

1. Your search: In the years/months prior to finding the Church of the Beloved, regarding your spirituality, church community and religious experience: What was happening in your heart? What were you thinking? Spiritually? Emotionally? Intellectually?

I was on staff for 10 years at a local Roman Catholic church, but left several years ago when a new pastor thought the church should return to the 1950's. He actually preferred the middle ages, but was trying to be realistic.

At my home parish where I continued to attend Mass, I became more and more frustrated with being told how to vote, how to think, and how to make sense of my own experience. It was an open-minded parish but ... things started changing. I felt lost in the crowd and that many members of the church, and especially those on staff, had their own agendas. Each week I listened to a homily that reminded me of how sinful I was and of the "correct" response to issues. Then the language of the liturgy changed to become pointedly exclusive. We could only sing certain hymns and not others. They weren't "holy". Meanwhile the Catholic hierarchy was penalizing the laity for clerical pedophilia, juggling the books and condemning women religious for "radical feminism". Every week I left Mass angry. During the week I would compose mental rebuttals to the sermon. It no longer seemed very important to attend church. I stopped going.

I felt empty and drained. A friend who was a Quaker suggested attending a Friends meeting. Another suggested going to a Presbyterian church. I seriously considered both options but never got around to it.

2. Your finding: How did you first learn of Church of the Beloved (or the ECC)? What finally prompted you to attend Mass? Tell us about your first experience and your response to it.

My husband first heard of the ECC through friends. He became a member. Two years ago we both went to mass on Christmas Eve at Church of the Beloved. It was small, quiet and beautiful. People were friendly. I was at peace.

3. Your staying: Share why you keep coming back.

I keep coming back because it still small, quiet and beautiful. I get something to nourish my spirituality without a prerequisite of turning off my brain. Members of the community seem to truly welcome everyone and are not judgmental. It is a place where you can get to know others and everyone is recognized. The language of the liturgy is inclusive. The community responds to the present needs of its members and looks to the future with faith and optimism. It is so refreshing.