

Advent was always a special season in my family of origin. From a young age, I learned that Advent was about preparation—getting ready for Christmas. Every year, my sister and I took turns opening little windows on the Advent calendar. I do not remember what was behind the windows. I think it was special time because it was a ritual and a family tradition that warmed my heart. It was part of the magic leading up to Christmas. It helped to build anticipation and excitement for Christmas. On Sundays at dinner, lighting the Advent Wreath candles, and reading a brief passage from the Bible prompted brief explorations of the meaning of Advent and Christmas.

My parents moved to Europe when I started college. One of the things I missed the most were the family rituals and traditions related to major Christian celebrations. I was struggling with my spiritual journey, and I felt a little lost without these anchors. That was not all bad as I had to step out on my own, explore and discover and discern meaning for myself. I view it as a time when I moved from my family's faith to my own faith, shaky and full of questions as it was.

I am deeply thankful that my parents provided a solid foundation that was both firm and flexible enough to allow me to grow.

—The Rev. Canon John E. Kitagawa, D. Min.