

# Spirituality

One might say I am spiritual after learning the following:

- Named Marie, like generations of women in my family.
- Baptized, confirmed, married in the Catholic Church.
- Worshiped at Mass every morning for 5 years.
- Attended 12 years of Catholic school, including 2 years boarding.

On the other hand, I feel I've been totally indoctrinated, and it taught me:

- To remain subservient to survive,
- To excuse child molesters.
- To believe men, unquestionably,
- To be ashamed of my body, and
- To reject some loved-ones.

What could have caused this shift in thinking?

- Confirmation is meant to make one a "soldier of Christ" to give strength to oppose evil. The week after my confirmation, a family-member raped me. There was no "change" and the devil still preyed on me. I was angry and this began my disbelief in the Church's teaching. Months later my parents found out and punished me. I was told, angrily that I would never be able to wear a white dress to my wedding and I was restricted to my room for the full summer.
- Following a divorce and a cross country move, I returned to the church for a sense of stability. I became active in the local church and friendly with the priest. I was invited to the Rectory for dinner with their team, a lovely experience. I invited the priest to my home for dinner. Over dinner he confessed "I was the kind of woman he would leave the priesthood for."
- After remarriage and the arrival of two children, we searched for a place to encourage our children to have a spiritual center. We settled on a local Episcopal church. Again we were friendly with the pastor. It became clear he was attracted to wealth and their benefits and inattentive to us in a time of need.

These events gave me a feeling of base humanity interpreting and molding spirituality to serve their own corporal needs.

Helen, my mother-in-law once told me that she and her husband are here to "serve others." I can remember this conversation as if it were yesterday. Later, I was in a Techstars program.

Their motto of “give first” reinforced Helen’s message. After years of ending conversations and emails with, “now what can I do for you?” asking this same question has become part of my daily practice.

Despite my separation from the Church, I retain a firm connection with a supernatural perspective on existence. Fundamental, is my belief that we don’t know what we don’t know. I easily imagine ways of life, communication, and travel that we cannot comprehend in 2023. Moreover, I do believe in the teachings of humans named Jesus, Ghandi, Mother Teresa and others. Primary to me is treating others as I would want to be treated and that compassion is the best response in any situation.

On reflection, the education I received worked to some extent, but I reject the organizations that control religious practice. I believe in a Supreme Being and that she is generous, compassionate. I try to emulate as best I can. I fail daily.

Having a terminal, degenerative disease brings up unexpected aspects of spirituality. My foundational beliefs remain unchanged, but my desires have shifted. I am working with the Stanford Palliative Medicine Team to prepare for the inevitable. The team offers Spiritual Care Services. I look forward to continued interaction with the Chaplain on the team. These are the expectations that give me comfort:

- *A calm listening presence*
- *Open hearted conversation about hope, gratitude, fear, connection and meaning*
- *Prayers and blessings*
- *Reading sacred texts*
- *Meditation and breathing exercises*
- *Support during or after a patient or family conference with my medical team*
- *Spiritual grief and bereavement support for my family.*