

Like many members here at Emmanuel, I did not grow up in the Episcopal Church, but I knew this was where I belonged from the occasional experiences I had with the church. After I moved to Del Ray in 2005, I set out to find a place that shared my values and where I could feel at peace and connected to my fellow parishioners and community. One church I visited was very large, with standing room only on a normal Sunday. To accommodate the crowd, they had built a brightly lit new church with stadium seating and all the latest technology. People seemed very happy, and I had heard great things about their young adult programs, but I did not feel peaceful or connected in such a large crowd.

Another church I visited was much smaller, with an older congregation and much more traditional service. The family service was earlier in the morning, as the very friendly ladies told me. I could have tried again at their more popular service, but I just was not sure they were for me.

In late 2006, I noticed there was another Episcopal church just up the hill. On my first Sunday, I immediately felt welcomed and engaged, especially by our seminarian Mike Sowards, who, like me, was a Navy veteran. I loved the energy of the kids and the genuine concern of the adults. History and tradition was mixed with a sense of humor and openness. While the parishioners seemed very comfortable with themselves and each other, they also were very friendly and excited to get to know me and include me. I didn't feel like the "newcomer" for long at all.

Mike led me through confirmation classes that spring. (We spent a small part of class time exchanging sea stories.) He came to the Episcopal Church as an adult as well and understood my questions, translating notions in the books into concepts I could understand. On my first trip to Shrine Mont, I was confirmed as an Episcopalian while small yellow butterflies flew around us in the Shrine. It was amazing! So, after many months of visiting Episcopal churches that were either too big or too small or too modern or too traditional, I finally settled into my "Goldilocks church."

We have been through a lot of change together in the last several years. Our former rector Dan Eckman retired after a decade at Emmanuel. We went through a period of soul searching to know who we were as a community and to identify our most important values. The masterful Martha Wallace led us through our transition, and we found the one, the only Chuck McCoart in our rector search process. Members have moved to and come back from other places around the world, while others have passed on to the next world. We have more of the most adorable babies and children crawling, wobbling, and running around the Parish Hall than I ever thought possible in one place! New friends join and enrich our community. New groups and activities pop up as the needs and interests of the parish shift over time. What has not changed is that every Sunday, after hearing our shared values reflected in the liturgy and the sermon and sharing a meal with my friends, I still leave with that feeling of peace and connection that led me to choose Emmanuel as my home.