



Testimony of Faith

Tony, aged 25 from Woking Arundel and Brighton Diocese

I don't come from a religious family. When they realised I planned to be a Roman Catholic my parents were very surprised. They weren't happy about it, but they have come to realise that it is important to me and now they support me.

It started with an experience I had when I was about 11 years old. I had taken my 2 brothers on a rubber boat on a lake. The rubber boat split and we were all stuck on a small island. My brothers, who were younger than me, couldn't swim. There was a strong current and I knew I needed help, so I left them to go and find someone. To get back to land I needed to swim, so I took all my clothes off, down to my briefs, and then I swam across the lake, and that led me to the river. I swam down the river looking for help, but couldn't see anyone. I was terrified my brothers wouldn't be safe. As no-one was around, I had to swim across the river to the other side, where I saw a boat. Nobody was there so I dragged the boat onto the river, and using only my hands, paddled upriver. Then I had to drag the boat across the rough ground to get it to the lake. It was wooden and heavy. I had no shoes on and my feet were getting cut on the stones.

I was terrified for my brothers and it was a long way to pull the boat, and then I just didn't have the energy to go on. I felt like giving up. That was my hour of need and all I could do was to turn to God. I knew about praying from school. There was nothing else I could do but pray. I said: "Dear God, Please can you show me some kind of sign my brothers are o.k., and give me the strength to get them." At the moment I said, "Amen", I heard my brothers calling to me.

We were all o.k., but I saw that as a sign. Since that happened I have always prayed. I got myself a small bible, I think from school, which I felt I had to keep secret. I think a lot of youngsters are embarrassed to go out and say "I believe in God". I didn't do anything about joining a church, but as a kid, I would just go and sit in a church or a sacred place. I liked the peace.

When I was 16 I went into the army. We had to go to chapel every week, which I liked, but I still didn't do anything about joining a church.

It wasn't until last year when I was 25, that I googled 'Catholic churches' in my town and came up with St Dunstons and its service times. I wanted to go but didn't want to go alone, so I asked my brother to come with me. We got there when Mass was on. I had never heard a Catholic mass before. I remember I sat there and I loved it. I felt as though I belonged there.

After that Mass I spoke to Father Frank. He asked me for my details and said he would contact me. He tried to ring me but couldn't get through and so he came to my house. I loved that, that he would take the trouble to come to my house. He put me in touch with the RCIA group and I used to go to all the meetings. Everyone was so nice. When I missed a meeting once, he rang me to see I was o.k., even the catechist sent me a text. It is nice to know that people care.

I had to explain to my mum why it is important to me to join the Catholic Church, and I took her to Mass to see why I like it. I am the first in our family to join a church. I just can't stop talking about it, to anyone who will listen, but it has been a long journey, starting when I was a kid and asked God to give me a sign that he cared.

Today I went to Arundel Cathedral. I wasn't sure what to expect, but it was amazing. I was looking forward to meeting the Bishop. He was really nice and down to earth, and to look around and see all those people and know they were doing the same as me, made me feel good: I know I am not the only one who has

made this journey. At Easter I am going to be baptised: I see it as a new start in life when my relationship with God is going to get even better.



Testimony of Faith

Alison from St John the Evangelist Parish in Horsham Arundel and Brighton Diocese

On Saturday in the first week of Lent, I was one of the many taking the second step in the RCIA journey: The Rite of Election.

My journey started two years ago when I did something I hadn't done for about twenty odd years; I got down on my knees and I prayed. As a child I had been to Sunday School but my family weren't churchgoers. Politics was the religion in our house and so as a result God had not played much of a role in my life.

I was at the Anglican Shrine in Walsingham (Norfolk) and I had gone there really with a historical interest about the place. I was there with my daughter who was preparing herself to be received into the Catholic Church that year.

I wasn't praying for me to become Catholic, I wasn't praying for my daughter, I was just praying to God to fill the void in my life. It was a void that I can't really put into words but I had an emptiness that I carried around like a great weight. I had become accustomed to this void and it was part of me. I tried to fill it with material things which at the end of the day never made me any happier.

