

1. Your search: In the years/months prior to finding the Church of the Beloved, regarding your spirituality, church community and religious experience: What was happening in your heart? What were you thinking? Spiritually? Emotionally? Intellectually?

I grew up in the Catholic faith, but turned away after trying to attend upon entering college after my mother passed away. I lost a lot of faith when I was left without any family line aside from my older sisters. For years, I had even started to question God and wondered if I could fill that void another way. After all, God had taken my grandparents and parents from me...my parents far too early

I began a search for a church community after many years, realizing that something was missing from my life and only a positive church experience/ reconnection with God could fill that hole in my life. I decided to begin a search by visiting a variety of churches, catholic and non-catholic. I wasn't finding a good match for myself or my family.

When we found COB, this belief system of loving and being loved without limits of the Roman Catholic church (anti-homosexuality, anti-women priests, anti priests marrying, etc. etc. etc.) we knew this was a good fit. I personally felt at home with the Catholic structure, and yet I didn't have to deal with the frustrations of the traditional church. I could be myself here and have my beliefs without having to bite my tongue in order to attend and feel welcomed. We could raise our kids in a setting where we share the beliefs of the church instead of having to take our kids aside and tell them what parts of the church we don't agree with because it is teaching our children that only one faith is right, or that homosexuality is wrong, or whatever!

I love that Church of the Beloved is so in line with our personal beliefs and yet meets our needs for church, community, and my personal desire to feel "at home" with the Catholic ceremony! (I must admit that it is also a very positive to me that the priest is a woman...and one who "talks to me" in her sermons. Mother Kae is so warm, loving, and real! So many priests just cannot relate to family life - how could they when they can't have it as a parent/husband/wife?) It fits my beliefs, and amazingly those of my husband. He started to lean more toward a belief in God when we had our children. When our daughter was in utero, the doctors thought she would not live long because they believed that there were severe issues in both her brain and her heart. Luckily, as it turned out she was as healthy as she could be. This experience made both of us begin to see God as a more prominent being in our lives.

2. Your finding: How did you first learn of Church of the Beloved (or the ECC)? What finally prompted you to attend Mass? Tell us about your first experience and your response to it.

I happened upon the Church of the Beloved's web page one day as I was looking for the next church I would try.

Our first experience was nothing like what we'd experienced anywhere else. People noticed and acknowledged that we were visiting. Everyone was welcoming and friendly even as early as the middle of mass when everyone gave peace to one another. We met such a loving community with so many of our core values that we knew then and there that we wanted to return.

3. Your staying: Share why you keep coming back.

As we continued to return again and again, we found that we were all experiencing a great sense of family community. The people are phenomenal. For me personally, it felt like I had reconnected with my spiritual home. I had missed this sort of family and am still astounded that I found such a loving spiritual family that also shares my beliefs about inclusion and God's love extending to everyone. I also found myself excited when my husband started expressing excitement about attending church, and actually missing it when we weren't able to attend. I expected that of myself, but not from him. The size of the community certainly contributes to the family feel. I have visited many churches that have a lot to offer, but because of their size I felt more like a cow in a large herd. At Church of the Beloved, we love Mother Kae, the teachings, the people, the community, and the way that we feel we are included and welcomed. We've already met so many wonderful people and made friends and we get closer and closer to the others as we attend the men's breakfast, the women's retreat, plan for children's education, etc. It is fun to be a part of something that feels alive, not stagnant! Who knew I'd ever say that about a catholic church! We feel like this church makes us reflect and helps us grow as people and as a family.