
For My Father

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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A Paper written by Martha Candler, for English Class, and for Father's Day

I was raised in the church. Yes, I went to the service every Sunday and youth group every Wednesday, but this is not what I mean. My dad has been a minister for as long as I can remember; I was *literally* raised in the church. The hallways were my playground, the pews my makeshift bed. My brother, sister, and I played hide and seek in each of the four churches my father has presided over.

While most of my friends played "school" or "doctor" in the basement, my siblings and I played "church" in the living room. My older sister, Sarah, was almost always the minister and my younger brother and I were the faithful parishioners. We took bread from the kitchen for our communion, grape juice was our wine. We were baptized a million times each and gave numerous sermons to our congregation of stuffed animals. Each one of us can each recite the entire church service, Nicene Creed and all. I was spiritually and literally raised in the church.

When I was younger I went to church because my parents made me, because I wanted to play, and because I wanted to see my friends. Church was wonderfully fun; I sat through the service so I could run around afterwards. When we were members of Holy Spirit, Cumming, Sarah, Sam (my younger brother), and I would race through every nook and cranny playing hide and seek in almost every room; one of the first places the seeker would look was in the sacristy among the vestments and robes, a room off-limits to most of the congregation.

As I grew up I began to go to church less and less, not because my faith was diminishing, but because I wanted to sleep in on Sunday morning. Gradually my negligence in attending church has become a desire to go. I want to go because I feel a need to support a church that has become my home. It took me a while to realize that the church was just as much my residence as any house I have ever lived in, but it is. I go to worship with my family in what has become our home.

My experience with church is much different from the rest of the cathedral congregation. While most people see their minister preaching from the pulpit, I see the man who used to change my diapers; while most people choose the shortest communion line, I pick the one my father's at the head of. While most people sit through the service with their families, it is a rare occasion when our family sits together on Sunday morning. Saturday in my house was as sacred as Sunday; dad needed his sleep, so Saturday nights were just as fun as a school night growing up. Unlike the rest of the congregation, I know what to expect when I get to church; sometimes I get to read the sermons before they are preached.

Going to the cathedral makes me proud. I get to see my dad doing what he loves for people he cares deeply about, along with complete strangers. I've watched him share the deepest parts of himself in front of hundreds of people, a feat many would not even consider; every Sunday he is in that pulpit sharing new ideas with folks. His sermons are fresh and fun, and while he loves his job, he is there for others. He is there to prompt and inspire us to think about your relationship with God. My dad is there to help people along their own personal religious path, a path that he knows is difficult because he himself has been on it.

When we moved to Atlanta in the fall of 1998 I was just starting my freshman year in high school. Since this was the fourth

school we had transferred to in our lifetime, Sarah, Sam, and I were old pros. It goes without saying that we were fairly used to being the new kids at school. Because of this, our relationship with each other was very different from most of our friends and their siblings; Sarah, Sam, and I fought on occasion, but we were *actually* friends. We *actually* enjoyed each other's company, and on the first day of school, we were always the other's best friend..

But, in the fall of '98 Sarah went away to The Outdoor Academy for the semester which left Sam as my only ally. He was in seventh grade at the time, so we rarely visited at school, but we spent every afternoon hanging out in the deanery next to the cathedral. I remember doing homework near the courtyard fountain, in Mikell Chapel, even up on the roof (don't ask how we got there). We spent the first three months in Atlanta roaming around our new residence; we rollerbladed through the parking lot, and raced around the Lanier house. When Sarah came home that December, we gave her the grand tour of what had become *our* playground.

I've been a member of four different churches I can remember (and one I have no recollection of) in my twenty years, but I've never been confirmed. It's not for rebellious reasons; we moved when I was fourteen. The church we left had begun doing Rite 13 as an early form of confirmation, and St. Philips was still doing confirmation at age 13. I moved during that transition time and I just never got around to confirmation.

Does this make me less of a Christian? No; one thing I have learned from my church experiences is that nothing we do on the outside can make us Christian. Yes, going to church helps and there are definite outside influences, but what makes us faithful is on the inside. What makes me a Christian is my faith. What makes me a Christian is that I believe in the God Almighty; I believe His son was sent to save us. I believe that when I pray, whether collectively or individually, God hears me.

Many people believe that as long as they go to church and go through the motions they will be "saved." Church is not about being saved; you should not wake up Sunday morning and go to church out of habit, although attending is a step. You should wake up with the joy and eagerness of sitting through something that inspires you! Don't look at church as an obligation, but as somewhere you can go to get away from whatever happened during the week.

The cathedral should be your playground, a place to gather with your family and friends because you feel, inside your soul, the need to worship in a place where you are most welcome. And that is what the church is. It welcomes you every day of the week with open arms and good intentions. Go to church to play. Go to church to feel freedom from everything else in the world. But most of all, go to church to be with the people you love and care about and find peace within the sanctuary.

Don't go to the cathedral out of habit or to prove yourself to anyone. Go because you love it. The church has been my playground for twenty years-make it yours. Let's all play together.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler