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# Yes! I Am Catholic

## How Faith Plays a Role in My Life

Beth Dotson Brown





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Saint Mary's Press®

The publishing team included Laurie Delgatto, development editor; Lorraine Kilmartin, reviewer; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this book to my husband, Jim, my family, my friends, and all the health-care professionals who helped me become physically healthy again as I was writing this book.

## Author Acknowledgments

There are so many people who have kept me in their prayers during the past year that I cannot name them all, but you know who you are and that it has been your prayers that carried me through.

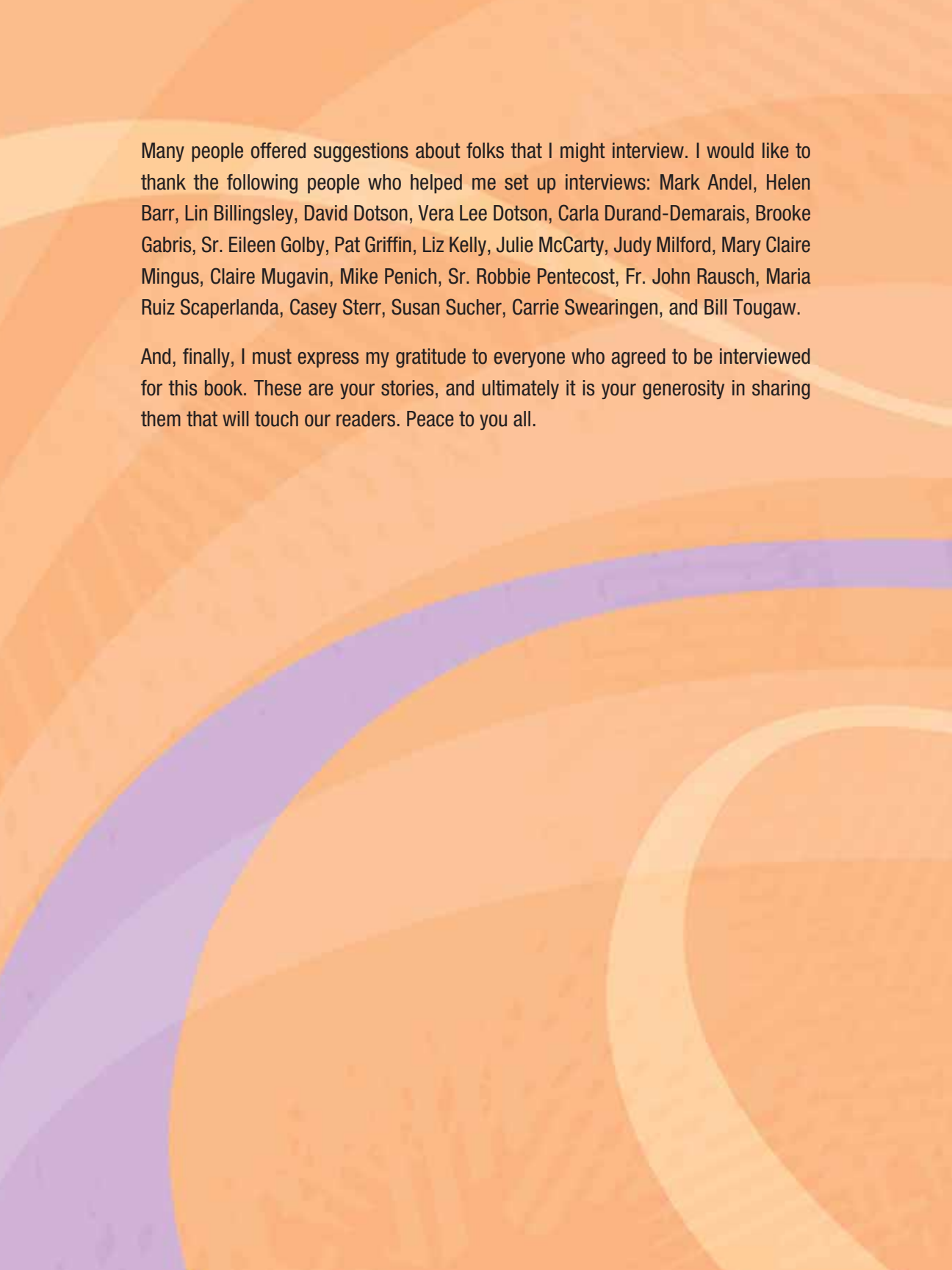
I want to especially thank my parents, Paul and Vera Lee Dotson, who have always supported my desire to write. Dad, you got me started on my publishing journey by providing me with an idea for my first published magazine article when I was a teenager. And Mom, you are the best unpaid researcher and public relations person a writer could have! Also thanks to my brothers, David and Dan, and my niece, Morgan, who all bring happiness into my life.

