

APPENDIX A

PHASE I FAITH REFLECTIONS

*“But through all our knowledge begins with experience,
it does not follow that it all arises from experience.”*

Immanuel Kant

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*Note: The reflections that follow have received only the most minimal of editing.
I have made every effort to present here the reflections as I received them*

FAITH REFLECTION #1

This can be easy to answer and at the same time be very hard to answer. My earliest memories are of a church in northern Ohio. I still remember the door was on the corner of the building. And of course the church in Ashtabula, Ohio with the new building where the Sunday school classes were conducted and the very old sanctuary. Oh! The many times that I got into trouble during church services there. But I still can hear the songs, and remember the smells of the candles burning. I don't remember the church in Perry very much. And I am not sure why. I do remember the building, the two sanctuaries, one old, and the other even older. I even remember the many potluck dinners that we always attended.

As I got older and more involved in the distractions of being a teenager I feel that I drifted from the formal church, viewing it more of a social gathering than a needed spiritual setting. Of course looking back this also was the time of conflict within my own body. I could not understand how there could be a GOD, while I was having a major conflict within.

I know that many nights I would ask God to allow me to be a "normal" person, to take the many strange thoughts that were going on in my head away. Other times I would pray, "God, if you love me as I am told, you will help me wake up as a girl that I know I am." And I did not understand why 'this loving God' would not help.

I joined the Army after high school, to fulfill a career dream. In the Army I was subjected to the full spectrum of male bonding and conflict. In many ways I was learning and later teaching, the "art" of war, how to actually learn to kill, to take the life of someone. This really did cause me to wonder just what I believed in. As we have all learned one of the "The Commandments" is "Thou Shall Not Kill". I questioned this many times, and at some point I read in a Bible the commandment as "Thou Shall Not Murder". This made more me feel better. The many years that I spent wandering and wondering. Two marriages, both for the wrong reasons, four children most of whom don't speak with me. Yet I feel more alive and more focused to stay alive these days. I took a very hard look at my life and the different events that I thought were so bad.

When I was in the fifth grade, this must have been the '63 - '64 school year; I was either sick or hurt much of the class year. Mumps, chickenpox, I fell with my bicycle, hurt my knee, had a concussion after being knocked down. It all ended up with my not being promoted to the sixth grade, but being required to repeat the fifth grade. At 10 or 11 years of age this was the worst thing that could have ever happened to me. But only recently have I actually realized how much this was the first good thing to have happened to me. If I had not repeated the fifth grade but had stayed on track and graduated with my age group I would have graduated in June of 1971. This would have resulted in my being drafted and sent to Viet Nam. A place that I would not have come home from I am sure.

In 1975 I was stationed in Berlin Germany and was working as a "truck driver" for the Transportation Motor Pool (TMP). A female friend (the only female with TMP was scheduled for over night duty and was also scheduled to drive a truck from Berlin to West Germany, a trip that took six to eight hours. I volunteered to drive the truck for her, so she could work her night duty. The day before this was to happen she called and said that she had gotten the First Sergeant to change the schedule. As it turned out she was in a very bad accident just before the Soviet checkpoint and ended up going out through the windshield of the truck and being seriously injured. This could have been me.

In 1988 on the anniversary of my completing sixteen years of service, (the actual day, 29 September)

I was called to the Battalion Commanders office and was given notice that I had been “selected” to be discharged. Basically FIRED from the U.S. Army! My life’s dream in shatters. Everything that I had dreamed of, worked for was now over. Earlier in 1988 I attended a school for senior NCOs at Ft. Benning, GA. And graduated in the top 5 percent of the class. Every year I scored in the top 10 percent of the entire Army in my career field’s evaluation. One year I missed getting a 100% by one question (my actual score of 97% was in the top 3% of the entire Army). Yet I was never given any recognition for excelling. And after sixteen years was told that I did not have the “traits” that was desired in a senior non-commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. My life was over. Within a year of my being discharged I watched with many others as the U.S. invaded the country of Panama. I saw people that I had served with, had trained with, and had trained loading on buses and ships to go to war. I again had avoided going to war. Yet I was troubled. I had trained and studied for sixteen years and had again not been able to put my profession to use.

I had four children and a wife that was dependant on my being able to provide for them. I had no skills, no desires, no interests, no prospect of knowing what work to seek. But knowing that I had to find something to provide for my family. Yet I did attempt to find work, landing a temporary position with the Post Office in St. Petersburg Florida. The job hours was placing a hardship on my wife, as I worked from 6 P.M until 2:30 A.M. and she was working from 9 A.M. until 4 P.M. and was driving to the post office to pick me up. Many times the supervisor would come to me at the last minute and ask if I would work over. This meant that my wife would have to sit outside and wait until I go off. So I took my motorcycle to a shop to get it running right. When I picked it up I attempted to drive the bike up a plank into the back of my truck. I fell with the bike and ended up breaking my knee. This resulted in my being hospitalized and having major surgery to repair the damage. Another major crush to my life. Yet in retrospect I feel that if I had not gotten hurt I would have tried to re-join the Army and would have ended up in the Middle East for the first gulf war. And we know the damage that this has caused.

My faith has remained strong. I have not remained strong to my faith. During times of struggle or pain I have turned to the church to comfort and support me. Yet during times when I was not struggling I do not attend church. I feel that the times that I thought were the most devastating in my life were actually the times that I was being protected the most.

-J. A.

FAITH REFLECTION #2

I am not in the Navy, though my father was. I have not been in any service, though my brother was a Marine. I was not raised to any religious preference. My parents claimed they did not want to prejudice the choices their children may make.

I have been to a variety of Christian services but have not been called. I am often uncomfortable at Christian services as for some reason I focus on the words and sentiment spoken compared to the actions taken by many of the same folk. I have seen and heard and felt too much hate from such people, so the services often feel hypocritical to me.

I observed and thought and read and listened for many years trying to find beliefs to share. It wasn't until I was challenged did I find the basics of what I believe. My beliefs are not from any organized religion, they are from my heart. They resemble beliefs of a variety of aboriginal peoples, a sort of

animism. I don't go to church, I am always in church. I can't just worship on Sunday; each minute of each day is worship. All life is precious. All life is equally important, but that doesn't mean beings don't die or should not be eaten.

From a very young age, I denied belief in myself as a person, my spiritual beliefs, how I should live. I remained in denial until my late 30s. Destroying myself from the inside until I could do it no longer. I woke up. I destroyed all my understanding of how the world worked and what people were like. I have come very far since that day, but I often feel like I'm sliding back as someone I love and respect feels my beliefs are very wrong. I love and respect them, so I listen to what they say.

What would I look for in a Chaplin? I would want someone smart and caring. Someone who I would like to talk to so much that I would seek them out. Someone who could share life wisdom without trying to convert a person of focus on one belief system. Someone capable of sharing pain and comfort in hard times, yet challenge my thinking when times are quiet. Someone willing to discuss ideas, theology, humor, without needing to defend any one view. Tough shoes to fill. What I would look for sound more angelic than human. I have met a few people like that, not many. Not enough to staff a Navy with Chaplains. One more important point. A Chaplin shouldn't fake it, "I don't know" is a legitimate answer and is so much better than a lie. A Chaplin must be a Human being, don't try to hide that you are.

“May happiness hunt you down and catch you.” -Tigger.

-C. G.

FAITH REFLECTION #3

I was raised in the United Methodist Church in my hometown, Oak Harbor, WA, which was definitely a Navy town, having NAS Whidbey Island right next to it. My father retired from the Navy in 1972 as a Senior Chief when I was 8. I never experienced moving around with the Navy as my father finished his enlistment as a recruiter in a neighboring city, and I also didn't experience direct interaction with Navy chaplains as my family were members of, and worshipped at, 1st UMC in Oak Harbor. Our church, however, was known for being very Navy friendly, and many of the church families were either active duty or retired Navy.

I grew up with the church as an accepted normal part of my life. I attended Sunday school and worship services, enjoyed the frequent potluck dinners Methodists are so famous for, and accepted being loved by God and Jesus and going to Heaven someday as perfectly natural facts of life. I joined the church at the start of 4th grade, just like normal and just like the rest of my Sunday school classmates. An added bonus was that my best friend from 2nd grade to 9th was one of our minister's daughters. All these years later and she's still one of my best friends.

Things changed dramatically, though, when my friend's father was transferred to another church in the summer of 1979 (as is normal in the UMC). For the first time in my life, I got nothing from the new minister's sermons and services. Through my sophomore year in high school I toughed it out and still attended the church, hoping things would improve. (I was also terrified that my parents would be furious with me if I announced I would no longer attend church.) So I was astounded to hear, at the end of the 79-80 school year (and the end of the Sunday school year), when I announced I would no longer go to the church as long as that minister was there, that my parents were stopping as well.

That was when my eyes were opened to the bitterness and divisiveness of church politics. That minister and his policies almost destroyed that church, and definitely stopped me and my parents from regularly attending until after he was removed.

Years later, in the 1990's after I had been graduated from university and was working at NAS Whidbey as a GS civil servant and with a new minister in place, I was regularly attending the church again. And singing in the choir, which I absolutely loved. Unlike my childhood though, I was attending as much if not more for social reasons than for religious reasons. I still believed in God and told myself I believed in Him from a Christian perspective, but mostly I was there because I liked the music and the rituals. It was what I was comfortable with, and I liked that comfort and routine as if it were a security blanket. An interesting bonus was that the new minister was also a USN Reserve chaplain who filled in at the NAS Whidbey Island chapel occasionally, and who fostered an even stronger connection between the church and the local Navy community.

In early 1994 I had a new job and I moved to Naval Air Facility Adak on Adak Island, Alaska (in the Aleutian Islands). Talk about isolated and remote! Adak was in a draw down phase, with only 500 people total on the island during my three years there. With no other towns there, we had to both work and play with each other, so it paid to learn how to get along with one another. For some, including myself, the chapel became an important part of their community - and their sense of community. There in a warm and supportive atmosphere, we shared common beliefs and experiences through both worship services and social activities. We were fortunate that our command still had a chaplain assigned to it, and for two of the three years I liked the chaplains assigned there.

I say, "We were fortunate" when more accurately we the Protestants were fortunate as it was always a Protestant chaplain who served there. Our Catholic friends had to make do with lay services and a supply of communion sacraments blessed by a Catholic Air Force chaplain who visited from Elmendorf AFB once a quarter. After my first two years there, the Catholics were in danger of having no music for their services due to their one musician transferring elsewhere. Being friends with him, I volunteered to help. Now, I don't play an instrument, but I can hold a tune and program hymns in a MIDI-based electronic hymnal. So during my last year at Adak I programmed the MIDI player each week to play appropriate liturgical music for the Catholic service.

It was one of the most enjoyable and rewarding times of my life. I took my responsibilities seriously (maybe too seriously) and always tried my best to ensure the music was seasonally and liturgically correct. I used all the Catholic reference materials available at the Chapel, and even ordered an Order of Prayer book for myself. (My mother always said I was a closet Catholic.) And yet, I wasn't doing this due to a strong religious fervor, but rather from my personal sense of duty to my friends and neighbors. I did take the idea of religious belief seriously, and because I felt the Roman Catholic Church held a position of primacy among Christian churches, I was determined to not let down the Catholics. Plus, I could indulge my love of church music and liturgical ceremony.

In 1997 Adak closed and I moved to California to work for the Air Force. The next three years were when I definitely moved away from mainstream Christian beliefs and almost completely stopped attending church services. While in California, I never found a church I cared for, and stopped looking for one after my first year there. I still believed in God, and I still liked attending Christmas and Easter services for the music and rituals, but I didn't miss attending regularly, and definitely developed a liking for free-from-commitments Sundays.

During this time I realized and accepted that I no longer believed in many of the Christian beliefs

with which I had been raised. From seeing too much coverage on TV and in the press, I came to despise conservative Christianity in America and what I believed was its hypocrisy, intolerance, and hate. I realized I didn't believe in Christianity's exclusive nature (i.e., this is the one and only true way), nor in similar beliefs in Islam or even Judaism. I believed that a loving God who created all people in his own image couldn't possibly condemn millions or billions of people to eternal damnation simply because they didn't adhere to a particular set of beliefs. Impossible. Why would I want to believe in such a God? If there were such a God - a one true God - then I'd rather be damned to hell, anyway. I cannot believe such a God would create so many beautiful people just to be automatically fated or pre-destined for hell. The God I choose to believe in is a loving God who judges each person individually and whose judgment criteria are almost unknowable. I believe the best I can do is lead the best life possible and leave my afterlife fate to Him.

Since leaving California in 2000 and coming to England, my church-going habits and beliefs have stayed pretty much the same. But I suppose I'm a classic mixed bag, what some would call undecided or even a hypocrite due to my hodgepodge of beliefs and practices. I haven't left Christianity completely, yet I am attracted to the inclusiveness and seemingly non-judgmental aspects of Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Shinto, and Zen. Then again, my love of traditional Christian church music and liturgical rituals is still strong. Because I grew up with it and for its emotional familiarity, I still feel comfortable attending traditional Christian worship services. I'll even keep attending if I like the minister's sermons and rituals. So during my first year and a half working at JMF St. Mawgan, I attended the St. Eval chapel services fairly regularly. I also sang in both the chapel choir and the American-British community choir. But when the chaplain changed, friends transferred, and the chapel community changed, I stopped attending. Yes, I was involved primarily for social reasons, but I do not apologize for that.

My long-time friend's minister father more than once explained if the only time he could get someone in church was for Christmas and Easter, then he was happy he at least got them there for that. Better than not at all. At this point in my life, I don't feel regular church attendance is a spiritual requirement. God knows what I think and feel, and He knows what I do, so if He thinks I haven't worshipped Him correctly or enough in the privacy of my thoughts and heart, then I'm sure He'll let me know come judgment time. Meanwhile, I can only try to do my best. And although I don't consider myself a practicing Christian, I still feel the Golden Rule is the best: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (What can I say? That old KJV style keeps coming through!)

I'm happy with my current beliefs, and while I miss the social aspects of regular churchgoing, I can live without it. I do believe in God, and in Jesus as His only Son. But I also believe that as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that Jesus and God are accessible to everyone through many different avenues - not solely through textbook definition "Christian" practices. What a person thinks and how he acts are much more important to me than simply mouthing a prescribed one-way-only dogma. I don't believe in the literal truth of the Bible (especially not an English language version as that is by definition a translation from earlier texts, so how can it be "literally" true), as I don't believe it's the only source of useful religious guidance. Then again, I haven't spent time studying other sources such as the Koran and the Talmud. I also firmly believe in the mystical aspects of religious objects and rituals. That includes Catholic holy water and the incensing of a holy circle around the altar - within which the magic of communion takes place. Certainly I know there are pagan similarities. That's fine by me, as I don't automatically condemn paganism as evil witchcraft. I believe it's hypocritical for Christians to do so since Christianity co-opted so many pagan rituals for its own use. I believe these are all valid means and avenues for finding and worshipping God, if done with the right attitude.

