

First, I came for the music.

Later, giving my elderly neighbor a ride offered a more satisfying reason to make an appearance.

Later still, the walk to church—and church itself—fulfilled my need for ritual and routine, both very much lacking during the frenetic years of grad school.

When Molly Bowler asked me to talk about what Holy Spirit means to me—and, more specifically, why I pledge—I immediately thought back to those early years when my attendance here was ill-defined and somewhat capricious. It was a place to come on Sunday when I needed something—and that “something” seemed elusive and changeable at times.

But Molly’s request also filled my head with—to quote Samuel’s favorite hyperbole—a googolplex of reasons and ideas. Where should I begin? With supper club where Mark and I met some of our dearest friends? With poignant memories of the kids’ baptisms? With the flawlessly edited *Paraclete*? The fact is, last year’s church school theme—abundance—aptly defines Holy Spirit for me. There is a richness in this place that supports me when I need it, challenges me when I’m feeling smug or complacent, and, like a whiff of back yard phlox through an open window, delights me when I least expect it. This is the place where Albert Borgmann’s Lenten lecture sparked a family dialogue that simmered late into the night; where last month I basked in the joyful energy of lively women at Camp Marshall; where my children hear iconic Bible stories and draw pictures of Jesus, often sporting green Yoda-like ears and wielding a double light saber.

But I think the notion of abundance transcends an extensive list of programs and activities. The abundance here forms—for me—the core identity of this church. Abundance

means a plentitude of opinions and perspectives, and this diversity offers me a multi-layered way to experience faith, growth, charity, and the divine. As a church identity, the idea of abundance both invites me in **and** gets me off the hook. I can explore different programs and read insightful books and dress my kids up for the Christmas pageant. But I don't have to worry that if I miss a Lenten potluck or skip every book group that I've somehow overlooked the vibrancy of this community.

Several years ago in a *Paraclete* article, Gretchen described the myriad reasons bringing our children to church has value. At one point, she described the joy of driving past the building itself, mid-week, and hearing the child say, "Hey, that's my church!" Her description resonated with me because that's how I feel when **I** drive by. Like a kid, I want to shout, "Hey, that's my church!" That's the place where I can go to think deeply and act charitably and—if I'm being totally honest—sometimes space out during the Nicene Creed. Still it's my church—part of my identity—and it's replete with avenues to both step outside myself and to look carefully inward.

Today, I came for the music, to walk my kids to church school, and to experience stewardship in this very public way. I cannot predict all that Holy Spirit Parish will offer me in the coming year—but I do know that I will strive to revel in its abundance.

—Jennifer Walworth