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And, finally, I must express my gratitude to everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this book. These are your stories, and ultimately it is your generosity in sharing them that will touch our readers. Peace to you all.



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# Introduction

## Ask and you shall receive.

Anyone who has gone to church has heard that sentiment. Although it is a favorite of mine, at times I have found it to be deceptively simple. There have been occasions when I asked and did not receive, or so it seemed.

There have also been times when I received even before I knew what to ask for. Such was the case with this book. The offer to write it came to me just when I most needed to hear stories of faith.

## Seek and you shall find.

Although I was facing a personal health crisis, I spent time in silent prayer, trying to open myself to answers from God and guidance about who to interview for this book.

God told me to knock and the door would be opened. So it was.

I made a list of people that I might interview and invited them to share their stories. I began to ask simple questions: Why do you choose to be Catholic? What do you like about your faith? Each person I spoke with opened the door and gave me answers.

One of the first stories that truly inspired me was that of Helen Barr, a fashion business owner in New York City. She had faced repeated tragedies in her life, including the aftereffects of the 9-11 terrorist attack on her business and the death of her sister from cancer. Yet she said it was her faith that sustained her. Even when she did not know what to do from minute to minute, she remained open to hearing God's guidance, and God took care of her.

I interviewed my uncle and godfather, Bill Tougaw. I knew that he had left the Church for a significant period of time in his life, but I did not know why or why he had returned. He shared that story, as well as the four words from the Our Father that have gotten him through the most difficult times in his life: thy will be done.

I talked with actress and Olympic gold medalist Tara Lipinski as she prepared for an acting audition. She told me about her devotion to Saint Thérèse the Little Flower and the miracles God had wrought in her life through the intercession of this saint. I marveled at her story about the workings of one of my favorite saints in her life. And I remembered the power of prayer.

Each of the people I interviewed opened the door to their faith life so that all of us might take away a bit from their stories to strengthen our own journeys. They certainly did that for me. My soul became richer as it filled with the stories of these people, people who could be your next-door neighbor, favorite athlete, beloved author, or special teacher. God sent me an answer to a prayer I did not know I had, and I am all the richer for it.

As you read this book, I hope these stories will have some of the answers you are seeking. Turn the page and the door will be open.





# 1

## my faith sustains me

It is often a moment of crisis that causes people to understand the importance of their faith. They nearly accomplish a lifetime goal, only to fall short of it; a loved one dies; terrorists attack. People realize that they were sustained by faith during the crisis.



## derek parra

Derek Parra says that building a relationship with God is like building any other relationship; it takes time and commitment. For him, part of the building process has been spending time with the Scriptures and talking to God. “Once you feel comfortable with that connection,” he says, “it’s like having Mom and Dad to help you and kiss the boo-boo. God can do the same thing in God’s own way.”



## Derek Parra, Olympic Medalist, Speed Skating

Derek Parra was raised Catholic in a Mexican-American home in California. He faced his share of troubles at a young age, when his parents divorced. He left home when he was seventeen years old to pursue a skating career.

“I always believed in heaven and God and everything like that, but it wasn’t until I was away from home that I developed a personal relationship with God,” Derek recalls.

He began developing that relationship while he was living in a trailer without electricity near a training facility in Wisconsin. He did not have any money, but his coach found him work and helped him continue to train. Living in the middle of the woods, Derek struggled with loneliness.

During this time a pastor handed him a Bible.

“I started reading it, and that’s when I developed a personal relationship with God. This relationship reinforced my faith. From that point on in my life and in my career as a skater, God played an important role. When I had hard times, I didn’t look at them as hard times but as times when God was teaching me something. I was learning something from the experience that would help me in another part of my life.”

**“I started reading it, and that’s when I developed a personal relationship with God.”**

When Derek found himself without money, food, or work, “somebody came out of nowhere to help me.” It happened too many times, he says, for it to be coincidence. Rather, he believes it was God working in his life.

Derek took his faith and his experience with him to Nagano, Japan, in 1998, when he earned a spot on the U.S. Olympic speed skating team. Just as he was perched

on the brink of achieving one of his goals, his name was pulled from the starting list because of a clerical error. “I was devastated and didn’t know what to think,” Derek says.

He returned to the United States for four more years of training. At the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, his name stayed on the roster. Then it rose to the top. Derek won the gold medal in the 1500-meter race and set a world record in the process. He won the silver medal in the 3000-meter race.

Looking back on the Nagano experience, Derek can now say: “I think I wasn’t prepared back then to win. I wasn’t prepared as a person to handle everything, and that experience allowed me to grow. I came back after four more years of training and growing up as a person. I ended up being able to handle everything that happened at that time. With God’s grace, I was successful and won the gold medal and went out and preached to others about my faith and talked about it freely. Maybe that’s why. Maybe I was chosen to win because of what I would do and how I would share my faith.”

