

**Haley Smith**

**Children's/Student Ministries Witness Script**

**SLUMC - Builder series**

**9.24.17**

Good Morning! My name is Haley Smith. I am a transplant down here by way of Oklahoma for the last 16 years and have been a member here at St. Lukes for that same 16 years. I have been lucky to have sort of fallen into my ministry here and have been serving in the children's and now student ministries for the last 10 years. I say that I "fell" into it because I don't have any kids of my own in the youth program. But I do have two lovely nieces that I keep for a week every summer (they live in McKinney). 10 years ago, when they were toddlers I brought them to church and put them into the children's area for Sunday School...at the time I think all the kids were running around in the gym that day (I'm sure I was just excited to let them burn off some energy).

Anyway – when I picked them up in the gym, one of the children's ministry staff complemented me on my way with the kids (remember – these were my nieces, not my own kids!!!), and asked if I'd consider teaching. I immediately clarified that these weren't my kids, they weren't part of the program and they didn't even live in town...so obviously I shouldn't and wouldn't be teaching. My eyes and heart were maybe opened a little when that person invited me to teach anyway and that not having my own kids wasn't a problem at all. I must have had a little hole in my life that God was ready to fill because it did appeal to me to serve in the children's ministry. I didn't have kids of my own and I only got to see my nieces every so often, so it felt like a great outlet to spend time with kids as well as find a place to serve the needs of the church.

I started out teaching the 4 year old class and was invited for a second year, so I taught the 4 year olds again. I came every week I was in town, even though the schedule only required me every other week or so. I found myself not wanting to miss that consistent touch point with the kids every week. And, truth be told, I enjoyed teaching...letting the kids be individuals and have fun and learn at the same time, and I just didn't want to miss it. From that year on, I also decided that the relationship aspects were important too and so I wanted to journey with the same group of kids as they grew. So I moved up to Kindergarten, then 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade...all the way up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. After that came 6<sup>th</sup> grade confirmation classes and now they are in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade where I help with small group discussions for the middle schoolers in general, but especially the 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

It is so gratifying to be watching these once 4 year olds now as 7<sup>th</sup> graders and growing in their faith. One of the gratifying things for me has been to be a consistent face for both the kids and the parents.

Serving with the children has been an important element of my life – filling that hole in my life that loved and didn't have children. And laid a foundation for me. I can only assume that God thought that I just needed a LOT of extra training before he laid it on my heart to have a child of my own. And I am so pleased now, that after 17 years of marriage, my husband and I are now parents of our very own 5 month old! Perhaps God was just waiting until I was positioned to have a great pool of babysitters to choose from!

And truly, with no family down here in Houston, the church has really drawn me in, particularly through the youth ministries and I can say the staff and the kids and the parents have really provided me with support and encouragement as I've now had my own little one.

I'm glad I was asked, point blank, to start teaching with the kids. I would have never volunteered otherwise. And it just goes to show the power of the ask. And here in a few years, who knows but if I won't be ready to start over with the 4 year olds again!