

## **MOLLY REYNOLDS FAITH STORY**

I like rules. I've liked rules for as long as I can remember, and I grew up into a person who basically thinks about rules for a living. But as a kid, being a steadfast rule-follower meant that I was constantly concerned about making mistakes. So when I was in middle school and my friend Liz invited me to a youth group activity at her church, I said "yes," mainly because I thought she was cool and saying "no" seemed like it would be a big social mistake. It wasn't because I was necessarily eager to go to church—in my family, church wasn't something we did. But I went with her that first time, and then I kept going back—on retreats, to Sunday School, to church camp, on mission trips through high school and college—not because I liked Liz and the people I met there, though I did quite a bit—but because I was captivated almost instantly by the idea of a God who loved me whether or not I got it "right." That profoundly changed the way I understood the world and my place in it.

Years later, about a year after I moved to Ann Arbor, MI for graduate school, the assistant rector of the Episcopal church I had started attending called me and asked if I would be interested in co-leading the high school youth group, including going along on their J2A pilgrimage. This was a challenge for me. On one hand, I had no idea what a youth pilgrimage was and, in my mind, I wasn't really an Episcopalian. The church I had been active in as a teenager was a Moravian Church. Usually, this would be the part where I explain to you that you've probably only ever heard of the Moravians if you've not spent a lot of time near Bethlehem, PA, where I grew up, or in parts of North Carolina. But I am, I think, the third St. Columban to get up here and talk about Moravians as part of my faith story. So you're all way ahead of the curve on that front. But that meant between being new to the Episcopal church, and not having years of kids' Sunday School to prepare me, I was terrified of being asked questions I didn't know the answer to. On the other hand, I was desperate to spend some of my week talking to people who weren't also in graduate school; and I am generally bad at saying "no" to things, so I said "yes," and I'm so glad that I did. Over the next four years, I learned that it didn't matter if I knew the "right" answer. An authentic

relationship with God isn't about being right, it's about being honest and open to new experiences and to what God is calling you to do.

Somewhere along the way, I managed to finish my dissertation and just weeks before we were to move to DC from Michigan, my now-husband Joel and I got married. When we went in for our first pre-marital counseling session with the rector, one of the first things she said to us was that we lived in a world where we certainly didn't have to get married in the church—so why were we doing it? My initial reaction was, “What a silly question! Of course we'd get married in the church! That's what those rules that I love so much say!” But I knew she wasn't going to let us off the hook with that answer, so I thought about it for a bit. And I came up with this: getting married in the church wasn't just about what I was “supposed” to be doing; it was about declaring publicly, including to people who I was never terribly comfortable discussing it with, that my faith was such an important part of my life that I wanted it to be part of one the most important moments in my life.

When we first came to St. C's shortly after that, I'll admit to being overwhelmed by the size—it was the biggest church I had ever attended. But as early as that first visit, I sensed that size brought with it a relentless energy. I've gotten to experience this energy in ways that I've expected—I've had the privilege of continuing to work with youth as a SCAP leader—and in ways that have appeared to me by invitation, like serving on the adult formation team. But most importantly, it's been a place that keeps encouraging me to ask questions, even if the answers aren't easy to find.