Faith continues to be the foundation of Derek’s life. He believes that the faith Catholics share makes them all one family. He calls on his Church family as he continues to train. “Maybe that’s something I enjoy the most because I’m living in Utah and my family is in Florida when I’m preparing for the games. When I am lonely, when I’m feeling alone, I can call anybody I know at the church. I can go to church and I can call the pastor and talk, and it’s like being home.”

“When I had hard times, I didn’t look at them as hard times but as times when God was teaching me something. I was learning something from the experience that would help me in another part of my life.”





## helen barr

Helen Barr did not always rely on the Catholic faith that sustains her today. Although she was raised Catholic, she drifted away from the Church for a number of years. As a young person, she thought that people who were religious must be plain, unaccomplished folks. Today Helen is neither plain nor unaccomplished, but she considers herself a devout Catholic.

## Helen Barr, Fashion Business Owner

As an adult, Helen listened to the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale. She heard something in his sermons that helped her develop a personal relationship with Christ. As she learned that the Holy Trinity was always available in her life, she also found an example of faith to admire. Helen began volunteering with the Missionaries of Charity in the South Bronx, where she met Mother Teresa. “My experience with the Missionaries of Charity, probably more than anything, changed my life because I witnessed faith in action and the extraordinary love of these women,” Helen says.

“My experience with the Missionaries of Charity, probably more than anything, changed my life.”

When she returned to the Church, Helen developed a new appreciation for the Catholic Mass. “The Catholic Church has created a Mass that lets us begin by confessing our sins, to feel cleansed.

It moves us on to glorify God and profess our faith again, together. And we are prepared to receive the sacrifice that Jesus made for us in the Eucharist,” Helen explains.

We feel “physically and spiritually changed by having received the Body of Christ. When our experience as a community has been completed, we leave with an inner sense of peace and strength. Every part of the Mass is significant in uniting us with God.”

Helen deepened her faith by taking part in silent retreats in Assisi and by reading the writings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Augustine. She greatly needed this faith when life threw her a series of unexpected challenges.

While Helen was running a fashion business with a partner in New York City, her sister died of breast cancer, leaving a thirteen-year-old daughter. Helen adopted her niece, instantly becoming a single parent with a great new responsibility. “Without my faith, I don’t know how I could have withstood so many challenges,” Helen remembers.

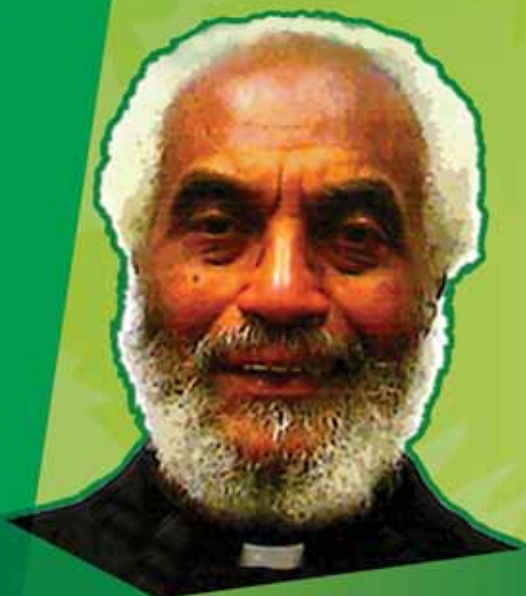
The challenges did not end there. When Helen's business partnership dissolved, she lost all the company assets, including her retirement fund. "I had no money, and I had a teenager to raise," Helen remembers. "That's when my faith deepened tremendously. I would pray every hour for strength as I started my own business. Hour by hour I rebuilt my life; it would have been completely impossible without my faith. I would have quit. I simply would have sat in tears. My faith changed everything."

Half of the companies in her building went bankrupt after the terrorist attacks of 9-11. "My faith was a deciding factor in staying in business," Helen says. "Every day through my prayers to God, I knew that I would find a way to solve problems sometimes so insurmountable that I honestly didn't know what I would do four hours ahead. I stayed calm and prayed and knew the answers would come. And they did."

Helen finds inspiration and examples of perseverance in historical personalities, such as Winston Churchill, but she says those examples are not enough; they must be combined with faith. "The strength to keep going, the belief, the smile on my face when I wasn't very happy—that was from knowing I wasn't alone. It was knowing God would see me through. It was praying every hour.

"Some of those things were so tragic that without the strength of knowing there's something more, it would have been impossible," Helen says. "The reward is astonishing because each time you are tested, you realize that God is so remarkable and you experience a different aspect of God's mercy and it's astonishing. Everywhere you look, God's there, if you look. God's the net. You can leap and know that the net is there."

