

## **PATTY JENSEN - FAITH STORY**

Sharing my faith story reminds me of when I was an Organizational Development leader and we would roll out a new leadership program. For the first iteration, the strongest, most promising leaders attended. As the program became established, other leaders came – the ones struggling more with their skills or way of being. I feel a little bit like that today. The living “saints” of our wonderful parish have told their story. Now I get to try.

I am a lapsed Catholic who has at times believed everything and at others, struggled with the whole notion of God and religion.

I was born in Frostburg, a small town in western Maryland in 1952. I mention the date because in those days, I was considered the child of a mixed marriage. My mother was Catholic and my father was Methodist although he rarely attended church. The story was that my parents eloped because Nan Nan, my grandmother, didn't want my dad to marry a Catholic. My parents decided that my three sisters and I would be raised in the Catholic faith.

As a child, religion for me was more about rules than revelation. It was hard to hold on to the Jesus that loved me like in the song. I was certain that I'd never say enough prayers to avoid purgatory-that was where sinners went if you weren't quite good enough for heaven when you died. I remember my monsieur telling me that only Catholics went to heaven. My father whom I adored was not Catholic – so this was a deal breaker for me. Suffice it to say; by the time I reached adulthood, I was rejecting the Church all together.

Like many of you my children and life (in my case, the death of my mother) brought me back about 20 years later. My husband Bill and I moved to Washington in 1980. We had our children here. When we did attend church, we came to St. Columba's. Bill was raised in the Episcopal faith. I liked the liturgy. For years we were Easter and Christmas only attendees. After my mother's death Bill and I had experiences of longing; for God, community, something more. My 9 year old daughter Meg wanted to belong to a church. My 11 year old son Bill came along for the ride, eventually becoming a sacristan.

So we joined. That was over 25 years ago. Then lots of things seemed to happen at once. We began regularly attending services. Sermons spoke to me in new and different ways. The music and certain hymns moved me to tears. They still do. And I began having experiences of the spirit outside of church. So my spiritual awakening occurred here.

Looking back, I think that my path has been one of call – a call to join, to pray, to discern and to serve. My story is still unfolding but several moments stand out:

- Joining the Discernment Ministry was significant. I had never talked about my spiritual journey with others until then.
- When I started attending the First Monday Morning Prayer group, I'd walk in thinking the bible passage we were reading had no relevance to me. I'd leave having felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in community, knowing that God had intended that passage just for me. Rip Coffin was a member of our group and we journeyed with him during his battle with cancer. Experiencing faith in community was powerful.
- I was received into the Episcopal Church by a female bishop right here in the nave; a special milestone for me.
- When my father-in-law died, Rose Duncan came to the nursing home and took us through Ministration at the Time of Death. She laid her hands on and prayed for each of us. It was beautiful.
- Co-chairing the rector search was time of community building and prayerful discernment as we found Ledlie and he found us. I learned so much about this community and the many ways people were seeking God.

So what now? More and more I feel called to look inward, to seek and be present to where the divine touches my soul. I want to live into that; to integrate my spiritual life with everything I do. So, as a leadership coach, I try to create a compassionate sacred place for my clients to share. Joining the Stirring the Waters Ministry has given me the courage to look at my own white privilege. It is compelling me to bring my faith to action, not only because I want to help, but because they are me and I am them. I continue my education and read spiritual works including ones that go beyond our Christian beliefs. They deepen my experience of the divine and how to authentically express it in the world. And I keep coming here, whether I am experiencing God's presence or feeling disconnected. Most importantly, this is where I am at home with fellow seekers who hold me up in joy and pain and who continue to enrich my life and faith.