

What RCIA and Being Catholic Mean to Me

By Phet Saysomphou

In 2020, the pandemic and Rochester Public Schools moving to distance learning inspired our family to make some major changes. One of the changes was my son, Myles Carlson, chose and we enrolled him to attend St. Pius X Elementary School for first grade, initially to be in-person, on campus five days a week to provide Myles the best possible learning environment. Since then, we have experienced even more that we love about Rochester Catholic Schools.

While in first grade, Myles was selected to read a prayer of petition at Wednesday Mass at School. He excitedly practiced his reading at home as he prepared for his role. When I watched the video of this event and his reading on the St. Pius X Church's YouTube Channel, I was very impressed by the videography, structure and organization of the Catholic Mass, beauty of the Church, and warm feeling in my heart as Myles gracefully embraced his part at Wednesday Mass at School.

In 2021, Myles started his second-grade year at St. Pius X School, and he returned home one day with a Religion Unit Test sheet that he completed in class. On that sheet was a teacher's marking that indicated an answer was incorrect, and when I asked myself that question, I did not know the correct answer either. It was in that moment coupled with planning for Myles' Faith Formation sessions when I made a firm resolution as if God spoke to my heart; I felt a need and desire, that I must learn more, not only to become a better resource to Myles as he was choosing to embrace Catholicism, but to enrich my own purpose in life and deepen my connection to God by converting from a non-Catholic Christian to the Catholic faith.

Also in 2021, I attended Mass for the first time at St. Pius X Church with Myles, and as we were leaving, Father Russ stopped and greeted us, then asked me, "Aren't you the one who volunteers in the [school] lunchroom all the time?" Myles and I felt so welcomed and were amazed that he knew and took the time to mention it. Myles later said to me, "I've never fist-bumped a priest before! That was awesome!" I later shared with Father Russ about my intention to be the volunteer adult supervisor at all the Faith Formation sessions in support of Myles, then join RCIA the following year.

Father Russ subsequently extended an invite to me to RCIA the same year as Myles' Faith Formation so that when he receives his First Communion in April 2022, I would be able to receive Communion with him.

Ms. Betty Renner has an awesome and effective style of teaching RCIA, inspires great discussions which has helped me relate her teachings to my own life and experiences. She, Ms. Kate LeBarron, fellow RCIA candidate, Josh Grossman, and Myles, are the reasons why my faith continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Another inspiration for my growth in faith was after hearing Father Russ' homily about forgiveness, I challenged myself to search deep within to forgive, and that has been the greatest spiritual challenge I have overcome. I am grateful for and excited about the journey, and I have much to look forward to as this is only the beginning.



*Phet Saysomphou
Sponsor: Deb Priebe*

The Evolution of my Faith and Reasons for Converting to Catholicism

By Josh Grossman

My faith was most nurtured by my mom and my grandma. I was raised in the Lutheran Church, went to Sunday school, attended church regularly, and was confirmed when I was a freshman in high school. I always believed strongly in God, but I did have many questions about Jesus. I think my faith was strong when I was around 15 or so, but it waned during my college years. I attended Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD, which is nominally a Lutheran school. We had chapel there, which we could attend, but I did not really feel like organized religion was important for me at the time. After college, I attended Lutheran Church again when we moved to Rochester in 2001. I got to know a number of Lutheran pastors at Gloria Dei when we joined the church in 2001. I enjoyed the traditional services that I attended, but I noticed a change when my older, more traditional pastors left, and younger, more contemporary pastors were hired. I no longer recognized the church I had grown up in. I grew more and more frustrated with the pace and rate of change in terms of the liturgy, how the pastors dressed, and the political message becoming more and more infused in the worship. I wanted a change, but I did not know what.



Josh Grossman

Sponsor: Eric Pederson

At the same time, two very influential people in my life converted to Catholicism: my sister-in-law, Jodi Reel, and my best friend from college, Eric Pederson. I was bewildered at first by their decision to convert. It made sense on some level because both of their spouses were cradle Catholics. I still thought of myself as a Protestant, but I became more and more open to their message. It was their witness and how they embodied for me the love and grace of God toward others that started me on my road to conversion. I felt a bit on a very small level like Paul on the road to Damascus. I also love reading history, and I read quite a few books on Catholicism. There were several reasons why I converted. One was the strong moral teaching and consistency in what the Church has taught and believed over 2,000 years. There was a consistency in terms of belief and tradition that I was not finding in the ever-changing, Lutheran Church. In addition, I love to read history, and I started to read and think about the Catholic Church. I found that only the Catholic Church could be declared the church that Jesus founded as being One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. All the other Christian denominations have multiple versions within the same denomination. Third, during Covid, the Catholic Church seemed to be the only church standing up for its members to attend church in person. Other churches were strictly virtual and were not fighting for their members' rights. Fourth, I believe in signs. I was destined to become a Catholic as I have mentioned before, such as that Pope Paul II became pope on my birthday on October 16, 1978, and the fact that Pope Benedict was born on the same day that I will become a member in full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil, on April 16th. For all these reasons, I decided to convert. I have so much to learn, but I feel like I am exactly where I am supposed to be.