

Maria Bryant's Spiritual Journey

Maria has been an Elder since 2005. She and her husband Ken along with their daughters Alexandra and Rebecca have been members of First Christian Church since 1997. They came to First Christian by way of an invitation from a neighbor and friend. Maria is a registered nurse and works for a large Cardiology practice in Cincinnati. Her interests include walking, gardening, cooking, knitting and singing. Ministries she has participated in are the Praise Team, mission trips to Indiana, Kentucky and Mississippi, Servant Evangelism, Power Team, Upwards, Emmaus Walks and ALPHA. Favorite Scriptures: James 5:13-16.



I was born and raised Catholic, and was the second oldest out of six children. Guilt and fear were the basis of religion as I knew it. I went to church every Sunday and on holy days of obligation until I got into nursing school, then I went sporadically. I met Ken while in college—he was Baptist and I was Catholic. From the beginning it was a “his church versus my church” dilemma. We were married in 1981, and celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary this past Valentine’s Day. Our daughter, Alexandra, was born in 1984 and Rebecca in 1987. I very rarely went to church, and Ken hardly ever went with me. For the most part I did the bi-annual thing on Christmas and Easter. I occasionally took the kids to church, but they hated it.

In 1989, we moved to Harrison. I joined St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, but rarely went. One day after my girls had been playing outside, they came in all upset because they had broken our neighbors’ basement window. So being the compassionate mother that I am I made them go next door to apologize. Those neighbors were Mike Mains and Willisa Redford, fondly referred to as Mr. Mike and Miss Willisa. Well, Mike just laughed at them and Miss Willisa captured their hearts. That led to what I call my “clothesline conviction”. I’d be out hanging laundry—and some people still do that—and Willisa would be outside. We’d strike up a conversation and on many occasions it would lead to talk about God and church. I would then express my frustration and disappointment with my current “church” affiliation or lack thereof. Willisa invited me to Bible study multiple times, and I do mean multiple. Well, I finally went. That’s where I first learned about this so-called “relationship” with God, a concept very foreign to me. I was totally in awe of this, not to mention a little afraid. I remember early on in Bible study having to sit next to the minister, Bill McConnell and across from his wife, Nancy. I thought, great, I have to sit next to teacher/preacher and he’s going to ask me something and I’m not going to know the answer. But thankfully that never happened. Then Willisa invited me to church. I finally went and the very next Sunday I asked Ken to go with me. He went and was very impressed with everyone’s genuine kindness. We’ve been going every week since. It was no longer “his church versus my church.” It was now “our church.”

I was baptized on April 12, 1998. It was Easter Sunday and it was also my fortieth birthday. Ken was also baptized with me. We also invited God into our marriage. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” We began to tithe and we began to pray about decisions to make. Then Ken got the call on his heart to quit work and stay home with the girls. We had always been a two-income family and we needed two incomes, at least that’s what we thought. So we prayed. Pencil, paper and calculator couldn’t make it work. But what does not make sense to man makes perfect sense to God, if you just trust Him. It was a step of faith, an act of obedience and a testimony of God’s goodness and power. So for about one and a half years Ken stayed home, and it was one of the most blessed times of our marriage.

I have been on the Walk to Emmaus, which was okay. I worked a Walk, which was, for me, better than my Walk. I went to Alpha and, honestly, I didn’t get that much out of it. I started thinking there was something wrong with me. I was frustrated and disappointed that I didn’t experience, like some others, this major, immediate transformation. I wanted to be changed and fixed right away. Patience is not my virtue. Philippians 1:3 - 6 (MSG) says, “There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who has started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.”

What has changed my spiritual life the most, changed my relationship with God, is my service on the Praise Team. Please don’t take this as a commercial for the Praise Team because it’s not. I started out “just singing,” then Bill made some comment about being a worship leader. My first thought was, I, sir, am no leader. It took a while, but I finally got to understand the difference between just singing and leading worship and really praising God. I am humbled by the task and the call. I am a butler, a person of service, ushering others into God’s presence. The singing is just a bonus. It’s about a relationship with God, serving God and being obedient. It’s about discipline, humility, sacrifice, accountability and raising the spiritual bar. I am my most complete when I am serving God.

Another thing that has helped me grow spiritually has been going on mission trips. Now, that’s a humbling experience! Now I am being called to serve as an elder. I’m not worthy, nor am I capable, but with God all things are possible. I’ll close by saying these two things to MY LORD and KING:

- 1) Here I am Lord—send me.
- 2) Every blessing you pour out I’ll turn back to praise.