I don't believe it's my place to judge them. I would rather respect and understand them for what positive results they can bring to others and me.

So like I said, a mixed bag. But it suits me and nothing for many years has come along to change my mind. And I don't foresee that happening, either. Eventually, though, I'll find out for sure. Meanwhile, I just try to do my best . . .

-D. H.

FAITH REFLECTION #4

Which person or persons have had the most influence on your faith Journey? C. S., Southern Baptist Minister, Founder " _____ " Television Series and L. D., Counselor, FFSC

What age have I made a decision regarding my faith or religion? Biggest spiritual moment? 34-35

Have you ever changed or converted to another faith or religion? Yes, Catholic to Protestant.

Organized Religion? Very positive, when feeling spiritual growth happening within my environment.

How much does Faith impact your life/ spiritual journey? It essential. I have felt moments like I was in line with God direction within my life. There have also been times were I have felt stagnant and declining.

Highpoints? Coming in line at age 34-36.

Low Points? Wondering if I made some bad choices recently and steadily declining at present.

Spirituality? Believing in God but not actively practicing faith. Religious is actively practicing faith.

Diversity? The ability to adapt to a given situation.

Community? The place in which you call "home". Your surrounding and the people you have regular interactions with.

Chaplains Faith Group? Found a significant amount of growth when I attended several sessions of CREDO, Norfolk.

-P. K.

FAITH REFLECTION #5

This is a subject I have struggled with to some degree in the past few years. There has been a lot of discussion dealing with our individual faith journeys and if we are aware of just were we are in that journey. Frankly, I am not really sure. The problem stems from feeling that God and His Son Jesus Christ have always been in my life. I don't remember a time when I didn't know that God loved me and sent His Son to die for my sins.

I suppose as a child I didn't understand the power in what Jesus did for me but memories from my childhood include being involved with Sunday School, choir and churches at least from the time I was old enough to walk to the church on Sunday mornings in a small, rural South Dakota town. In those days you didn't get all excited about your first or second grader walking across town by themselves. It was a safer, saner world then and that was how I got to church on Sunday. I was five years older than my closest sibling and my parents didn't go to church so I walked alone. I remember loving the Bible stories and the peaceful hush of church services. As I grew and matured so did my involvement with the church. I enjoyed helping with Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, and loved youth group. All of these things helped me grow as a Christian.

As a young adult, from the time I graduated from high school and many years thereafter, I dropped out of my relationship with the church. I was married, happily, at a young age. My husband did a tour in Vietnam and then we settled in our hometown area to start our lives together. We worked and enjoyed our lives together for ten years before we were blessed with a child. When I look back on that period of my life I know that I was very happy except for the fact that we wanted a child. In retrospect I don't know what I was thinking through the years of infertility. I don't remember being angry with God for our problems but for some reason I didn't go to Him for help either. I believe that God's grace remained with me at this time, holding me above my problems, and in some way assuring me that the plan would work out for my best interest although I didn't go to Him and ask for His help. It had to be His grace that kept me from becoming discouraged during all the trials and tests we had to put up with. Each time not receiving any concrete answers as to why we were childless. After ten years we were blessed with an adopted son and received three more biological blessings over the next ten years.

With the receipt of a child and the eye opening realization of the responsibility that goes along this blessing we found our way back to the church. It wasn't like we became involved in a church and spent a lot of time with our church family as we moved several times in the next years and changed churches with each move. When we returned to our home area we finally settled in and at that point became more active in the church.

In the past few years I have felt a certain calling to come closer to the Lord. I feel a great need to dig deeper into the Bible and to try to understand just what He is calling me to do. I have taken some courses and even provided pulpit supply but although I often feel I have thoughts to share I don't feel that I have enough education to speak with authority. I also often worry that what I say may be misunderstood and lead someone astray. I continue to strive to hear what God is trying to tell me and go where he wants me to go. It is something I deal with continually in my daily life.

Through my journey I can think of a few people that have made a lasting difference in my faith life. My Grandmother was not a real cuddly grandma but I remember her strength and somehow knew that it came from her faith in the Lord. I was blessed with a minister that came to our community for a sort time. He was in every way the most spiritual person I have ever met. I was fortunate enough to get to know him outside of the church also and it may have been the first time I realized that being a strong Christian person did not make you into someone that was so odd nobody could or would relate to you. There was also another minister that was transplanted to our area with all kinds of different ideas. He helped us realize that there are more ways of worshiping and being a church family than we ever dreamt existed. These ministers not only influenced my life but also revived a withering church.

As I said, I have a problem tracking my faith journey because I think that God, through His grace, has been my guide even when I wasn't paying attention. My faith in God has been with me since I can remember. When things get tough my faith takes center stage but during a run of the mill day I am mindful of how thankful I am to God for His blessings. His grace provided my personal traits, people to love, and people to assist me. He is there looking out for me and leading me along through the life he has planned for me. All that is left for me to do is to pray that I will be aware of His voice and understand what He wants me to do.

-L. B.

FAITH REFLECTION #6

Being at a low point in my relationship with God, initially I was certainly not going to write a faith reflection after being invited to by my father, a Navy Chaplain with the 2nd Marine Div. However, despite my struggles and anger at God, myself, and other people, I decided to take this opportunity to be honest with myself and perhaps begin the healing process. Also you get a unique insight into faith that may aid you in your dissertation.

*Which person or persons have had the most influence on your faith journey?

I'd say my parents had an influence in my faith simply by being my parents. My father went to seminary when I was age 6, so I grew up with a pastor for a dad. That being said neither of my parents were a particularly strong example of faith to me nonetheless. He pastored in Wyoming until he joined the Navy Chaplains Corp two years ago. I have been in the Army for 7 years, and I like to think that in some small way I inspired my own father to join the service, ha ha. My two grandfathers were definitely godly men, with obvious blessings in their lives. I rarely saw them though, having grown up in Wyoming, moving there after my dad got his first pastorate fresh from seminary. Also there was one summer missionary that served at our church briefly. He lived his faith as a city on a hill, I remember Christ's light shining through him well. Of course I met other Godly folks through the years. But given the sparse nature of any true example of faith in my life, I interpreted much of the scripture for myself, becoming more and more disillusioned with the hypocritical "faith" of most churchgoers I knew. I am thankful however that I grew up in a Christian home, otherwise I most certainly would not have accepted God's grace.

*At what age did you make a decision regarding faith/religion in your life?

I decided to be baptized at 13. I really began to become close with God, taking our relationship seriously after my 16th birthday. As I've said earlier, I was becoming increasingly agitated with conventional churchgoing attitudes and worship, especially in my teen years. I knew that I should continue to worship and break bread together with other Christians as God's word tells us.

*Have you ever changed/converted to another faith or religion?

In desperation, and seeking some measure of power and something tangible to grab onto after falling from grace through self-centeredness and sexual sin, in my college years I joined the Church of Satan to spite God. As you may or may not know, modern Satanism does not worship the Biblical Lucifer, but rather is a humanist movement, a dogma very much centered on the individual. I found this much more to my liking, even though I knew it was wrong and that God alone had the answers.

*What is your attitude at the present time towards organized religion?

I'd say that I have never personally been in a church atmosphere that I felt was as godly as the

Christians therein would like to think. God's work is being done, at least in a few places, but taken as a whole, and organized religion as we know it today has strayed from the purity of God's vision of the church being the body and bride of Christ. This of course is my opinion.

*How much does your faith impact your daily life? In what ways?

Around age 16, my daily relationship with God impacted my life greatly, evidenced by my change in lifestyle and witnessed by those around me. Before this time I simply did the "Christian" thing as I was raised to. After this time, around age 17 or so, when I fell back into a life of sexual sin and selfishness, I no longer did the "Church" thing. I simply didn't care. My attitude worsened when I left for the Military and college, no longer attending Church or worshipping with believers, except on sporadic occasions. Today I desperately seek to have a relationship with God again, but feel powerless to change my ways.

*What are the highpoints in your faith/spiritual journey?

The high points would be my 16th year, in which I came very, very close with God, also every year I attended and now teach at a summer camp in which I see the hand of God at work.

*What are the low points in your faith/spiritual journey?

My 17th and 18th years were horrendous, I was often suicidal and totally separated from God. Since that time I have lived in a relatively godless malaise despite my attempts to reverse this life back to the arms of Christ.

*How important is prayer, worship services, or chapel/church programs to you?

I pray most everyday. I rarely attend churches anymore and no longer have a church body of which I can claim to be a part.

*How do you define spirituality? Diversity? Community?

I don't know how I'd define spirituality. Community has varying degrees. The community of neighbors. Community of coworkers and acquaintances. Community of family and friends and other believers, those with whom you fellowship, share, help, and worship. Those you know, and those you love. Diversity is a mixing of people, ideas. A hard word to define.

*If you are a Christian, please be specific about which denomination of which you are a member. If you are a religion other than Christian, please be specific about which branch of that faith tradition of which you are a member.

I was raised Southern Baptist. I claim no denomination; I simply call myself Christian and claim that as my faith.

-M. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #7

My journey towards Druidry officially begins at age 10, though the roots of it extend back into my childhood. Since I can remember I've always been interested in fantasy novels and movies, starting with the Narnia Chronicles in grade school. As I read more and more, my mind expanded to encompass these strange characters who worshipped multiple gods and enacted complex ceremonies to them. My family has never been religious, and though I went to church with some close friends very early, I always felt bored by the distant, impersonal sermonizing of the pastor and the superficial

faith of these “Sunday Christians”. In hindsight I realize that this was probably just this one small church in my hometown, but the effect stuck with me for some time. In the 5th grade one of my friends introduced me to his parents, both of whom were members of a Mesopagan Druidic Order with Masonic influences. After a couple of weeks discussing it with them I was inducted into their branch of the Order (called a Grove) and started my training. For the next four years I learned about herbalism, divination and magical theory.

After 4 years I was initiated to the rank of Ovate, which basically serves as a seer, though it also involves healing duties. I was responsible for interpreting omens during ritual, which included entering a trance while staring at a fire or looking for patterns in the movements of certain animals, mostly birds. I was also called upon for spiritual and physical healing, mostly consisting of first aid and herbal remedies. At this time I didn't have much in the way of access to reading materials, so I relied mostly on my friend's parents and what books they had. Unfortunately, this mostly consisted of Douglas Monroe, DJ Conway and Sirona Knight; authors who I later learned had no scholastic credibility. Still, these first tentative steps gave me a very solid grounding in the basic principles of magic and the occult while familiarizing me with certain Celtic principles. During these early, formative years, I also had the pleasure of reading several books on the Western Esoteric tradition by authors like Israel Regardie and Dion Fortune.

At age 18, just before I left for the Navy, I was initiated into the rank of Bard and given the task of learning by heart the myths and legends of the Celtic people, which I don't view as a chore at all. I didn't have long to study, though, before I went to boot camp and my life was changed. The primitive blindness of high schoolers is easy to defend against, especially when you've surrounded yourself with like-minded individuals who back each other up. Not only was I the only pagan in my boot camp division, I was the only non-Christian, and that caused me a lot of grief. The RDCs mostly didn't care what religion someone was or wasn't, as long as they did what they were told. Most of the taunts and torments fell to my fellow recruits. While I can't sight any specific abuses, I can say that I was appalled at what seemed like a general feeling of intolerance. I do recall being told that I was a “damned Satan-worshipper” on a couple of occasions, but nothing major.

After RTC I was stationed in sunny San Diego for Sonar Tech “A” School, and met with very little in the way of intolerance or abuse. I didn't socialize with many people outside of work, so religion never became a topic of discussion, though I did meet a fellow Pagan who would one day become my wife. Of all the people who've had an effect on my faith, she is the most influential. Our almost constant streams of intellectual discussion have forced me over and over again to refine my views logically, making what I do and believe more streamlined and in keeping with the rigorous demands of my brain. Most of my faith experiences were grounded in study during this phase as I attempted to learn the mythic history of the Celtic peoples as if it were my own. After I left San Diego, my wife and I went to Florida, my first ship. I met very little in the way of religious intolerance other than the common remarks that come from the narrow-minded. Rather, Florida was another quiet period of contemplation where my faith neither aided nor interfered with the other aspects of my life. It wasn't until I transferred from Florida to Virginia that drastic changes occurred in my life and faith, intertwining the two until one was inseparable from the other.

Though I'd always been a faithful and devoted member of my path, it had never really affected my life. My experiences in Virginia caused me to question some of the core principles of my faith, and redefined many of the things I took for granted in my life. The Pagan community of Hampton Roads, Virginia is the largest and closest-knit group I've ever had the pleasure of being involved with. While

there I was confronted with concepts the likes of which I had never before experienced. I was introduced to a sub sect of Paganism called Reconstructionalism, who, in keeping with their title, is attempting to reconstruct the pre-Christian religions of Europe through a combination of anthropological clues, archaeology, vernacular texts and logical analysis. I quickly established a group of peers, many of whom were reconstructionalists, and engaged in a sort of latter-day Dialectic College. Guided by such great scholars and authors like Isaac Bonewits, Ross Nichols, Philip Carr-Gomm and John and Caitlin Matthews, I discovered that many of the ritual precepts held by the Mesopagan authors I had read until then were misguided and based on inferior scholarship, no matter how well grounded their understanding of Celtic mythology and magical theory. Aided by my small but very close group of peers, each of my views was dissected, analyzed, refined and reincorporated to give me a much more complete understanding of what it means to be a Druid in the modern world.

Of course, Virginia wasn't just studying subjects I find fascinating anyway and discussion with like-minded friends, it was also the place where I encountered the most prolific religious intolerance and bigotry that I have ever been faced with. While the taunts of my coworkers had always been scathing, it wasn't until my second cruise that these simple comments became determined attempts to goad me. On many occasions I was humiliated and publicly ridiculed, but on one very memorable instance it grew far more insidious. I view journeys over the ocean as a very mystical process. The mythology of most pre-Christian European cultures contains some sort of mystical travel over the sea. As such, I kept a journal of my thoughts and spiritual inspirations throughout the voyage, and normally I kept my journal in the drawers of my desk. In the middle of the cruise one day my journals disappeared, and they were replaced with a note from my division explaining that they had taken the journals and were going to throw them over the side. The note was replete with statements like, "This division won't tolerate these satanic writings" and "We think you're going to hell." While it was couched in terms of saving my soul, it really seemed as if they were simply trying to hurt me. Mustering my strength, I reported these goings-on to the Master-at-Arms and other legal authorities on board. Though I got the items back and all charges were dropped, every day on board since that time was a harrowing experience. I was regarded as a crybaby who couldn't take their "little joke". In Virginia, my religion became the focal point for much of my life and affecting every aspect of it. I began performing devotionals and morning meditations with more zeal and devotion while taking a much more active role in the local Neopagan community. I participated in local pagan events and holidays, sometimes giving workshops or competing in Bardic Circles. It was through these trials and joys that my faith went from something that I studied to something that I lived. Full moon festivals, weekly meeting and large, cross-quarter ceremonies came to the foreground of my schedule, and I even took an active part in teaching young pagans what it means to be a member of this varied and diverse faith.

