

When Chuck e-mailed us about writing this piece, he asked why we *chose* Emmanuel as our parish. That particular choice, however, is not made once and never considered again. It's made every single week when we *choose* Emmanuel as the place we go to express our faith. Faith is a living, breathing, evolving concept to us, and that fact alone makes finding a parish to stick to that much more difficult. Emmanuel has been more than up to the task.

Like so many others in this community, our roots are not solely in the Episcopal Church. For the most part, we grew up in the Catholic Church and our exposure was more or less limited to that for years. If you examine our path to Emmanuel, though, you can pick out some clues that suggest that this parish and this faith were where we were headed the entire time.

The first clue is in Pittsburgh where Rachel and I were baptized by Scott, the energetic young rector at the local Episcopal church. We then moved to Rochester and were part of a Catholic church called Transfiguration led by Father Jerry. The way I remember Father Jerry is as a wise, cheerful, kind old man who at the time did NOT fit my definition of a priest. Father Jerry was the first one who made church fun for me and was beloved by his parish.

Our next stop was Buffalo, where we searched a little while before landing at the Newman Center of a local university. It was an eccentric parish, to be sure, but there were two factors that made the decision an absolute no-brainer. One was the community; people just like us that we could relate to and would eventually work alongside as we became increasingly involved in several parish ministries including music and education. The second was Father Pat. You could really write an entire page about Father Pat and not be halfway through, but suffice it to say that the man is the single most interesting person I think I've ever met. An Irish Catholic with an affinity for Greek literature and all things philosophical, Father Pat was a 69-year-old firecracker whose sermons may have been hard to follow, but were guaranteed to introduce an idea you hadn't considered before. Finding this community when I was six and Rachel was nine, the formative years of our faith were spent there and Father Pat became our ideal picture of who we wanted leading our services. When we moved here, we knew it was going to be hard to find a suitable replacement.

During this time we also experienced a shifting or perhaps an expansion of our views. An evolution, if you will. Certain teachings of the Catholic Church no longer resonated with us, especially when we ventured outside the Newman Center for Mass. At the time, we thought little of it. But it created a rift of sorts when we started feeling like square pegs fitting into a round hole.

Our search around Northern Virginia started in Catholic churches and we tried a few, some even for months. But after months of sitting in the same pew every week and never once being greeted, never making a connection to any of the priests, and otherwise feeling dissatisfied by the entire experience, we knew we needed to keep looking. We finally decided to give this little Episcopal church a try. It took all of two weeks for us to realize we had found our parish. Re-examine the clues and it shows you why Emmanuel is an absolutely perfect fit: we need a rector who challenges us and makes us think while keeping it fun, we need a community we can be a part of, and we need the flexibility to allow our own faith to grow. Our first experience with Emmanuel was through Chuck's brilliant blog post about Super Bowl Sunday. Then we got to see his homilies in person. Check on the thought-provoking rector. Our very first week, we were approached by no fewer than six people welcoming us to Emmanuel, one of which was Meredith Wade who then made sure we met just about everyone in the building and also talked to us about God & Donuts. Check the community box, too. And as we met these people around

us, we heard their stories and how they had come from all walks of life and all different faiths to land at Emmanuel and we knew then that this was a place that encouraged growth and transformation of faith. Checklist complete.

As a family of four adults all with different ideas about faith and religion, it's not an easy task to find something that satisfies all of our individual desires. In truth, we all get something different out of coming to church each week and it will probably always be that way. The one thing we can all agree on, though, is that whether it be for Chuck's guidance, the support of the community, or the accepting nature of the Episcopalians, there is no place better-suited for the continued growth of our faith than Emmanuel.