

My Conversion to becoming a Catholic

By: Sandra R

My conversion story will probably sound like every other convert story. You hear the phrase from a lot of converts to the Catholic Church, "I read myself into the Catholic Church." Read what? Well, it was a shocker when I found out. Some guys who are known by Catholics as the "Church Fathers", you have probably heard about them... If you haven't heard about them already, I must warn that these fellows are dangerous for Protestants. Not that they are bad or anything, but because of the long line of succession that leads you all the way to the place some, if not most protestants, will say is the 'Church of Popes'. Yeah, you guessed it... the Catholic Church.

Well, just to get it out there... I wasn't opposed to the Catholic Church. I was never taught to be. My formation in my early years was focused on memorizing scripture verses, and morality. In my early years of schooling, I went to a Christian school for 4 years. But, I knew something was missing, but I didn't know what. The day would start off with a worship service. It was pretty much some man or woman would get up, wearing a nice suit or tie, or a nice dress. Then he or she would read from scripture and then we would leave.

I remember after being told something by my teacher that really made me think, "Are we worshipping God, or the weather?" She told us (the class), "You can tell how God is feeling by the weather outside. If it's a sunshine blue day outside, God is happy. If it's raining, God is crying. If it's thundering and lightning, God is mad." Now, you have to understand how this sounds to an intelligent kid. I may have been small, but I am not stupid. After our teacher said this, I went to reason. Reason and common sense said that God is indeed the Creator, and that creation is the handy work of his hands. But, to me, what the teacher had told us sounded like if God could be manipulated. Then I thought, "Well, my mother says that

down in Florida we receive hurricanes. So, when a hurricane comes, does that mean God is wiggling out?" Soon after, I lost my faith and left Christianity.

I didn't totally lose my faith, because I knew that there was a God, I just didn't know if it was the God of Christianity. After leaving this school, I went to a school that didn't teach any type of religion. Fast forward a few years, and I was in about 6th or 7th grade, or it could have been 6 and 7th grade; I noticed my friends were continually asking me, "Sandra do you want to attend CCD? It will be fun." And I asked, "Does it have to do with the Bible?" They replied, "Yes, but come on! It's fun!" Now, at this point in my life, theology was not in my 'of interest' category. So I respectfully did not accept the invitation to go. Little did I know what was going to happen later on in life.

So, for 2 years I did not accept the invitation to attend CCD. And this continued and after a while, my friends just had quit asking me. Anyway, fast forward to my 8th or 9th grade year. One my teachers walked in during English class If I remember correctly, or maybe I was sent to give something to the vice principle of the school. Anyway, the principle of the elementary school was there, and I hear my teacher say, "Oh excuse me sister." I thought, "Sister? I doubt that they are related." Then he explains to us that, he isn't referring to the 'sister' as blood relation, but 'sister' as a nun. This was a shock to me, because for whatever reason, I had said that, "I am never talking to a priest or a nun." The reason I even knew the words priest or nun was because, I saw the movie called *The Sound of Music* and *Sister Act*. I wasn't taught anything Catholic, so the closest I came was by watching movies. At this time to be honest, I didn't even know there was such thing as the Catholic Church, but I did know that there is only 1 church. I should mention that, that nun was my 4th grade teacher who I love dearly as a teacher.

So I thought, "Ok, I will make an exception for sisters, but I am still not going to be talking to priests." Fast forward and I had graduated from the school. 9th grade was as far as you could go until you had to switch out, so I did. I knew all of my friends were going to a school which they used the abbreviation for, which they called ABC. So, I went to ABC for the sign up process. I was accepted into the school. Summer goes by, or should I say was almost over, and they were having

the open house. My mother, my dad, and I went to the open house. As we were driving there my mother tells me, "Sandrita, Catholics do things a little differently than when you went to the Christian school." And I thought, "Well, how different can it be?" Oh, I was about to see for myself how different.

