

# Where did I go wrong with my children's faith?

Last weekend I attended Mass at my former church, St. Francis Xavier in Hunt Valley. Since that parish (and St. Joseph's Church in Cockeysville) were where I raised our two youngest children in the Catholic faith, I was flooded with warm memories.

Inside that beautiful contemporary church I witnessed my kids complete the Sacraments of First Holy Communion, First Reconciliation and Confirmation. We held hands Sunday after Sunday while reciting *Our Lord's Prayer*. We kissed and hugged during the greeting of peace. Together we participated in service projects, such as peanut butter and jelly sandwich-making for the needy, crafting Christmas cards for overseas military, and making Advent wreaths. We attended delightful parish picnics each summer and shared in fellowship after many Masses over coffee, juice and doughnuts. My kids were signed up for various youth group activities and thrived in them. We were friends with the staff and the clergy.

St. Francis Xavier was a good place. It was a good era. The parish helped me to do a fine job raising little Catholics, as did St. Joseph's Church while my kids attended its attached school.

These days I am embarrassed to admit my kids no longer attend church, nor practice much of their faith in any way I'm able to notice. (Hopefully, in their private quiet time, they at least pray!) Living out of state, neither belongs to a parish nor is involved in ministry or a volunteer opportunity that ultimately serves God. The best thing I can say at this point in their adult lives is my 27-year-old son has several very faithful and spiritual friends - that offers me comfort - it proves he is still drawn to the concept. As well, my kids are really good people with good character.

The common question we parents often put upon ourselves is, "Where did I go wrong?"

I do not think I went wrong at all. *I know I did all the right things* to sow the faithful

seed. I took them to church weekly. I sent them to Catholic schools from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade! I involved them in service projects such as adopting families for Christmas. My kids participated – and now they don't. (I am grateful they didn't fight me on it then.)

Now their faith is out of my hands. As adults, it is their responsibility to practice it.

Can I nag them about it? Sure. Can I invite them to join me at Mass on Easter and Christmas? Yes (and they do). Can I suggest they seek God's help in prayer about a specific situation on their minds? Yes.

Can I make them pray? No. Can I force them into volunteering their time and talent? Nope. Can I reverse the clock and have them be good little Christians tucked under my arms, as they were while students in Catholic schools? No. (How I wish!)

As an empty nester, it was a tad painful to sit there alone in the pew without my kids around. I miss being with them in all ways. I miss praying with them. Certainly, I want my children to live happy lives and follow their goals and dreams. (But ahem, why can't it be in *Maryland*???)

I am no longer in control of my children's faith. I was then; it's impossible now. I can pray about it – and I do. I ask God to pull them back into His arms. Touch them with His grace and mercy. Help them to see it's the only way to joy.

I can't force any of it, but I can hope one day they will return to their faith, especially if they ever become parents.

Where did I go wrong? I didn't. I went right – to God.