**H**elen Barr lives her faith outwardly in the workplace. "In my office, we pray in the morning. We're not all Catholics, but we pray. That was a hard decision to make." Another outward sign of her faith is her financial support of the Missionaries of Charity. "God has given me so much, and I should honor that," she says. "There should be a light that shines from what I'm doing."



## fr. robert pittman

“The Catholic faith is a very sustaining faith. My faith is telling me that God is in control, God loves me, God is caring for me, and I have nothing to worry about.”

## Fr. Robert Pittman, Priest, Blessed Sacrament Congregation

When Fr. Robert Pittman was six years old, in church with his mother, he realized that he wanted to be a priest. “There were many, many seemingly impossible obstacles, but inside of me, I felt as though this is what God wanted me to do, and I was going to be able to do it.

“We were growing up extremely poor, almost homeless and foodless and everything else, living on our grandfather’s farm for survival. Mom had had a bad experience, and she was trying to raise us the best she could. One of the things she was very strong about was raising us in the faith.”

**“There were many, many seemingly impossible obstacles, but inside of me, I felt as though this is what God wanted me to do.”**

It was not easy at that time to be African American and Catholic. “When I was growing up, certainly the segregation and the treatment of black people in church were very disedifying to me,” Father Pittman says. “Members of my faith were practicing the opposite of what we’re taught.” Father Pittman could see that although people professed their Catholic faith, they did not always put it into practice. “But still, I felt that I had to stay with it. By abandoning my faith, I wasn’t going to gain anything.” Father Pittman says that for him, the core of faith is loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

When he was old enough to attend the seminary, Father Pittman had to leave Maryland and go to Mississippi. “Mississippi was a long ways off. I had heard all kinds of stories about the things they did to black people in Mississippi and that it was a horrible place to go.”



“If God doesn’t give you what you want, God always gives you something better.”

Nonetheless, he went, only to be called home to help his family before he finished school. He worked so hard at home during those years that he compromised his health, and the seminary would not allow him to return. The diocese would not take him either. So Father Pittman looked for another avenue and found the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. They accepted him. “These struggles seemed impossible, but God took care of them in God’s own way. That’s why I take the principle that if God doesn’t give you what you want, God always gives you something better.”

Since his ordination, Father Pittman has served in Africa, England, and the United States. Many of his dreams have come true. “I wanted to go to Lourdes; I wanted to go Fátima; I wanted to do this and do that. So many of those things sooner or later were realized. Look, I’m here, I’m in Fátima, in Lourdes, in the missions. I’m studying Portuguese in Lisbon. I dream about it, and the next thing I know, it’s happening. If you open your eyes and pay attention, you are blessed over and over.”

Father Pittman continues to be blessed and to work as he approaches the age of eighty years. He ministers at the Body of Christ Farm in Maryland and travels to Mozambique to help the Church there. “Some people say I’m too old to go back to Mozambique, which somewhat makes sense because I am rather old, but at the same time, I believe I have a mission there. There’s some work there that God wants me to do, and God will see me through.”

**F**orgiveness is an important concept in Fr. Robert Pittman’s life. “One of the sermons I preach often is on forgiveness, how important it is that we forgive from the heart. It’s only when we forgive that we can enjoy peace and the assurance of God’s forgiveness.”



# timothy goebel

Timothy Goebel grew up in the Catholic Church, with a devout Catholic mother and a father who was not Catholic but attended church with the family. Timothy says of his faith: "It's something that's always been a part of my life, and it's something that I feel plays an important role in my life. I try my best every day to live my faith, to be a good person and a good example of morals and values for other people."



## Timothy Goebel, Olympic Medalist, Figure Skating

Timothy's faith has been especially important to him in his career as a figure skater. "Being in the career I'm in right now with skating or being in any sport where there are so many external demands on an athlete's time is a challenge. When I'm in the limelight, I'm always expected to be 'on' and be sort of perfect all the time, to fulfill the role people expect me to fulfill. It's really easy to get caught up in that and be completely consumed by my career."

**"I've had some rough times these past few years. My faith has helped me stay on track and appreciate that everything is not always wonderful in life. It's what you make of the hard times and what you learn from them that helps you get through them."**

While Timothy was training full-time for the Olympics, eight hours a day, his faith was important to him. "It's easy for me to get so wrapped up in and focused on one thing that I sort of let the rest of life slide," he says. He believes it is important to "keep a good perspective on things and not get too up when things are going well or despair too much when they aren't." Timothy's faith is the force that helps him maintain that perspective.

