had the best stories of what they would do in the Seminary, and how they learned to communicate with God about their personal life. The most important thing Fr. Nick has ever told me was, "Even when you think God isn't listening to you, just know that he is doing what is best for you, whether you believe it, is up to you." I had never thought of the situation in that manner. When I was nine I was diagnosed with a chronic disease, one that cannot be cured. I was placed in the hospital for eight days, all I could do was pity myself. When I was released from the hospital, the first thing I did the next morning was go to Mass to talk to God. Fr. Nick told me that God will never give you more than you can handle, and this experience will only make you that much stronger. I thought God was too busy to talk to us personally, but God has time for each and every one of his children. When I was in the hospital, I kept asking God "Why me?". I was blaming him for my misfortunes. Now I ask, "Why me, why would you give me this honor when I have done nothing but turn my back and shame you?" This was the question Fr. Nick told me to ask myself. I was given this great honor and would not have been able to see its full potential if not for Fr. Nick showing me that God helps me through everyday life, and gives me opportunities like these to thrive.

Second
Place

Taylor Zarinelli

Ursuline Academy

St. Joseph in Imperial

Mrs. Kathleen Stinehart

A New Perspective

I could point out a specific phrase or speech a Priest, Decan, Sister, or Seminarian has told me in the past that I thought was nice and inspiring, but honestly those don't stick with me. I always struggle to remember specific sayings or passages, and I can never really get attached to them. Something to this day that I still haven't forgotten and that changed my view on my faith, I learned in my 7th grade theology class.

A young Seminarian came into our class to teach for the day, and the way he talked about God and our faith was different than anything else I had been taught. He taught us about the most simple things in faith, but in the most fun and energizing way. Nothing seemed to be a burden for him and you could tell how much he truly loved God. We didn't go into anything complex at all in that class, just the most simple things in our faith like praying, going to mass, and being a good person. When he described praying it was like having an amazing conversation with your best friend and when he described mass it was like the most refreshing thing anyone could ever do. Not a single word that came out of his mouth was without the biggest smile. He told us that if we are truly close with God then being a good person is just a habit, you don't even have to think twice. Not only did the Seminarian give me a new view of my faith he also gave me a new one for life. Ever since that day in theology class, I have tried my best to love God and the world He has given us, as much as the Seminarian that came in and gave me a new perspective.

Third
Place
Tie

Kaitlyn Thole

Ursuline Academy

Christ, Prince of Peace

Mrs. Kathleen Stinehart

kstinehart@ursulinesl.org

Finding Forgiveness

Growing in faith is such an important part of being a Catholic. A priest at my parish helped me see just how amazing our religion can be. Father Dennis Doyle has been at Christ, Prince of Peace parish for around five years. When he came, I knew there was something special about him. All of his homilies are well thought through, and unlike other priests I've seen, he doesn't need a piece of paper to help guide him in speaking. Also, I visit him every time I go to reconciliation. This in particular is how he has influenced me.

Reconciliation is a time where one asks for forgiveness from God. I have always felt uncomfortable going because I never felt I could trust the priest. Even though I know they can't tell our sins to anyone, I still didn't like going. In sixth grade, I tried going to Father Doyle for the first time. As soon as I entered the tiny room, I could feel a different atmosphere than before. It was quiet and peaceful. Unlike before, I wasn't stressed. Father Doyle had a calming presence that made me feel like this was my time to truly say sorry to God. I sat down and told him my sins without feeling judged. Never before have I felt that amount of satisfaction after going to confession. Father Doyle made me feel forgiven. He made me feel that God was present in my life and that I was never alone. He gave me the true meaning of forgiveness, and I will never forget that.

Ava Eiler

Ursuline Academy

St. Simon the Apostle

Mrs. Kathleen Stinehart

kstinehart@ursulinstl.org

Third
Place
Tie

Fr. Brad

My family and I have been members of the St. Simon parish for over 12 years. Throughout our time here, we have undergone 6 priests, but Fr. Brad Moode is a priest that many people can connect with. He isn't a priest that people feel uncomfortable talking to, or someone who gives homilies that are difficult to pay attention to. His homilies often consist of childhood memories and stories, and he once gave out toys to demonstrate his story. I have one specific memory where Fr. Brad influenced my faith. It was at our Luke 18 retreat about 3 years ago. He had come into our classroom to encourage us to attend this retreat. He told us how fun the retreat is and how this retreat really helps you find your connection with God. So my friends and I thought about it, and we decided to sign up. We had all signed up for this retreat because we had heard how fun it was, and no one really thought about the religious aspect of the retreat. It was Saturday night, and we quickly found out that this was when the retreat got more serious. We had just gotten done with adoration and everyone was very emotional. Everyone was giving each other hugs, and this is when I noticed how much of an effect God has on our lives. God had brought us there that weekend so we could find our way back to God, and he brought us closer together as a faith family. Without Fr. Brad's encouragement, I would not have the bond I have with God today.