

Turn it over to God and let go of fear.

Everything will happen in God's time and on his terms. Just like this letter I have been working on for over 6 months. This time last year the only thing I had figured out so far was my wedding dress and date. The budget was all over the place, we were struggling to form a guest list of family that would be willing to travel to Virginia (where we have started our family) and where to house the family that came to celebrate with us. All I could feel was fear of the unknown, there was no excitement surrounding the planning of this day. When the going gets tough hit your knees and pray, or in my case, cry very loud ugly tears in the car and the answer will come to you.

Out here (Central Virginia) we do not have a congregation that we feel connected to. Just because your attendance in a building might not be as frequent as your neighbor, God hasn't forgotten about you. Sometimes it's the little things that bring us back to him, like Christmas music. Every day to and from work I listen to my local Christian radio station "The Journey," and it all started with Christmas music (and I'm still listening every day for 2 years now).

It reminded me of the simpler days of middle school, when I found myself and faith. All because a neighbor and friend Cecelia would take me to school and play her Christian CD's that she had bought at the many Youth rally's she had attended with St. Stephens. Then a ride to school turned into singing in church on Sunday and never missing Wednesday dinner at Camelot Hall & youth group that followed. This love for wanting to spread my faith only continued to grow once I got to experience the Youth Rally for myself. With St. Stephens I attended 3 Youth Rally's and through connections I made at church found myself on the Board of the Conference Council of Youth Ministry for the Pen-Del UMC. The best part of the whole experience was being able to represent St. Stephens on stage in front of 1,000's of my peers and youth leaders. St. Stephens was so much a part of my life; I feel like a little piece of me was left behind there when I left for VA.

I was in the car crying listening to the Journey and as they so often do, they said the right thing at the right time. Out loud in the car I told God I'm done with it, I'm done stressing about this wedding, and it's his problem now it's out of my hands and God will deal with it. It was July and I had less than 90 days left to plan and execute this wedding. Later that day when scrolling on Facebook there was the answer. St. Stephens. I don't know how I could have been so blind to the most obvious choice.

1. It was my hometown church, with all its natural beauty
2. All my family was within just a few miles
3. My angel in disguise- Gwen. All it took was one phone call to the church office and the tears were rolling. Gwen calmed me, reassured me, and took over everything (she could hear the terror in my voice). She sent photos, checked Pastor Paul's schedule, (made sure the fall festival wasn't scheduled for the same weekend) and shared heartfelt stories of her own to put our minds at ease. In just one phone call I felt like I had known this friend for years and we hadn't even met in person yet.

Austin had some hesitation to the venue change because his family would have to travel to Delaware. After meeting with Pastor Paul and seeing the church in person he knew we made the right decision. The stained glass, green carpet, and details on the wall were all we needed to make this a day to remember. But his deciding factor was watching the smile on my face when we walked around the church grounds and there was a different story for every inch of the building.

Oct. 12th 2024, Our wedding day was amazing and one we're still talking about. Don't stress the little things because they will all work out. It would not have been possible without the love and help we received from the Congregation. Throughout the morning of Ms. Gwen, Ms. Joy, Ms. Wilber ran around Camelot Hall hanging last minute banners and finding serving trays and warmers for all the food that had been prepared by family. In what felt like the shortest 4 hours of my life it was all over. Everything was packed up, the tables clear and we were pulling out of the parking lot as Mr. and Mrs. Austin McKinney.

To anyone who is considering St. Stephens as a wedding venue, do it, you will not regret it!

P.S. Make sure you have an amazing photographer to capture all the beauty this church has to offer inside and out!