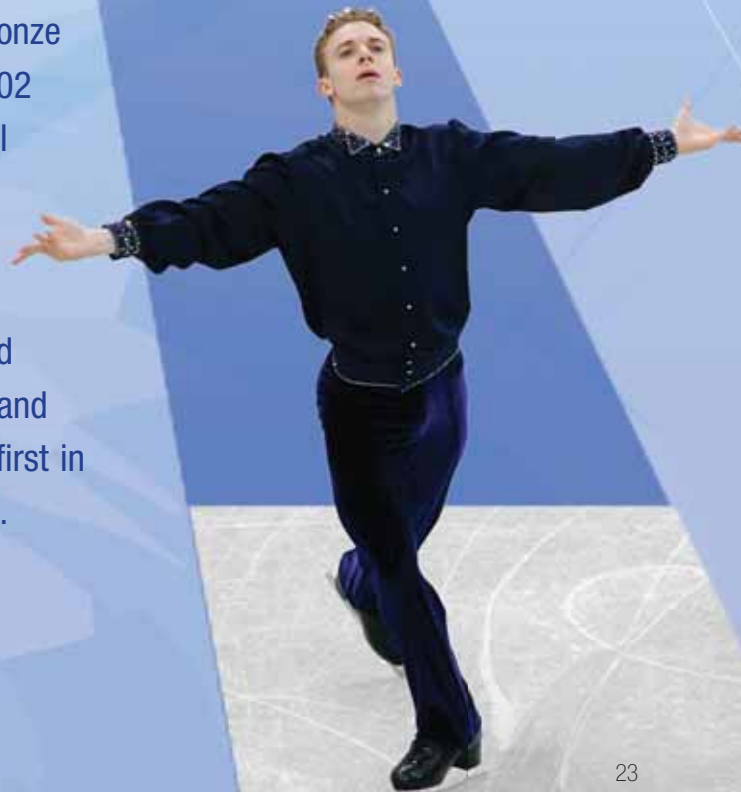
At times Timothy has despaired. He won the bronze medal in the 2002 Olympics but struggled in the 2003–2004 season. He was dealing with equipment issues and injuries and was working with a coaching staff that did not encourage or

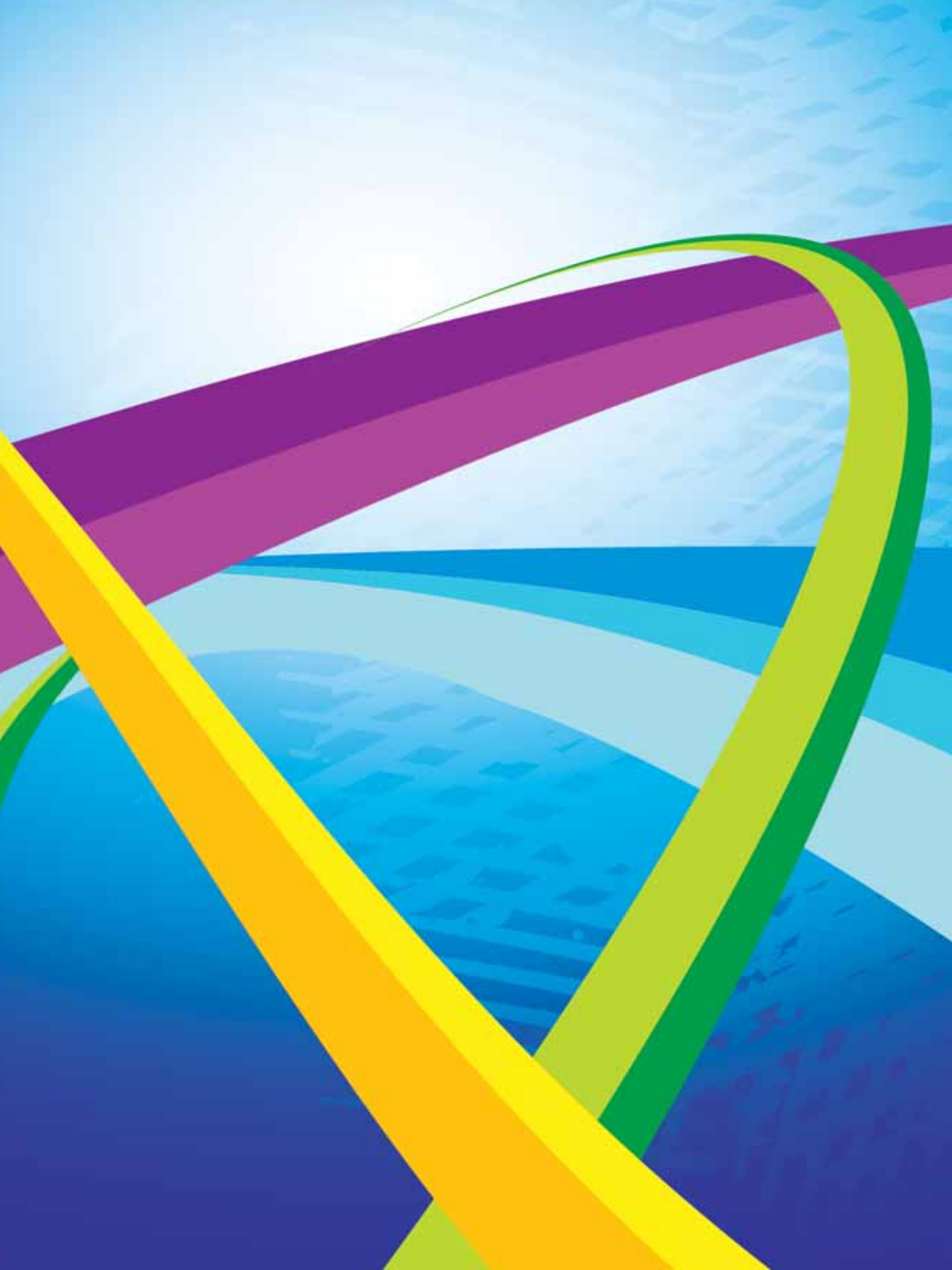
support him. While he was going through that difficult time, he was living and training across the country from where his parents lived.

