

WHY I CHOSE A CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Why did I choose Congregationalism? It offered me the best way to find God through a community. I did not know much of the history of congregationalism — I grew up in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. But there was something both familiar and new to Congregationalism. And as I learned more about its history and principles, it felt very authentic to how I wished to find God.

In our family growing up, we actually had two churches. My father was a choir director for a church in Chinatown — the church I was baptised in — The First Chinese Presbyterian Church. When we moved to Queens, it became too far to travel and our new neighbors became our fellow congregants at a Reformed church in Bayside. My father kept directing choir in Chinatown, signing in Queens periodically and my mother and my sister and I attended church in Queens more often.

Community was the center of worship. My mother and father found God in small groups in those church communities. Bible study, singing, raising kids in the Church. These were common threads that bound congregants to each other. All with one purpose - finding god. I recall a conversation during confirmation class with Rev. Norman Thomas in Bayside. I asked him about Hell, and he said it wasn't fire, brimstone and suffering for suffering sake. It meant you were outside the presence of God. But he said that if you were with others looking for God, God would be there. I was young and didn't really appreciate these lessons until much later.

My first introduction to Plymouth and re-introduction to finding God was through my daughter. To be honest, my wife found it first, and I followed. In high school and college, my church attendance had waned. I thought I was growing up but did not realize for years that I was actually missing out. I missed the fellowship of others seeking God. I wanted my daughter to have the same experience and grow up knowing God and in a church community.

I learned about Congregationalism from the example of so many Plymouth members with whom I ushered, served communion, planned coffee hour, or simply talked to. What better way to worship than with others. I find God in the passing of the Peace, the unexpected long talks in the sanctuary after the service, the church picnics, the small conversations, manning a table at Yankee Fair. We are all so different but yet we are very much the same. I knew there was a Bible passage for this, so I looked it up:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”
1 Cor. 12:4-7

I so enjoy learning about the gifts of each member of our congregation.

Eric Huang