

Why I still love the church

By [Heidi Haverkamp](#)

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I often think I hear colleagues asking, “How could we attract nuns to our church?” Actually they’re talking about “the nones,” of course. One of the clearest findings of [the Pew Forum’s new religious landscape study](#) is that fewer and fewer people have any religious affiliation at all. Catholics and mainline Protestants show the biggest drop.

I feel pretty conflicted about all of this. First, I think, “Who cares about numbers? Jesus didn’t care about numbers.”

Then I think, “At least the people left in mainline churches really want to be there. Folks don’t just come to sit in the pews or to see and be seen. They’re searching for God. They’re living their questions!”

Then I think, “But their children are all going to leave. ‘God loves you!’ is apparently the most boring message ever. My Sunday school teachers are working their butts off, and it won’t even matter.”

Then I get sad. I feel like I’m giving my life for something that seems to be dying. As Adam puts it on *Rev.*, I feel like “a remnant of an illusion of what people used to believe in.”

Adam’s parishioner Colin, a grizzled man and a sometime drug user, gives the correct response: “Don’t be such a dickhead.”

So, no self-pity. I can only stand in what I know, which is that I continue to find life, hope, and the love of Jesus Christ in the church.

I love being in spiritual community with such a diverse group of other people, people I would probably never hang out with if I wasn’t part of a church: a lesbian couple who are avid Cubs fans, an older lady who has traveled the world, a young boy who speaks Igbo at home and sings “Holy! Holy! Holy!” at the top of his lungs at church,

a man with a motorcycle jacket and a red and gray beard that he parts into two braids and fastens with beads, a teenager who sings in the choir and wears bright gold high tops and ironic t-shirts.

I love the sacraments. I love singing with other people (especially when they sing at the top of their lungs). I love hearing “that sweet, sweet story” of the complicated but rich library we call the Bible, and I love standing with others in the presence of the mysteries of God and human life.

There’s no place like church.

[Here’s how Rachel Held Evans puts it:](#)

You can get coffee with your friends anywhere, but church is the only place you can get ashes smudged on your forehead as a reminder of your mortality.

You can be dazzled by a light show at a concert on any given weekend, but church is the only place that fills a sanctuary with candlelight and hymns on Christmas Eve.

You can snag all sorts of free swag for brand loyalty online, but church is the only place where you are named a beloved child of God with a cold plunge into the water.

You can share food with the hungry at any homeless shelter, but only the church teaches that a shared meal brings us into the very presence of God.

In John 6, a large number of Jesus’ followers leave him. He asks the 12 disciples, “Do you also wish to go away?”

Peter replies, almost audibly shrugging his shoulders, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

I guess that’s how I feel. Where else would I go? Even if the mainline ship turns out to be sinking. My congregation is where I hear those words of eternal life and find myself worshipping with that mismatched crowd: “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:66-69).