Suffice to say there was no bolt of lightning or angels singing, but a path did open up for me. I started the RCIA journey that following September, somewhat unsure if I should be there. To be honest, I have asked that question quite a few times along the road including the morning of 16 February 2013 at Mass before heading down to Arundel Cathedral to take part in the Rite of Election. But the answer directing me to proceed has always come back to me: In this decision I know that I am loved and I am wanted and I am filled with a great joy when I hear that answer. The void? What void?

Testimony of Faith

Glynn, aged 37

Archdiocese of Liverpool

I am 37 years old, was born in Barnsley but moved to South Africa when I was 6. I came back to England aged 16 to pursue a football career, and am married with one son. My football career spanned 18 years and I played for 4 or 5 different clubs – Chesterfield, Shrewsbury, Notts County, Barnsley...

Religion wasn't part of my up-bringing. It didn't play a part in my mum and dad's outlook on life: They weren't believers. I think my Nan goes to church but apart from that I don't think that anyone else does.

When I was about 22 years old I had a dream and have since come to understand that Our Lady, the Mother of Jesus, spoke to me. Initially I thought it was an angel that had spoken to me. It all came as a great shock but at the same time was incredible.

At the time of the dream I was very much living as one of the lads and in the dream Mary asked me to stop smoking and she said loads of other things to me about my life too. I remember it as clear as day and it's difficult to explain, but two days after the dream I stopped smoking.

I am still bamboozled by what happened. The voice in my dream was so tender and yet stern at the same time.

Around the same time I met my now wife whilst we were both visiting Mexico. After the dream I phoned my girlfriend (now wife) to tell her about it. Things gradually fell into place. I just knew that I should get baptised and knew that it had to be in the Catholic Church, even though one of my football coaches that I told was encouraging me to go along to his church. Getting baptised was the most natural thing to do. My wife is also Catholic and she wasn't surprised by my decision. I am sure that she was praying for me.

I am now involved in Holy Rosary Church and it's been the best decision of my life. It's certainly changed my life and my outlook has changed enormously. I feel I still have loads to learn but I do believe that God will do great things through me by His Grace. Getting baptised has changed me as a person – made me more humble and a lot happier. Before it happened I thought I knew where I was going and after getting baptised, well, it has completely changed everything. You get a lot more peace in your life. You sense when you are doing God's will. It's brilliant. I don't know why he chose me – I'm not special.

God is good. He will call and use anyone, if they let him, to build his kingdom of love and peace. Don't expect your life to be the same again once you say yes to God. God will use all of your experiences for good to help bring about His will. I just say to people 'go for it!' I think we live in a world of instant answers, but on the journey of faith questions get answered gradually on the way.

I'm reading some of the prayers at the Rite of Election this year. I'm made up that I've been asked to do this and feel so honoured.



Testimony of Faith Ian, 50 from Stockport Shrewsbury Diocese

My name is Ian and I live in Stockport. I am 50 years old, am married to Cath and we have two children - Amy aged 20 and Matthew aged 15. My wife and children are Roman Catholics.

My journey in faith began when as a 10 year old boy I joined a Church of England organisation called the Church Lads Brigade, later to merge with the Church Girls Brigade and become the Church Lads and Church Girls Brigade (CLCGB). During my early teens I was a server periodically. Meeting the requirements of being a member of the CLCGB, I attended services on a very regular basis.

I was in the Brigade up until I was about 43, holding many different positions which took me to a number of churches as my base. However for the past 14 years I was a Crucifer at St Georges C of E Church in Stockport, a role I took very seriously and felt very close to God when fulfilling this duty especially when

leading the gospel procession.

My wife and I have always supported each other's faith and for the past 28 years (24 married) we have attended each other's churches, so I have always been familiar with what the Roman Catholic Church stands for.

One of the things that always puzzled me was why in the Roman Catholic Church, as opposed to the Church of England, there is a special prayer for Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Until recently I didn't really pay much attention to this but having made the decision to convert, I felt it was important to understand why.

