

I am a life-long Episcopalian from Maryland. Pat, my husband, grew up a Roman Catholic in Alexandria. We were born in Washington, DC and still have many ties to family in the DC/MD area. After meeting in college, we married in 1970 in my childhood parish, St. John's Episcopal Church in Hagerstown, MD. We were in agreement that the Episcopal Church was the right place for us to grow in faith and where our concerns and questions were embraced. Being active in a very small parish for years in the Alexandria area, we decided to look for a larger church home but not a corporate size. We wanted opportunities to participate in worship, education, volunteering, fellowship, and prayer. In particular we wanted a strong youth group for our school-age children, Megan and Christopher, who were baptized Episcopalian.

In the early 80's, we were drawn to Emmanuel by a few parishioners. One was Mary Lou Titus, a fellow lay listener in Homiletics at Virginia Theological Seminary. Together we listened to student sermons and discussed our thoughts with the professor and students. Mary Lou demonstrated amazing qualities of knowledge, calmness, clarity and faith. I learned that she was a member of Emmanuel and asked her about the parish. With an invitation from Mary Lou and an affirmation from our friend Nancy Dupree (we met in 1973!), we decided to attend a Eucharist service.

We knew very quickly that we had found a new church home on our first visit. The worship service fit our comfort level. The sermon was based on scripture, related to daily living, and warmly delivered. The music was familiar and comforting. All ages were in attendance, which was a definite plus. Megan and Chris liked the Sunday School. When all four of us were welcomed at coffee hour by many of the congregation including Bob and Betty Coombs and Ernie and Kim Langholz, we knew we were home! Our entire family found numerous paths to serve and received so much love in return. We made precious friends for life. Megan taught Sunday School with the legendary Catherine Wheeler and 20 years ago she married at Emmanuel. Chris was an acolyte and delivered the sermon for his final Youth Sunday. Both children will tell you today how much they appreciated St. George's Camp, the Christmas Pageant, Shrine Mont Retreats, and the Youth Group leaders like Kirk and Linda Gibson and Cheryl and Alan Knudsen. The Rev. Churchill Gibson's renowned sex talk with the youth became notorious among all the high school students at Emmanuel. The influence of our friends in Christ on our family is immeasurable.

After many years of love, worship, fellowship, volunteering, and praying with our Emmanuel family, we moved to Charlotte, NC in 2005 for family reasons. We treasure the years of being close to our daughter and her family. However, our church attendance in Charlotte was intermittent. We could not find the clone of Emmanuel!

When our daughter's husband accepted a job offer in the DC area, Megan's family moved from Charlotte to Vienna, VA, in 2016. Our son and his family live in NYC so Pat and I decided we could move anywhere we wanted. We discussed the beach, a retirement home, and mountain living. Our thoughts always returned to Alexandria, Emmanuel, friends, and nearby relatives. We took a year to downsize and sold our home in 2017 for the move back home!

Walking into Emmanuel after being away for 12 years was overwhelmingly heartwarming. We were bear hugged by our dear friends! We marveled at the church congregation and all the new, beautiful, intergenerational faces. The spirit of the Lord was at work and we were back home!

Pat and I are very thankful that we returned to a community of faith and mutual support. Our memories are full of love and caring through so many life stages as a family. Our prayer would be for all who gather at Emmanuel to feel the same spirit of Christ's love as we have felt for all these years.