Now that I'm here in Cornwall, my active role in Neopaganism has only continued to grow. Not only am I in an area rich with the history of my religion, I also find myself in an epicenter of religious tolerance. I have been faced with little to no prejudice from either my peers or superiors, and the aid of the Chaplain's office in helping me achieve a position of leadership in my faith has been integral. While my previous experience with Navy Chaplains has never been bad or negative, I've never experienced such unilateral support and aid in my faith journey. With this additional aid I feel that I can take many more steps on my faith journey, and help foster the diversity and understanding I've desired at other commands.

-E. H.

FAITH REFLECTION #8

I was born and raised Roman Catholic and attended Catholic schools throughout – first grade through nursing school. I attended church each Sunday with my family. My father openly spoke of his faith. My mother did not, but her deep faith was obvious. She prayed every morning before she started the day, reminded me gently about God's expectations, and missed Mass only towards the end of her battle with cancer. Throughout her illness and suffering, her strong faith never wavered. I believe she had the most influence on my own faith. Both of my parents had died by the time I reached the age of 26. I attended Mass on occasion, but not regularly. I had a time and place for God and it never occurred to me to involve Him in my life or seek his guidance more than occasionally.

Into my thirties, I became intrigued by the New Age movement and attended some classes in the subject at a local community college. One night the leader had everyone comment on his or her reason for being there. One after another stated they had left their church in search of something more. I couldn't believe that people actually left their religion for this New Age brand of theology. I had found some of the ideas interesting, but I realized that I needed Jesus Christ to be the center of my life. I began to read the Bible in earnest. I have come to realize firsthand the power of the scripture speaking of the Good Shepherd retrieving the lost sheep, and that those the Father has entrusted to Jesus, He will not lose one. That is my assurance now.

I married into a deeply religious family – born again Christians. Although I do not see some things the same as they do, I can appreciate their beliefs and dedication to serving God. My own brother-in-law has given me insight into some things I hadn't thought about. I almost left the Catholic Church at one point soon after my marriage, while my husband was attending RCIA to become Catholic. I could not receive Communion while waiting for my husband's annulment from his first marriage. In the confessional, I spoke to the priest about how hard this was for me. I did not expect any exception to be made for me, just wanted some encouragement, I guess. I'm not sure I should type what he said to me – it was in the confessional – but I can tell you I came out of there upset, feeling like my own Church had slammed the door in my face. I could commit murder, go to confession, then step into the church & receive Holy Communion, but living with my husband was committing sin that could not be atoned for until the annulment was complete. I missed a lot of Mass in those days, as well as some of the RCIA meetings. I contemplated going to the Fundamentalist Christian church my in-laws attended. I guess you can take the girl out of the Catholic Church, but you can't take the Catholic Church out of the girl. Their communion ritual left me wanting. The Eucharist is a big deal for a Catholic. I could not go with the casual treatment it got at the other church.

I consider myself to be a decent Catholic these days. I know it is the right religion for me. Before Mass on Sunday, my husband and I enjoy watching Charles Stanley on TV. I have gotten a lot of insight and have been blessed by his preaching nearly every time he speaks. I don't agree with his ideas on confession. I can't blame him, though. Most Protestants do not understand it. I want to tell him that at no time were we taught that the priest was forgiving our sins – only God does that. But we do not believe that our sins are just between God and us. My sin affects others sort of like dropping a pebble into still water and watching the ripples flow out from the point of impact. Because of this I must make a public admission of my sin. I don't have to yell it on the street corner, but I can tell it to my priest in private where he advises and encourages me. I believe all Christian religions would benefit from the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I enjoy Mass and find peace there. I do not buy into every single bit of doctrine that the RC church puts forth. I truly believe that our relationship to God is the most important thing, transcending religion. We need religion through which to express our faith. It is God's Will that we assemble and worship together. I find it necessary to go beyond my 'religion' to seek and learn as much about God as He will allow. I am grateful to God for His salvation. I know I can do nothing on my own. I pray that I pass on a strong faith to my son, so that he will seek God's Will in all things and desire to serve Him.

Our Lord Jesus wants His people to be one. Didn't He pray for that in the Garden at Gethsemane? I hope this essay will be useful. I am learning all the time and still have a really long way to go. If I didn't explain myself too clearly, please let me know and I will try again.

-E. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #9

I am a minister. I did not come by this conviction easily. On the contrary it was not until recently that I began to understand on a deeper level one of the most important parts of what it means for me to call myself a minister. A great deal of that understanding has to do with what is known in many circles as my "journey of faith". Just about everything I have to say about my identity as a minister has to do with my faith. I believe. I did not come by this conviction easily, either. Indeed, it was not until I was well into my ministry that I could even be comfortable thinking of myself as a believer. I thought that strange for the most part – more than strange, even perverse, and hypocritical. What follows is a broad outline of my faith journey.

I am a Lutheran. I grew up in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, a denomination not known for its tolerance of conflicting viewpoints or its warm embrace of change. Our view of faith was a rather stolid, sturdy one. Faith, the work of the Holy Spirit accomplished through the Means of Grace administered by the Church, enabled one to know God as holy, to know oneself as a sinner, and to know that he/she was forgiven and saved through the vicariously atoning work of Christ. Some of my early influences in faith were, of course, my Pastor, my father, and a man who was the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's answer to Billy Graham, the Reverend Doctor Oswald C. J. Hoffmann. I was nurtured in the faith by my Sunday school teachers, a series of matronly, grey haired women by means of Bible stories and "Jesus songs". My father, who was an adult convert into the faith and had ever since wished he could have been a pastor, decided that his son would be a pastor instead. So ever since fourth grade, I can remember knowing that part of my identity was never in question. As a child I remember both the pastor who baptized me and the pastor who confirmed me—both figures capable of striking the fear of God into the heart of any young boy. Doctor Hoffmann, however, was incredible. He was the permanent speaker of "The Lutheran Hour", our Church's worldwide radio evangelism ministry. He would not only preach every Sunday on radio but would travel literally around the world holding "Lutheran Hour" Rallies, the centerpiece of which would be Doctor Hoffmann's powerful and captivating Gospel-centered preaching. As a child, the Church, the Gospel, God in heaven, and my calling as a Pastor were of central importance in my life.

Predictably, however, the time came to forego childish things. I began to think and to question. My searching spirit came to see my early images of God as being far too human and insufficient. I began a time that I can only describe as "shipwreck". I set sail on a journey away from my childish faith

and what I thought of as the safe and comfortable ideas of my parents. It was a journey of which I could not imagine the ending. Somewhere in my late teens, I experienced shipwreck. The “Death of God” theology knocked down what remained of my naïve faith and I came to see myself as an agnostic, maybe even an atheist. I was caught in a double bind. I couldn’t say I believed in the same way that I did as a child. Nor could I abandon the pretense of believing out of concern for what my parents and all my friends would think. I went through both my undergraduate program and my Seminary program shipwrecked in this way, clinging for dear life to a spar as the waves of doubt washed over me.

At some point I washed up onto a strange, foreign shore, amazed and grateful that I was still “alive” but not quite sure where I was. I had gotten through Seminary and through the first year of my first call, resigned from the ministry, and knocked around doing one unskilled job after another. I had gotten married, had a child, and was struggling to contribute to their support. The Lutheran clergyman who had charge of the pastoral circuit where we lived called one day and asked if I was available to do some preaching at a congregation that had just lost its pastor. I still saw myself as an unbeliever but I figured I could use the money and it was something people had always told me I was good at. From there I came to the provisional conclusion that being a parish pastor wasn’t so bad and I put in for a full time call. When I took up my duties as the Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Seguin, Texas, God used those people to love me back into a relationship with himself. I wasn’t exactly a hopeful participant in all this but over the years, little by little, I came to abandon the idea of myself as an atheist and to see myself more as a hopeful agnostic.

I am a Chaplain. One day an Air Force Reserve Chaplain called our home looking for someone he could recruit to fill a vacant Chaplain billet at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas. And so began a new direction both of ministry and of faith. Beginning as an Air Force Reservist long on willingness and short on information regarding Chaplain ministry, I wound up as an Active Duty Navy Chaplain with over twenty-four total years of time in service. The best way to describe this part of the journey is to say I have become much more pluralistic than before.

When I began my Air Force duties, I was not very open to persons of other faiths. I assumed I was being invited to become a Lutheran in uniform. Maybe that was true to some extent, but, due to the nature of the ministry, it couldn’t remain that way for long. At first my operating definition of pluralism was to be tolerant of other Christian denominations as much as possible (all the while hanging on to the conviction that my denomination was the “true faith”). Slowly, tolerance turned to respect, then to true acceptance. My next stage was to broaden the parameters a bit more and come to tolerate, respect, and then accept persons of all faith, Christian or non Christian. This has not been a logical process of acceptance through coming to understand their doctrinal positions and their practices. It has been something that happened in my own spirit without my full awareness or complicity. I think it comes, as much as anything, from a humble realization that if God can love me, as deaf, dumb, and blind as I am, he can and will and does love all his children just as they are.

Looking back on it now, it appears to me that in the beginning my faith had almost everything to do with the Church. I accepted the God whom I understood through the rigidly defined doctrines of the Church. I accepted this unquestioningly as it was handed down to me by those who were in authority over me. During my shipwreck years, I became hardened to the Church and I became bitter and critical of those who professed to believe. When I found myself washed up on the shore once again I found it was indeed possible to believe if belief meant love. I came back to the vocation of ministry reluctantly and falsely. I was loved back to faith by a congregation that never knew their greatest

mission work was to bring their pastor back to spiritual life. I found that the closer I got to God the farther I felt I was moving from the Church. I came to see the Church as a “necessary evil,” especially when it directs the loyalty of its members toward itself instead of toward God. In the Chaplaincy I finally found what I’d been looking for all along—a pluralistic vocation, a call to serve God by living in love and service to all, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

I am now a bit more sanguine in my appraisal of the Church. I can’t bring myself to be too critical of anybody for his or her beliefs. We all see things the way we’ve been taught to see them. We are loyal to our dearly won and held points of view. But all of this is of human origin. For me most of the questions that provide the focal point of the Church’s doctrine and practice are questions relative to which religion is true. They amount basically to, “What true things must I believe and practice in order to be ‘saved’?” At this stage in my faith journey, the most important questions for me have to do not with what I must do but with what God has done. The most important question is, “Whom does God love?” When I am humble and able to listen very carefully, I believe what I hear God saying is, “I love you, and you, and you, and, yes, also you.” My ministry is much more joyful now that I am focused on interpreting that blessed fact into thoughts, words, and deeds that have an impact on the faith of others.

-G. K.

FAITH REFLECTION #10

About your faith:

* Which person or persons have had the most influence on your faith journey? I’ve relied mostly on authors of different book to help me with my religious journey. The Power of the Witch and The Witch in Every Woman by Laurie Cabot changed me life. Raymond Buckland, Scott Cunningham and Silver Ravenwolf have also had a bug impact on my life. I actually got to meet Silver Ravenwolf a couple years ago. Her energy alone was life changing.

*At what age did you make a decision regarding faith/religion in your life? I was about 17 when I converted to Wicca.

*Have you ever changed/converted to another faith or religion? I was born and raised Catholic as my Mother and Father were. When I was about 17 I had too many questions that couldn’t be answered by the Catholic faith or Christianity so I started looking for something that could answer my questions.

*What is your attitude at the present time towards organized religion? I believe that as long as you’re not hurting anyone, including yourself, you can do what you want to do. Keeping in mind, however, that judgments, words and actions can all hurt.

*How much does your faith impact your daily life? In what ways? My life is impacted everyday because it’s all around me. My faith includes everything that you can see as well as things you can’t. The big 4: earth, air, fire and water. Nature, energy and beings that most children believe in, but adults feel cast off as make believe (faeries, gnomes etc.)

*What are the highpoints in your faith/spiritual journey? The highpoints have been that I can worship at anytime. I can go out at anytime and sit on the grass or in a tree and marvel at the wonders of nature. As long as I keep within the Wiccan Reed: *“Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill: If it Harms none, do what Thou Will!”*

*What are the low points in your faith/spiritual journey? The low points. #1. Most people hear the word witch or Wicca and immediately think of Satan. Wiccans do not believe in Satan. In the Wiccan faith there is no such being. There is no being that is either entirely good or entirely evil. It is this way because life and nature are this way. You cannot have light without dark nor good without evil. There is a balance to everything!

#2. Most people also think that my morals are lower than most peoples. I was asked once, by someone who I thought was my friend, to have an affair with him. His wife had two kids back home and they were constantly fighting because he was in Norfolk and she wasn't. He said that he needed a female's touch and love. I asked him "Why me"? He said that he thought "I was Wiccan so my morals are lower". He said because I don't "answer to God" I wouldn't have a problem with it. This is completely wrong. Just because I don't answer to the Christian God doesn't mean I can do anything I want. Everything has a consequence and everything you do will come back to you. Be it good or bad, it will come back to you times 3.

*How important is prayer, worship services, or chapel/church programs to you? Wiccans do pray! It is important to me because it gives me someone to get answer from. They don't always come right away or in "regular form" (if there is such a thing). However, the answer will come in some form you just have to be aware of the signs.

*How do you define spirituality? Diversity? Community? Spirituality - What ever gets you through the day. With some people it's whole-heartedly believing in the Christian God. For some it's believing there is nothing but what you can see (no God just physical).

Diversity - Being open-minded to other people's thoughts and ideas. Not saying that you have to agree with other peoples opinions but keep and open-mind.

About Navy chaplains:

*How important is a chaplain's faith group to you? I think it's nice to know that there are people in the Navy that are there to talk to when you need them.

*Has a chaplain's faith group/tradition ever been a factor in what ministries/services were offered or denied to you? I remember in Boot Camp they had a mediation room but it was on Sunday during our letter writing time. I did go to the Catholic service on Easter (it was the only one offered because we were in service week). It was very moving to know that even though you're being worked very hard and it seemed that the entire world was against you, you still had someone there that cared.

*How have Navy chaplains helped or hindered your faith journey? I don't think I've received help for my journey from a Chaplain. I've gotten help in the spiritual sense (boot camp example) but not in my journey. I've never been hindered either. I usually try to keep my faith quiet. Although, I won't deny it if someone asks me.

*When have Navy chaplains been most useful for you? Boot camp. Also, a year or so ago there was a YN3 that worked at my parent command that was found in her apartment 3 days after she died. The

service for her wouldn't have been the same without the Chaplain especially with so many unanswered questions.

*Has a chaplain ever visited you or a family member in your workspace or in the hospital? No. Fortunately, I've never needed one to.

*Outside of religious services, has a chaplain ever been helpful to you? How? Boot Camp, again. During Service Week, the Chief in charge of my division had a heart attack and had to spend a week in the hospital. It was very helpful to have the Chaplain there to reflect and help us through. Also, there was a girl while we were in service week that had been raped by a second class. Again, it was nice to have someone there. (Wow, I just realized service week really sucked!!!)