For many years I, as a Protestant, didn't recite the Hail Mary but now I understand the relevance and importance of her role in God's plan and feel it is my duty to remember such a courageous and important woman.

I have for a number of years now been very concerned with the direction of travel the Anglican Church is heading, including the introduction of women priests. More recently I have been struck by the clear stance that the Catholic Church has taken against Government proposals to introduce same-sex marriage. I feel strongly that marriage, as laid out clearly in Scripture, is between a man and a woman.

I took the decision to convert to a faith - Roman Catholic - that has been very clear in its understanding of marriage and has never lost its sense of identity, sticks to the teaching found in Scripture and is true to itself.

Having made the decision to convert I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders and any fears I had have been quashed by the kind welcome I have received.

I am, therefore, delighted to be able to say that I have been accepted into the Parish of Our Lady and the Apostles, Stockport where my Reception into the Catholic Church will take place.

Testimony of Faith

Sheila from North Somerset

Clifton Diocese

My name is Sheila and I live in a small village in North Somerset.

I was raised in the Church of England, although once I reached 16 my parents said the decision whether to continue to go to church or not was mine. Being a typical teenager, I was more interested in going out with friends and having a good time rather than spiritual matters.

Although I still believed in God, like a lot of people, I only attended church for christenings, marriages and burials. I was married in a Catholic church and at the time I considered converting to Catholicism but, once again, life intervened and following my husband's disaffection with the Church I did not proceed with my journey to the faith.

I never lost my belief in God and can remember when I was diagnosed with cancer, sitting in my hospital bed and praying, not to be cured, but for the courage to deal with whatever treatment I had to undergo. I felt a complete change in myself and I went from being anxious and scared to being very calm and am happy to say that today I am free from the cancer.

I would like to say that this experience brought me to the Church, but I'm afraid it didn't. Whilst I still prayed, I never sought out either the Church of England or the Catholic Church.

In 2010 my husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. I again prayed, but this time I asked God that if my husband could not be cured, then at least that he would not suffer. Again my prayers were answered

as I recall the Consultant and doctors being surprised at his strength and good humour throughout his illness.

My husband died in August 2011 and although I was very upset, I was impressed at the comfort his family got from their faith and I realised that I did not have that comfort. I thought then that I should once again investigate the possibility of converting to the Catholic Faith, but as I didn't want to make such an important decision whilst in an emotional state, I decided to wait.

After a year I found I still wanted to know more, so I began attending Mass and after a couple of weeks contacted my local church and started attending RCIA meetings. The other people attending those meetings were friendly and welcoming, but had all been attending Mass with their partners for some time and therefore were much more advanced along the path than I was, so the Deacon at my local church arranged that I should receive instruction on a one-to-one basis with a member of the Church. This worked very well for me and I learned an awful lot in a short space of time. I am now going forward and hope to be accepted into the Church at Easter.

I had always thought that just praying at home was enough, but found that by attending Mass I got so much more out of my faith and I find the services quite emotional.

Throughout my journey I have never felt pressurised by any member of the Church. If after attending meetings I decided not to proceed, that would have been O.K. Everyone I have met at the church has been welcoming and supportive and I feel that I have discovered another family.



Testimony of Faith
Jonathan from Cornwall, age 30
Plymouth Diocese

I grew up in Cornwall and went to a small Church of England primary school. My family was not religious but somehow I had a small faith as a child that led me to pray for God to look after those I cared for and myself. That faith disappeared when the social pressures of modern teenage life took hold and my only desire became to fit in with my peers.

Nothing spiritually significant happened to me until one week when I was 22 'God woke me up' – I saw my life in relation to eternity (Ecc 1,14). The realisation shook my world and had a profound effect on my consciousness. It was not a personal encounter with a loving God, but an impersonal realisation that evoked a great fear in me.

A spiritual quest was started and many years of exploring the world's religions and philosophies followed. To begin with I was detracted from Christianity, partly because I saw no philosophy of the soul and partly because I was still bound by fears of what my friends would think.

