

## Stewardship Reflection

### Heather Blackwell



I did not grow up Catholic; in fact, I did not grow up with a lot of religion at all. I would go to my great-grandmother's church frequently in the summer when I would visit as a child, and later with my father to our small-town church as a college student, but nothing in between and nothing until I began attending Mass in my early 20s.

During my early attendance, I never felt at home in any of those places. I never felt what I thought I should feel in church, what everyone else seem to feel but me: God. Because of this, I felt unworthy and anxious any time I stepped foot in a church.

When I began dating my husband, he talked about being Catholic. I had known a few Catholics in college, but they weren't very prevalent in my Eastern Kentucky hometown, and had never been to any Catholic service. We had been dating a few weeks when his parents invited me to church. And not just any service, but Christmas Eve Mass. Yikes. And we were late, so the only pew available was in the very front row. Yikes again.

As Mass continued, I followed along as best as I could, but I felt a warmth like I had never felt in any church before. Even though I was still nervous, the voices around me, the evening light coming through the windows, and Father Mark Spalding's presence helped put me at ease. I finally felt what I hadn't even realized I was missing. I truly felt as though Jesus was there with me, and even though I couldn't fully participate in Holy Communion, I felt the power of the Eucharist even then.

Now, as a Catholic of St. James, I still feel the power of the Eucharist every time I am able to receive it, and feel its absence when I can't. The past year has been difficult on every human being, and serving God and the people of St. James is now more important than ever.

As a family of public servants, we support St. James the best we can with our treasure, but I think so much of stewardship goes beyond that. I have been involved with our Confirmation candidates, helped lead a young woman into the Church, welcomed new members with our Welcome Committee, and have served on the Stewardship Committee the last several years. I see the importance of being a part of our St. James community, and being able to serve has, I believe, brought me closer to God. Now as a mother to a St. James Kindergartener, I value our faith-based education and am so grateful to our school for helping raise my daughter.

The plaque on the statue outside the school reads, "The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort, you were made for greatness." I think about these words by Pope Benedict XVI often, especially when remembering my first visits to Immaculate Conception, and I encourage all of you to seek greatness as God's stewards.