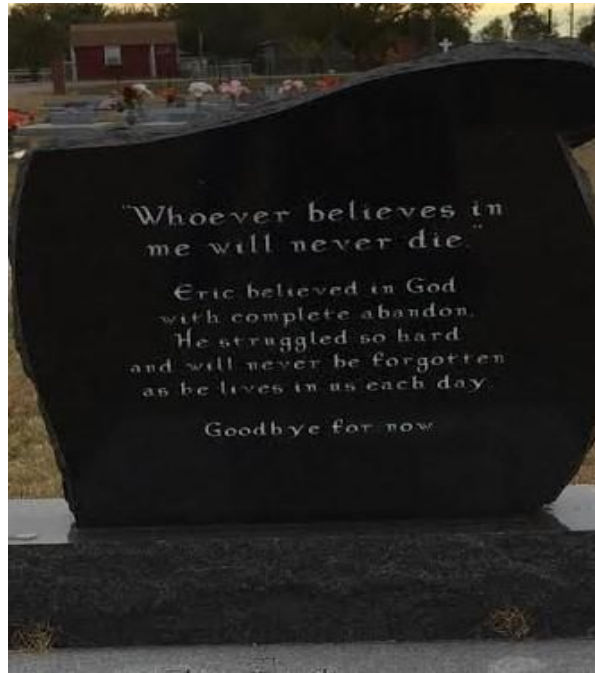




Eric's Legacy of Hope

Faithfully shared, hoping for surrender, rooted in love

Janelle Stamm
13 February 2019



***"Whoever believes in me will never die.
Eric believed in God with complete abandon. He struggled so hard and will never be forgotten as he lives in us each day.
Goodbye for now."
-inscription on Eric Patterson's tombstone***

For Becky Leddy, Eric's older sister, healing has come in another church. Along the way, she has gained a new appreciation for what she says happened on the morning of her brother's funeral.

She lay in bed, her soul crying out to God, wondering why Eric had been allowed to die. She immediately heard an answer in her mind.

"Eric would have hung in there a few more years, but he would have been tormented the entire time and everything would have ended the same - with Eric taking his life."

Surprised, Becky thought: "You are God. You have the power to do all things. You could have easily healed Eric."

Again came a reply: "I allowed this to happen for healing to take place."

"I didn't know what that meant," Becky said, "but it comforted me."

Now she is seeing the fruit of that promise: Victims and their families are healing.

From the Wichita Eagle newspaper titled "Losing Eric, Part III"

Published February 2001: <http://www.kansas.com/news/state/article1095498.html>

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Memories

I come from a Catholic heritage in the heart of the USA. My mom is from the very small town of Westphalia, Missouri, where she says “the town was the church was the town” . . . so intermingled that the public high school is named Fatima High. My dad is from the small town of Conway Springs, Kansas. They met at a Catholic college, married and remain faithful servants to the Catholic faith through their daily life and chosen professions. In September 2018 they were honored for their 50+ years of collective service in their vocation as educators of the Catholic high school in my hometown of Atchison, Kansas.

Janet Patterson is my aunt, my dad’s younger sister. In 1999, one of her sons, my cousin Eric, committed suicide when he was 29, 17 years after being sexually abused by his parish priest.

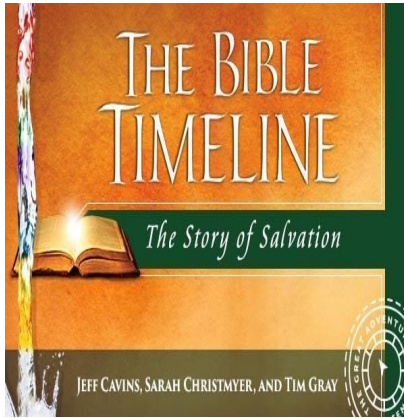
Eric was 4 years younger than me. There is one childhood memory of us together that remains in the forefront of my mind. We were in our Grandparent’s home, in a playroom painted a bright blue with a lot of windows which overlooked the back yard. He excitedly showed me a paper airplane that he made. It had cut outs in the shape of diamonds along the body of the plane. I did not understand why anyone would take the time to cut out shapes into a plane. I didn’t believe it could fly that way. So, I told him how stupid it was to cut out shapes in a paper airplane. (At the time, in my adolescent mind, it made perfect sense to me.) Then to prove my point, I made fun of him for doing so.

Next thing I remember is my Uncle Horace (Eric’s Dad), asking to talk with me. He had Eric’s airplane in his hand. He asked why I would make fun of Eric for his beautiful airplane then he told me how proud he was of Eric’s creation.

As a young adult, I remember Eric suffering from depression for years before he died, yet I did nothing. I did not understand his depression or its roots. So caught up in my own world, I didn’t even pray for him.