I came across the teachings of the Hare Krishna movement, and thanks to them I was convinced that a love relationship with a personal God was superior to just an awareness of an impersonal infinity. This led me to reconsider Christianity and I found a Christian community in America which spoke the language of spiritual experience that attracted me. I went to stay with them for some months and there made a commitment to Christ as my way. Coming back home and knowing the importance of being part of a spiritual community, I started attending my local gospel church.

A few years later I was prompted to go to Taizé European festival in Poland. Not knowing what Taizé was, I went and was amazed at the life and vitality of the Christianity there. I felt a natural affinity with the meditative style of Taizé. I was impressed by the Catholicity in Poland, and saw the Catholic Church at its best. I also met my future wife there.

A couple of months later I had a dream where the monks in the nearby monastery were doing a play at Easter on the passion of the Christ. In this play it was the day of the crucifixion and I was due to play the role of Christ. But I knew in this play the crucifixion was going to happen for real. I felt an overwhelming sense that it was my duty to go ahead and suffer a gory death. But I could not face it and ran away. Then I awoke.

Because of wanting to take Holy Communion with my future wife, and because of an appreciation of the Catholic contemplative style of prayer, I started to consider becoming a Catholic. As I lived in the parish belonging to the monastery and because I had not been properly baptised, my joining of the Church required that I be baptised in the monastery at the Easter Vigil service. After reading St. Paul's writing and teaching about baptism as being crucified with Christ (Rm 6,4), I saw that the dream of my crucifixion in the Easter play was referring to my future baptism.

When I contacted my parish priest, I was happy to find that he had an RCIA group about to start for the coming Easter. It was not long before I was baptised and confirmed at the Easter Vigil. And later in October that year my wife and I were married.

The next year I felt I needed to change my work to be more connected with my faith and was able to find a job with the Adult Formation team of Plymouth Diocese – their offices having just moved to be almost next door to me.

I can say that the bible passage, "seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened", has certainly been proven true in my case and I am only excited about what more God has waiting for me.



Testimony of Faith

Jean from Newcastle upon Tyne

Hexham and Newcastle Diocese

My name is Jean and I am 70 years old. I was born and raised in Glasgow and moved away when I was 40. I now live in Newcastle upon Tyne. I have 3 sons and 2 granddaughters. I divorced my husband when my children were very young - not a step I took lightly. I have been retired for 10 years. Previously I was a clinical psychologist working with children and young people, training for this following my divorce.

I have always had a faith and belief in God. I cannot "explain" this - it is just there. As a child I did not belong to any church and any religious teaching came via the school (Church of Scotland/Protestant faith). I did not find the Church of Scotland inspiring - it seemed to be a place where people went on Sunday in their "Sunday best". When my 2 younger sisters and I were young teenagers we were introduced to the Christian Science Church - my paternal grandmother had belonged to this. I do not know why this decision was made. I found this experience at times inexplicable and it did not come close to that faith I had inside. It seemed more of an intellectual exercise - particularly for the well-off middle class. I apologise if this seems critical of other Christians but this was what I experienced.

I married fairly young and did not have any more contact with that church. I have a number of friends - some of them go back to my youth - who are Catholics (some have lapsed). What I noticed from the outset was that their faith was part of the fabric of their lives - not an add-on which only came to life on Sunday. St Mary's R.C. Cathedral is a short Metro ride from my home and occasionally I would go in when it was empty, sit in a pew and admire the beauty of it. I would also have a coffee at the little cafe there. About 10 years ago my middle son was ill with a neurological condition which, though not life-threatening, was at times very disabling. One particular day I was very distressed for him and went to the Cathedral where I lit a candle at The Pieta and prayed very hard for him. It gave me comfort at the time. More importantly, over time my son's condition improved remarkably and he is now very well. I thank God for that - although I understand we do not always get what we ask for - and that faith is not an insurance

against disaster.

