

Our story of why we chose Emmanuel has to start with why we didn't choose other churches. I was raised in the Baptist church, but found my way to the Episcopal church as a young adult in rural St. Mary's County. There I was told there were two churches in the area; the Catholic church for the Catholics, and the Episcopal church for everyone else. I was a part of that everyone else, but quickly fell in love with the liturgy and history of this old parish. A few years later I was confirmed, and was a very active member for many years. Paul was raised in the Roman Catholic church, attended Catholic school as a young child, and attended off and on throughout his adulthood. He found the history and the ritual meaningful, and wanted to retain these elements in his spiritual life. When we joined forces as a couple, we talked about what we wanted in the church experience, agreed to try the Catholic church, and attended several. When it came time to make a commitment, however, neither of us could do it. There are too many negatives associated with the Roman church, starting with the sexual abuse of children, that we could not ignore. And, of course, the Roman church didn't want us, two divorced people, in spite of one priest's assurances that annulments were easy to get.

I was happy to turn back to the Episcopal church, but the parish I left in St. Mary's County was now over an hour from my home. It was also from a different time in my life, and I felt like I needed to move on. We found the local parish nearer to our home, and attended for close to a year. Paul attended the inquirer's study and was received into the fold at the Cathedral. However, as time went on, we found ourselves missing more and more frequently, and eventually dropped out. Neither of us was comfortable or felt like we really wanted to be a part of that community. We were also so exhausted with our work that we were overwhelmed with the additional commitment every week. The summer of 2016 brought some new experiences that forced us to reevaluate our priorities, and once again we wanted to find a church home that would be right for the both of us. We knew we wanted a church that was small enough to be personable, where we could make relationships with others, and feel we are a part of things. At the same time, it had to be large enough that there is diversity in membership, where we could feel we belong in spite of not having three generations of ancestors buried in the church yard, and where we can be as active, or as inactive, as we choose to be. We also wanted a church that was not in the community where we work, making the Alexandria area perfect. We made the list, and began attending; Emmanuel was the first we visited, and the last. Here is why: Bonnie immediately recognized that we were visiting, greeted us, introduced us to others, gave us some parish background and made sure we met Chuck before we left. Chuck immediately invited us for a personal conversation, where we could share our stories and where he could encourage us to more fully participate in Emmanuel parish life. The music is wonderful: Ryan is such a gift to this church! The congregation is composed of young families with children, middle aged adults with adult children, and older folks on their own; families and singles, noisy and quiet. We love the energy of the parish, the acceptance, and the comfort of being able to be reflective and reverent, and joyful and social, all in one place with one group of people, all trying to do the right thing, to the glory of God.