When I first heard about his abuse, I thought “How DARE he accuse a Catholic priest?”

I carry these memories with me each and every day.



Road to Rome

Before 2013, I had recently re-entered the workforce after a 12 year hiatus. During my time as a stay-at-home mom, I spent many years in bible study classes and quickly found that the more I studied the more I wanted to learn. I had a very simplistic view about what a relationship with God felt like prior to studying his word. My faith was tucked into a nice little box that I took out on Sundays to go to mass. Afterwards, I put it back in for safekeeping until the next week. I didn't know any different and I was fine (or so I thought). Through studying, I let my faith out of the box: nurturing it more often than not and as a result it increasingly became more intertwined with my everyday life. So much so, that I couldn't find the box anymore. So, even if I wanted to go back to how I lived before, I couldn't. My box was gone. It truly was a lifestyle change for me. In my mid 40s, my personal relationship with God finally began which continues to grow deeper and deeper each and every day.

I was also mourning. Eric's younger sister, Catherine, a gifted writer, was posting entries to her blog called "Eric's Story." I was deeply impacted by her vulnerably raw emotional sharing. At the beginning of her series she writes: *Everyone has a story. Mine, sadly, is intricately woven with the tragic loss of my older brother Eric to suicide. At 29, he decided to take his own life after finally revealing to family that he'd been sexually abused by the parish priest at the tender age of 12. The mental torment was just too much. While our family was forever changed by this devastating event, we've also remained incredibly close, and share a bond that only tragedy can forge.* The entire series can be read here: <https://momontherange.com/ericstory/>

I first heard about what happened to Eric shortly after he died (which was years before Catherine wrote her blog). I didn't believe it. It was unfathomable to me. Absorbing her words, I finally embraced the devastation inflicted especially through the coverup by church leaders. I began to privately grieve for the loss of everything I held dear. I felt as though the foundation I relied on was breaking underneath me while simultaneously vying for solid footing to support my developing personal relationship with God while raising my children. I also felt deep shame and remorse for my prior judgment and apathy.



Truth Revealed-Both Good and Evil

As I absorbed what happened to Eric, I was becoming extremely conflicted with my relationship with the institutional Catholic Church. Still raising my children in the Catholic schools, I rationalized not encouraging them to be altar servers but yet not secure enough to speak out. These extreme differences threw me into private turmoil. It wasn't easy to share what I now believed to be true with others in my faith community. I often felt lonely: a silent sufferer hiding in plain view. If I was that scared to talk about it, I could not imagine how hard it would have been for Eric.

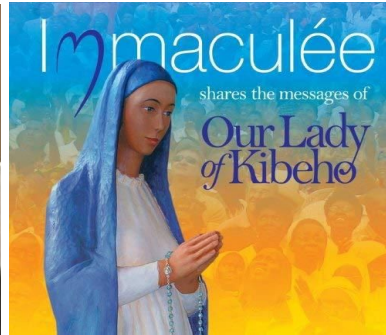
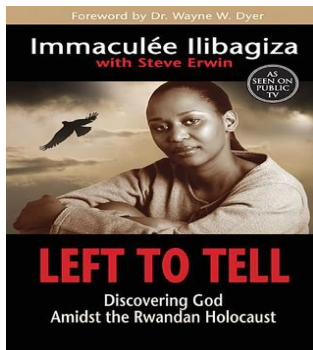
Pope Francis, I was with you at your installation mass. I happened to be in Rome with one of my daughters during a trip with her high school. I had no idea when we left our home in the middle of the USA that I would be in the audience that day. Seeing you in person, receiving the Eucharist blessed by you and sharing the entire experience with her will forever be engraved in my heart. What impressed me the most was not the dignitaries who sat in the front row, but the faith demonstrated by a family who traveled from Argentina to have their baby blessed. Hours after your installation mass I blogged about my experience which ended with this thought: *"Furthermore, it feels like Papa Francesco's commitment to the poor aligns perfectly with CFCA's mission. This alignment confirms my belief that the blessings I prayed for CFCA, our sponsors and our sponsored friends and families will be answered."*

<https://blog.unbound.org/2013/03/cfca-staffer-pope-francis-inaugural-mass/>

I also learned how evil can thrive in an environment where people are so engaged that they assume all other around them share the same focus, and thus risk being harmed. During mass, my daughter alerted me that a nun kept trying to touch her. My initial response was "Everyone is touching everyone" (we were so tightly packed—there was no such thing as personal space). But my daughter was persistent. After awhile I realized the truth. The real nuns were in front of us, quietly praying their rosaries with their eyes focused on you. The thieves disguised as nuns had their backs to you ready to steal from the faithful.

This experience helped me understand the "how" behind what happened to Eric in the midst of our deeply rooted Catholic family. Not all the priests were priests. Some were pedophiles disguised as priests and we had no idea. We trusted and believed all those who were there to lead us to God shared our same focus which left us vulnerable and thus at risk to be harmed.