“It was a really, really hard time for me. I think part of what helped me get past my problems, refocus, and find the motivation to keep training and trying to improve was my faith. At that point, I didn’t have a lot left. The only thing I had to fall back on was my faith.”

“I’ve had some rough times these past few years. My faith has helped me stay on track and appreciate that everything is not always wonderful in life. It’s what you make of the hard times and what you learn from them that helps you get through them.” Timothy emerged from those times a disciplined person. He was on his way once again to pursuing his dream of Olympic gold. When he encounters difficulties, he remembers that his faith tells him that Jesus Christ provided a human example of sacrifice and love, an example of how we all should live.

**B**esides winning the bronze medal in the 2002 Olympics, Timothy Goebel placed second in the U.S. Nationals in 2005, placed second in the World Championships and won the Cup of China Grand Prix in 2003, and placed first in the U.S. Nationals in 2001.





# 2

## prayer helps me communicate with God

**T**hey pray when walking, attending Mass, listening to music, reading the Scriptures, or sitting quietly and appreciating the beauty of nature. Through prayers, Catholics receive answers, comfort, and fortification of faith.



## catherine hicks

Catherine Hicks is effusive about her love for the Catholic faith, even the parts that are difficult. "It's deep, it's dark, it's shiny, it's happy, it's magical, it's tough, it's real, and it's old. It was founded by Christ himself. I love that it goes back to the Last Supper. I love that it's a mystical religion, very prayer and meditation oriented."



## Catherine Hicks, Television Actress

Hicks was raised in the Catholic Church. She has found that her faith has comforted her. As a child, she loved the idea that Christ was her friend. “As I got older and was alone as a young professional woman, I knew I could go [to my faith] if I was scared or lonely,” Catherine says.

Catherine still likes being in Church today. “I love the spirituality, the peace and quiet of the Church. I love that churches often have statues and candles. It’s very comforting,” she says.

When Catherine travels, she finds it reassuring that wherever she goes in the world, the Church is there and she can find a Mass to attend. “I love that it’s international,” Catherine says. “I love that it’s not just white Americans. It’s everywhere; it’s global.”

In addition to being globally accessible, the Catholic Church is a prayerful Church. “Catholics pray hard,” Catherine says. She describes the Church as mystical, meaning that “you seek the faith of God through prayer, and the more you pray, the more you see God and the more [God responds]. It’s like a relationship.”

Catherine attends Mass as often as she can, enjoying the opportunity to listen to the Scriptures. She finds that focusing on the Scriptures during Mass is easier than reading them at home. At Mass she encounters one of the great mysteries of the Church that leaves her in awe: “We have the Eucharist. God became visible in human form and lives on in bread [and wine]. It’s forever mysterious.”

**“Catholics pray hard. Catherine describes the Church as mystical, meaning that “you seek the faith of God through prayer.”**

Besides praying at Mass, Catherine likes to pray the rosary and recite memorized prayers. “It’s hard to make up your own prayers,” she says. “I love that there are so many wonderful prayers to be learned. It makes it easy to pray. I often pick out a memorized prayer.”

The saints also offer Catherine opportunities for prayer. “I love the saints, the real people who have died and are in heaven, whom we can talk to,” Catherine says. “There are a lot of heavenly friends.”

Some of Catherine’s heavenly friends are her patron saint, Saint Catherine of Labour, Saint Thérèse the Little Flower, and Saint Joseph. “I love Saint Anthony [the patron saint of lost things]. He bails me out at least five times a day because I’m left-handed and I lose everything,” she says. “Even my Protestant husband is devoted to Saint Anthony.”