*What specific needs do you have that you'd like a Navy chaplain to know about? There isn't any kind of needs that I can think of. My journey has been solitary and will continue to be. If I wanted I could find a coven but I'd rather stay solitary. I do consider myself Wiccan and on my way to learn how to be a witch. I can't just wake up one day and say, "Hey, I'm a witch!" There is a non-specific process and most coven witches don't agree that you can be a solitary witch. I don't agree with them.

*What should a Navy chaplain do or say at command functions? I can't tell you what they should or shouldn't say. Whenever there is a moment of silence or a prayer I usually kind of tune the speaker out and say my own little prayer in my own little way.

-C. T.

FAITH REFLECTION #11

I am responding to your appeal to send a brief account of my religious/spiritual journey, my "personal faith experience". Since it is a subject near and dear to my heart, I would love to answer. Thank you for this second posting, as my attempt to explore the first was frustrating and I abandoned it.

First, I am a civilian working for the military for the second time. This is a much more intensive life change than my last position, having moved my dog, all my worldly possessions and myself overseas. I have needed my faith very often as I have adjusted to this new life and all of its complications. I am very glad I have my spiritual base strong and intact within me to guide me back to a place of loving kindness, and to see me back to clarity of purpose and my core values. My spiritual values were most influenced by my grandparents. They were of no particular denomination, but they were very open-minded and deeply spiritual people. Even though my grandfather was a career Navy Rear Admiral, he was a gentle and quiet man, and had a great deal of influence over my formation of right and wrong. Though he has long since passed, I call to him regularly for cosmic guidance and reminders of what is really important in life.

My parents divorced when I was eleven years old, and it was primarily their religious differences that were the final blow to their marriage. My mother adopted the Baha'i faith, and recruited my sister into the Baha'i fold. Being younger, I was in attendance at Baha'i functions and studies, but too young to adopt the faith. When it came time for my own decision, I shied away from any declaration.

I was all too aware of the hurt and anger that it would cause if I too adopted a religion that had been the source of such controversy and pain for my family. My grandparents tolerated the Baha'i faith, but did not embrace it. I think they were glad that my mother found a faith that seemed to fill her with loving intent, and saw that it was very good for her.

My sister has since converted her Catholic husband, but remains tolerant of my decision not to become a Baha'i in spite repeated attempts to recruit me over the years. We are now content to be who we are, even though things such as differences of opinion over burial rites can be a bit tricky.

This background revealed, and my civilian status added to that, I have never taken advantage of the chapel's resources on either this or my previous base of employment. Civilians are outside the mainstream chain of command, as well as the information stream. Here in St. Eval (I work at the CDC right next to the chapel) I am particularly outside the loop. Most of the base's email messages are loaded with acronyms that make no sense to me, and are not in any way related to my work or personal life. I rarely make it to the base except to get my mail (once a week or so), and feel quite isolated from the workings of the military personnel except for their need for quality childcare.

I admit, that I am isolated in part because I am inclined to do things on my own. But, I have found that the folks at St. Mawgan have not been a particularly welcoming group. I have looked elsewhere for companionship and conversation. The multicultural dinner that was held the other night was the first "offering" that I might have attended, but Thursday is my Tai Chi night, which I need to attend to continue my search for spiritual guidance.

From the outside looking in, which I definitely do, I am as aloof to the Chaplain's function, prayer groups, services and Bible discussion groups as I am in general. However, I am very interested in everything of a spiritual nature as long as the Bible or the Koran or any other text is not cited as the answer to all of life's questions. I would welcome discussions about the struggles to find basic human kindness within our everyday lives, and ways to be true to my values. I appreciate that for many, these answers are in the text of the bible. Since the Bible is not a source of answers for me, religious services of all kinds are not a place for me to find spiritual inspiration.

I would love to find a place to discuss not religion, but all matters spiritual. Here we are in Cornwall, England, the place of the origins of paganism and the Anglican Church, as well as continued deep divides with Protestant and Catholic religions. I tire of religious battles, and long for spiritual discoveries. I can only marvel that you are faced with the deep differences of opinion from divided religious faiths on a daily basis, and must look for common ground. The Bible must at least be a common denominator for those in your varied congregation, even though the interpretation is much argued. As for St. Eval, I hope you are a breath a fresh air. This community could use someone to bring it together. I see the people in the three separate buildings out here to be little acquainted with each other, and we work side by side every day. The CDC is a vibrant and alive place full of families and children and the wonder of life, it's problems and triumphs. It is a community waiting for recognition and substance. Perhaps I am too new myself (7 months) to know the history and attempts to bring this community together.

Last December, the CDC building's pump house flooded all the electrical panels. We had to move all the children and operations for almost two months. The infants and younger toddlers went to the chapel/FSC, and the older toddlers and preschool children went to the Youth Center. It was the first time we became a community that got to know and help one another in a crises. The circumstances were very stressful, but the outcome was that of sharing community. There were elements of a silver

lining. Now we are back to our old ways and separate programs. I look forward to meeting you, and thank you for asking these probing questions. It has been a good thing to reflect and air my views and religious history. Thanks for listening.

-C. A.

FAITH REFLECTION #12

I read your web page and I believe that these papers may answer some of the questions that you posed. I included two papers that I used for an English Literature class. The first one is a reaction to Paul Zimmer's poem "The day Zimmer lost religion".

Reaction to "*The Day Zimmer Lost Religion*:" Guilt plays a major role in religion, especially Catholic religion. When Paul Zimmer served as an altar boy this guilt, combined with the spiritual mysticism, seems to have had a profound effect on him. Like many of his contemporaries, he doesn't view God as a loving God, but as a revengeful, angry, autocratic God. This becomes clear in the first verse when he pictures Christ climbing down the cross and clubbing him on his irreverent teeth.

Questioning your own religious beliefs seems to be a coming of age issue for many young Catholics. What was once considered as a personal struggle has almost become a right of passage in many intellectual liberal circles. Because of this it has lost some of its poignancy and contemporary literary value. However, the image of the one-eyed triangle, the obscure bell and the terrible, terrible brings back vivid memories of endless Sunday mornings spent in a cold, damp church. It seemed like a returning mystical magic trick wrapped in incense, which felt very familiar and peaceful to a young boy.

I can associate with the fear and guilt the author experienced when he missed that first Sunday of mass. However, I envy the confidence that he portrays in his last sentence, when he says, "I was grown-up and ready for Him now." I am not sure that I will ever reach that stage. I guess you can take the boy out of the church, but you can never quiet get the church out of the boy.

God, Santa Claus, and the Easter Bunny: I can still hear the shuffling of the wooden chairs on the old black and white marble floor, and the suppressed coughing of old people as they stood up to listen to the priests sermon. It all felt very comforting and familiar even to an eight-year-old boy. God existed, his name was Jesus and as long as I did my Hail Mary's, sang the songs and hung out with all these other people on Wednesdays and Sundays everything would be just fine. Life was simple and very organized, just like an eight year old likes it.

That same year, however, things started to unravel. I was sitting in the backseat of the car, with my thighs stuck to the hot vinyl seats, unencumbered by any child restraint or safety belt. And for the last thirty minutes I had been asking my dad, "Does Santa Claus exist? Does Santa Claus exist? How can he go to all these houses in one day? What does he eat? DAD, DAD!" And I probably kept getting the same standard answers I had gotten for the last couple of weeks. But something told me I should keep pushing today. I saw my mom growing more impatient with me by the minute. I kept firing off my questions. My mom finally had enough, she turned around looked at me and said, "There is no Santa Claus." She probably expected me to start crying, but instead I asked, "How about the Easter Bunny?" She looked at me again and with a deep sigh she said, "No, no Easter Bunny either." "No Easter Bunny, but mommy" and then it felt like someone turned on a light in my head and I yelled, "So there

is no God either?" No response from the front seat, instead my dad brought the car to a full stop, turned around and slapped me so hard across the face I could feel the sting of his hand on my cheek for the next few days. While I didn't get an answer from him that day, it really seemed to piss him off when I asked him.

II

For the longest time I believed, the good catholic boy that I was, that religious people were some of the most tolerable people. Talking about Gods' love, how good Jesus was and how he gave his life for us and so on. I also believed that non-religious people had evil intend and just couldn't see the light.

Now when I am in my 30's I have found that it is exactly the opposite. Some of the close-minded bigoted people are among the most religious people that I know and the atheists turn out to be the good guys. Open minded, tolerable and usually a whole lot funnier than most religious people. According to my catholic belief structure this should put me right into hell, so be it. I certainly don't want to spend eternity with a bunch of close-minded, bigoted bores and neither does Jesus I believe.

So maybe it is one big bait and switch operation, with the atheists going to heaven and these close-minded bigots going to hell, ha. And when my two boys will ask me, "What religion are we daddy?" I will tell them just like Roseanne did on her show, "We are just good people, but we are non-practicing."

-P. D.

FAITH REFLECTION #13

My faith journey began as an infant. I was baptized in a Lutheran (Missouri Synod) church in upstate New York. My grandfather helped to begin the first Lutheran church in Owego, N.Y. We attended church regularly as a family. My maternal grandmother was a member of the Methodist church, so my mother attended the Methodist church as a child. Since my paternal grandfather was strong in the Lutheran faith and resided with us, all of the family attended the Lutheran church. After the death of my grandfather we moved from the dairy farm to a much smaller farm. We still attended a Lutheran church regularly, but we were not as actively involved.

At the age of eleven, my brother and I began attending confirmation classes. Martin Luther's catechism was thoroughly studied; a very learned man was he. Being confirmed is a momentous event in the Lutheran faith. After becoming confirmed an individual can partake in the Sacrament of Communion. After two long years of study we could participate and truly understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper. While attending high school my faith journey took a turn that I often look back on with some regret. I met a man who was later to become my husband. He was a member of the Roman Catholic Church; his mother and maternal grandparents were devout Roman Catholics. He was not as strong in his faith, but when he asked me to marry him the religious issue did come up. I opted to become a member of the Catholic Church, not really because I believed, but because I knew that his family wanted it. I later realized what a mistake I had made. Not only was I not being honest with myself, but also I broke my parents' hearts. I did not attend church regularly after getting married. After my daughter was born, I knew she would have to be baptized Catholic. She was baptized as an infant. We still did not attend church regularly unless we went to visit my husband's parents in New York. Of course we went then because it was expected of us. My faith journey

continued for several years like this until my husband and I divorced. Since my husband was not a practicing Catholic the Catholic beliefs regarding divorce did not affect him.

I felt as though something was truly missing in my spiritual life. My life was at an all time low, so I really needed help. I turned to alcohol and drugs, but the answer was not there. I had a responsibility to raise a daughter, who was the light of my life. My daughter and I began attending the Lutheran church again regularly. When she began middle school, I knew it was time for her to begin confirmation classes. She successfully completed her instruction and was confirmed into the Lutheran church. After ending a relationship with a man whom I had loved and trusted, my life hit another low. I realized that I needed the Lord more than ever. I did not turn to alcohol, drugs, etc., but I kneeled and asked the Lord to please help me and to take over my life- to please help me to forgive the individual who had hurt my daughter and myself so bad. This is when I started attending Tabernacle Methodist church. I found closeness to the Lord like never before. The minister there at that time was a lady, which was a unique experience in my life. I still continued attending the Lutheran church, but at this time I lived only a short distance from Tabernacle church. After moving back to Jacksonville, after living in the Belgrade- Maysville area for a number of years, I started attending the Lutheran church again. My daughter was attending Campbell University at this time, which is a Baptist university. She remained at Campbell for undergrad and grad school; receiving an outstanding education not only professionally, but ethical and above all moral...I did marry again to an awesome Christian gentleman who attended the Methodist church regularly.. We did marry in the Lutheran church and asked the Methodist minister to be a part of the ceremony.

I feel that God should be first in our life. Prayer is so important; its' power is beyond all understanding. Study of the Bible whether it is private or in a group should be never-ending. We owe our lives to the Lord. Throughout my faith journey, I have been blessed with awesome pastors, ministers and chaplains. The Lutheran church I attend is very fortunate to have Navy chaplains conducting services. For several months , before a new pastor accepted the call, the chaplains accepted the responsibility of meeting the needs of the members. During this time our country has been at war with some families parted from their loved ones. The chaplains provided and met the needs of all. I believe a Navy chaplain has a more difficult role simply because he must deal with many different ministries and faith groups. I have been truly blessed to have contact with Navy chaplains and all have been most helpful in contributing to my faith journey; truly helping in my understanding of God and His Word. Thank you for letting me share my faith journey with you.

-C. C.

FAITH REFLECTION #14

Charles, thanks for the opportunity to do this job for you. It was a bit daunting, but I think I will print it for posterity now that I went to the trouble to get it all down! If you need clarity in any part, I will be more than happy to help again. I will send to my friends for request their aid. Shall I send them your e-mail or have them go through me? Thanks!

(The address, phone number & email for the author have been deleted))

The above locates me, but falls impossibly short of describing me. I was raised in a home that formally placed God above all other endeavors, as did their families before them. As I have grown in

understanding, I have seen ways that the dysfunction of sinful man affected every part of that process and yet also how God protected each of us and our journeys.

My life began in Angola, Indiana where we lived for two years. The following five years I lived in New Jersey, just below the state line. I attended a Christian school where my mother taught and my father commuted 1 1/2 hours to New York City to work in a printing company. He did as many spare jobs as he could manage to make financial ends meet.

Our upbringing was conservative and I remember once being spanked for finding the play slacks in the file cabinet and putting them on myself and my sister. Make-up, jewelry, and earrings were forbidden, but hair length was optional.

In 1967 we moved back to Indiana. My father had been called to teach at Marion College (Now Indiana Wesleyan University) where he and my mother attended college. He decided it was God's will and took a major drop in salary. My parents still live in the house they had built in 1968, though the college - then two blocks from their house - has now grown to nearly surround their property. We attended the College Church regularly - Sunday School, Morning Service, Afternoon children's choir practice (didn't like) and Evening Service; Thursday mid-week service for children and adults, Friday morning breakfasts, Friday night youth meetings and occasional Saturday events -- needless to say, I was involved and on the Core Group team for the youth.

The Wesleyan Church (Denomination) would say that once one accepted Christ as their personal savior, they were welcomed into the kingdom of God, forever - but the message that came through to me growing up was one of judgment. I felt I needed to "walk the line" in that we must walk in the light as He is in the light for our salvation to be secure. I lived in fear that I might do something God saw as sin and not be able to ask forgiveness before Christ returned - then being condemned forever to Hell because of one wrong, even though I had lived my whole life for him. It was a life of suffering and emotional pain. I loved God more than I could verbalize and wanted to serve him with my all, but had no idea how much he loved me or that he would never let me go. I saw the church (many of whom were of had been college professors) judge and rate the pastors who came and went, as well as others in the congregation and outside in the world. The church as a whole didn't understand God's love for them, thus I was not taught that unconditional love.

