

My journey into the Church took several years. Even though I had not been raised with really any faith, because my mothers family was Baptist and my dads was Methodist, and neither of them could agree on where to go to church, so we didn't go anywhere. When I was a teenager, I began finding ways to get myself to the Methodist Church and from that point on had always considered myself a Methodist. I married a Baptist man and we were married in a Baptist Church, although I refused to become a Baptist. After many years of sporadic commitments to attend church regularly, I finally agreed to start going to a Baptist church with my husband, as long as the family would worship together and consistently. My daughter, who was about 8 years old at the time, told me Jesus told her it was time for me to be baptized (she had been hounding me since she was 4 to be baptized). I knew it was time and I took my baptism very seriously. My daughter and I were baptized together, in the Baptist Church. I believed I was truly raised to new life in Christ; this was not a symbol to me.

I immersed myself into church life, becoming very involved with co-teaching elementary to middle school girls on how to be Godly girls in an un-godly world, volunteering to head special girls youth events, leading mission teams to work with the homeless in inner-city Atlanta, participating in women's and co-ed Bible Study groups and then finally a very serious spiritual formation class.

Our main pastor challenged the congregation to truly get to know Jesus through the Bible. He spoke about sacraments, but only 3 (baptism, marriage and holy communion), and he asked the entire congregation to participate in a 40 day journey to know Jesus through the Bible. He encouraged us to pray to the Holy Spirit before reading and allowing the Spirit to enlighten our minds with understanding. He even provided us with prayers so we could all be praying together as one body. As I look back, his approach was very closely related to the Liturgy of the Hours. Since I was also participating in spiritual formation and we had been practicing lectio divina, I accepted that challenge and had a great desire to know Jesus and God's word more intimately. Many things began to come alive for me, and many wonderful understandings came into light during this time. The very first story I remember coming alive was the wedding at Cana. Our Mother Mary boldly made herself known to me during that reading. It was one of those "when did that get there?" moments! I was so excited to see there was something about Mary we were all missing out on, that I called one of my fellow spiritual formation friends over to the house to show Mary to her, in the Bible. She didn't quite see things the way I did. My heart was on fire for the Lord, His Word, and getting to know His Mother, Mary! I began to pray for Mary to continue to reveal herself to me.

In my journals, I began to write down lists which included what the first group of Christians were like, how they worshiped, what they believed, how they were structured, how they were true community, and *how they **did not** have Bibles*. I realized there wasn't a new testament at this time. Wow! That was big. How could we believe in the Bible alone as our authority, yet the early Christians didn't have Bibles? They were teaching Jesus by oral tradition. I clung to John 5:39-40 and the conclusion of John 21:24-25.

I was determined to find this Church which Christ established here on earth, since I already knew "the gates of hell would not prevail against it". His Church was here, but where?

As I began to ask our pastors why we didn't believe this or that (from my many lists), since it was what the first apostles taught, they began to literally run from me. I was told to be careful, because I was beginning to sound like a Catholic. Whenever I heard the term "protestant" I would protest against that term. I even asked "what is it you protest?" Whenever I was told we protest the Catholic Church, I felt so strongly that I could not protest something I knew nothing about, and I was very upfront about this.

Our main pastor, the one who started us on our 40 days to understanding Jesus, told us he was leaving us to go help save another church in another state; at first I was thrilled. He is off to save more sinners! Then, when 2 weeks later he left us quite suddenly, and the other pastors did not want to be in charge, I felt a little let down. Then, I became outright mad because we didn't have any other pastor in the church who wanted to take over until we found a permanent replacement. We were left to be devoured by the wolves! And, there were many wolves in sheep's clothing who came to try to lead us down a path to perdition! No one in Christ's church would have done this. I was trying to get the people in charge to see we were doing things all wrong, we needed to be looking for a pastor who would run things the way the Apostles did. One pastor even told me I should consider starting my own church. This really put me over the edge. I flat out told him (1) women do not lead the people, men do; and (2) Christ's church is here, now; why would I go start something that is already here? I just had to find this Church. Again, it was said my ideas sounded too Catholic, and I was warned to be careful.

The more questions I asked, the faster our church leaders would run. I continued to be told I was speaking like a Catholic. When they said things like this before, I blew them off, but now I was starting to think about this. After all, as I was searching for the answers to my lists of what Christ's church looked like, everything was pointing to The Catholic Church, but I kept telling God "nah, you don't need me to go there; I'm doing pretty well in the Baptist church". Why can't we just change Baptists? I'm not going to become a Catholic - my husband would never become a Catholic!" Since we were all one body anyway, why would I need to go over there to the Catholic side? Why couldn't our church be convinced we needed to change so I can stay right here where I'm comfortable and where I'm plugged in and part of the inner-leadership circle?

I was already listening to Scott Hahn and Fr. John Corapi, and liking them, but I was still thinking our congregation would have to change together, not just me. We would do this as a church family, is what I thought. No one else agreed with me, though. As I talked to people, I learned there wasn't any consistency in beliefs, even within the walls of the same Baptist congregation. This baffled me.

There were many things which occurred during my journey, which I will not write here, but when I finally gave in was after I had been praying for God to truly reveal to me His

will, since He had already answered all my questions with “The Catholic Church”. If His will was for me to become Catholic, He really needed to tell my husband, since he came from a very anti-Catholic family, I assumed he was anti-Catholic too, although we never discussed it. I was too afraid to tell him my thoughts about all of this. My husband had no idea I had one single Catholic thought. It was clear to me I was supposed to start attending mass at the Catholic Church (yes, I did believe in the real presence, and had stopped taking our quarterly communion at the Baptist church a long time ago and never failed to mention to our daughter holy communion was most definitely **not** a symbol!)

After about 2-3 weeks of praying for God to let me hear through my husband’s own mouth if I was to become a Catholic, one Saturday morning, my husband slept in; I had been sitting in my prayer chair reading my Bible and praying and he called me into the bedroom. He said he had something very serious to talk to me about and I might want to sit down to hear what he had to say. At this point, my mind is going 9 million miles an hour thinking he’s about to tell me he’s going through mid-life crisis and is going to leave me. This is the most serious thing I could think of at the time.

He began to tell me about this reoccurring dream he had been having; he went into great detail. Then, he told me the devil wanted his soul and God told him the only way to keep that from happening was to become Catholic, and so he was going to start going to the Catholic Church starting the next day. My jaw nearly dropped to the floor!!! My husband thought my reaction was because of my opposition to that idea. I assured him I was not upset about this idea and when he finished telling me his story, boy, did I have some things to show him!

We began attending mass the very next day and our entire little family came into The Church Easter Vigil 2008. Praise God!

I always give thanks to God for my journey from the Baptist church to The Catholic Church and many times have thought about finding out where our previous pastor is now so I could send him a letter giving thanks to him for his participation in leading me home to The Church, established by Christ Himself! I truly believe I would not have come this far so soon had the pastor at the Baptist church not encouraged me to really know the Bible and know Jesus.

This is only but a tiny bit of the story of my faith journey into the Church, but every day I give thanks to God for my faith and for allowing me to be Catholic.

By the guiding love of Mary to Jesus, I am

Carol Eubank