

# Why I choose to be part of the church

Kristin Walker

I tried attending an established Mennonite church after college, but sitting in the pew on Sunday morning, I looked around at the most familiar scene of my life and felt lost. My job, teaching in the most challenging classroom of a severely disadvantaged urban school, took everything I had. The sea of serene white faces in the pews around me were a world away from the troubled faces of my black and Hispanic students. And the fact that I blended in with the people in the pews only heightened my discomfort. The chasm felt too wide, and I lacked the energy and vocabulary to start building a bridge between the real-life chaos and the Sunday calm.

So I stayed home. And there I found a kind of church, a place where I asked hard questions about the relevance of Jesus's teachings in this great big world I was discovering. Church became the community I already had. It was my roommates, close friends and fellow graduates of Goshen College, who were my most relevant faith community. We explored our new surroundings and new ideas, supported each other through difficult times, and lifted each other up. We were church.

Eleven years later, I now regularly attend the same church that I attended briefly as a recent college graduate. It is a source of strength and stability, a safe haven in what seem like perilous times. For the sake of my small children, I go to church. I go to show another way of being in this world: to seek peace, compassion, love, the social gospel of Jesus. I go to remain connected to my faith heritage, even as I live far from the family who instilled that faith. And I go to pass that heritage on.

The chasm that I couldn't bridge, the space I needed as a young adult striking out on a new path: these are no longer hurdles. I needed room in order to grow into the person of faith that I have become. That interval gave me time to appreciate the value of a diverse community of believers who gather with purpose: members from all walks of life who share a common vision of seeking wholeness in a broken world, exploring new ideas, supporting each other, lifting each other up.

## About the author

Kristin Walker attends Portland (OR) Mennonite Church. She lives with her husband and two children in nearby Milwaukie.