My teen years were my "haunted years" with voices that I now know were from Satan and his demons attempting to make me believe the lies they told me so convincingly that I thought they were true. I was convinced I was a loner, that I didn't need people, that I was introverted, etc - I have since discovered the opposite of all the above is true - I live for others, I just need my quiet time to refresh. I was a competitive person and thoughts of that nature swam in my head all the time - that if I didn't walk past the parked car before the one approaching me from behind overtook me, that I would lose my salvation . . . that if I breathed before I confessed my sin of the moment that I would be giving myself over to Satan . . . that if I didn't FEEL forgiven, then I was not forgiven and needed to pray it all over again because I didn't say it right -- I often stayed up until 2:00 - 4:00 a.m. asking/pleading for forgiveness until I fell to sleep, then waking the next day with an extra load of guilt for falling asleep. I spent the days following a night like this exhausted for lack of sleep - often praying in arms over my face with my head down on my desk "to look like I was sleeping" in an effort to "say it righter." :) I was sometimes late to class and tormented every step of the way. Yes, the "haunted years."

No one much asked about those times, my parents never knew - they were too busy serving God to notice, and my sisters just thought I was super-spiritual to be praying all the time. It was my best-kept secret. I lived my life within the constraints of my concepts of right and wrong, and when God taught me more, I accepted it and aligned my life with Him more closely. It was only hearing the hymn, "I'd Rather Have Jesus Than Anything" - I'll not include all the words, but will look them up if you need them - that I drew a line against God. In my infinite understanding, I thought to give Him everything meant that he would take away those things that I most dearly loved - my talents in art and creativity - not realizing that he was only asking me to submit them to Him SO THAT He could use them for His kingdom. It took several years of God drawing a gentle and consistent line in the sand for me, that I "gave in" and gave Him my all.

My parents were the controlling sorts, but each did well to get along with each other in front of us. My father was forthright with his control, my mother more deceptive. My sisters both married and divorced in 3 years and 14 years. One remarried and continues in marriage. My marriage is the only one that has lasted and is (what I consider) healthy. My sisters (5 years older than myself and 2 years younger) both show codependent behaviors. I believe God protected me from some of the results of my upbringing, and yet I am still learning to accept myself and reliable and as an adult, capable of making good decisions completely on my own.

I jumped the "family cycle" three times in my past with my parents. My mother listened and either took it to heart, felt guilty, or believe what I said but would not stand against my father in disagreement - I don't believe she has all the healthy tools I'd like her to have. My father forthrightly returned in argument to defend his position though I didn't attack him personally. Part of the reason the elder sister's marriage didn't work was that he husband was Jewish (non practicing) and my father's love for him came across as proselytizing (spelling) rather than unconditional love. He rejected the pressure and it divided the family. Love showed forth in judgment to do better, be better, and act well . . .

In my early thirties, I began my real journey to healthy living and understanding. Gordon and I had been married for 4 years and had our first two children. The books that started this journey were Classic Christianity by Bob George (Calvinist), tapes from the Menrith Meyer Clinic given me by a friend, Parenting with Love and Logic by Jim Faye and Foster Cline and Boundaries by Cloud and Townsend. I am now reading Bondage Breaker by Neil Anderson. The other meaningful book was Wild at Heart by John Eldridge - realizing that I was named by my father and it was not a name that would have inspired self-esteem. My continual struggle was for acceptance. I have heard God's voice in my heart four times in my life - each being a redirect ional word to my life. The first two regarding the man I would marry, the next two regarding the mission that my second son will someday have in Christ. (I will detail these if you desire).

At this time, I consider myself to be on a healthy road, dealing with the patterns that were given to me in my family of origin and working to change them to more healthy ways of life. I am working my way into the LifeBalance family as a LifeBalance coach, talking to people about their LifeCreeds and helping them to become all God intended them to be. I am a wife of a Navy Chaplain and mother of four children . . . but mostly I am L., God's treasured child . . . living eternity one day at a time in the joy and blessing God intended long ago. I live to be able to share Christ with any to whom He is calling. I work with CREDO as a team member on various retreats as well as stay involved in a church setting to minister to those I meet. I prefer the military atmosphere to that of the church parish right now, but will serve wherever Christ calls. While in England, the solidity of my value for being

real in life and taking time for living was secured. Life is truly too short to miss the real thing (subtitle for Classic Christianity).

My favorite life quote is from Hereclitus: "You cannot step into the same river twice, an opportunity missed is forever lost." I live never wanting to say, "I wish I had...." I've sometimes said, "I wish I hadn't." :) but I never want to miss all God has for me while here on Earth such a short time.

-L. R.

FAITH REFLECTION #15

I don't know if just one person had the most influence on my faith journey other than God and his designated representatives. Yes, My parents and grandparents had introduced me to God and Religion and there are a handful of people that I can mention by name that assisted me in my growth and development, but never the less it was God, his Angels, Saints and the Virgin Mary that had the greatest influence and here is why.

I was a career soldier I have had some tough but great assignments. I was active duty from 1972 to 1995. Although I was somewhat religious, my faith journey began in 1986 when I literally died in a military training accident. I was dead there is no doubt about it; I am alive and here today by the grace of God because he told me so. Other incidents, like falling 120 feet while tied to a rope and a very vicious car accident have all re-enforced my faith and belief. Strangely, it was in 2002 and my subsequent deployment to CENTCOM as an Army Central Command Contractor that I finally decided that I was no longer going to wax and wane like the tides and I would commit myself entirely to God. I guess I was 48 years old when I decided that I had truly been blessed and it was time to stop straddling the fence.

I have changed religion twice. I was raised Catholic by my Parents. When I went to live with my Grandparents at the age of 12 I converted to Lutheran. When I married my Australian wife, I converted again to Presbyterian. I currently attend the Catholic field mass because I feel that it is closer doctrinally to the Presbyterian Church. I am somewhat dismayed with the Military Chapel and religious system. Everything seems to be Venial and Born Again Christian. That was why I also decided to attend Catholic Mass. I attended several different services before I decided to stay with the Catholic. I have also stopped going to Bible Study because I disagree with the way the message is delivered. I am now studying on my own.

I am not convinced that organized Religion is doing its job. It is too much like business and it is ignoring the simple things. (I have 7 years of Experience as a Director of Supply Chain for a Fortune 50) I have never seen so many committees' in my entire life. I was heavily involved in our Church before deployment and I quit to focus exclusively on Bible Study. I am tired of committee's and how we decide or not to decide to support something because of the Internal Politics and or the Politics and influence within the city. Too me it smacks of the Pharisee's

Faith impacts my life daily. God has done so much for me in the last two years I would need pages to detail all the blessings and answered prayers. I am so critical of myself now because I wish I would have made this commitment back in 1986. Since my eyes have been opened in the last couple of years, life has been tough, but it has also been so much more meaningful and satisfying.

My highpoints are the revelations and gifts, both physical and spiritual that God gives me. My low points were having drifted and waned in my devotion and commitment over the years. Sometimes I like to think that I was not mature enough back then and that I am now. Part of me believes that this was destiny and that I was supposed to travel this rocky road in the manner that was chosen for me so I could decide this commitment to God on my own. Never the less I feel that I will never be able to do enough penance for having strayed.

Prayer, worship services and the spiritual/educational programs are very important to me. I think they are all required, but lets get away from forming so many committees to discuss feasibility.

Western belief in science and the application of logical and controlled steps to prove or disprove theory has evolved since Plato, Aristotle and Socrates provided us with the philosophical grounding of deduction and logical reasoning, but real Western standards of science officially began with the work of Newton and Descartes. Western democracies are proud of the separation of Church and State, the separation of the secular from the religious. The adherence to strict controlled standards of scientific reasoning; but the paradox of all this is that Western Democracies are founded on values, mores, tenets and beliefs that have a religious basis. One could arguably state that even the philosophical orientation of Western democracies is a moral grounding based on religion and religious tenets.

So where is this all leading? How do you explain when things happen at a precise moment during a thought process? Or, as you give thanks and count your blessings that at the precise moment that you give a special thanks, that the sun shines on you from behind a patch of clouds. Non-Believers could argue any number of mathematical combinations and or serendipitous events to account for such actions; but more and more I am learning that God speaks in very, very subtle ways. God does not yell, he speaks very softly, almost inaudible and that it takes a special self discipline to learn to train your minds eye and decision making process to listen for Gods subtle clues and instructions. Today was such a day, as the clouds covered the morning sun and I watched and marveled at Gods great work I prayed special prayers of thanks and blessings and at a very specific and precise moment of this prayer offering I know that Gods approval was granted when the sun shone directly on my face and then slowly, gracefully, fell back behind the clouds. I know and believe that God changes people and those God Changes things. Equally amazing, at least to me, another test of listening to God and trusting in Faith occurred this last couple of days.

A couple of days ago I began the process of "Requesting" my vacation or Leave. I have one Boss and as Director of Operations he signs my request as both Director and Department Chair. After his approval had been given, I am required to allow S., our Administrative and Plans coordinator, to record the transaction. It is implied in an informal way that S. would then transmit this document to HR. My position does not require me to do so, I could have hand carried my document, but my boss asked me to allow S. to handle the process. I complied without comment, but, secretly had reservations. S. feels that it is his job to also act as a "Watchdog" on adhering "Strictly" to policy and procedure. You see, I had also requested and had approved, an exception to policy in order to have the company pay for my plane ticket, "by Policy" I was about 20 days shy of meeting the actual 6-month requirement. I waited a day before I went to see S. I mentally rehearsed at least a dozen "Action-Reaction" scenarios that ranged from the most conciliatory to the most extreme and rude, to match the tone and texture of S.'s rude and vindictive manner. Each time, I was quietly reminded in a very soft whisper that under no circumstances was I to utter a single word. A very small voice said, "Let it go, it will be ok, those that persecute you are more numerous than the hairs on your head". I

am sure that I tested Gods patience each time I prayed for a sanction to an action that I wanted to take, yet each time I was reminded not to.

When I gave S. my document for processing he questioned the validity. I bit my tongue and merely responded that "J.", our Boss, had already approved this after I had discussed it with him. Again I felt that my reservations were founded and wanted desperately to confront S. on his actions. I didn't. A very small voice said, again, "let it go, it will be ok, those that persecute you are more numerous than the hairs on your head". So I remained quiet. Two days later I received my request back from HR; they had approved the request and that company finance would pay the " Mid-Tour" ticket. Coincidence that it worked out? I don't think so. Had I not acted in faith and even mumbled one word, even one conciliatory word, I am convinced that the outcome would have been entirely different. I am convinced that Faith and Divine Intervention caused this all to be such a success.

Yes I had serious reservations. S. is an "informally" powerful guy and he has very vindictive style. I was sure that his strict notions of "Tenure" and "Hierarchy" were going to sabotage my request for exception to policy. Without my Faith and Trust, I am convinced it would have been entirely different, even the most conciliatory approach would have resulted in failure. It is this kind of thing; the thought process, mental dialog, steps and actions that occur without scientific explanation, contrary to what my training in Historiography or Science would otherwise demand; That The fact is: God does work daily miracles in our lives, we have to continually listen for the whispers, not the yells, and watch for the subtle signs.

The other Moral of the story? If God has no patience with the rest of you it is because I have already tested his Patience to the limit with my infinite questioning of "Why"? :-)

-T. T.

FAITH REFLECTION #16

My faith journey has been marked by input from many people-some of the people who have had the most impact have been authors such as C.S. Lewis, Jerry Bridges, Elizabeth Elliot and also my friends from church.

My faith decision has been gradual. I remember praying to God as a child. I prayed a formal prayer of repentance in 1991 or 1992 (age 19). However, it wasn't until May of 1996 (age 24) that I really understood what it meant to be a Christian. At that time I was introduced to a wonderful local church and had a friend who poured a lot into my life.

I have never converted to another faith. There was a time (1990) that I was considering the Catholic Church.

My attitude toward organized religion is that it is important. However, I know of people who have been hurt by involvement with certain organized religious groups.

My faith (relationship with God) is the most important part of my daily life. I try to live each day to the glory of God. My day (most of the time) starts with a time with the Lord and also ends with some time with Him. I pray frequent little prayers during the day and try to make decisions based on Biblical principles.

Some of the highpoints in my spiritual journey include special times with the Lord and fellowship with other believers. Low points include times of spiritual dryness.

Prayer and church worship times are very important to me. Without consistent teaching, prayer and fellowship it is very difficult to grow spiritually and become progressively sanctified.

I am a Christian but don't belong to a specific denomination. My theology and beliefs would most likely be considered reformed.

To me it is important that a Navy Chaplain be a Christian. The denomination isn't important as long as they have a true relationship with God through Jesus.

All in all, Navy chaplains haven't been very helpful to me in my faith journey. In most places I've been I've had the privilege to be part of a local church and have had minimal interaction with chaplains. There have been times that I've been disappointed in Chaplains because it seems like they aren't genuine Christians. To me, this is sad.

-M. M.

FAITH REFLECTION #17

Feedback Profile: 56 and older; Female; semi-retired family member; Caucasian; Methodist minister's widow; Presbyterian minister's daughter and granddaughter; mother of a Southern Baptist minister.

1. The person who had the most influence on my faith journey: Several: my father first, then my husband, and then a special wife of a district superintendent, and then conference and national officers of United Methodist Women. Persons who did not live up to moral standards expected of them have also influenced my life as a disappointment when they should have been role models.
2. At what age...I assume you mean...did I join a church. I was 12 and joined a Congregational church because we were living in Hawaii at the time, and due to a Comity agreement, there were no Presbyterian churches there at the time (1947). I often led Children's Church, and I remember memorizing hymns in my bedroom at home.
3. Have I ever changed/converted to another faith? No, I have always been a Christian, but I did change denominations from Presbyterian to Methodist when I married.
4. My present attitude towards organized religion is: I don't see how people can get along without it. Living alone, the high point of my week is Sunday morning, going to church to see my church family, getting spiritual input and refreshment to face another week. I like traditional services with contemporary liturgy, but I don't like "worshiping" big projection screens and a forest of microphones, nor do I like communion stewards to serve Communion wearing shorts.
5. My faith impact my daily life in many ways: grace before meals, random prayers throughout the day, meditations reading and prayers at bedtime, I try very hard to not do business on Sundays--for and with my sewing customers, nor buying groceries, gasoline, etc. on Sunday that would encourage others to work on Sundays. Exceptions would be police, firemen, hospitals, and such. I am honest, and fair in my dealings with others.

6. High points in my spiritual journey: When I have been asked to lead others in worship or programs, or discussions, or study groups. Schools of Christian Mission with United Methodist Women. Choir camp when I was in high school. Designing and making six 30 ft. x 30 ft. backdrops for our 3-state United Methodist annual conference, making two Episcopal stoles for our bishop. Being asked to make a banner representing one million U. Methodist Women in the U.S.A. for a World Federation Assembly in England in 2001--without competition!

