

My name is Paul Hagy and I've been asked to explain why I'm Lutheran.

My Dad's family was Lutheran and when my Mom and Dad got married, my mom changed from Methodist to Lutheran.

I was born in 1959 and was baptized by Pastor Shultz. I grew up listening to Pastors Shultz, Huntly, and Bangle. Until I was 20, the Lutheran religion was the only one I'd know and experienced.

Dropping out of college, I joined the Marine Corps in January 1980. While in boot camp at Parris Island, we were "highly" encouraged to go to either the Catholic or Protestant services.

It was there that I got to experience my first non-denominational service. The Navy chaplains conducted the service and while parts were familiar, some seemed awkward. It was like a mixture of several religious services.

After boot camp, Aviation School in NAS Millington and a brief stop (2 weeks) at Cherry Point, NC, I finally got stationed in Beaufort, SC.

Living in a barracks, you found that a lot of Marines weren't particularly religious or just didn't want to get up on Sundays.

When U was a child you had to have a really valid reason to miss church. Folks would actually call the house to see if you were sick.

The Lutheran church in Beaufort was St. John Lutheran Church. Barring duty, work, or deployments, that's where I went.

My mother asked me to send bulletins home to her from St. John's and other churches I attended and she would share there with Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Greenwood and probably Pastor Bangle.

Throughout my career in the Marine Corps I was invited by fellow Marines to attend church them. I've been to Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Southern Baptist. I actually felt more welcomed and comfortable in the Catholic church. I don't agree with all it's precepts, but I liked the structure and formality I guess.

During the Gulf War the chaplains would hold services either in the chapel tent or even in the hangar. You may have heard the expression "there are no atheists in fox holes". It's true, when we took our first Scud Missile Attack, everyone prayed. Two prayers I prayed the most: 1) Don't let me show fear in front of my troops. 2) Don't let me make any mistakes that could get my Marines killed. I'm glad he heard me.

Whenever I was aboard ships (carriers), Navy chaplains conducted services and Bible studies. With all the risk and hazards on a flight deck, we were always glad they were there.

Because of the ship's deployment, I was blessed to visit Israel 5 times. I've seen the Garden of Gethsemane and the Silent Sentiments of Christ. These are olive trees that have been carbon dated to close to 3000 years old. They were there when Christ prayed there. It's very humbling.

Also, they had excavated the stairs into the Second Temple. You could say, Christ may have been here, or He may have been here, but He had to walk up those stairs to get into the Temple. Talk about awe inspiring.

After the Marine Corps I worked at TRW (a lot of weekends) then at the sheriff's office as a jailor – more weekends.

Next I worked at the Regional Jail in Abingdon. I had to work every other weekend.

I've tried to be more active in church and feel more connected. This will always be the church of my youth and teens. As I grow older and old fashioned, I know that of all the churches I've been in, this church has always been family.