What is the result of all the prayers? Catherine sees “the soul as a muscle. One needs to work out for one’s physique, and one needs to work out for the soul by praying. By praying, we exercise the soul. The soul gets in better and better shape all the way toward seeing the face of God.”

**Catherine sees “the soul as a muscle. One needs to work out for one’s physique, and one needs to work out for the soul by praying.”**

Catherine believes that people are not praying enough. She teaches her daughter about prayer. She thinks it is important to raise the question “Why are we here?” even with young people.

As one ponders the possibilities, it is necessary to back up one’s beliefs and prayers with actions. Catherine thinks the Catholic Church does a good job with this through organizations such as Catholic Relief Services and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. “Catholic charities are everywhere,” Catherine says. “The Church really lives Christ’s mandate to feed the hungry and clothe the poor.”



“There’s extreme devastation on the planet,” says Catherine, as she muses about Africa and other war-torn places. “There’s plenty to focus on. Catholicism is a socially active religion that works with the poor.” The Church also stands up for people who are oppressed, she says.

Catherine believes in being active in one’s local community too. “We have to visit a neighbor, that old person down the street. We’ve got to be kind,” she says. “Be nice to the kid who is ‘left out.’ Why? Because God created that person.”

Catherine Hicks has appeared in numerous movies and television shows. She played the role of Annie Jackson-Camden in the series *Seventh Heaven* from 1996 to 2007. In 2005 she became the spokesperson for Catholic Relief Services on the Darfur situation in Sudan.



## bill tougaw

Church is not the only place where Bill communicates with God. "I do that through prayer, trust, and accepting whatever God's will might be. I can look outside and see the beauty of nature, and God's there.

I leave the house in the morning and trust that [God will] get me home at night. The communicating might not be in silent or spoken prayer with words. It's in knowing that God's presence is there."

## Bill Tougaw, Retired Trucking Manager

Bill Tougaw was raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools. He played basketball for a Catholic university during his college years. When he divorced at age twenty-nine, however, he drifted away from the Church. He had two children and feared that if he got an annulment of his marriage, his children would be labeled “illegitimate.”

He moved forward with his life, carrying his Catholic roots with him and respecting the faith but not attending Mass. He married a woman who had also been divorced, and together they created a family with his two children, her daughter, and a son they had together.

For about twenty-eight years, Bill stayed away from the Church, exploring other options. “I would go to other churches and leave feeling empty,” he remembers. He felt that other faiths were less rooted in the truth and more likely to blow with the wind. When he thinks about the Catholic faith today, he says: “It’s not willy-nilly. It won’t always be politically correct. It’s stable and steadfast. It won’t be different next week.”

Catholic doctrine, he points out, is set in stone. And when he hears what the Church has to say about issues such as abortion, he says, “You can depend on this: It will not change. I respect that, and I count on it.”

When he thinks about the Catholic faith today, he says: “It’s not willy-nilly. It won’t always be politically correct. It’s stable and steadfast. It won’t be different next week.”

When Bill learned more about the meaning the Church attaches to annulment, he felt more comfortable about going through with the process. “I wanted to get involved again [in the Church] because I felt as though I was missing something.”

While he waited for the annulment to be granted, he began to attend Mass again. “During that time, I went to church weekly, wishing especially to be able to receive Communion. The urge for that got stronger and stronger.” Bill says about the Mass: “When I don’t go, I feel as though I’ve committed a sin against myself because not going deprives me of an important opportunity. The Mass refreshes and renews me for the following week.”

Church is not the only place where Bill communicates with God. “I do that through prayer, trust, and accepting whatever God’s will might be. I can look outside and see the beauty of nature, and God’s there. I leave the house in the morning and trust

that [God will] get me home at night. The communicating might not be in silent or spoken prayer with words. It’s in knowing that God’s presence is there.”

“God gave me the confidence I needed; I went from being a wreck who was about to lose it to having the confidence I needed to get through. I wish everyone could experience that.”

When Bill’s father was near death, communicating with God helped Bill get through the difficult time. His father had cancer, and his health was failing. One night the doctors told the family that his father probably would not make it through the night. Bill’s parents had been married for forty-five years; although Bill’s mother looked as though she was doing okay, Bill was worried about her and his sister.

Bill did not know what to do. So he turned to a prayer he had known all his life. “I prayed the Our Father over and over again,” he says. “I had probably prayed it about

nine times when I started concentrating on the line 'thy will be done.' As I said it, this warmth grew in my chest. I started to feel almost weightless. God gave me the confidence I needed; I went from being a wreck who was about to lose it to having the confidence I needed to get through. I wish everyone could experience that."

Bill found comfort in those words and in his faith when his wife died in a freak accident. "I kept going back to those four words: 'thy will be done.' They are as powerful as anything."