7. Low points in my spiritual journey: When certain persons in churches and family have let me down, when respect for them and subsequent trust faltered, causing great heartache.

8. Prayer, worship services, small group study and special programs are very important to my spiritual growth. I wish I had the stamina and money to go to all I want to attend.

9. Spirituality: Living a life consistent with my faith beliefs, continuing to learn and grow in my faith.

Diversity: A wide variety of whatever: skin color, faiths, worship formats, ethnic backgrounds, etc.

Community: Persons living, working, playing, worshiping together with mutual respect, care and concern for each other.

10. My Specific denomination is United Methodist, loud and clear. I have even taught church membership classes, and think I was "predestined: to be a Methodist all along. There are some things about the Society of Friends (Quakers) that I think I could relate to, especially their pacifism.

-J. P.

FAITH REFLECTION #18

As a child, I longed to belong to a church. I had attended a few Christian churches with friends, but when I was eleven, I was so excited to be invited to church regularly, that I got quite involved and ended up being baptized in the church-, which happened to be Mormon. (Let this be a reminder... when considering whether or not to invite someone to church. Chances are if you don't invite them, someone else will, and it may not be their best interest) I continued to be active in the church for some time, but as High School approached, my enthusiasm waned.

After High School, my friend, who's father was a Nazarene Pastor, told me her parents wanted to ask me a question, so I went to their church and was offered a job as a Nursery Attendant. As I worked there and got to know a few people, I noticed there was something different about them. It intrigued me, and I decided I needed to get right with God, so I quit my job with the promise to return to my old church (the Mormon one). Of course, after the first Sunday off in quite a while, I changed my mind after sleeping in all morning... and went back to a life of lazy Sunday mornings. Sometime later, I was offered the job again, and decided to go ahead and take it. Because there were so many young adults my age, a mid-week "College Group" Bible Study was started at this Nazarene, and my friend invited me along. I asked another friend along, and we both attended the first week. We

thought it was fun, and liked the people (and I was excited to get to know someone in the church besides the same parents I saw week in and week out).

With in a short time of attending this college group, my friend Jennifer and I knew we needed to attend Sunday Services, so I again quit my job, but this time I stuck with my promise to go to church, and this time around, I also attended at this Nazarene Church (thank heavens!).

Around the same time, my parents were going through a divorce, I had recently moved away from home and I had begun dating a guy that I thought was so great. I put him on a pedestal, although I knew his faults were many. About three months into our relationship, he raped me. My entire world was turned upside down that night. Three months later, while staying at my Dad's house, in my old

bed, something happened to me. I could not understand what, but I knew that God was in charge of what happened. I prayed a prayer, in my heart that my mind could not comprehend, and when I awoke in the morning, everything was different. Everything was so clear to me. It was all black and white. Everything in this world is either for God or against God. Later my friend (the pastor's daughter), explained to me what salvation was, and I knew then and there, that was exactly what had happened that night... I had accepted Christ into my heart. My other friend soon accepted Christ as well.

While rape is an awful thing, for me, it was one of the greatest events of my life. God used a terrible situation, to change my heart for eternity. That was seven years ago. When I met my (now) husband, my pastor had warned me not to marry him, because he was a sailor (my pastor had grown up in San Diego), at least not until we had a chance to really get to know one another (we had a whirlwind romance). Fortunately I did not listen to my pastor this time (but I did pray, A LOT, about whether or not I should marry J.), and we are now about to celebrate our 5th anniversary.

Marrying J. and living life as a Navy spouse has helped me grow immensely in my Walk with the Lord. As we lived 800 miles apart prior to our wedding, J. searched for a church in San Diego for us to attend together. After our wedding, and moving in together, we attended a Nazarene church for nearly two years. While we were feeling a bit spiritually stagnant, we did not know where else to go (it really hadn't occurred to us to use the chapel program on base). We finally found a church (Four-Square/Missionary) that we absolutely loved. In July 2001, we began to get involved in our new church, attending membership classes, and such. Then after September 11th, I knew J. would deploy soon, so we arranged to have our son Jh. (then 3 months old) dedicated in our new church. After J. left nearly a month later, I got as involved as I could in church activities. In fact, when planning trips out of town, even for the holidays, I would do whatever I could to avoid missing any weekend services. This church became the center of my life. I became a paid staff member in Children's Ministry, and usually attended at least three of the four services. Jh. absolutely adored being at church. While I served God in this church, God served me... He gave me a place of refuge, while my husband was at war in the Middle East. He provided a wonderful support network to help me raise Jh. "alone".

But I was not true to the Lord. After a bit of time, began to lose track of where I was going, and I was more involved "Being Involved" than in keeping my service to God, centered on Him. I believe that is the reason that I am here in Cornwall. God has laid it upon my heart, that I had to be moved... He has reminded me of a situation with a child... A child who is so wrapped up in what he is doing, he needs a time out. Now sometimes Mom, can say, "Go take a time out and settle down" and he will do as he is told, but sometimes, Mom must physically remove him from the situation, to place her hands

on his shoulders and guide him to a spot of rest, so he can refocus and get himself "in check". That is what the Lord has done for me. I was so wrapped up in "serving" that He had to physically remove me from the situation so I could refocus, and put Him first.

Since arriving in Cornwall about 1 1/2 years ago, I have struggled spiritually. For the first year I was convinced that God was nowhere near here. I knew deep down that is not true, as God is omnipotent, but I felt as far away from Him as I could be. But somewhere, somehow, in the past 8 months or so, I have come to know that sensing God is not the only assurance that He is in control.

My family had not found a church home in Cornwall, although we had tried a few places, including one church that gently informed us that women were not to participate in the Sunday Morning Communion Service, nor was there a place for children in their church service.

There had been quite a history with the old chaplain at our base, who arrived shortly before my family and I had. As there were large numbers of people that quit attending chapel events over the issues involved with this chaplain, we too felt it was not the place for us. I did attend the Women's Bible Study for a while, but with the changes around the Chapel, I was no longer comfortable going after a few months.

With the news of a new chaplain here, we decided to check things out for ourselves, and for the first time attended a service at a Military Chapel. While we have only been to two services, I have prayed, and I am hopeful that God will put me to good use in the Chapel, but this time, I know to keep Him in the center of all I do. I am grateful that the Lord has opened my eyes to the value and benefits that a Military Chapel can offer.

As for my points of view on religion and faith...I sincerely believe that there are a number of religions and denominations out there that God has used to his benefit. I know that He has the power to do so, but I also know that the only way to get to heaven is through Faith in Jesus Christ, and the acceptance that He died on the cross for me, to pay the price of my sins. I am inclined to think "once saved, always saved" but I do not believe that salvation is the end of it... faith is about accepting the gift of grace, and by doing so, I as a Christian must surrender my life to the Lord. I believe that there is no right or wrong denomination. I know that Christians can come from a multitude of backgrounds, and your attendance in church, or participation in church programs does not make you a Christian (being a "good person" and living a "good life" won't get you through those pearly gates!). I strive to remind myself, and am working towards living a life that reflects the true meaning of life. Right now, having two young children, I know that it is most important in my life that I do everything in my power (given to me by God), to raise my children to know the Lord. While it is their choice, I play a major role in it...

Part of fulfilling this goal is to bring my children up surrounded by Christians, to learn Biblical values and truths, at home, school and especially through church. For this reason, Chapel/church programs are extremely important to me. I want my children to have a church that they feel at home at. I want them to be there so often, that they know all the regular faces, as well as they know family. I want them to feel like they have a physical fortress, and as they grow older (they are currently 2 1/2 and 8 months old), I want them to understand that this is only a part of the foundation, a symbol of the strength and solid nature of Christ. While it is important that they make their own choices towards faith, so that their decisions are sincere, I honestly, would be crushed to see them involved in a religion aside from Christianity.

I am grateful to be getting involved in the chapel, for both my family and myself. My hope is that the chapel will again rise to be a major part of life on this base. I don't know how it used to be, but from what I understand EVERYONE went to the chapel, and the Chaplain was very involved in the community. It would be fantastic to see such an environment again, especially in Cornwall where there is a great amount of spiritual warfare going on.

One last thing- my point of view on the Military Chapels, and Chaplains: I think that out of all the benefits the Military provides for it's members and families, that the Chaplain program is by far the most important. While it is nice to have the commissary, and medical benefits, to have spiritual guidance is paramount. Not many civilians understand the unique needs of military families. The hello/goodbye relationships, the structure of the workplace, the politics that come into play in that workplace, and the uprooting that many families go through time and again, for their careers. The military is not a job; it is a lifestyle, no matter how hard we pretend it isn't. It is a lifestyle few "outsiders" understand, or desire. Having a spiritual support system not only makes it bearable for many, but also helps many families to grow from the experiences. A military chaplain who understands the families around him is an invaluable resource. It is also a wonderful reminder of our nations beginning, that our government still supports the right to practice religion freely. We should all be thankful to God for having such a clear hand in our government!

-T. S.

FAITH REFLECTION #19

I came to know the Lord at a very early age. My own father seemed to yo-yo in an out of my life at his own convenience--even before my parents divorced. What a blessing! God truly knows who our parents should be, because in the absence of a steady earthly father I clung to the Rock. And my life has been blessed ever since. I received Christ as my personal savior almost 21 years ago--to the day! Not to say that I haven't had my peaks and valleys, I bear the burden of intelligence, which often places roadblocks in front of faith. And some of the gifts God has given me often get perverted and twisted when I attempt to take control away from the Creator. But all in all, many people who have a personal relationship with God have nurtured my relationship with Christ. I have grown.

I went to a private Episcopal school for some of my early education. I grew up in a non-denominational Christian Church. Then, rebelled in High School and changed to a local Baptist church!! I went to a Catholic University and worked with University Ministry there, which focused almost too heavily on diversity--all the while being a Nanny for a Jewish family. So my experience with various theological backgrounds--though leaving me somewhat vague as to what my "denomination" is--has prepared me for the life as a Navy wife. I simply try to rely on the only perfect source of God's truth...His Word. And I try to surround myself with Christian friends. I do sometimes feel overwhelmed and under prepared when talking to non-Christians. I don't think I am a strong soul winner for Christ. I try to grow closer to Him everyday. I try to keep my heart open and, hopefully, people see God's love and an unequalled peace in me--that is my witness.

My family, and my church family have been a tremendous help. All the Chaplains I've met have been loving Christian men all with very different styles and personalities. While the style of worship is often a key factor for some Christians, it is not my concern. I look for a leader who uses the Bible with realistic applications to daily life. Guidance.

The role of Chaplain is quite dual fold, in my opinion. I think that these leaders have a responsibility to God, and to the Navy. And sometimes “towing the party line” and presenting the vocabulary that is “diverse” enough for everyone to palate overshadow their fire and zeal for Christ. This leaves the Christian followers without the sense of spark, and the lost feeling that the status quo is good enough. I also think that (especially overseas) the Chaplain has an incredible responsibility to foster and encourage a sense of community--not just support it. I think what all Christians crave is a Chaplain who teaches the Bible, not theology; who preaches with confidence, not condescension; who listens, loves, and has an open mind to his congregations wishes without compromising his own beliefs. I would like a Chaplain who knows he is still on the road; is still searching for God's direction. First and foremost, his authority should come from Christ...not the Navy. I know that the burden of diverse religious backgrounds must be difficult. Developing a vocabulary that explains without talking in theological jargon cannot be an easy transition from seminary or Bible college. However, my husband is unsaved, and doesn't have the background, vocabulary, or knowledge of the different types of faith. He and his sister grew up in the Navy. And both of them seem to think that Noah and Moses are the end of it all. They aren't much different from most of the "navy brats" I know. I am not trying to throw stones. I simply think that there must be a way to give Chaplains the room to minister to a congregation in a real way, without a watered down text, and without a condescending vocabulary.

I truly appreciate the Men who are strong enough to face this calling and stand accountable to God and the Government. I just hope that the balance is well defined, because God tells us that you cannot serve two masters. I hope the Navy knows it needs to take a back seat. To grow good sailors and their dependents, their feet need to be firmly rooted in the Word--or the fruits of the spirit WILL NOT be there.

As for Chaplains of other religions, I hope and pray that their contact with Christians in the Chaplain Corps lead them to Christ. No one comes to the Father except through HIM.

-S. G.

FAITH REFLECTION #20

I have delayed writing this account due to fear at having to express the inexpressible. Though I think of spiritual issues often, my attempt at answers leads to more questions. This has been the case throughout my life. I was raised in the Methodist Church, attending Sunday services and Sunday school nearly every week since I can remember. My family has a deep history of religious involvement, including members of the clergy.

Around the age of 13 or 14 I began having questions about Christianity specifically, and religion and faith in general. The minister at my church, and a relative who later became a Methodist Minister, encouraged my questions. In the past 20 years I have studied several different religions at different depths. Among these are Zen Buddhism, Judaism, Rastafarism, and Paganism. While all of these, including Methodism, have aspects that appeal to me, I have not found a religion that I can fully embrace, nor that fully embraces me. I have attended several Unitarian-Universalist services and found these to be provocative, though not enough to attend consistently.

I have come to agree with Marx that religion is the opium of the people (with television now a close 2nd). Organized religion, while undeniably often a source of good, has always seemed to me to be another tool used by one group to control another.

In certain periods of my life I would have considered myself Agnostic. Other periods I would have called myself an Atheist. As of right now, I guess I'm Pantheist or Independent. I abandoned Atheism for the same reason I abandoned theism: They all require a leap of faith I am unwilling and/or unable to make. An Atheist has to believe there is (are) no god(s). I do not know enough to believe either way.

I often find myself drawn back to Zen, but the leaps of faith needed to follow that path continue to stymie me. The same can be said of Paganism. I do find profound peace through listening to and making music and experiencing nature.

My favorite answer to questionnaires that ask my religion is Jedi Knight. Calling myself Agnostic seems like I am hedging my bets. I often think of spiritual issues. To say I do so daily would be to underestimate the amount of mental energy expended on these questions. I read often on spiritual matters, including the weekly Faith & Values section in the local newspaper. Fantasy and Sci-fi books, of which I am a fan, frequently address spiritual issues. Two recent books I have read are The Advance Code and Zen Guitar.

More important than a spiritual life is living a good life. The main reason to lead a good life is because it is less stressful. In my experience, you generally are treated the way you treat others. Spirituality is the attempts of man to explain the unexplainable. I am comfortable saying, "I do not know", rather than making a best guess, or blindly following another person or groups answers.

Being a civilian, I feel uninformed to comment on the role of Navy Chaplains. The only comment I would have is my concern of the separation of church and state, and the fear of the government proselytizing to members of the military and encountered civilians, domestic and foreign. Saying that, I do appreciate the importance of military chaplains on the lives of those they serve. A Chaplain's faith should be irrelevant, as long as their faith does not preclude them from serving any other faith.

A Navy Chaplain has been one of the cornerstones of my spiritual understanding, though most of his influence came to me before he joined the Navy.

