



WHAT CHURCH SHOULD BE, OR WHY I LOVE GOING TO CHURCH:

By Krista Dutt, First Church of the Brethren, Chicago

In the church statistic world, I don't fit. I am one of those almost 30 something's that doesn't have a spouse or kids. People my age usually had left the church and start coming back (if they went as children) or coming (if they have never gone) when they get married and/or have kids. Am I bucking the system to prove a point? No, I love going to church. Here is why.

Last Sunday, to start off the service we were challenged by the words of joy provided by our Advent walk. That puts it too churchy. In other words, we are never asked to check our lives at the door. We are asked to come to God as we are, nothing more, nothing less. So in the Call to Worship, I needed to think about joy in my life even through the hard stuff and recognize the presence of God in the good stuff. When a church accepts the whole person, we are challenged to come to God in a realistic way, not perfectly, but just as we are.

Nothing is off limits during our prayer time. (Okay, maybe asking for a certain Chicago sports team to win is a little taboo.) We share concerns that are both specific and general. This particular Sunday requests raised by the community included joys about the Advent season, the Spirit's leading, and a magazine's decision to run a front page story that would challenge as well as concerns for a brother who had been hurt on the job, a Nobel Peace prize nominee on death row, and for the Christian Peacemaker Team's workers in Iraq.

No big deal, right? Wrong. I am often struck by the honesty, pain, and struggle that comes out during our prayer time. When a church accepts the whole person, we pray more deeply for each other and share each other's joy more graciously.

I continue to worship through my meeting after church. My church is planning a special Martin Luther King Jr. weekend celebration of which I am a part of the planning. I find myself energized by this work. A friend once told me that Martin Luther King Jr. Day is more important to me than Christmas, and that is not far off. In this church, I feel my passions supported. When a church accepts the whole person, we are able to call out passions and talents that may not traditionally be used in churches.

So, what's the point?

Well, too many times we as the larger Church forget that church isn't the place for perfect people. In fact, people who have it all together need not apply. Church, instead, is a place to figure it out together, a place where I don't have to separate my political beliefs or my passions from my prayer requests. I don't have to hide my faults, shortcomings or my overwhelming praise either. Church should be a place that no matter how dressed up I get, I don't have to dress up or dress down my feelings and thoughts. Church is a place that my entire being, on my best days and my worst days, I can be loved.

I love going to my church because I can be a complete person. I don't have to pretend that I don't really care if the White Sox win or that I really don't want to see the latest romantic comedy. I can be a complete person. I can talk about theology, the Bible, and faith with conviction and not always agree with those whom I am talking.. I can be a complete person enjoying hearing people's love stories for each other and for God and at the same time be honest about my lack of love stories about others or at the time God.

Since the church is to be a reflection of who God is, I can only surmise from my church experience that God loves the whole me. Thanks be to God.

DISTRICT YOUTH ARE ACTIVE:

This year's fall district senior high youth retreat was held during district conference Nov. 4-6 in Springfield, Ill. We had a good weekend together but would like more youth from the Central and Southern Regions.

Roger Schrock, a former Brethren Mission Worker, spoke on God's calling in our lives and ways that youth can promote challenging issues. The Youth served ice cream Saturday evening. They raised about \$300 to help with next summer's National Youth Conference bus trip costs. The weekend included worship, games, good meals, and free time to get better acquainted. Many thanks to cabinet president Becca Lipscomb and the Springfield church for helping with the arrangements.

Plans for the **SPRING RETREAT** are to meet March 17-19 at Freeport Church of the Brethren. Tom Benevento, Latin America/Caribbean specialist for the Church of the Brethren General Board, will be our guest leader. Visit the youth website at www.cobyouth.org for details.

NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE:

The 2006 National Youth Conference approaches quickly and the Illinois/Wisconsin District bus will take you there! It's a much-enjoyed tradition, and will be a great trip again this year. Buses will leave from Naperville, Peoria, and Dixon on July 21 to head west. The first night will be in Omaha, Neb. On the return trip, July 27, we will stay at McPherson College in Kansas. The trip costs just \$200 - only \$25 more than 2002. This covers everything on the trip except meals and personal expenses. Registration/deposit deadline is March 15. An information packet with forms was sent to all churches in December. For more information, contact Walt Wiltschek at wwiltschek_gb@brethren.org.

This does not include your NYC registration. You must register and pay for the conference separately. Go to www.nyc2006.org. NYC comes only once every four years for youth in grades 9 through one year beyond high school. Plan on being at the largest and most exciting Youth event in the denomination. **Don't miss it!**

THE CHANGE JAR:

Members of the Springfield First Church have taken a bold step in the direction of change. We stepped out in faith and are doing our very best to live up to our Faith Statement. The change came with some difficulty, but when we are still, we know that He is God. We were led out of the wilderness and into a model church for all to see.

The District Chairperson asks us to help make a change on a wider scale. The symbolisms of a jar and candle are reminders that it takes all of us working together and focused on a mission to make change happen.

The change (coins) collected each week will be delivered to the next District Conference. It will help support the district budget and New Church Development Board where change can really make a big difference in someone coming to know the loving Lord we serve.

Contributed by the Springfield Church of the Brethren

CHRIST CONNECTIONS COMMUNITY JOINT SERVICE:

The Chicago Area Churches of the Brethren Joint Advent Service met at Christ Connections Community fellowship on Sunday, December 11. Pastors from each of the congregations shared scripture readings and prayers. The Naperville, Chicago First and Christ Connections choirs sang as did the children's choir from Neighborhood Church. An offering was collected which will benefit the ministry of our district. The Chicago Area Churches meet for a joint service each year during Advent and Lent. Several of the Pastors also shared a "Pastor's Statement on Peace."

Blessed Advent, Christy Waltersdorff