Bill knows that his actions show his faith, so he tries to live by the Golden Rule and be a good example. "I'm proud of my Catholic faith." Bill has married again, and says, "I'm proud that my wife, Brenda, is taking instruction and becoming Catholic."

It has been a meandering journey for Bill Tougaw, but it is obvious from his stories, enthusiasm, and example that he is comfortably at home in his Catholic faith again.

**B**ill Tougaw says he has great respect for priests, in spite of the negative publicity they have gotten in recent years. "The true priests continue to be proud of being priests, and they do their duty for God and their flock." His own parish priest sat with him by his dying wife's bedside from 2:30 a.m. until 6:00 a.m. "He was there when we needed him. That was a real gift to us."





## Paula Davis

Paula Davis grew up as the seventh of twelve children in a Catholic family. Her parents taught her about the faith. “We said prayers together as a family, and [the pastor] would come over to pray over us all the time,” she remembers. She treasures a photograph of herself and her siblings with their priest when she was still the baby in the family.

## Paula Davis, Housekeeper, Xavier University

Paula Davis grew up as the seventh of twelve children in a Catholic family. Her parents taught her about the faith. “We said prayers together as a family, and [the pastor] would come over to pray over us all the time,” she remembers. She treasures a photograph of herself and her siblings with their priest when she was still the baby in the family.

Paula’s father was a sergeant in the army, and her mother stayed home and took care of the children. “I think they did a beautiful job bringing us up in the Catholic faith. My mother had to go through a lot.” The children attended Catholic school until the tuition got to be too costly to keep all of them there. Paula’s brothers sang in the church choir. She thinks back on those early days of being ingrained in the faith and says: “That’s really all I knew. I was raised [Catholic], so I stuck with it.”

Although she does not have anything against other churches, the Catholic Church is where Paula feels at home. “I love the teachings of the Church and lots of different things,” Paula says. “There’s just something about it I like. I also like that the Catholic faith hasn’t changed.” The steadiness of the Mass, the teachings, and the traditions reassures Paula.

One of the childhood traditions Paula continues to practice is praying. “I try to pray every day and go about things the right way. It’s so rough out here.” Paula is aware of her environment because she walks thirty minutes every night to get home from her job as a housekeeper at Xavier University in Cincinnati. She finds those walks to be a good time to pray.

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She says three prayers in the evening. “I love the Our Father, and I love the Hail Mary. I like a lot of them. And the ‘Lord, Lay Me Down to Sleep.’ That’s something I’ve prayed since I was a kid.”

When Paula prays the Our Father, she is praying for her brothers and the men of the world. The Hail Mary is offered for her sisters and the women of the world. The ‘Lord, Lay Me Down to Sleep’ is for her seven granddaughters. “And I pray for the world to be a better place. Those prayers have so much meaning.”

Paula learned to pray from her parents. She says that even if people are not brought up Catholic, they can still learn to pray such prayers. “Talk to someone who’s really

into the faith to learn how to pray,” she suggests. She also thinks it’s a good idea to read the Bible.

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Working with a boss who is a minister of another faith sometimes brings up questions of religion. She remembers that at one point, her boss noticed all the difficulties that were coming her way: the death of one sister from cancer, the loss of two nephews, the deaths of her parents, and the loss of a sister who had a baby. Her boss asked her how she dealt

with all the losses, and she answered: “I pray. I have to pray for some sanity.”

Paula has experienced things she cannot explain except through faith. She remembers one particularly bad period in her life when she was lying in bed and felt a big gust of wind around her that pinned her to her bed. It frightened her deeply. “I pulled myself up and went and laid on the couch; I laid by Jesus’s picture, and the feeling went away.” She cannot define what happened at that moment. Years later she still remembers the terror, followed by the comfort Jesus gave her.

“Some people say that when you pray, your prayers aren’t answered, but I’m a living witness that they are. I’ve prayed a lot of prayers that have been answered.” For example, Paula remembers a time when she desperately needed help to pay her gas and electric bills. She got the money she needed. Recently she was in a housing situation that made her unhappy. When she began to look for a new place, the rental expenses discouraged her. “One day I got out of bed after I had been praying and praying; I started walking and just lucked upon a place. God is good!” The new place was larger than anything she had expected to be able to afford, and it was close to her job.

If someone asks Paula about her Catholic faith, she is glad to tell them how she feels. “I just love it because it’s a beautiful faith,” she says.

**P**aula Davis especially likes to pray the rosary. In 2002 Pope John Paul II enhanced this Catholic devotion by adding a new mystery. To the traditional meditations on the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, he added the mystery of light, which highlights some of Jesus’s actions on earth.



## matthew ott

Matt was raised Catholic, but he did not consider himself to be truly Catholic until his Confirmation. "It's when I said for myself: this is what I believe. I'm glad I was given the opportunity."