

# You *Can* Go Home Again

by Jan Meeks

The day before Ed's ordination, and two days before Christ the King was to be received into the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, a reporter from the Baltimore Sun called to interview him. After speaking with the reporter for about an hour, Ed said with a big smile on his face, "She wants to talk with you now."

This was my first interview by a reporter. I took a deep breath and waited for her question.

"I've heard the story from your husband's perspective, but what is your story?"

I was completely unprepared for that question. This was about Ed becoming a Catholic priest and about our parish becoming a Catholic parish. It was not about me. We chatted for a good while, and, thankfully, I was able to shift the conversation back to Ed and the parish. However, it did get me to think about how we, as a family, came to this day . . . how we got to go home again.

## FOSTER PARENTS

One evening in 1977, Ed read an article in the *Catholic Review* about The St. Vincent de Paul Infant Home in Dulaney Valley, MD. The infant home was run by Catholic Charities, and they had recently made the decision to close it. The plan was to place the babies in homes where they would receive one-on-one care from loving families while the

administrative details were being finalized for their adoptions. The purpose of the article was to recruit foster parents who would be willing to bring the pre-adoptive infants into their homes for about 6 to 8 weeks. Ed and I had volunteered at St. Vincent's before we were married so of course this article got our attention, and within no time, we were on the phone.

I was 26 and Ed was 30. We had two small children of our own, and yet, we were completely unprepared for the bonding that would take place during the two months that the babies would be with us. That bonding and the relinquishment of the first baby that came to live with us changed our lives forever.

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Baby "Jessica" stole our hearts immediately. The day that the social worker from Catholic Charities came to pick her up and to place her with her adoptive parents, our entire family grieved as though we had lost our own child. It hurt, but I realized if it didn't

hurt when the babies left, then we didn't really give them the love they needed in the first place. I wept until I was too weak to stand and cried out to God saying, "Oh God, if you are here, help me!" That prayer would be answered dramatically six months later.

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## PERSONAL CONVERSION

Within a week after the first baby left, the next baby came, and two months later, Katie arrived. When she was four months old, a close friend gave us a teaching tape by an Irish Catholic nun, Sr. Brieghe McKenna, who had (and still does have), a healing ministry within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Sister's message was simple: Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. She spoke of the necessity of committing ourselves *totally* to Him.

When the tape was over, my heart was bursting. What had been missing in my life was Jesus, flesh and blood and divinity! How had I not seen Him before? He was there in the liturgy and the scriptures at Mass, in the Eucharist, in all of the sacraments, in my own soul, and yet I had failed to respond personally to Him, and thus had failed to really know Him.

I had been like the blind man in the Gospel who, after Jesus placed spit on

his eyes, saw men, but they looked like trees walking. And now, through the words of Sister Briega, Jesus touched my eyes a second time, and I could see everything clearly.

That night I did respond to Him, I made a total commitment of my life to Jesus, and then I prayed for us to be able to adopt Katie.

For various administrative reasons, Katie's stay with us was extended many months beyond the norm. The mutual bond between our family and Katie was immeasurable. As far as we were concerned, she was our daughter, and as far as she was concerned, we were the only parents she had ever known.

There are some who might call what happened to me, and subsequently to Ed, a "born again" experience, but having already been born again by Baptism, we refer to it as a personal conversion. It was that powerful, and our lives have never been the same since. After much prayer and waiting, we approached Catholic Charities and made a formal petition to adopt Katie who was then about seven months old.

## **ADOPTION**

During the months we were waiting for the decision concerning Katie's adoption, we learned of an unwed teenage girl who needed a place to live after she gave birth to her baby. The case worker from Catholic Charities told us that she was planning on parenting her baby, but could not go back to her parents' home.

Ed and I prayed and felt God calling us to bring this young girl and her baby into our home as well. She and her baby lived with us for two years during which time she completed her high school education, and then, having been reconciled to her family, the two of them returned home.

Not long after they came to live with us, however, we received the decision from Catholic Charities concerning Katie's adoption. Based on the many months that she had been in our care and her attachment to our family, her adoption was granted to us.

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We continued to bring pregnant unmarried teenagers into our home one at a time. We provided a place for them where they could be cared for, counseled, and have the space away from outside pressures to make an informed decision between parenting and adoption.

Once Ed and I began to respond to the graces that God had given us, it seemed that the flood gates of heaven were opened. There were times when it was hard to contain the joy, love,

and wonder of the riches of God's grace and of the Holy Scriptures which suddenly became so alive to us.

We found ourselves wanting to be in church more and around others who shared the same spiritual renewal that we had. We became part of a small charismatic prayer group in our parish, and although it provided much in the way of fellowship, scripture study, and a venue for heartfelt praise and worship, there was troubled water in the Church.

The 1970's were filled with all kinds of liturgical innovations and private teachings that were in direct contrast to the teachings of the Magisterium and the Holy Scriptures. The Catechism of the Catholic Church was not yet published, and our new found zeal for God outgrew our spiritual maturity. These factors sadly led us away from the Catholic Church.

