

# Journey of Faith

by Terri Kobel

I was hoping to get “off the hook” for providing a synopsis of my spiritual journey, but alas...it was not to be. I have two journeys to disclose. One is religious (long) and one is spiritual (not so long). They are quite different from my perspective.

My religious journey started within the Roman Catholic Church. I was baptized in Rankin, IL. I attended St. Martin of Tours Catholic School in Kankakee, IL for 2nd and 3rd grade. I had a wonderful young nun for 2nd grade whose name was Mother Mary of the Child Jesus. She wore a very full and long habit. We girls tried to see her legs at recess to make sure she had them...she laughed at us and told us she didn't have legs. I remember kneeling in prayer in the classroom when John F. Kennedy was shot during that year; praying that he would be okay. I learned all my prayers in 2nd grade...the “Our Father” the “Hail Mary” and the “Glory Be”. Since all of these are part of the Rosary, I learned that prayer method too. I had my First Confession and First Communion during 2nd grade and believed my soul was purified whenever I ate the Communion host. My body tingled with the purity. (Oh, how I wish for that feeling again as an adult). I had to attend Confession each week and sometimes I had trouble figuring out what I did that was so bad that it needed confessing. My great dislike of the Confessional started at this early age. Because both my parents worked, I was dropped at school early in the morning and attended Mass each day before school started. Mass was said in Latin and no girls were allowed to help the priest, which seemed chauvinistic even to a 7-year old.

My teacher for 3rd grade was a lay teacher whose name was Miss Sunnysack. She had red hair, thin red lips and carried a ruler for swatting our legs. I didn't experience the same joy with her as I did with Mother Mary...Christ's love for children just wasn't there for Miss Sunnysack.

Vatican II happened and I moved onto the Chicago suburbs for the rest of my childhood. I attended St. Joseph the Worker Church in Wheeling, where I was confirmed. Because I didn't like to get up early on Sundays, I attended church by myself frequently. My parents liked to attend mass at 7 a.m. (yuck). I attended at 11 a.m. You can probably guess which service I attend at Emmanuel.

Upon moving to Champaign, I attended St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Urbana. I liked St. Patrick's when a priest by the name of Father Doug Hennessy was in charge. Fr. Doug was kind, flexible and I saw Christ's love shine through him. I think my first adult “spiritual” experiences were in that church. Randy and I attended Pre-Cana at St. Patrick's, although we were married elsewhere. I helped serve communion at St. Patrick's and I helped with the middle

school youth group. I was told by the youth minister in charge that there was a special place in heaven for middle school youth ministers. I sure hope he was right!! I participated in a program at St. Pat's that was called “Christ Renews His Parish.” It was a weekend retreat, segregated by sex, that helped participants connect with how Christ and the Holy Spirit works within each of us. It was great!!

Being a Roman Catholic was hard for me. I had my own thoughts about “the rules” and obedience has never been my strong suit. Major church rules that got under my skin had to do with birth control, the role of females in the church, and abortion rights. I got angry when “letters from the bishop” were read at church which emphasized the rules that I didn't agree with. One such letter explained that we should not receive communion anymore if we voted for pro-choice candidates. That's the one that sent me over the edge. I came home from church and talked about my frustration with Randy. Randy did not attend any church...however; he suggested we find a church we could attend together. I almost fell to the floor in a faint. He suggested we try the Episcopal Church. I had never attended one, so I agreed to give it a try. And the rest is religious history...

My spiritual journey feels different than my history with the “church.” Sometimes I have very spiritual feelings in church (like my First Communion) and other times those feelings occur elsewhere. When I was a biology major in college, it became crystal clear to me that God existed. There is no doubt in my mind. The perfection with which life is formed is not happenstance. God's work is exquisite.

When I had to get up in front of a group of women attending a Christ Renews His Parish retreat and “witness” about fellowship...the Holy Spirit was there to guide the words that came out of my mouth. They were not my words. That was scary and cool at the same time.

When I read a book written by Eknath Easwaran about meditation and became enthused about his writings, and then attended Emmanuel to hear one of his followers preach at Mass...that was like God telling me “pay attention!!”

When I saw how the Holy Spirit took charge of us at the All Parish Retreat in 2006 and helped us discern the areas we wanted to pay attention to...I was amazed and humbled. It's all in God's hands. We just have to remember we're not in charge, as hard as that is for many of us (especially me). My spiritual journey continues with the help of all of you, and I know Jesus is by my side and by yours too.

## featured outreach program

### Meals on Wheels Senior Resource Center at Family Service

405 S. State Street  
Champaign, IL 61820  
217-352-5100

Meals on Wheels is a program of home-delivered, hot noon meals available to those persons of any age who have difficulty cooking for themselves. For those who want it, a cold evening supper can be delivered with the noon meal.

The meals are prepared at the Illini Union following a menu prepared by a qualified dietician. During times when the Illini Union is closed due to school breaks, Manor Care prepares the food. Meals are delivered each weekday by teams of volunteers. Participants pay a small fee for meals and special diets can be accommodated. Bills are mailed monthly for the meals; volunteers do not collect any payments. For many of the meal recipients the daily contact with the volunteers is as important to them as is the food.

The summer is a good time to volunteer for Meals on Wheels, as many of the regular drivers are college students who are away. Emmanuel usually takes delivery routes during the last week of July and the first week of August. Watch the Sunday bulletin for announcement of sign-ups to help during those two weeks, or call the above number to volunteer on a regular basis.

## spreading the word

### Ideas on Becoming a More Welcoming Parish

In his book titled, *How to Hit the Ground Running*, Neal O. Mitchell makes seven suggestions to help congregations welcome newcomers (page 143.)

1. Follow the three-to-one rule: Talk to at least three newcomers for every one "regular" you talk to. The church is a place for business and fellowship. Try to avoid conducting business during times of fellowship.
2. When you meet newcomers, introduce them to another "regular." Allow newcomers to connect with as many "regulars" as possible.
3. Introduce yourself with an open-ended question. Many "regulars" are embarrassed to visit with newcomers because they fear they will mistake a long-time member for a newcomer. In order to get over this fear, introduce yourself as follows: "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I've been coming here for \_\_\_ years. How long have you been coming to the church?"
4. As a "regular," don't monopolize the clergy's time, especially in the handshake line. Newcomers often like to speak with the priest or deacon before they leave.
5. When giving directions, take newcomers where they want to go, don't merely point them there. Consider the type of customer care you'd like to receive in an exclusive ladies' or gentlemen's clothing shop vs. the type you often receive in the impersonal "big box" store. Provide that special kind of care to the newcomer.
6. Have a positive attitude about your parish. It is infectious.
7. Don't just meet newcomers; invite them to an appropriate activity in the church. Help them make personal connections by asking them to join you in Christian education classes, musical events, parties, dinners, youth group meetings and other ministries.