Now that I finally understood how, I hoped to use this insight to help others. Truth revealed, both good and evil, renewed my hope being a part of the institutional Catholic Church and I felt energized once again.



Immaculee Ilibagiza and The Rosary of the Seven Sorrows

At some point during my years in bible study, a friend suggested that I read a book titled “Left to Tell” by Immaculee Ilibagiza. This friend had a much deeper understanding of everything Catholic: a level that I didn’t know existed before I met her. So, when she suggested I read something, I followed her lead. Immediately, I found myself drawn in by the miracle that Immaculee survived the Rwanda genocide and how her story came to be published. I was so moved by her faith journey that I re-read her books many times studying HOW she survived. The lessons I learned from her helped me navigate the treacherous waters as a mother of teenagers. As a result, her faith profoundly impacts mine.

After reading her book “The Queen of Kibeho, Mary speaks to the Heart of Africa,” I started praying the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows as she suggested with my rosary CD that my aunt Pat shared with me. In doing so, I quickly saw how this rosary intertwined with other mysteries, both Joyful and Sorrowful. This made sense to me—how a mother’s heart can be filled with both joy and sorrow from one experience. I saw how the 1st Sorrow- the Prophecy of Simeon is linked to the 4th Joyful Mystery-the Presentation; and how the 3rd Sorrow - Losing Jesus in the Temple has to happen before the 5th Joyful Mystery -Finding Jesus in the Temple can occur.

Beginning with the 4th Sorrow –Mary meets Jesus on the Way to Calvary- I start seeing my aunt Janet as Mary, Eric as Jesus, and the Church as the tormentors and crowd. I see Janet walking with Eric on his path of depression. I see the Church leaders tormenting him by their unwillingness to help him when he asked, and by covering up what happened to him and others like him. I also see the Church, myself included, in the crowd, watching, but disengaged by ignorance and apathy.

The 5th Sorrow-Mary Stands at the Foot of the Cross- I cannot imagine the depths of grief Mary or Janet must have felt when they stood at the end of their sons’ paths which culminated in the ultimate sacrifice—their own lives. The 6th Sorrow-Mary receives the dead body of Jesus in her arms. Immaculee describes how after Jesus’ death when Mary cleans his damaged body she realizes just how deep the wounds were. She didn’t know before. Just like Mary, it wasn’t until after Eric’s death that Janet learned just how “deep” Eric’s wounds were.

Immaculee shares how Mary chose to appear in Rwanda because it was there that she felt people were humble and not attached to wealth or money. Therefore, they might be open to hearing what she had to say.

Their refuge was unbound

I see how the institutional Catholic Church in America was also attached to its money. Focused on protecting its material wealth it chose to handle abuse allegations via lawsuits and settlements which silenced those whom it had hurt the most.

By doing so many directly affected left the institutional Catholic Church to find refuge somewhere else. Janet explains how they were “Driven from the Flock” in her essay published in 2003:

http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news/2003_03_Patterson_DrivenFrom.htm

None of us want to be in this new family, but now that we are, we love and support each other, desiring to stop this evil in the Church. Although we feel betrayed by the perpetrators, our greatest anger is directed at Church officials who lied or kept the truth from parishioners. A bishop simply saying he is sorry or that he got “bad medical advice” gives us no comfort. Our new family is finding a voice, one which demands to be heard. With all our hearts and souls, we pray that no one else has to be welcomed into our midst. Our Lord has never failed us; the Church has.

She and Horace became very active in an existing organization, SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests). They spoke nationwide and Janet was on the Board of Directors. When she retired from the board, she was honored for her efforts to help other families facing similar pain.

http://www.snapnetwork.org/tribute_pages/janet_patterson.htm

Eric’s brother married a wonderful woman whom we all believe Eric found for him. Eric’s sisters found refuge in other religious institutions in which their children call home.



My Refuge is Unbound

I see myself as a refugee as well, though stuck in the journeying process unable to settle in another land. I tried other religions and found myself missing the Eucharist. I can't really explain why I missed it so, other than to say it is home for me.