## **SPARROW HOUSE**

We eventually settled in an Assemblies of God church and completely immersed ourselves in the life and activities of that congregation. We found many people there who shared our deep conviction and commitment on behalf of pre-born infants and their mothers. In 1985, with the help of the church and congregation, we founded a home for unwed teens which we named *Sparrow House*.

Ed left his secular position so that he and I could serve as house parents, and our family, which by then,

consisted of ourselves and our four children, moved into *Sparrow House*. Ed was asked by the Pastor to become the part-time business administrator of the church in addition to his role as house father. As *Sparrow House* filled up with the girls, it became necessary for our family to move out since there were more of us than there were of the pregnant teens. New house parents were hired, and Ed and I continued as directors of the home for almost 25 years. In 2009, *Sparrow House* became part of the Gabriel Network.

“... You are priests of the New Evangelization. All around you are those for whom the Gospel has lost its savor. Your ministry will be to those who were too often taught that their Catholic faith and its life-giving message is an option. To them you are sent today.”

### **CHRIST THE KING CHURCH**

Ed's role on staff at the church quickly grew into a full-time position, and he was eventually licensed as a minister. His gifts of preaching, pastoral ministry, and administration converged into a reality that not so surprisingly was the fruition of a much earlier seed planted in his heart as an altar boy at St. Anthony's Church in Trenton, New Jersey.

As these gifts flourished in his life, a sense of longing for the Eucharist and the Sacramental life of the Church began to grow. Ed took a sabbatical from church ministry to sort this out and worked as an executive for a company that manages retirement communities.

During that time, Ed connected with the Charismatic Episcopal Church, and was ordained a priest by Bishop Philip C. Zampino. He founded Christ the King Church in Towson in 1996. Because of the CEC's respect and regard for the Catholic Church, it became for us the first step of spiritually going home.

There were a few twists and turns along the way, but by 2008, we affiliated ourselves and our parish with the Traditional Anglican Communion because of their serious desire for unity with the Catholic Church. In October 2009 Pope Benedict issued a generous response to those Anglicans seeking full communion with the Church in the form of the Apostolic Constitution, *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, which would allow Anglican parishes along with their clergy to become Catholic.

Immediately, Ed began preparing the congregation here at Christ the King for this momentous event. In September of 2010, he began a Catechetical series beginning first with those teachings and doctrines of the Church that are most difficult for protestants to understand and receive, and then in 2011, a yearlong review of The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. In May of 2011, Ed submitted his formal request to join

the ordinariate and his dossier to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

### **THE ORDINARIATE**

In January of 2012, the American ordinariate was established as *The Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter*.

There was great rejoicing among most of us who had been yearning for this news. For Ed and me, there was a lot of joy, but also anxiety. Not only were we former Catholics, but Ed had spent a number of years in a Catholic seminary though he left several years before ordination.

These were potentially serious impediments. Yet, by the grace of God, the Vatican granted a *nulla osta*, (a letter stating that there was nothing to stand in his way of being ordained to the priesthood), as well as a letter dispensing him from the impediment of schism, and a rescript (a dispensation to be ordained a priest, although married).

Six days after we received the rescript, he was ordained a transitional deacon by Bishop Mitchell Rozanski. Seven days later, he and two other Ordinariate deacons were ordained to the priesthood by Cardinal Donald Wuerl. The next day, our entire parish and congregation of Christ the King were received into full communion with the Catholic Church as part of the *Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter*.

### **HOME AGAIN**

So many ask us how the Archdiocese of Baltimore has responded to our coming back into the Church in such an unusual and unprecedented

manner. We cannot say enough about the kindness and generosity of all those who have reached out to help us in every step along the way, from the archdiocesan staff and bishops to the clergy from surrounding parishes.

Without exception the Catholic laity have received us with open arms. I have said on many occasions when questioned about the local Church's reaction to our prodigal return, "They have killed the fatted calf, and put a ring on our fingers."

At Ed's priestly ordination, in addition to making reference to the need to reach out to Anglicans seeking full

communion with the Catholic Church, Cardinal Wuerl said,

*“. . . You are priests of the New Evangelization. All around you are those for whom the Gospel has lost its savor. Your ministry will be to those who were too often taught that their Catholic faith and its life-giving message is an option. To them you are sent today.”*

This is our call and our passion: to encourage those Catholics who, like ourselves, for one reason or another, have left the Church and who desire to come home again. Within a few weeks of our being received as a parish into the Church, there were individuals and families who had been

away from the Church for over 30 years who came seeking reconciliation. Knowing that we too had left the Church and returned gave them a certain level of comfort in approaching Ed for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As we were welcomed, we welcome those who may be unsure, hesitant, or afraid to come back home to Holy Mother Church. It is time for us “to kill the fatted calf, and to eat and make merry and be glad, for what was dead is now alive and what was lost has been found.” You can go home again!