

Andrea Chamberlain – Stewardship moment 2016

One of the things that first drew me to this church was, quite honestly, the food! No, not the cookies during Fellowship Hour...although those are Anya's favorite.

When Brent and I had moved to Manhattan from Vancouver, British Columbia, we experienced quite a bit of culture shock. We were living through several major life transitions – a change in jobs for both of us, a new baby, our first house, and a move from the west coast to the Midwest. Our lives were sort of turned upside down.

One aspect of life I hadn't anticipated as being an issue was our diet. Having a vegetarian diet in Vancouver had been common. Vancouver is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Canada, and this diversity is ingrained in many aspects of life. When we moved here, suddenly we found ourselves in a place where meat seemed to rule. We even read it on license plates – Eat Beef! After a year and a half of living here, I was resigning myself to the sad reality that when we attended public events involving food, my family would be eating potato salad, macaroni salad, and deviled eggs. And picking rogue bacon bits off of our plates.

But it was more than that – it was more than the food that I was eating. Food is nourishment and food is comfort, food is what often brings people together, providing a space for community to develop. If you can't eat and enjoy what everyone else is eating and enjoying, you can feel like an outsider. And if no one seems to notice or care, you just may not come back to the table.

When I stepped into this church for the first time, I felt a presence of acceptance. I had only attended worship a couple of times before coming to a Welcoming Dinner. When I walked into the dinner that evening I must admit I had made sure not to arrive hungry. At least not physically hungry. Yet what I saw before me at the table brought me a rush of recognition...and it smelled heavenly.

There were three pots of curry. Curry! At a church dinner. That was different. One pot included chicken, one had tofu, and one was a paleo option. And it didn't end there. There was cilantro, cashews, and coconut to add to the dish. Wait...was I still in Kansas? Where was the mayonnaise-based salad? I didn't ask.

Through the conversation that night I felt truly listened to, I felt heard. Unlike the other church communities we had visited here in Manhattan, I felt as though the people I was sitting with understood that our move here from Vancouver may have been difficult, and that it was OK to feel like a puzzle piece that didn't quite fit yet. There was a deep sense of knowing, and a sense of support.

Needless to say, I left that dinner feeling satisfied. And hungry for more!

There are many things I enjoy about this community, besides the food. In this place I find nourishment and challenge for my spiritual growth. Individuals are accepted for who they are and where they are on life's journey. Social justice issues are upheld as important life work, integral to our Christian faith.

As a mom, it is encouraging that my children are welcome to stay with us during worship, even when they make noise, as children are known to do. I was very touched that when Silas was born, Pastor Caela often dropped off food at our doorstep, and even offered to come and clean my bathroom while our lives with a toddler and newborn were a bit hectic. I had never heard of a pastor offering such practical care. That type of leadership reminded me of Jesus washing his disciples dirty, dusty feet, and that type of leadership impacts me to go and do the same.

These are ways that I have felt God's love through this community. And this is a community I'm proud to support and be a part of.