

We sprang from two very different religious backgrounds. Jane was raised a Presbyterian. Ken had no formal religious training, as his mother was a lapsed Presbyterian and his father was a former Jehovah's Witness who had been baptized in the "Greek Catholic" Church.

After marrying in 1969, we spent fifteen years in Northeast Ohio, where Ken taught political science and Jane cut her teeth as a development officer at Hiram College. During those years, we formed a very close friendship with a Hiram English professor, Charles F. McKinley, a cradle Episcopalian and pillar of his parish church in Hudson, Ohio. A bachelor, McKinley was revered as a classroom teacher and beloved by several generations of students. Though he was many years older than we, he gradually became an "adjunct" member of our family of three (including daughter Amanda, born in 1976). Indeed, he liked to be called Amou, which means "uncle" in Arabic.

Charles McKinley had earned his Ph.D. at Trinity College Dublin, an institution that instilled in him a deep love of modern Irish literature. Nevertheless — or possibly because of Yeats's and Joyce's antipathy to Roman Catholicism's role in shaping Irish society — he never allowed his love for all things Irish to threaten his faith. Twice he served as a Fulbright Scholar in the Middle East — both times in major Arab capitals — at a time when Islamic societies valued erudition and cosmopolitanism. During our Ohio years we attended Plymouth Church (United Church of Christ) in Shaker Heights, where, at the age of 39, Ken was baptized along with nine-year-old Amanda.

An opportunity for Ken to work at the National Endowment for the Humanities led us to Virginia, where in 1987 we adopted a baby boy whom we called Theodore (Teddy). We're confident that we are not the first Emmanuel family that found its way into the Episcopal Church, and this parish, through the Emmanuel Preschool. Emmanuel seemed familiar and welcoming to us, and we began attending church services on a regular basis. Since then, we have continued to find Emmanuel a most congenial church home.

We always have liked the centrality of the prayer book in the Episcopal worship service. As Churchill Gibson used to say, building a congregation without relying on a prayer book is a little like pouring concrete without the benefit of a wooden frame. We also like the fact that the Episcopal Church is aware of its rich cultural and historical heritage, yet it is not afraid to change. We like that Episcopalians think of themselves as belonging to "one holy and apostolic Church," while also taking seriously their commitment to service. We have found the Episcopal Church to be a "big tent" and welcoming enough to accommodate members who have for whatever reason felt marginalized in other Christian denominations. We like that our congregation is diverse in many ways, and that the Episcopal Church refrains from a literal-minded reading of scripture. We think God answered the prayer this congregation offered up during the interim leadership of Martha Wallace, when we asked Him to "unstick" us — to the point of enabling us to think radical thoughts.

So we thank you Martha, and Chuck McCoart, and Amou Charles McKinley, for leading us to this place of grace. Thanks be to God!