We walked inside the school and made our way to the gym. The 1st thing that caught my attention was when I met Father (a priest) for the first time. Now, father was dressed to the nines, robe and everything. But, I was baffled a little bit. I saw father wear the little hat that the Jewish people wear. So I was thinking, "Am I attending a Catholic school or a Jewish one?" I now knew the word Catholic from my mother. Well, during the tour of the school, I learned that the school abbreviation is not ABC, but ACCHS (Archbishop Coleman F. Carroll High School). Archbishop is one word, not two separate words.

Fast forward again, and 10th grade has started. Next thing I knew something called a Mass was upon us. I never heard of such thing. So mass started, it was our 1 a month mass where the whole entire school attended. It soon occurred to me this is the equivalent to the Christian service that I had attended. But attending mass was way different. I found so many things to be Jewish. But Jesus was front and center throughout. Whereas what I attended, I am sorry to say, was all about the pastor. So, this was refreshing to attend. I noticed the cross comes in 1st, incense, robes, priests...ECT. I would later discover that everything is indeed Biblical. As the 3 years go by, I was becoming head over heels for the mass. That's right; I was slowly converting to the Catholic Church. Everything about the Catholic faith just made sense: the Sacraments, the Mass, the History...everything.

I have to say, that I am extremely grateful and thankful for my teachers in those 3 years. My friends also played a big part, because if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have gone to this Catholic school. I would be someplace else still looking for answers to the questions I had about Christianity. I thank God for the Catholic Church that has answered all of those questions. For example: Where did the Bible come from? How come in the Old Testament, it is categorized into 4 main sections, and one of them is history, but no one seems to be teaching it? How come I never learned about what happened after the Bible? So on so forth.

My journey is kind of like the stages of a camp fire. It goes a little something like this:

Beginning in my 10 grade year the spark had come. I call it the beginning of curiosity; my attention by God was captured.

In my 11 grade year, I became a smoldering ember that was beginning to smoke up. I call this the beginning of a relationship; God was teaching me how to pray. I made my first heartfelt prayer that year, and it still continues.

In my 12 grade year, that smoldering ember now had a small flame. I call this the beginning of being humbled; God used the history of His Church to knock me off my high horse. He knocked me off my horse called: Pride. I thought I knew everything, and that I didn't need anyone. I learned that year, that I did need someone...His Church.

After graduation, the flame grew and until this day it hasn't stopped growing. I have learned from the Church Fathers, I will give some examples:

1. St. Jerome
2. St. Ignatius of Loyola
3. St. Justin Martyr
4. St. Polycarp of Smyrna (who by the way was taught by St. John)

I have learned from people who are not only cradle Catholics, but also converts and reverts. Some of these people are:

1. Fr. Larry Richards
2. Dr. Scott Hahn
3. Steve Ray
4. Fr. Bill Casey (from the Fathers of Mercy)
5. Deacon Alex Jones

And of course, I thank everyone who has helped me along the way.

I learned throughout my journey about Mercy and Forgiveness. I was witnessed to by my senior year theology teacher who is a permanent Deacon.

When I needed spiritual guidance in my senior year, he listened. I should admit that I was reluctant at first, because like I had said in my early years, that I was never going to talk to a priest or anyone of that sort. Well, like I have heard, "Never say never." I experienced what Catholics experience in Confession; you feel about 1,000 pounds lighter; like a big chip has been lifted off of your shoulders.

Towards the ending of my senior year of high school, I ended up asking the same deacon to baptize me. Actually, there is more to it than that... I must confess that actually I was taking Communion without being baptized. I had been testing God about Communion and he had sent me a healthy guilt, which led me to asking him. I admit that I was jealous of Catholics, because I wanted the Eucharist. About 2 years later I went through R.C.I.A, and received all 3 Sacraments of Initiation. Thank God for His Church and the Sacraments! I love being Catholic, and I wouldn't leave it for anything! I hope you enjoyed my conversion story. God Bless † † †

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CHURCH!!!**

