

Patrick and I met in 1995, and as a young couple living in Old Town, we decided to start attending church. Neither of us had a strong religious foundation, but Pat had attended Catholic high school, and my mother was raised Catholic, so we decided on a conveniently located Catholic Church in Old Town. We were both confirmed there, and a few years later we married there.

During our wedding preparation, we started to have doubts about our choice in church. The priest marrying us seemed very concerned that our parents were divorced and remarried and that among the people who would be involved in the ceremony were step-parents, half-siblings, people with tattoos, and worst of all — non-Catholics, but this was our family, and it was important that they all play a part in our wedding. We worked through these “issues” and the wedding was a success, but we stopped attending regularly as the sermons began to feel judging and harsh. It did not appear that ALL were welcome.

A few years later, after our twin daughters were born, we decided to give it another chance, but we felt ourselves questioning more. I remember very little about the last mass we attended, but one line stands out in the priest’s sermon that day. He said something to the effect of: *Catholicism is not an a la carte religion, you cannot accept parts of it and reject others and call yourself a Catholic.* I looked at Pat and our unbaptized toddler daughters and knew we would not be going back.

We researched other churches and religions and decided the Episcopal faith was a much better fit. We started attending Christ Church in Old Town, and it was welcoming and comfortable. Our short time there was enriching, but when I got a call from a good friend who said Father Chuck was now the Rector at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, it was a game changer.

Everyone in the local Catholic community knew Father Chuck, and having attended Chuck’s alma mater, West Springfield, our paths had crossed a few times. He presided over several weddings and unfortunately funerals of close friends, and I always found his words about faith and God poignant and relevant.

We attended our first service at EEC in July 2013, and we immediately felt at home. Friendly faces welcomed us, and our daughters Ava and Samantha were given activity bags to enjoy during the service. Chuck’s sermon about sparring with Jesus and keeping your heart soft resonated with us. In November 2013, the girls were baptized at the age of six. They started attending Sunday School, but sometimes they prefer to grab an activity bag and sit with us through the service. I like to believe they are absorbing at least some of what they hear.

A few months ago in the middle of one of Chuck’s sermons, Ava blurted out, “I found Jesus!” Although slightly embarrassed by the outburst, I was struck by her passion. When I looked over, I discovered she had simply completed the Word Find.

In any other place of worship, this disruption might have garnered scorned looks, but all I saw were friendly faces. We love that EEC serves “in the spirit of love, friendship, compassion, fellowship and fun.” We are grateful to have found the church we call home....and of course grateful that Ava found Jesus!