

Amy: Growing up, my family was very involved in our Methodist church on Long Island. My parents were both members of the choir, and my brother and I were "choir orphans." Orphan Sundays were a blast; we piled into a pew with our friends, while one poor non-musical parent sat nearby trying to keep us quiet.

Mom's side of the family had deep roots in Methodism. My dad's side on the other hand was very much discontented with religion in general. Having had a terrible experience with his own strict Catholic upbringing, my Grandfather chose to raise his children without religion. With such different religious experiences, I'm grateful that my parents decided to begin attending church regularly when I was 5 and my brother was 8. My parents will admit that the wonderful music drew us to that church, but I know it was the spiritual grounding, loving community and community outreach that kept us there.

I didn't attend church regularly while in college or while living in New York City, where Adam and I met. It wasn't until we found ourselves living briefly on the west coast that we began talking about growing together spiritually. When we picked up and moved "down south" to Alexandria, we set about making a permanent home for ourselves, and began looking for a church to attend.

Adam: Searching for a church with Amy was a great opportunity to reflect on some aspects of the religious experiences I had growing up that I wanted to keep as an adult.

I was raised Catholic, and sitting in the pews with my parents and eventually five younger siblings, I found that I appreciated the form and reverence of a Catholic mass, as well as the opportunity during the service for quiet reflection.

You will notice in the newsletter this month that in addition to the "Why I Became An Episcopalian?" article that we've also begun another new article as well. This new article is titled, "Why I Choose Emmanuel Episcopal Church?" or "Why I Choose EEC?!" Everyone's story is different. Every path unique. We've all come from other places and find ourselves calling EEC home. Thank you to those who have contributed printed messages in the past and if you'd care to now share with us why you have chosen EEC as your faith community, please let Chuck know and he'll gladly add you to the list of those who want to share their story. Many thanks for your contributions.

Music was present, but wasn't anything memorable, aside from the usual variations on "alleluia" or the "hosannas." It wasn't until I spent a summer at a sleep-away camp that I had a chance to experience a different form of worship. At Camp Dudley, a YMCA boy's camp in upstate New York, in addition to the sports and swimming in the lake, I especially enjoyed the Saturday evening hymn sing and the Sunday chapel service in the woods overlooking the lake. It was at hymn sing that I first experienced the beautiful songs in our Christian tradition, and learned so much about the history and origin of many traditional hymns.

Like Amy, I didn't attend church all that frequently during college or as a young adult living in New York City. When Amy and I moved here from New York, we both wanted to start attending church regularly and weren't sure where to start. Although Catholicism still held an interest for me, I wanted to find a church that was just a little bit more progressive in terms of social issues, but still embraced the a traditional approach to worship and music.

Amy and Adam: Coming from such a varied Christian background, we were lucky to have the chance to learn about the variety of denominations and churches out there. Some seemed to have a little too much of “this” or not enough of “that,” so we kept up our search for a church that would be “just right.” It wasn’t until one Saturday evening, just after returning from Christmas up in New York, when Adam was sitting at the laptop searching Google Maps for nearby churches, that he suddenly said, “I think I’ve found it!”

Emmanuel’s description on its website made it seem like a good fit for us, and when we came in the next morning, we immediately felt at home. On the walk home from service, we talked about how we appreciated the multi-generational congregation, the family-friendly service, the thoughtful sermons, the good music, and of course the lively community at coffee hour.

After a few months we signed up for a preparatory class for being received in the Episcopal Church, and during that class we came to an even greater appreciation about why the Episcopal Church was a great fit for us. In particular, we liked the balance between traditional worship and the importance placed on being active in ministry and a part of the world around us. The non-dogmatic foundation of the church, and the openness to applying reason as part of one’s religious experience (alongside faith and scripture) were also important to us. With that said, we would say we ultimately became Episcopalians because of how we were received at Emmanuel and the wonderful community we found here.