I hope my answers can aid your research in some small way. Thank you for the opportunity to search within myself. While no closer to my answers, I do feel a little closer to my questions.

-D. A.

FAITH REFLECTION #21

In spite of many hours of religious discussions, I never really considered my faith; I just knew it was there. I don't know if I would say that church attendance was mandatory growing up- it was more like it was just something to be done. When I joined the Air Force after high school, I never had any real contact with chaplains; they seemed to be something to go to when you were all screwed up. After my discharge, I attempted to merge back into my old church- unfortunately I had changed and my friends didn't like the change

and weren't willing to accept me as I had become. Looking back on it, if I had only turned to the older members of the church, I would have found the reassurance and support I was looking for. Instead, I rebelled- looking first at Agnosticism; and when that didn't square with my faith-I tried to reach an intellectual handle to my faith.

After thirty years, I've developed a way of looking at faith that will never include the church. After thirty years, my views on faith are so unorthodox that I can't imagine being welcomed in any church without making major compromises to the way I look at things. And I doubt that there is any church that I would be attracted to enough to want to make any changes. If any chaplains want my advice, I would tell them to council the enlisted men that they can't go home again- that they have changed so much and their homes have changed not at all. They should prepare them to brace up for the shock that their change will bring to themselves and others.

-J. A.

FAITH REFLECTION #22

I was raised a Catholic. This in itself should explain many things!!! LOL! I always "believed" in God. When I was a teenager I had a friend (a grown woman) that really led me to know the Lord. Well, lets say she planted the seed. When I was 28 yrs of age I was pregnant, unmarried, and living with my boyfriend. I felt in my heart it was time to get right with God. Looking back, it must have been the prompting of the Holy Spirit. That said, anyone that is a Catholic knows the traditions of going to confess your sins before a priest. I had the option of sitting before him or sitting in that little dark cubicle that used to scare me. I used to wonder if I would be zapped for the sins in my life when younger i.e.: saying damn or disobeying! I chose to sit before the priest. And in a nutshell, he told me the church could NOT forgive me, as I was pregnant and living in sin. Needless to say, I was devastated! I didn't stay at that church long after that although I did get my son baptized in another Catholic church.

I moved to Alabama when I was 29 yrs old. I went to the Catholic Church for a while here. Also had my second son Baptized in the church. Eventually though I changed over to the Baptist faith. It seemed to me that they had much more to offer me than the Catholic Church. They taught from the bible and I gained much more knowledge. I also gave my heart to Christ during this time and I was baptized in the Believer's Baptism in front of the church. However.... There was a time, I went to a "revival" (At an Assembly of God church) only to be told after going to the alter during the alter call that I wasn't filled with the Holy Spirit because I couldn't speak in "tongues"! Once again, this shook my faith to no end. I STILL to this day have a problem with this. This had a lasting effect on me, one of which I pray the Lord will give me the answers to. What angers me the most, is "man-made" rules concerning Christianity. In reading my bible, I have gleaned that these things told to me were NOT from Our Lord, Jesus Christ!!!

I think it tragic that there are many out there caught up in all of the religions and they will NEVER know God's heart for them. You ask what religion we are Chuck. This I cannot answer for you only that I AM a Christian, I AM a child of God, and I am forgiven! There are times when I go through the fire (like now) and I question my faith. I have seriously questioned my faith in the past, as you know. But I hold on to that one, tiny piece of faith that won't let ME go, WAITING for the promises of MY GOD to come to pass!

-D. D.

FAITH REFLECTION #23

I grew up in a Lutheran household in heavily Mormon Salt Lake City, Utah. Being an oppressed minority does wonders for religious convictions. I am a very cynical person by nature and would not be predisposed to believing in any kind of God, but I'm still quite Lutheran. I've even been to Beliefnet.com and found myself smack in the middle of "liberal Protestant denominations." Hello. I'm not sure that this wouldn't have been true for any other religion, though; under the same circumstances I probably would have ended up a fairly devout Catholic, Jew or Muslim. So the persons most influential to my religious convictions were not of my religion, nor indeed people I even liked, but other people, mostly Mormon children. Mormon adults, as a whole, are extremely nice, and hard not to like. The same is not true of their offspring, at least when dealing with non-Mormon children.

My father is also quite religious, though he never said so. It just sort of came across in the way he conducted himself. There was a distinct tension about religion in my house, which I think came down to my mother not really believing a word of it but just going along, reluctantly, to please Dad. I picked up on this when I was about five, and found it very confusing. Later when I started going back to church as an adult, my mother asked me why I was doing this since I'd "always hated going to church as a kid." Without thinking, I said, "I didn't hate going to church, I hated going to church WITH YOU!" Which was accurate but perhaps could have been put more delicately.

I was confirmed at thirteen according to the usual Lutheran traditions. Shortly after we moved to Arizona and joined a church, which was ALC instead of LCA. (Side note: There are several Lutheran denominations in the States. The biggest is the ELCA, which was formed out of the ALC and the LCA, but before the "merge" the LCA was distinctively Swedish and the ALC was distinctively German.) I hated it and, when I was about fifteen, quit going to church. This was the source of constant fighting between my mother and I until I moved out. Ironically, the religious one, my father, wasn't the one who objected to my not attending church, though it did seem to make him sad. I think the word here is "hypocrite" but we'll just not go there, okay? Because my mother was insisting I attend some kind of service and because I was tired of fighting about it, I went variously to a Presbyterian service, a Catholic service and a Quaker meeting on and off into early college. While nothing about those other churches seemed "wrong", nothing was particularly "right," either, though each of them had something valuable.

I started attending church again about ten years ago, when I first moved to California. I first attended MCC, a gay church, which was very Methodist, warm and welcoming. Later there was a furor about calling the assistant pastor (a woman) to take over after the old pastor (a man) stepped down, and there wasn't anything doctrinal about this, just plain old sexism. (She later left and formed her own darn congregation.) Some time later I ran into a man in the philosophy section of a bookstore, struck up a conversation, and discovered he was a Lutheran pastor. (They should wear warning labels.) He invited me to his church, I went, and have been a "regular" for the past six years or so. I sing in the choir, occasionally read at services and even more occasionally serve on committees.

Organized religion to me is valuable from the basis that we all need to hang with a bunch of people who know the same songs and have the same accents every so often, ja? The concept of the Christian God is more or less an afterthought. I'm the most unchristian Christian I know (heck, I married a pagan) and have very little patience with what other people say that Christians are supposed to do/say/feel/believe. Some of my beliefs are very Jewish and others border on Zen. I get "The

Lutheran” magazine every month and agree with about half of it. I’m gay, liberal, feminist, pro-abortion, anti-stupidity and have very little patience with people who want to stamp out smoking, drinking, drugs and extramarital sex (which isn’t to say I indulge in any of those things, but I’ll defend to the death anyone else’s right to do so.) This isn’t to say I don’t deeply believe in God—I certainly do—but trying to cram God into a Christian frame just doesn’t work for me. God is too big for cramming. So a lot of the “Lutheran doctrine” to me is lip service, but that’s okay. I pray a fair amount, meditate when I can, and try to live a good life, not to trumpet from the mountaintops, but hoping that people who might be looking will say, “So that’s what Lutherans are like” and be at least mildly impressed.

The low point in this great religious drama of mine was moving to this congregation in Arizona. The parishioners were very well to do, we really weren’t, and they had this choir director from hell who—well, never mind. Anyway, the youth choir went on a trip and there was this brouhaha about me using foul language at the dinner table (What the fuck is that about? I don’t fuckin’ swear! That’s fuckin’ bullshit!) and I ended up getting sent home early (which, at that point, was hardly a tragedy.) That same month, the church decided to spend \$100 grand on a new organ and \$5,000 on famine relief in Ethiopia, and I never did quite get over the contrast, so I left. High points? I have them every week, practically. Usually while singing.

-J. J.

FAITH REFLECTION #24

I was fortunate to grow up in a household where church going was a priority! I was raised in Kingston, NY and Pittsfield, MA by devote United Methodists. My father served on the administrative board as well as on other committees in the church. My mother taught Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, was a member of what is now the United Methodist Women, as well as a member of a women’s circle. I went Sunday school, sang in the choirs, etc. So, I guess my earliest influences for my faith journey were my parents as well as other adults in my local church.

While I went to the Univ. of Mass (Amherst) I was involved in the local United Methodist Church and lived for two years in the co-op owned by the congregation. Several of us went on to seminary and have either married ministers or become pastors ourselves. I made a firm commitment to God between high school and college after watching a Billy Graham crusade on television, although I don’t believe that there is always only one event of that sort in one’s life. The formation I received while living in the co-op made me think I’d like to continue my education after college at a seminary. I was also moved to ‘go forward’ at a small revival being held at a Salvation Army Post in Arlington after college, while I was serving in the United States Marine Corps.

While working on a masters of divinity degree and after I had been approved for ordination in the United Methodist Church, I began ‘coming out’ to myself as a lesbian. It was during that process that I became familiar with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the denomination which I am now a member of. I am the pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, DC.

Although I served for three years in the USMC, I rarely attended chapel services. I remember going once to sing with a small group, but beyond that I don’t believe I ever attended a service. When the Marine Corps moved me to my permanent duty station, Washington, DC, I sought out and joined an

United Methodist Church in Washington. I firmly believe that God is a creative God who has made the beauty we see around us and within us! I consider myself blessed to be a part of a denomination that celebrates the diversity of creation and specifically to serve a diverse congregation within that Fellowship.

-C. S.

FAITH REFLECTION #25

My grandmother encouraged me to attend church and usually took or went with me. She had been baptized in the Presbyterian Church but was not a regular churchgoer. As a child I attended various protestant churches including a Presbyterian church. In my later teens and early twenties I developed an interest in the Roman Catholic faith. I think the rituals of the church were what caught my attention. Additionally my mother remarried a man of the Roman Catholic faith. I received instructions and joined the Church when I was 19 years old. I remained a steady churchgoer through my twenties. As I entered my 30's I began to question organized religion and my place in it. This was in part due to my "coming out" as a Lesbian and knowing that organized religion had no place for me in their scheme of things.

I still maintained what I considered a spiritual life. I read and studied various religions including eastern faiths and what is now called pagan or goddess worship. I've always had difficulties picturing God as an old white man so looking at the creator through different views was easy and enriching.

As I have aged the appeal of worshiping within a larger community returned. For a while I attended the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, D.C. A church made up of primarily lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people. It was comforting but I also felt separated from the larger community. I briefly attended a United Methodist Church down the street from where I now live. After almost a year I had "the talk" with the minister. She did not quite freak out but came close. She recovered somewhat and was always pleasant but her initial reaction helped me to decide to look elsewhere for spiritual comfort.

I read about an Episcopal church in nearby College Park, Maryland that was open to all people. I started to attend services there while still going to the Methodist church. Eventually I switched to the Episcopal faith. The church retains the rituals and high church of the Roman Catholic faith while addressing today's issues anew. Recent decisions by the American Episcopal Church demonstrate our desire to grow and learn and truly be a Christian Church. As a friend of mine likes to say "Jesus accepted everyone" and in my opinion most Episcopalians do try to be "Christ like" rather than "Christian". By that I mean behave, as we believe Christ did 2000 years ago and would today.

-L. A.

FAITH REFLECTION #26

My true faith journey began in 9th grade when a Baptist preacher moved to my hometown of Yankton, SD and his daughter was in one of my classes. Thru S. & her family, esp. her dad, C. F., I was brought to Christ. I was later baptized into the Southern Baptist church there in Yankton. My parents never had much to do with religion--my dad had issues with the Catholic Church that his mother (from Czechoslovakia) belonged to, and I'm not sure about my mom. Anyway, I wasn't

baptized as a baby 'cuz Dad thought I should grow and choose the religion that I wanted. My view of "organized religion" has changed some over the years--seems to me too many religions are going by man-made rules and not the words of the Gospel. Like why do some churches refuse Communion to non-members? I don't think Christ would turn them away. I try to quietly listen to Him in my heart, and express this to others if the situation arises, but trying not to be pushy. I try to go by the verse, which I am sorry I don't know where it is found, I think Matthew," Whatever you do for the least of these, you do unto Me." I work with the mentally ill, and some of these folks are quite unlovable, but that verse has always put things into perspective for me. I appreciate everything God has given me--family, friends, nature, and I try to thank Him often. My grandmother also was a big influence. She worked so hard caring for my grandpa who'd had several strokes, worked at a Lutheran boys home, and still found ways to thank God. She died of cancer when I was 11, but her faith remains with me still. I don't attend "organized religious" services as I should as of late, but I don't think that makes me less a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ, and I know He will be there for me always, taking care of my family and friends. He is everywhere. How can you see a mountain and not feel God? How can you listen to the birds sing and not think of how God takes care of each and every one of them? The miracle of a new baby, the first green grass in springtime, I could go on and on! I just saw "The Passion", and this was absolutely so powerful. It makes me truly realize how He suffered, FOR ME, and that I need to continue my faith journey, with Him by my side.

-D. H.

FAITH REFLECTION #27

**At what age did you make a decision regarding faith/religion in your life?* I made a decision to become a baptized Christian at age 11. I probably should have discussed it with my parents but I've never been one to seek advice.

**Have you ever changed/converted to another faith or religion?* I grew up a Methodist/United Methodist though I started out as a Nazarene and EUB. Now I've ALSO been confirmed in the Episcopal Church (but haven't given up the UMC connections).

**What is your attitude at the present time towards organized religion?* Organized religion will be the death of us all. I have developed a premise that there are four functions within faith and religion: (1) belief in God (2) acts of worship (3) the community of faith (4) denominational institutions. 1, 2, and 3 are critical to the survival of faith, the 1st and 3rd probably being more significant than the 2nd. They can exist without number 4 and number 4 can add to the first 3. However, point 4 most often detracts, and as battles between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Muslims and Orthodox in the Balkans, and Muslims vs. Muslims and Muslims vs. Jews in the Middle East show, number 4 will kill us all.

**How much does your faith impact your daily life? In what ways?* My faith is the core of who I am. It accounts for the root of my beliefs and my morality. It is like electricity, it is always there. Sometimes unseen (like a running refrigerator) sometimes obvious, when I turn on the lights.

**What are the highpoints in your faith/spiritual journey?* My conversion, baptism, and joining the church. Seeing the play Godspell 10 times.

**How important is prayer, worship services, or chapel/church programs to you? They used to be critical. Now they are adjuncts to my life.*

**How do you define spirituality? Diversity? Community? Spirituality is the belief in a divine being and the influence that divinity has on my life and my world. Diversity is realizing that people answer the 4 points I made above in sometimes entirely different way. Community is inclusive and welcoming body acting in the way of faith and Christ.*

**If you are a Christian, please be specific about which denomination of which you are a member. If you are a religion other than Christian, please be specific about which branch of that faith tradition of which you are a member. United Methodist (ordained) and Episcopal (confirmed)*

-E. F.

