

WHY PLYMOUTH? A PILGRIM'S STORY

My journey to Plymouth started about 10 years around the Christmas holidays. Christmas is my favorite holiday and time of the year. Growing up as a child in Lagos, Nigeria, my family held annual Christmas parties. Big parties where everyone was welcome. In the lead up to the holidays we were part of a Christmas choir with our close family and friends, and I delighted in the performances.

I was born in London to parents who had moved to the UK from Nigeria as students in the early 60s. My parents returned to Lagos, Nigeria in the early 70s with my two older brothers and I. My younger sister was born shortly thereafter. Sadly, my parents divorced when we were very young. Christmas was one of the few times we would see my Dad in the years immediately following their divorce so it was especially precious for me. The joy of seeing my Dad at Christmas was indescribable.

I moved back to the UK at 16 and to New York in November 2011 for work with my partner- David (now husband). We had previously lived together in London and The Hague in The Netherlands. We moved to the DUMBO neighborhood of Brooklyn in January 2012. I have always been a Christian although my parents weren't church goers. My brothers and I went to a Catholic boys High school where we had mass every day. In London, I attended several churches before finding my home church at Holy Trinity Brompton, Knightsbridge, a vibrant Church of England church.

On moving to NYC, I was keen to find a new home church. I worshipped at several churches but none that felt right for me. During Christmas 2013, I was strolling in the neighborhood and stumbled across Plymouth Church. I was struck by this church building that didn't look like a church. It looked, to me, like a stately home adorned with the most magnificent Christmas

decorations. The little 5-year-old boy in me who has always loved Christmas was fascinated. I peered in and made a mental note to attend the Christmas Eve service. I did and loved it. I started attending regular Sunday services. I became a member about a year later.

Plymouth has become my home away from home. A place to worship and fellowship. To be still, centered and rejoice in being a disciple of Christ. David and I were married in September 2014 by the then acting Minister Reverend Al Bunis. At the time, Plymouth had not taken a congregational vote to be outwardly inclusive church and so we could not have the marriage ceremony at Plymouth. However, the Church Committee were happy to allow Reverend Al to bless David and I's union at a church on the Upper West side. This made our fairytale wedding even more special. I like to think that our marriage was one of the events that caused Plymouth to hold an open discussion and congregational vote to become a church that is outwardly open and inclusive and welcoming to all. This is what, in my view, being a true Christian is all about. Plymouth is a church that uplifts and embraces all of God's children. It's a place where I feel seen, heard and welcome.

Kunbi Sowunmi