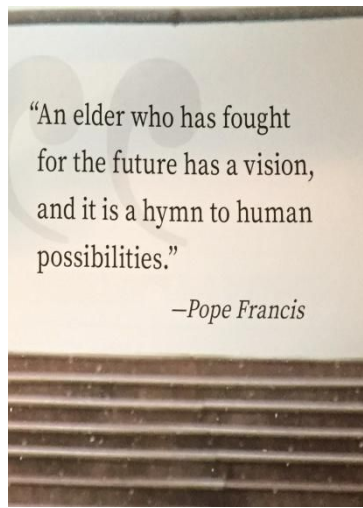
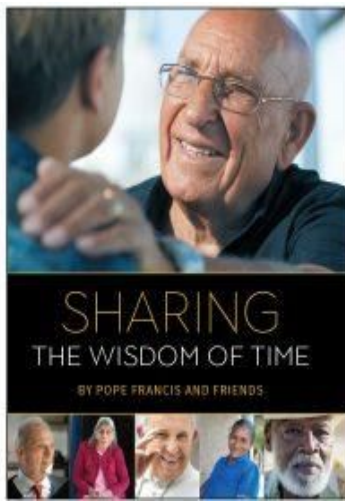
In 2011, a friend invited me to volunteer with her at Unbound (formerly known as CFCA), a sponsorship organization which my husband and I have been sponsors since 2001. My friend's invitation led me to part-time employment there shortly thereafter. I find "refuge" working at Unbound and in turn Unbound has become my faith community. I feel at home celebrating mass and I don't feel conflicted because it is not a part of the institutional Catholic Church. At Unbound I help do God's work with others who desire the same within a governing structure that allows the good to reach others and the bad to be handled as it should via typical corporate human resources policies.

Similar to how I was drawn into Immaculee's faith journey, I immersed myself into learning HOW Unbound helps others from themes emphasized at work and from various songs written by one of the co-founders, Bob Hentzen. In turn, Unbound was the perfect environment to reside in when I found out I had cancer in November 2013. Embraced by themes of compassion and gratitude while faced with my own mortality, I learned how God is present in our lives and how to recognize his presence through my relationships with others.

In the spirit of dedicating my cancer journey for a higher purpose, I sponsored an elderly person named Lucinda. I was in the perfect place, physically, emotionally and spiritually to learn from her. Moved by her hobby of implementing compassion, it is not lost on me that it was the extreme differences within our similar situations that guided me on my personal transformation journey from power to love.

For more details read here:

<https://blog.unbound.org/2018/08/the-grace-of-sponsorship-flows-both-ways/>



Our Shared View: The Wisdom of Elders

On my 52nd birthday, I was at work watching the intergenerational dialogue at the Synod. We were watching because one of our social workers, Yenifer from Colombia was there to celebrate the launch of a new book, "Sharing the Wisdom of Time".

<https://www.unbound.org/Stories/2018/October/UnboundStafferMeetsPope>

I smiled watching it. Believing in the power of prayer, I recognized how the blessings I prayed for at your installation mass were answered through her visit and because some of the elderly persons featured in this book are sponsored friends with Unbound. I remember thinking that I just received a birthday gift from heaven.

Yenifer asked what inspired you to listen to the stories of elders who live in poverty. Your response, "*Listening to the elderly we find our roots*", resonated with me. I began thinking about my roots formed from a Catholic heritage; my grandparents (both maternal and paternal), my aunts and uncles (both maternal and paternal) and my parents. How I've learned from them.

In the book, beginning with the section on Struggle, you say "*An elder who has fought for the future has a vision, and it is a hymn to human possibilities*". This too resonated with me because I see how my aunt Janet fits this description.



A Revolutionary of Tenderness

As agonizingly painful as this tragedy has been, we cherish every day we had with our son. If avoiding this pain would require never having had Eric in our lives, then I gladly embrace the pain for the honor of being Eric's mother. http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news/2003_03_Patterson_Hope.htm

Pope Francis, you are just a few years older than Janet. She too has led a life devoted to serving our Lord. She initially studied to be a nun in high school, later choosing marriage as her vocation. As a result, she is now a great-grandmother. Although she has endured more pain than I can ever imagine, she remains a compassionate listener to many who have been harmed by sexual abuse.

She and Horace were among those who shared their stories with the United States Council of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) ad hoc committee on sex abuse in Dallas, Texas in June 2002. This meeting led to the creation of the USCCB's Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The middle picture above was taken while she was absorbing other's testimonies at that meeting.

Below is an excerpt from an article where it is suggested that she is prime example of a "Revolutionary of Tenderness" that you've called for in The Synod on the Family in 2015.

. . . . Pope Francis has called for "revolutionaries of tenderness." That is an apt description of Janet Patterson, . . . I ask that Archbishop Martin press to have Janet Patterson named in paragraph 70 as one of those revolutionaries of tenderness, with a link to her account of her own family's experience: her son Eric's abuse at age 12 by Fr. Robert Larson, and Eric's courageous battle with depression and despair, and his death by his own hand, and Janet's work with many other families of abuse victims.

<http://www.hamilton-griffin.com/2015/10/19/the-scandal-of-the-synod-by-terence-mckiernan-bishop-accountability-org/>

Janet is an elder who has fought for the future. I see her vision as a hymn to human possibilities that you describe in your book. Given all her efforts, I pray that she feels peace knowing she did her best to show Eric the way to our Lord and that she feels peace knowing she continues to do so for her other children. I pray she finds comfort knowing Eric, Horace and Grandma and Grandpa are patiently waiting for her with open arms in Heaven while we continue to be blessed by her presence here on earth.



