



## Diocese of Fargo *Our Stories of Faith*

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### *Laura Johnson's Story*



Freedom! That was what I thought as I drove away from home in a car overflowing with all the necessary items for a college bound student. My purpose in going to NDSU was to satisfy a natural curiosity for discovering truth in the matters of science. It just so happens that this curiosity also carried over to the topic of faith and morals. I had a friend who was Catholic and I asked him if I could attend Mass with him. He agreed and I walked into St. Paul's Newman Center not knowing that my life would be forever changed.

As I pulled open the door to enter the chapel, I was captivated by the silence. As an ELCA Lutheran, I was unaccustomed to this quietness because that was the time that we would typically use to talk to our neighbor about the events that occurred in our lives during the previous week. It was not a time where we prayed. My next observation was that the congregation was REALLY young - my age young. This was also striking to me because my hometown Lutheran church had a mean age of about 87 and the people in my Confirmation class were more excited about what the pastor brought for snacks than what he was teaching about God. My parents had instilled in me a great love for God as well as the importance of cultivating a relationship with Him, but I had never met anyone my age who actually loved God like I did. I was intrigued by this church and as I sat through Mass, I formulated numerous questions to ask my friend for I was puzzled by its mysteriousness. I asked him if we

could go to Mass every day so I could solve this perplexing ambiguity and he agreed.

While attending daily Mass, abortion and artificial birth control were discussed in the homily. These were topics that I had not considered from a moral standpoint because they were never talked about in my church, nor were they ever discussed in any academic classroom in which I had been a student. I began to wonder what the ELCA taught on these matters and was astonished at their positions. They taught that abortion was acceptable under certain circumstances which filled me with great anxiety. The question I sought to answer was not under what circumstances should a pregnancy be terminated, but rather at what point does life begin. The Catholic Church proclaimed with great clarity that life began at the moment of conception and I began to doubt that the ELCA was in conformity with the will of God, who is truth itself.

The most shocking piece of evidence I gathered was concerning artificial contraception. I learned that not only the ELCA, but EVERY Christian church, regardless of their denomination, had been *against* artificial birth control until the 1930 Lambeth Conference. It was at this conference that the Anglican church became the first church to announce that artificial birth control was permissible under certain circumstances and from that point on, nearly every denomination followed in their footsteps. Once again, the Catholic Church stood strong in her undying conviction of the goodness of the human person, and I began to understand that the Pope wasn't just some old guy with weird shoes and no sense of

style. I realized that Jesus giving Peter the keys to the kingdom was extremely significant and that the Pope was entrusted with the monumental responsibility of binding and loosening matters of heaven and earth. I was perplexed because I knew in my heart the Catholic Church might prove to be right in every circumstance, but I held on to the tiny hope that the Church would have an erroneous opinion on something, so that I would not have to disobey my parents by joining the Catholic Church.

I've always loved my parents and been thankful for their guidance in my life. They brought me to church every Sunday, taught me how pray, and nurtured my relationship with the Lord. I still remember the day I received a pink Bible for Easter and how enjoyable it was to read about Adam, Noah, and Moses.

My parents encouraged me to learn about the Lord and now I was contemplating leaving the church in which I had been raised for what they perceived as the Anti-Christ. I was afraid to tell them all I was learning and I wasn't yet confident that I was going to become Catholic, so I chose to say nothing about my newfound knowledge.

At this point in time, my spiritual life was in great turmoil. This was no longer a matter of reason, for God had already revealed enough for me to know where the fullness of truth was found, but I needed faith to believe in what He had shown me.

I needed to be certain that I should become Catholic. I walked into the Newman Center at NDSU, knelt down, and prayed earnestly to God that He would grant me the gift of faith. Praised be Jesus Christ for He calmed the storm raging in my heart through the same mystery that initially drew me closer to Him: the most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. After the consecration, when the priest held up the host, my heart was filled with a consuming love and for the first time, I knew that this *truly* was the Body & Blood of Christ.

This desire for the Eucharist was the final piece of a divinely orchestrated series of events that led me to enroll in RCIA. I didn't tell my parents right away but waited until March. I asked them if they would like to sit next to me at the Easter Vigil as I joined the Catholic Church. This was NOT the best way to approach the subject so I was not surprised that they were not present at my Confirmation & Communion and did not want to have anything to do with my joining a "cult." My father told me that I was the biggest disappointment of his life and that all he had taught me about God had been wasted. He did not understand that it was precisely his good upbringing in the faith, this fertile ground, which permitted my tiny mustard seed to grow!

Satan used the lack of acceptance from my family to try and lure me away from following God's truth, but the longing for union with Christ overshadowed all my fears of rejection. Every time I attended Mass, I longed to be united with the physical body of Christ. That longing was finally satiated when I received the Holy Eucharist for the first time on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009 upon entering into full communion with the Catholic Church.



*2012 Laura Johnson  
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