

Trip to Medjugorje puts woman on path to full membership

ST. PAUL, Minn. – Deb Brunsberg, 52, of Coon Rapids still feels a bit woozy from the wild roller-coaster ride her life has been lately.

Two years after a devastating divorce set her spiraling into the depths of despair, an 11-day trip to Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina shot her at breakneck speed to the height of happiness.

Her wild ride finally leveled off March 22 at the Easter Vigil, when she joined about 1,000 people in parishes across the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis as they became full members of the Catholic Church.

Across the country people of all ages and from all walks of life joined the church that day. Some were catechumens, who were baptized and confirmed and who received their first Communion; others were candidates, who already had a valid baptism and entered into full communion with the church.

The figures for this year are not yet available, but last year, according to the Official Catholic Directory, almost 64,500 catechumens and almost 93,000 candidates joined the church.

Ms. Brunsberg was baptized in the Catholic Church as an infant, but left the church when she was a teenager before receiving the sacrament of confirmation.

For most of her adult life, Ms. Brunsberg didn't go to church. Eventually, she lost her faith in God, she said. After a painful divorce from her husband of 30 years, Ms. Brunsberg hit bottom.

"I really didn't have much faith in anything and was pretty despairing of even being alive," she said.

In an effort to help Ms. Brunsberg, her sister, Angela Beljeski, invited her to go on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, where many believe Mary has appeared. When a

seminarian whom Ms. Beljeski had asked to pray for her sister offered to pay for the trip, Ms. Brunsberg reluctantly agreed.

"I wanted nothing to do with the religious part of it, only a break from my life," she said.

Ms. Brunsberg had no idea how much her life was about to change.

In Medjugorje, "I'd go to Mass every day, and it would seem like every priest, no matter where they were from, was talking to me," she said. "It's like they knew me."

During a prayer service, a priest placed his hands on Ms. Brunsberg's shoulders while he prayed over her. At that moment, Ms. Brunsberg said, she experienced a surge of emotions that left her running from the church.

"I was starting to realize that God exists and that I was brought there for a reason," she said.

Later that day, Ms. Brunsberg witnessed what she describes as a miracle.

"The sun was spinning and hopping around and radiating color ... from pink to blue to green," she said. "I have since seen the miracle of the sun constantly," she added.

After returning to Minnesota, Ms. Brunsberg's spiritual journey continued. She participated in a healing Mass, where she saw people dropping to the ground after the priest prayed over them.

"I figured they were religious lunatics," Ms. Brunsberg said. But when she went up to receive a blessing, her knees suddenly became weak.

"I felt like I'd been thrown across the room," she said. "I went down with such force and I was paralyzed."

Her sister explained to her that she had experienced the Holy Spirit.

A few days later, Ms. Brunsberg realized all the emotional pain that had weighed on her for years had disappeared. She even forgave her ex-husband.

"I received an incredible, miraculous healing of my heart," she said. Subsequently, almost every aspect of Ms. Brunsberg's life changed. She went to confession and began attending Mass as often as she could. She quit using drugs and smoking cigarettes after more than three decades.

Now she spends her free time reading religious books and listening to Christian music.

After attending Mass with her sister at St. Paul Church in Ham Lake, Ms. Brunsberg decided to join the parish. Soon she enrolled in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, with Ms. Beljeski as her sponsor.

"I have total peace and joy, and those are things that I've never felt in my entire life," Ms. Brunsberg said. "You think you know what joy is, but it's completely different now."