

MMU – October 5, 2026

Note from Lisa – Who I am

The summer before I started 9th grade, we moved to Huntsville, Alabama. The first church we joined was large, not quite a Megachurch, but one with a large theater-style sanctuary with a balcony. I believe that there were probably 1,000 people at church on a Sunday morning. Both evangelical and contemporary, the church recommended that we switch from the King James Version of the Bible to The Living Bible translation. That was the first of many contemporary changes that became too much for my parents.

I joined the youth group but never fit in well. It was a large group of youth, many of whom were cheerleaders and football players. I had grown up attending a small community church and felt out of place. We stayed at that church for about a year. Around the same time, my parents moved me from public school to private school, and I started attending the local Youth for Christ meetings. This new youth ministry was not for me either. It was a large group, and I felt lonely and lost. I also didn't enjoy the games that focused on humiliation.

Feeling lost, I decided to go to the small United Methodist Church, which was walking distance from our home. There, I joined the choir and the youth group. We had belonged to a small church before, and this felt like home to me. The Youth Group wasn't large, but it was made up of very kind and accepting leaders and youth.

After two years, we returned to Woodland Hills. Our new home was in a different High School district from the one my friends from Jr. High and Church were attending. And I started my third High School feeling out of place. I went from a private school with 100 students in 9-12 grade to a High School with 3,000 students in 10-12th grade.

During our time away, our home church had declined and combined with another Reformed Church in Canoga Park. We returned to that church, and I sang in a youth singing group that traveled to other churches, performing Christian musicals popular at the time.

Having moved away and now attending a church where all my cohorts attended a rival high school made me feel disconnected from the church and the youth program. I remained in the program even though I was beginning to question the strict evangelical leanings of the church that prevented me from watching television on Sundays and discouraged reading books that weren't available in Christian bookstores.

When I went away to college, I tried attending local churches, but found that difficult as well. Finally, I gave up on church, floundering for years trying to understand who I was and what I believed.

I'm grateful for that little Methodist Church. Because of their acceptance and witness, I found that I was more uncomfortable away from church than I was in the church. I finally started attending Bel Air Presbyterian Church during my final two years at UCLA. It was at Bel Air Pres that I felt the call to ministry.

I share this story about my experience with youth groups to let you know that not everyone likes a high-energy game-focused youth group experience. And participation is not the same as belonging. I share this story to remind you that a small youth ministry with open, supportive leadership can make a difference in the lives of young people and be as successful as a large group. Do not be defeated by a small youth ministry. Rather, accept it as the opportunity to help shape the future of a young Christian disciple.