

I want to be honest with you. I was an experimental college student. Some of my experimentation led my parents to openly express their disapproval and my old friends to claim they didn't even know me anymore. Regardless of these sometimes-harsh criticisms, I needed that time and the trial and error experimentation to know the decisions I made – good or bad – were my own. And after it all, I would not trade my baptism into the Christian faith, or my confirmation as an Episcopalian for anything.

Often people I talk with about my story or my work with college ministry scoff and say they remember college being a time most people rebelled against the church, not came to it. I would argue that more and more we are seeing college students who were raised unchurched and are now instead rebelling towards faith. Or maybe I just like calling myself a rebel.

But regardless of your religious background, college is a time of conversion. For me, yes, that conversion is easy to recognize as it bears a familiar form, but this is not the only kind of conversion I'm talking about.

We go to college, and all of a sudden we leave the world of simple answers, and people who can fix everything. We can no longer get away with just regurgitating the quote unquote 'right' answers we have been told all our lives, and we are asked to justify and back up our answers with reason and consensus. Our training in critical thinking and the nagging questions that throw our paradigms into doubt have a nasty habit of leaking out of the classroom and into all facets of our lives. What an amazing response we have to that, as Episcopalians. We are a self-proclaimed faith for a thinking people, and everything that we hold dear as such is intrinsically compatible with the college experience. Which is why, now, being on the facilitating side of campus ministry, I couldn't be happier to be an Episcopalian. I have the best weapon I could possibly think of for these challenges and questions - the Book of Common Prayer. We, as an Anglican Communion have been coming together for centuries to try and work out our toughest problems together, and recognizing that we can't do this alone. We have community as one of our central tenets, and with that, a belief that we're all in this together, backed up by a prayer book allowing us to draw on multiple sources and the work of our community in trying to understand and come closer to God.

What an inviting thing at such a challenging time in our lives.

And now, during Lent, we have been given the wonderful gift of unlikely witnesses to draw upon as well. In the past weeks we have been exploring the stories of Nicodemus the Pharisee, and the women by the well. Nagging questions, seeking their answers in the middle of the night. Knowingly having thirst but not knowing why or for what, and going in search even without knowing the object we are seeking. -- I think they may have been college students. -- Just looking at the people that Jesus associated with, and who he called us to serve, I don't think we can say we are following in the path he laid for us without tending to some of the most dynamic, and sometimes the most lost, people around us – those within the college community. It is my mission to follow God's call to look to our college campuses and find those who are outcast, downtrodden, silenced, oppressed, questioning, and seeking. I challenge you to join me, with God's help, in this search, and in sharing with them the amazing things our community has to offer.

It won't always be easy. Sometimes, maybe often, we will talk in church, laugh during the sermon, wear Chaco's with dress pants, and not always cut our hair when we should, but none of this is done in disrespect, it is part of our journey to figure out who we are, and what our life in Christ is suppose to look like.

And please, in the words of my Godmother, do not confuse us students as the future of the church, we are the church now, and we welcome you.