

Church

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What does it mean that we, as the Young Adult Group, meet in a church? To answer that, we started to unpack the fairly complicated topic of what church has meant to us in the past and what it means to us today.

I grew up attending a United Methodist church. One of my favorite things about my childhood church was Bethlehem Marketplace, our more-or-less unscripted, interactive Christmas Pageant. Church members dressed up in robes and ran booths selling pottery, baskets, and dyed cloth, all the while passing on bits of the story of Christ's birth to our visitors from the community.

Something about Bethlehem Marketplace captivated my sense of wonder. It wasn't baby Jesus or the angel. (The food booth, where I, one of the numerous street urchins, could purchase pomegranate seeds and slightly warm cubes of cheese was always my favorite stop.) No, it was the teamwork it took to put it together and the fact that the play – with its only semi-scripted interactions with visitors – felt messily authentic. We weren't telling the story to visitors so much as we were inviting the visitors to tell the story with us.

Like many of the other young adults in our group, my relationship with church has evolved over the years. I lost my belief in God when I went to college, and though I continued attending church (partly out of habit and partly as a way to recenter myself), I felt like an imposter.

Since starting to attend Unity, my relationship with church has begun to heal. I have reclaimed the words holy and sacred. Maybe one day I will reclaim the word "God," too.

This healing process has been a halting one as I contend with the reality that all faith communities have flaws. I recently realized that the United Methodist Church does not recognize gay marriage and have not found evidence of my childhood church challenging this. And after some of Unity's services this summer during which our leaders named instances of microaggressions involving race happening here in our

own midst, I know we have work to do, too. However, I know that naming these flaws is the first step to healing as a congregation and so as Unity continues on its healing journey, I continue on my own.

So what does it mean that we meet in a church? It could mean that we're committed to holding on to the positive experiences we had in our childhood churches. It could represent our willingness to "stay a beat longer" with church, for those who have had painful church experiences to process. And it could represent our intention to continue to make church (the experience) happen here at Young Adult Group and in our broader Twin Cities communities.

Update: My dad has since informed me that some members of my childhood church have attended the United Methodist Church conferences where issues like gay marriage are voted on and have advocated for change.