A Spotlight on Healing

In October 2015, I reached out to the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) hoping to influence how they responded to the movie “Spotlight”. Per an online database of information related to world films , the plot in “Spotlight” is summarized as “The true story of how the Boston Globe uncovered the massive scandal of child molestation and cover-up within the local Catholic Archdiocese, shaking the entire Catholic Church to its core.” <https://www.imdb.com/> I firmly believed if the Catholic Church’s response was authentically compassionate, it could have been an instrumental gateway to healing for those still suffering as a result of the sexual abuse crisis.

I felt compelled to write to them because Janet was quoted in a Spotlight article titled “Through Kansas parishes, a trail of suicide” in the Boston Globe. “We weren't allowed to protect our children,” said Janet Patterson, whose 29-year-old son, Eric, shot himself to death in October 1999.”

http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/print2/071802_kansas.htm

My effort resulted from a culmination of events within that year; beginning with a Catholic Women’s Conference featuring Immaculee Ilibagiza to meeting with Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Kansas City, KS diocese about my struggle with whether or not to remain in the Catholic Church to attending a service for spiritual healing.

I kept the handwritten note Archbishop Naumann sent me after our meeting because it meant so much to me. He said in part:

It was a grace to meet with you. Thanks for sharing what was in your heart. I pray that when I depart this world I will experience the peace you felt before your surgery, knowing that I did my best to help those entrusted to my care to know Jesus and His love in this world and to help them make their way to heaven. Thanks for your love for Our Lord in the Eucharist. I pray this grace will be given to your children.

After I sent my letter to the USCCB, I did hear back from one person, Bishop Joe Binzer, of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, OH:

Dear Ms. Stamm, Thank you for taking the time to send me your email and attachment last week. I've read it carefully and I'm blessed by your witness and your message of faith in Jesus Christ.

I've been praying for you and all those who have been affected by the failures of the Church, and I will continue to do so. May God graciously bless you and keep you. Again, thanks.

I was deeply impacted by the service for spiritual healing I referenced above. I saw myself not as a victim, but as a sinner; contributing to Eric's death by my judgment as a child; apathy as a young adult and to our family's emotional suffering by not believing them in the first place. I felt as though the priest, Fr. Greg Haskamp, spoke from his heart and understood the complexity of the pain involved. Feeling God's presence right then and there within the Church where it was both previously absent and intensely strained contributed to my overwhelmingly emotional response to the service itself.

Subsequent to the healing service, I met with Fr. Greg. I asked how did he know what to say? He replied **"I listened"**. His answer was simple yet I'm guessing it was extremely hard to do. I believe his willingness to allow God to work through him resulted in his compassionate words and presence. When I shared my letter to the USCCB with him, he shared this thought with me *"One of the things I am learning these days, from visiting with you and from the healing services, is that there's a freedom in surrendering that need to defend, and in that freedom the gift of healing can really take hold. If we as an institution can learn this and practice this, everyone will be blessed by it."*

Reflecting back, this juxtaposing thought keeps crowding my mind: Given how pervasive both the abuse and the cover up were, very few people were at the 2 healing services offered by the Catholic Church which I attended in 2015/2016. *"A little more than 100 men and women scattered throughout the pews, some in small groups, some in couples, some quietly alone."*

<http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/kc-diocese-holds-second-healing-service-survivors-clergy-sex-abuse>

My take away from my experience is that most have already left. This confirms Janet's description of how they were driven from the flock and why over time I felt more and more conflicted staying in the Catholic Church. After the movie was released, I scoured the papers searching for any indication that the bishops embraced what I tried to convey to them. Nothing really came from it and at the time, I really didn't know why.

As I've shared before, Catherine is a gifted writer. She is in the process of writing a book about Eric's story from her perspective. Recently, she shared this post on Facebook:

"In gathering materials for my book, I came across a tub full of my mom's memorabilia. In it, I found something I'd somehow never seen before. An old copy of the New York Times with my brother's picture held up by David Clohessy of the Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). This year marks the 20th anniversary of my brother's death, and I've come so far from the 16-year-old girl whose family unwittingly caught a live grenade.

While I've been forming the words and story for years, I finally feel spiritually mature enough to deliver the message in a way that uplifts and inspires. If you would have asked me 5 years ago what I wanted people to feel after reading the book, my truest self would have said, "angry".

I wanted people to be mad WITH me. Because then, maybe THEN, things would change. But no. That's the way of futility. The way of fear and failure and fatigue.

*I've experienced tremendous spiritual growth and maturity in the short time I've been attending **The Father's House** and the unfolding of God's path for my life is clearer than ever.*

Let's take a moment to pause right here. Close your eyes and let Catherine's words sink in.

