

Dani

My Catholic family quit going to Church when I was in early grade school. In high school, some fellow Catholic students invited me to their Church, and when I went on a retreat, my spirit was reawakened. I saw the Holy Spirit work at that retreat, I felt the love of God and knew I would always love our God.

Growing in faith and knowledge, I became very active in our Church, married, and raised four children in Catholic schools. I was an acolyte trainer coordinator, bingo worker, folk mass music director, and a Knights of Columbus member. I was even a Grand Knight at one stage.

In 1994 I was involved in an accident that left me with a syrinx in my spine. I was told I would shortly need a walker and a wheel chair by 2000. During that time I went to a healing Mass. In 1996 a follow-up MRI showed the syrinx to have shrunk. My permanent nerve damage was no longer expected to get worse. While doctors had no medical explanation, I do. Faith.

I've always had one issue in my mind though. I never understood why I was in a male body, always wanting the female things in life. The churches I attended taught that being LGBT was a sin. I therefore expressed my female nature in private, at home, and then went to confession.

At one point, I was approached about applying for the diaconate program. I knew however, that this part of me was not accepted, and it stopped me from being closer to our Lord, something I would have loved.

As time would go on, I was fighting myself to be something I was told was a sin. Thirty Eight years into our marriage, I opened up to my wife, a born and raised Polish Catholic with a deep faith. While our marriage got really shaky, the one thing we agreed on was that I needed to see a mental health specialist. I thought I could solve everyone else's problems by ending my life.

My psychiatrist and psychologist shared that my inner feelings were not unusual and that others have the same feelings. With my wife's ok, I started anti-depressants, and then HRT, and immediately felt better and happier. My wife and I agreed to reevaluate in 6 months. After 2 months however, she stated that she could see the positive effects. She said she took her marriage vows very seriously and would stay with me, but was concerned that my soul may be damned.

I, too, shared her concern. I had felt this way since I was eight years old, but was unsure why. I just knew that it was not a sin or perversion. I had been told that being

transgender is a mental disorder. I came to the realization that God made me this way and, if I was born this way, understood that everyone who is LGBT is born this way as well. I read up on conversion therapy camps and was upset about what society and my Church had taught about the LGBT community. I saw a priest chastise a mother for supporting her gay child. I did not see acts of love toward the outcast of our society.

Continuing my quest, I first found Dignity, which was accepting and allowed me to worship our God as my true self. My first "Prayer of the Faithful" was for our brethren to learn to accept us for who we are. I was in tears, again feeling God's love in my heart. I felt a need to live and carry forth Jesus' message.

Eventually I did find a priest who let me know my soul is not damned for being transgender. I now attend this church where I am openly accepted. My wife and I are still together, and I truly thank God for putting this loving person in my life.

I currently run a support group for transgender people and am very active in an accepting church. My heart is filled with love, working to communicate with priests and others, doing Jesus' work. Prayers for all, and please pray for me. God Bless.