



Diocese of Fargo *Our Stories of Faith*

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The Larson's Story

“Please pray for where God wants us to go to church.” To which my friend responded, “You could consider the Catholic Church!” Inside I *laughed*. We were searching for a Bible-based church and would *never* consider THAT church. But less than three years later, we were Confirmed into the Catholic Church. What happened?

Bruce and I were life-long Lutherans, I attended a Lutheran High School and we both graduated from the same Lutheran college. Following graduation we married and Bruce began teaching at a Catholic school for 14 years. Three daughters were born during this time. They were baptized and later confirmed in the Lutheran church. In the mid 80's, following a Billy Graham crusade, I had an insatiable desire to read the Bible and began doubting infant baptism, even though I was working as the education director at our Lutheran church. I continued working there for 15 years and for almost 20 years I belonged to a non-denominational Bible study that helped my faith and knowledge of Scripture grow, but it fueled my doubts about some Lutheran teachings. Bruce belonged to the men's study for about 4 years and his faith grew.

Our Lutheran pastors were faithful followers of Jesus and we were comfortable in spite of struggles with the baptismal doctrine. But we were **not** comfortable



with our church's national leadership in the area of life issues. We didn't want to leave, but if we stayed, we were in agreement with those things we felt were wrong. So a search began for a denomination that followed truth *as we*

saw it! We wanted to be totally under the authority of a denomination that taught the truth, but so many teachings were at odds: infant vs. believer's baptism, transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation, liturgical vs. contemporary worship, female vs. male pastors.

We started to realize because WE believed something was true, didn't make it true. People used to believe the world was flat, but that didn't make it true. Maybe our interpretation of Scripture in regards to infant baptism, etc, wasn't correct? We needed to search for the TRUTH and then believe it. We began to read doctrinal statements to see if we agreed with them or not, but with 20,000 denominations claiming to have the Truth based on the Scriptures, we wondered, if the Holy Spirit was inspiring them, why wasn't He giving them all the same answers?

2001, I began working for a pregnancy clinic's abstinence until marriage program and started to learn more about the theology behind marriage. How the Lover (God) has a Beloved (Jesus), who returns with a Spirit of Love (Holy Spirit), which is an example of the Trinity and marriage. The one flesh union of marriage is sacred

and holy; an image of the Holy Trinity; the unity and community of love that exists within it. And Jesus pursues us, His Bride, because He wants to become one with us - giving us life so we can be fruitful and multiply! Marriage truly was a Sacramental mystery, a visible sign that points to an invisible reality.

After trying out many denominations, we were drawn back to traditional liturgical worship at our Lutheran church. God was a God of order and we desired structure during worship. Something was missing in the contemporary settings that had drawn us at first. About this time our eldest daughter, Karin, who lived in Denver, began 'trying out' non-denominational churches. She also began studying Theology of the Body and joined a non-denominational Bible study. Her faith and understanding of Scripture grew rapidly.

My husband and I started devouring tapes and books - *Contraception Why Not*, *John Paul II's Theology of the Body (TOB)*, *Father Larry Explains the Mass*, Scott Hahn's books, *Surprised by Truth* books, etc. In a TOB tape Christopher West explained Edith Stein's hypothesis of original sin and a 'sword' pierced our hearts - painfully convicting us of our sin of contraception and sterilization. We asked ourselves, "*Doesn't the Catholic Church teach that contraception is a sin?*"

Summer 2003, Karin and I attended the first Theology of the Body Conference in Pennsylvania. It was a blessing, witnessing Christ's love and understanding how we are saved through the Church's Sacramental graces. A real eye opener for

both of us was how the Catholic Church teaches that baptism removes original sin restoring original goodness, unlike Martin Luther, who taught that Jesus covers our sinfulness as snow covers a 'dunghill'. Deep down we had bought the 'dung theory'. God was also placing a desire in our hearts to receive Him through the Eucharist, as we witnessed such incredible Catholics worshipping and receiving Him at daily Mass during this conference.

Following 4 years of struggles, there was an undeniable pull to the Church, like a magnet to metal. We desired the '*peace that passes all understanding*' under the Church's authority. We were definitely Catholic on the inside and felt ready to submit to the Church's authority, even though we weren't attending Mass (that seemed like a really big step - actually stepping inside a Catholic church). But before taking this big step we wanted to tell a respected Protestant minister, who didn't know us well, what was happening. We needed honest feedback if there were concerns, but ...to our surprise he was also being drawn to the Catholic Church...a confirmation from God.

We were ready to say YES to the Church Jesus established - like a marriage proposal. Fall of 2004, Bruce, Karin, and I enrolled in RCIA. The next spring we were confirmed into the Church (Karin, Denver and Bruce and I, Fargo). A few years ago, if someone had told us this would happen, we would have said "That's impossible!" but as we searched, we kept saying 'yes' to God, and with God, nothing is impossible! We are grateful each time in Mass, we say YES as we receive Jesus Christ's Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity!

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