Now, let's thank those individuals and institutions, both within and outside the Catholic Church that have supported abuse victims and in some cases provided new homes for the refugee faithful.

I rejoice in recognizing the connection between the healing that God promised Becky years ago finally take hold for Catherine now. Her book will be nothing short of miraculous.



Letting Go

The picture above was taken about 50 years ago, in the early 1970s, at my childhood home. I was probably around 5 years old at the time. I was too young to understand the depth and beauty of the mass itself, yet old enough to feel lifted by the experience. For me, it encapsulates the fullness I feel being with my family while celebrating mass.

I've spent countless hours trying to reconcile my feelings about the institutional Catholic Church as an obedient child, as a compliant young adult, and then as an active, engaged participant while simultaneously discovering that what happened to Eric was not an anomaly. No matter how hard I tried, I simply cannot reconcile how the church I grew up in and raised my children in can possibly be the same church that chose to cover up, litigate and silence those whom it had hurt the most. Yet, it does make me wonder. I wonder about others whom I met throughout my life who were also impacted and I inadvertently added to their pain by not recognizing their plight.

In August 2018, after learning about the state of Pennsylvania's grand jury report, I found myself once again drawn into the cycle of searching through all the news stories I could find. Searching not for the details within the report, I already knew what it would say. Rather, searching for how the institutional Catholic Church responded to the exposure of the news.

"WHAT are you holding on to?" My husband asked. After a brief pause, I rambled on and on about loss of community and left it at that. Immediately afterwards I regretted my answer because I just did not feel right about it. Yet, I knew why my interest confused him. In the spring of 2018, we withdrew our membership from our local parish, finally severing the ties with the institutional Catholic Church in which our grandparents, parents, we and our children were raised.

Soon afterwards I received my weekly prayer reflection from Unbound. It stated in part, "*The original definition of sacrifice means giving up what no longer works in order to stay close to what is sacred.*" After reading this, I recognized my dilemma. Even though we severed ties with the institutional Catholic Church, I was still holding on to the dream that at some future date, we and our children will be worshipping together there once again.

Now that I understand what I was holding on to, I can finally let go.

Letting go, I now can make room to stay close to what is sacred:

Mindfully living my life in such a way that it gives others the opportunity to recognize God's presence in their lives through their relationships with me.

Many Paths, Same Destination

I raised my children in the Catholic faith because I didn't know any other way, relying on my deep Catholic heritage to make life decisions without understanding why. I enrolled them in Catholic schools because I was afraid not to, loyal to my parents' vocation. Generally speaking, we had a positive experience and although we left the institution, we still financially support Catholic education.

In 2011, my youngest (who was in 8th grade at the time) chose not to be confirmed. We attended the ceremony because she wanted to support her classmates. At the time, I was painfully overwhelmed with conflicting emotions ranging from despair to sadness to wonder and awe. The next day I attended her weekly class mass with my mother-in-law, emotionally drained from the night before. Soothed by the rhythm of mass I was just fine until the communion song began. As I started down the aisle, tears began streaming down my face. By the time I received the Eucharist I was sobbing; embraced by the song's refrain "We are one body, one body in Christ; and we do not stand alone." I felt God reassuring me that it's going to be okay and that there is more than one way to him. Completely embarrassed by my emotional breakdown, I immediately left the sanctuary. Afterwards, my sister (who was also the math teacher) found me. Together we sought out my daughter and I shared how I hoped that she firmly believed that I loved her more than anything, supported her decision and admired her bravery even though it nearly broke me watching her walk away from the only path I knew.

In January 2014, during a pivotal point in my cancer journey, only one question rose to the surface: "Did I do enough to show my children the way to You, Lord?" After reflecting on my life, I concluded, "Well, I did the best that I could. Even if I die tomorrow, I know our children will be okay and will find their way to you."

In early August 2018, I began to re-read a book titled "The Boy Who Met Jesus" in which Immaculee shares how Jesus appeared to a pagan boy named Segatashya in Africa in the mid 1980s. I want to believe it because Immaculee wrote the book. When I came to this passage I stopped: "*When I come looking for my children, I will not only look in the Catholic Church for good Christians who do good deeds and acts of love and devotion. . . it is their love, not their religion, that makes them true children of God . . .*" I feel comfort in this passage because it validates my experiences.

I follow Bishop Robert Barron on social media. Starting in late August 2018, he posted several messages promoting his video "*Why Remain Catholic? (With So Much Scandal)*" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ani_hnN8Fs After watching his video, I had two thoughts: 1.) I've already done what he suggested (writing to Archbishop Naumann, the USCCB and I planned to write to you) and 2.) "Why Remain Catholic" is the wrong question.

