

Why I go to church

By [Richard A. Kauffman](#)

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When I sit in church on Sunday mornings, I sometimes look around at the other congregants and ask myself, "Why are these people here? Why did they choose to come to church?" Some people prefer staying at home to leisurely read the Sunday paper, or go out for a relaxed Sunday brunch. Why have these people given up their precious spare time to be here?

Not only is church attendance going down, but those who do go to church do so less frequently. As Lovett Weems points out in a recent *Century* article, the definition of a regular attendee [has changed](#) from someone who is there almost every Sunday to one who attends perhaps only two Sundays out of a month. And yet 38 percent of Americans report being an active member of a church or other religious organization. Many keep coming back to church for some reason.

I can't speak for others, but here is why I go to church. I go first of all to meet God, to be in God's presence. I go also to make connection with other people who share many of my foundational convictions and commitments. I go to find meaning in life, to make sense of my life and to search for guidance on how I should live out my life.

In other words, I go to church to be part of something bigger than myself, to join my storyline with one that started long before I made my appearance in this life and will continue beyond my earthly existence.

I also go for the music. My congregation is blessed with some talented musicians, especially two pianists, one who is a professional pianist and professor and the other a lifelong college music professor who does meditative improvisations on familiar hymns. Often after one of them has played I don't need to hear a sermon--no offence to my pastors--because I've already received the inspiration I need.

I also go to church to sing. As John Bell has pointed out, the church is about the only place where people gather to sing anymore. My tradition (Mennonite) has a longstanding practice of singing four-part a cappella hymns. Of course by now we use a variety of instruments to accompany some of the songs we sing, and our repertoire has grown beyond traditional hymnody to include Taize, Iona, Catholic liturgical renewal and international songs.

But the default still is singing in parts, unaccompanied. Joining our verses together in praise resounds deep within my being. It is then that I sense most assuredly that I am in the presence of God with my people, the ones with whom I am pledged to live out my baptismal vows. What Sister Joan Chittister says is true for my congregation too: "My benedictine community is a singing community. Maybe that's why we're a community at all, come to think about it."

There are two necessary things in life, James Luther Adams said: a sense of ultimacy and a sense of intimacy. I may not find ultimacy or intimacy every Sunday at church, but that's what keeps me coming back week after week. That and the singing.