Last October I applied to the RCIA course at the Cathedral. I had thought about becoming a Catholic for a long time but the catalyst was the sudden illness of my daughter-in-law in Brazil. A year earlier my eldest son phoned to say that Lena had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. I remember setting up a little "shrine" for her on the mantelpiece - with a small wooden replica of The Redeemer (brought back on a previous trip to Brazil), a photograph of Lena and Mark and a candle which I lit daily, while praying very hard for Lena. I also made plans to go out to Brazil, and before I left heard that Lena had survived the operation and was doing well, and that the tumour was benign. We all had a very good Christmas. Lena's illness was undoubtedly a turning point for me in terms of my faith - not just because of the outcome but because I was so moved by the Catholic friends who went to Mass to pray for her and who had Masses said for her. They were a real inspiration.

Another turning point is perhaps a little more unusual. 2 or 3 years ago I was watching the film "The Passion" and I remember being very moved by the scene of Jesus, bleeding and exhausted, struggling with the Cross - and one of his disciples says to him "Not long to go now, Lord". I was also aware of Mary following her son, and the agony she must have been experiencing. I remember thinking: "This is what Jesus did for us - but what can I do for him?" It can't all be about taking - we also have to give.

Yesterday was the Rite of Election at the Cathedral and the next step will of course be baptism and confirmation at the Easter Vigil. There is still 6 weeks of RCIA teaching and I expect I will find it as enjoyable as I have done to date. Most importantly, what I have learned, and the people I have met have confirmed for me that I made the right decision. I no longer feel as though I am "on the outside looking in" but that I am part of a real community - a Church where God is at the very centre. I am also aware of trying to be a better person - "the best version I can be" as one of the course teachers put it! I no longer feel "self conscious" when praying as a group - I now see it as a natural thing to do. Someone close to me who was asking me about my decision said: "Jean, there is more to life than the Catholic Church". She does not have a faith. I wanted to say: "...but there isn't (more to life, etc)" but in the end said nothing. Maybe I should have tried harder. She seemed to have missed the point - that the Church is not a separate entity from life but is a part of it.

I would say to anyone who is thinking of becoming a Catholic that they should follow their instinct. If they are thinking of becoming a Catholic then they are probably half way there already!



Testimony of Faith Craig from Jarrow Hexham and Newcastle Diocese

To begin my name is Craig and I live in Jarrow in South Tyneside, I am 29 years old and in May last year I married my wife Amie.

Religion and faith had been ideas I had been interested in for a long time in perhaps a more overtly academic sense, as an interest like that I had in history, philosophy and then at university in Art History. I feel I was something of an observer looking in at the concepts and beliefs of mankind with a certain reserve, but as I began to consider faith on a more personal level I was reminded of influences that had existed around me as a child.

My maternal grandmother and her family were Catholic and they had a very strong sense of family and that influenced me greatly; my great aunt, with whom I spent a great deal of time after my grandmother passed away, taught me the Our Father as a child.

I was baptised an Anglican and seldom attended church for many years other than for baptisms or weddings. This interaction with church changed when I met my future wife. My wife and her family are Catholic and a close family friend at the time was at Ushaw College studying to become a priest. Visits to

Ushaw College and discussions with the now Father Marc, as well as personal reading and consideration, led me to explore my faith more.

For a long time I struggled with my relationship with something bigger than myself, I resented the fact I could not take Holy Communion in Catholic services I attended, but failed to understand why that was. As my wife and I planned for our wedding I experienced Anglican services and Catholic services more frequently and this allowed me to look at my relationship with God. The sense of community and continuity I experienced in the Catholic faith, and the focus I feel it holds on family deeply affected me and after several months I came to feel that being part of the Catholic Church would give me the foundation on which to develop in my journey of faith and hopefully prepare to start my own family.

I believe deeply that the teachings of the Gospel and the Church can help improve my relationships with my family, my friends and the wider community, and allow me to take time to look at my own life and actions. I hope that in following this course of teachings I have become more humble and more open about my faith and more willing to stop talking and listen.

To anyone thinking of taking part in the RCIA course as part of a personal move toward the Catholic Church or purely out of a wider interest in Catholic teachings, I would say that being able to take time in today's busy world to talk to others, to listen and discuss, has been invaluable. It has made me see that in the love and support of my family, and in the commitment and care of those I meet at church, God is present in our daily lives.