Now our children are adults. Not beholden to the institution they are choosing their own paths. For example, the daughter who was with me at your Installation Mass has graduated from college, moved to a new city and started her career. She is also searching for a community to walk with her on her faith journey. In late August 2018, she went to a Catholic mass in her new city.

Afterwards, she asked, "Mom, why would I join?" I replied, "You're asking the right question."

Our children are good people, each uniquely contributing in their own way. I see ample examples of their good deeds and acts of love and devotion. No matter what path they choose, they'll get to heaven. Thus, I'm finally at peace walking along beside them on paths that might be unfamiliar to me.



Surrender with Me

This picture of Jesus praying at the Garden of Gethsemane is one of my husband's favorite pictures. It hung in his grandparent's house when he was young. Its home now is in our dining room. When I asked why he likes this picture, he responded *"Because it depicts when Jesus is most like us."*

In September 2018, friends shared with us news from their diocese. Similar to what we've heard before, we weren't surprised until we learned that their diocese *"refused to participate in the annual reviews of sexual misconduct that were a key reform enacted in the wake of the 2002 Boston clergy abuse scandal."* <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2018/09/02/nebraska-catholic-diocese-rocked-by-old-abuse-allegations.html> After learning that a diocese could refuse to implement changes which were being suggested by the church to help protect future generations, I finally surrendered.

Afterwards, I reached out to my prayer partner, Fr. Bob Bonnot about what was stirring in my heart. I knew I wanted to invite others to surrender with me and my head was still spinning with an abundance of thoughts. He helped me articulate them and he helped me understand why I feel so at home with the Eucharist. I'm so grateful for his time and look forward to sharing his insight with others.

I see the governing structure of the institutional Catholic Church as a dam prohibiting God's love and peace to flow and there is nothing sacred about a governing structure. Bishop Barron says now is the time to fight. With all due respect, I disagree. So many have worked and continue to work diligently to help facilitate needed changes within the church. All of us are doing the best we can but this dam is too large for us to do it alone. We need help from God. I have learned from past experiences that the only tool strong enough to chisel a small hole into a dam this large is Love. Before we can use this tool, we must surrender.

Building on the momentum from Fr. Greg Haskamp's theme of surrender that he shared with me a few years ago, I extend the following invitation:

Pope Francis, I invite you to surrender with me. Surrender the need to maintain the inherent governing structure of the institutional Catholic Church; allowing it to be transformed into something else so profound that complete healing for all will finally take hold.

I can't imagine a world if Mary said no or if Jesus chose to fight instead of surrendering. Imagine our world if you say yes and surrender with me. Anything short of that is simply not enough.



A Legacy of Hope

Eric was so much more than the abuse that happened to him. Like you Pope Francis, he felt a calling to the priesthood. But, he was rejected. A few years later, he ended his life on earth and left a suicide note titled "Hope". As tragic as his death was to our family, the sexual abuse and the cover up of that abuse was not enough to steal his eternal life as Eric's legacy lives in each of us.

http://www.bishop-accountability.org/sites/we_are_alert/PersonalStories_EricPatterson.htm

If he was alive today he would have been 48 years old, about the same age as Immaculee. In 1994, when Immaculee was hiding during the Rwandan genocide, Eric was residing with my parents while teaching at the same Catholic high school with them.

After I wrote to the USCCB in October 2015, my mom sent me this email, *"While at Mass this morning something gave me the idea of sending you Eric's crucifix. Eric had hung it on the wall in the northwest bedroom when he stayed there. He left it there when he moved . . . and it's been there ever since. I thought about removing it several times, but just never did".*

I was immediately moved by Mom's thoughtfulness and recognized the connection. I received the crucifix in the mail on October 29, 2015 (the anniversary of Eric's death) and saw it as a sign.

In August 2017, Catherine learned that the bishop who was in power when Eric was abused and who covered up that abuse was being honored by having a multi-million dollar building named after him. She was struggling with this honor because this was done in spite of the multiple lives lost during his rise to power. <https://news.newmanu.edu/bishop-gerber-science-center-opens/>

While processing her words during one of my runs, I heard *"Pass on Eric's crucifix to her."* So, I did. Now it resides with her.

Catherine wants to rename the building to "Legacy Hope" Science Center. I cannot think of a better way to honor Eric, others like him and their respective loved ones by pivoting our collective focus on a symbol of hope through their suffering; a symbol like Eric's crucifix.

I came to realize that God never shows us something we aren't ready to understand. Instead, He lets us see what we need to see, when we need to see it. He'll wait until our eyes and hearts are open to Him, and then when we're ready, He will plant our feet on the path that's best for us ... but it's up to us to do the walking." — Immaculee-Ilibagiza —

The Burden of Janet's Thanks

I still have a letter Janet sent to us in the early 2000's. It begins like this:

Dear Jeff and Janelle, Please excuse my sending a form letter, but because I am trying to reach as many relatives and friends as possible, this will be the best way. During Christmas season, no one wants to read and/or think about clergy sexual abuse, but tragedy and suffering still exist for many. One year ago we started the Wichita SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) support group for abuse survivors and their families. Monthly attendance varies from 6 to 12. These support meetings are tremendously helpful in erasing some of the isolation, anger, and sadness felt by so many. I have recently been named the first parent representative to the National Board of Directors for SNAP. Families nationwide suffer religious, emotional, and physical trauma from the ripple effect of abuse aftermath. So often survivors feel that very few care. Most people do care but are unsure how to help. Through prayers, actions, and emotional/financial support, we can stand up for our hurting brothers and sisters. Survivors seem united in this common goal-protecting children. Their efforts are truly heroic. Here are some of their stories. With Love, Janet

Reading this letter again makes me realize how I wasn't ready to hear what Janet knew to be true. I also see how she was implementing compassion. The same gift I learned from Lucinda after my heart was finally completely open to God. I was blind, and now I see and can now recognize what was already in front of me.

I regret how I treated Eric: making fun of him when we were children, being apathetic about his depression when we were young adults, not believing that he was sexually abused by a priest and how that abuse ultimately led to his suicide. I also regret not outwardly supporting Janet and Horace's involvement in SNAP because at the time, I didn't want to believe what I know now to be true and I was too afraid to act on it.

If I had a chance to go back in time I would change the following: As a child, I would have been open to Eric's view of beauty even though I didn't "get it" and I would have thanked him for sharing it with me. As a young adult, I would have prayed for him, reached out to him, just let him know I cared. When he committed suicide, I would have believed him when I heard why.

Janet lost her son, yet fought for change and through the process she helped so many others who shared the same past by her compassionate presence. After I reached out to Archbishop Naumann about this issue in 2015 she wrote *"Your letter shows the strength of the family. I am so proud to be your aunt."* She lost her son, yet she thanks me.

I live now with the "burden of Janet's thanks", another theme I learned from my work at Unbound. I remind myself to forgive myself then I accept God's grace offered through her to fuel me as I try my best to follow her lead.

My Hope

Last August, a friend and work colleague asked me “How are you and your family with the recent scandal?” I appreciated how he asked the question. I felt his genuine empathy embracing the words he said. I responded “I don’t know how to say this without sounding strange, but I’m almost energized. This time it feels different. It feels like maybe, just maybe things will finally change.”

I struggle with the terms used to describe sexual abuse in the church, words like “crisis” and “scandal.” To me, they fail to adequately describe the issue. As I see it, more people are becoming aware of past abuse and cover up of that abuse, the abuse is still happening and still being covered up, and the fixes introduced by the institutional Catholic Church are not being implemented by all dioceses. As Janet explained in her essay she wrote in 2003, sexual abuse is the Church’s millstone.

http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news/2003_03_Patterson_SexualAbuse.htm

Pope Francis, I reach out to you now because the hierarchy of the institutional Catholic Church is finally ready to listen via the upcoming Global Abuse Summit. I read that the “organizing committee has already informed participating bishops that they should prepare for the gathering by meeting with survivors of abuse” and “without “a comprehensive and communal response” to the abuse crisis”, the committee said, “not only will we fail to bring healing to victim survivors, but the very credibility of the church to carry on the mission of Christ will be in jeopardy throughout the world.”

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/pope-wants-abuse-summit-lead-clarity-action>

When I shared a draft of this letter with Becky, she replied:

As I think you know, I don’t view the Catholic church as the whole of “The Church” (but only one, sometimes broken, sometime beautiful, part of Christ’s body) so I will have a different lens on this than others may but do appreciate the opportunity to have a preview of this very important message. And I think it is important for those with a burden for this part of Christ’s body to encourage healing and restoration – for all of the ship wrecked Catholics in our world, and those set up for future ship wrecks.

I share her insight with you because it validates the importance of this summit. Taking Janet’s lead, I share my story with you. By doing so, my hope is threefold:

First, it is my hope that you and the other committee members absorb my testimony prior to the abuse summit. I hope that everyone prayerfully considers my invitation to **surrender the need to maintain the inherent governing structure of the institutional Catholic Church; allowing it to be transformed into something else so profound that complete healing for all will finally take hold.**

Second, 29 October 2019 will mark the 20th anniversary of Eric’s death. It is my hope that Janet and all who loved Eric embrace this anniversary with peaceful hearts. He did not die in vain because we did the best that we could to give the institutional Catholic Church the opportunity to learn from our struggles.

Third, it is my hope that the institutional Catholic Church will be transformed through co-creators united in that effort. A transformation so profound, that by the time our future great-grandchildren are ready to search for a faith community to reside in, it will be a viable option for them.

A place their children will call home.