FAITH REFLECTION #28

My faith journey is a never-ending one. I was born and raised a Lutheran by my mother who came from Minnesota, and her great-grandfather built the very first Lutheran Church in their hometown of Lake Park with his own hands. A lot of Lutherans came from Norway and Sweden in the 1800's, and my family was a part of this immigration.

From a very early age I knew I was not like other children. I knew something was wrong with me but I did not know what. Kids made fun of me for acting different from them, so I realized not everyone was like me, and I learned to hide my "quirks" from others. I had a disorder that only in recent years has become known as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD. I had feelings of impending doom that would only quiet down when I acted out rituals as they are called now, but only would quiet for a short time, then rear its ugly head again. I would do things repeatedly until it "felt right." If I did not do these rituals, I felt as if something horrible would happen to someone in my family, so this to me was as important as saving a life. I suffered "intrusive thoughts" that were centered around my religion and faith. I loved God more than anything, and for some unknown reason, OCD hones in on what hurts or frightens you most. If I saw something I considered bad, I would have to cancel it out by seeing something good. Often in a panic to do so. Now if treated early enough, some people can get minor relief from their OCD, but I went untreated for 40 years and now am in the stages of OCD at its worst. Agoraphobia. When I was a teen-ager I was so exhausted from OCD, I challenged God one day when I was home alone. I spoke to Him out loud in my living room, and I told Him I believed He could heal me from this hell in my head. I gave Him 5 minutes to do so. As the minutes ticked away, I sat and cried. I loved God so much, I could not bear the blasphemous intrusive thoughts that tortured me night and day. The 5 minutes was up, and I was not healed. I was devastated because I told God if He did not heal me, I would no longer believe in Him. I fell to my knees and asked His forgiveness for my ordering Him to heal me. I would rather live with the disorder than lose Him. I figured there must be a reason He let me have OCD in the first place, and I would somehow learn to live with it.

I became a very good actress, most people not even knowing how sick I was unless they spent a great deal of time with me. Many times I would see a friend or family members love fade as they did spend time with me and witnessed what they could not understand. I could not blame them as I did not understand it either. I felt unlovable. I still do. But I know God loves me, and I have faith when I die I will go to Heaven and there I will be free forever from the bonds and agony of OCD. The only

way to describe what I have felt in my head for 45 years, is that it is like a demon in your head saying the most horrible things, I myself could never think of or imagine. I even worried after the movie *The Exorcist* came out, that I was possessed. But I know better now. I inherited this disorder. Many times I have had a crisis of faith dealing with the intrusive thoughts, praying that maybe God would grant me 24 hours to be OCD free so I would know what "normal" was like. But then it crossed my mind, that once I tasted that kind of freedom, I could never stand to go back to being a woman with OCD. God works in mysterious ways, and I have to keep that faith in my heart, that someday He will free me from this illness. My worst fear is that someday I will be all alone. For the most part, today, I am. I only have a small handful of people I know love me for who I am. But it is causing great stress in my marriage and any relationships I have left. But I think I will be able to face whatever comes my way in life, because I won't give up my faith in God.

My physical life may not have been the life I dreamed and hoped for, but my life in Heaven with God will be more wonderful than I can imagine. I have faith there will be love, healing, and a freedom I have never known. I came to terms with my OCD and the intrusive blasphemous thoughts, when I realized, God made me, He understands OCD better than anyone, and He won't hold it against me. I pray for forgiveness a thousand times a day just to be sure. When everything I hold dear on this earth is gone, the one thing I can be sure I will still have, is God. That, I have faith in.

Thank you,

-J. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #29

I am writing at the request of my granddaughter, a student at Drew, who thought my experiences might be helpful to you.

Looking back over my 84 years, I concluded that I was born into the Christian faith, the descendant of two families who were French Huguenots, migrated first to the Channel Islands and then to the Ohio wilderness in the early 1800s.

I was born into a loving, devout Methodist home to exceptional parents who allowed me to decide when I would be baptized and when I should become part of the organized church. I made this decision at age 11. I have never regretted it.

My one departure from Methodist was to attend a Presbyterian college. My early professional life was in high school teaching. In 1943 I joined the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, was stationed in Washington, D.C. as a company officer in charge of young women who did the paperwork of the Navy to free men for active duty. My job was mostly raising morale and self-esteem. In Washington my only contact with chaplains was at public functions and at funerals.

In 1944 I was married (by an Air Corps chaplain) to an Air Corps officer from my hometown. After WWII we raised and educated a family of 2 boys and 2 girls, living over much of the eastern U.S. Once we were one of 7 couples who started a Methodist Church in Pittsburgh. My faith was tested many times during those years but endured.

Children raised and educated, we lived in Florida for 20 years, until my husband's death in 1984. Since then I have lived alone in Gadsden, Alabama where one daughter lives. Faith has been most

important these last years. My friends, mentoring, a reading program, working for my church has helped fill my life. Now I'm waiting to see what else the Lord has in store for me.

-B. H.

FAITH REFLECTION #30

“A somewhat something moving dreamlike on a fading road...”

“Read to me the story of Daniel, Mother!” was my plaintive cry as I bounced up and down on the side of her bed. She would read from my new Bible. The genuine imitation leather bound edition of the Revised Standard Version. About the same time I can remember going to church. We attended White Oak United Methodist Church (UMC). It was in Red Bank, a suburb of Chattanooga, TN. We were growing and we built a big new sanctuary to accommodate the flock. One Sunday morning before the service, sitting in our usual third pew from the front on the right hand side looks towards the front, the minister walked out to adjust his notes. I got my mother's attention, pointed, and exclaimed, “That's what I'm going to be!” That came from a place that was deep within me and, even though I remembered it, the memory was laid to rest as I entered my teen years.

From the youngest age my heart has been filled with wonder at the world around me. One time I walked behind my grandfather whose hands were firmly on the plow, eyes always looking forward whose only words were ‘gee’ and ‘haw’ as he came to and end of a row behind his mule Mandy. Accompanied by birdsong the rich black soil my grandfather and Mandy turned over released a symphony of aromas that greeted my eight-year-old nose with messages of potential and promise along with an awareness of incredible latent power. Additionally, my grandfather owned a part of Stringer's Ridge that bordered Chattanooga; this part of the ridge was undeveloped and wild. As a pre-teen and teenager this ridge was my “sacred grove” where I could walk, contemplate, meditate, and converse with God in delicious solitude. These two places and my experience of them in the context of family and isolation was the lathe that turned my forming spirituality. The tools of knowledge, family and community, isolation, and land shaped my budding spirituality and left an indelible imprint that continues to influence my inner vision and understanding of the world.

Would that the landscape of my family of origin be as nourishing or such a refuge, but that was not to be. It is not an easy thing to live in fear, especially when one is a very sensitive child – and fears abounded. There was a spiritual terror that my father would spend eternity in hell. It was my mission to rescue his soul from that fiery, non-dying death. At revivals sponsored by my church I would “go down front” as a virtual sacrifice for my father. Yet he never turned to my expectations. His experience in WW II, the ugliness of his own childhood, and growing up in The Church of Christ had seasoned his spirit such that there was no need to flavor it with organized religion. Yet my young heart and mind could not comprehend this so instead of going fishing with him on Sunday morning I'd recall Jesus telling his parents, “Should I not be in my father's house?” and I would go to church instead – a true cause of regret in later life. Physical intimidation and pain flowed from both my parents but my mother was exceptionally skilled at mental cruelty and playing mind games. She managed to drive a wedge between any relationships my three sisters or me would try to develop with one another.

However, it was my mother that instilled in me a great fondness for church. We were always there when the doors were open: Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon for MYF, Sunday evening for the

evening service, Wednesday evening for Prayer meeting (I was the only kid there), and any other time something was going on at White Oak UMC. Unlike my peers I never fell away from attending church or believing. If anything, I was always worried that I didn't believe sufficiently enough. Later in college at Christian Youth Fellowship services I was always at a loss when asked to tell my conversion story. I would listen with envy to the tales of drugs, sex, and woe that many of my friends went through before they finally came to the Lord. When it was my turn all I could say was simply that I had always believed and had a relationship with God. That always provoked disbelieving looks from my peers. Soon I was to experience an altered state of consciousness episode that would radically alter my life. At the time I was dating a young woman named A. Wouldn't you know it? A. was a member of The Church of Christ. I even attended Northside Church of Christ with her. It was my father's childhood church. No musical instruments were allowed and 33 A.D. on the cornerstone – they had Christianity all figured out and everyone else had it wrong. I remember riding in a car in downtown Chattanooga and A.'s mother looking at me in the rearview mirror and saying, "You know, J., A. cannot marry you unless you become a Christian." Huh? That one got me because I could not recall a time when I was not a Christian.

In this context I found myself in church on a Sunday morning when the place was packed. For some reason I sat in the back row on the left side facing the front and not the traditional three back from the front on the right pew. F. A. was the minister and was a man I admired deeply. His sermons were provocative and challenging. For some reason, this particular Sunday, I couldn't concentrate on what F. was talking about. I was nervous and fidgeting. It came time to take up the offering. Since I had started working in a local grocery store I started tithing. I reached into my pocket, got my wallet that had my envelope, put it back, when something said, "You are not giving enough." At that point the congregation became a blur. In response I said, "Ok," and reached into my wallet again. The voice, "That's not what I mean." "Uh oh...what do you mean?" "I want you to serve me." "Ok." "Now go and tell everyone of this decision you just made." At that point I freaked. "Uh, Lord," uh, it is really crowded today and, you know, next week it probably won't be as crowded, maybe then?" Nothing. That afternoon was spent going over and over the event in my head. Was it a trick of my mind? Was it a way to keep from having to become a member of The Church of Christ just to marry A.? I went back to the Sunday evening service still in a quandary. F. mounted the pulpit and said, "Tonight I'm going to talk about: When you feel the Spirit moving you – don't wait." That did it. All the confusion and doubting came to an end – I just had myself a genuine call to the ministry! Fred backed this up when I shared it with him, after the service, the events I had experienced that day. Years later I would be applying for candidacy in the Priesthood with Bishop T. F. of the Diocese of North Carolina. He had called for the election of a coadjutor so I knew he wasn't accepting any new applicants but other priests assured me it would be a good practice interview. From across his desk he looked me sternly in the eyes and said in his famous gruff voice, "Why do you want to be a mannequin all dressed up in some shop window?" "Because," I replied, "I was called." He snorted, "That's just Protestant piety!" In a moment of genuine listening to my heart a reply formed on my lips, "That's OK," I said, "I was Protestant at the time." His gruff exterior dissolved into laughter and he shared with me several good points about navigating the application process for the Priesthood. Dalton, GA sits in the Appalachian hills of north Georgia. It is an unremarkable southern town but beneath its sleepy façade it manages to control 80% of the world's carpet manufacturing and supply. This economic dynamic produced a community of professional people who were type A's and very stressed. In 1988, I moved my family from the mountains of east Tennessee to Dalton, GA; I was the new Associate Rector of St Luke's Church. One day, the Rector, E. B., approached me about working up an idea to form a spiritual direction group called 'Balance.' He was concerned about the frantic pace of life taking its toll on many of our parishioners. He reasoned that a group that learned

how to meditate and worked on spiritual texts together would go a long ways toward mitigating the effects of life in Dalton.

My work with the group began an odyssey of spiritual quest beyond the confines of my Christian faith and experience. I had found an article in a magazine called Gnosis written by Edmund Helminski titled, "The Education of the Soul." It was a brief article that extolled a group spiritual work from the perspective of Sufism. The article was also my first exposure to Jelaluddin Rumi. Years later while serving as Rector of Christ Church in Oil City, PA, I once again gathered a group of spiritual seekers together. This time we focused our hearts through "Healing the Child Within Group," Our minds through "Education for Ministry," and our souls through "The Contemplative Prayer Group." Some members of the group fought the demon of child sexual abuse and found the confidence to rise spiritually beyond the emotional death that such trauma brings. I found myself struggling with my faith. In the context of this intimate community I was free to express my doubts and concerns openly.

While in Oil City the opportunity to attend a gathering of Mevlevi Sufis presented itself. E. H., who was now K. H., was the Sheik of the group. The first gathering I attended with my wife, M. J. At that gathering I met G. W., a Roman Catholic writer from Jersey City, NJ. He compelled me to say Mass daily which I did. It was a spiritually rich week with zikr (a service of remembrance saying the name of God) daily, shobet (Spiritual conversation) three times a day, and a sema (the turning ceremony – 'whirling') on Thursday. It was an exhilarating experience to be worshipping together with Muslims, Jews, Christians, Gnostics, and Buddhists without any rancor or discord.

At another gathering the guest Pir (teacher) was a gentle physician from Istanbul, Turkey by the name of Refik. In his sohbet he would often speak of Jesus in such terms of compassion and love that I could feel the presence of Jesus in the room. Once K. cut him off with, "But Muhammad..." before he could go on Refik agitatedly and sternly said, "But I am talking about," then his voice softened to sweetness, "Jesus." After years of restless seeking and wandering I thought I had found my true spiritual home. This was a seasoned spiritual group that had been together for sixteen years. I was filled with wonder, desire, and idealism. Later in individual conversations with K. at his house I would painfully learn that the depths of my projections and the reality of the group were very far apart.

There was such love in this group though. A love that still warms a large part of my heart. Among the Sufis I came to recognize a truth about myself. After moving to Chappaqua, NY, G. introduced me to a group of Sufis who met for zikr and study in Chelsea, NYC. These women and men became special friends with whom I could speak frankly about spiritual insight and revelations. Last spring we were just beginning to read Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of The Kernel of the Kernel, by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. R., our Pir, asked me to read and I read the following:

If a Gnostic ('arif) is really a Gnostic he cannot stay tied to one form of belief." That is to say, if a possessor of knowledge is cognizant of being in his own ipseity, in all it's meaning, he will not remain trapped in on belief. He will not decrease his circle of belief. He is like materia prima (hayula) and will accept whatever form he is presented with. These forms being external, there is no change to the kernel in his interior universe. The knower of God ('arif bi'llah), whatever his origin is, remains like that. He accepts all kinds of beliefs, but does not remain tied to any figurative belief. Whatever his place is in the Divine Knowledge, which is essential knowledge, he remains in that place; knowing the kernel of the all belief he sees the

interior and not the exterior. He recognizes the thing, whose kernel he knows, whatever apparel it puts on, and in this manner his circle is large. Without looking at whatever clothing they appear under in the exterior he reaches into the origin of those beliefs and witnesses them from every possible place.” (The Kernel of the Kernel, trans. Ismail Hakki Bursevi, Beshara Publications, page 1.)

Reading those lines was akin to a spiritual experience. It was as though I had finally heard someone put into words what I could not say about myself. R.'s eyes twinkled as she saw the impact of those words hit home. My fading road began in a territory of “One Way” and “Jesus is the Only Way” and now carries me even into landscapes that stretch me further and further. Yet always the kernel has been present. The strength of standing in that place allows me to appreciate and understand the varied approaches to the One. And still, I have a secret to share...

-J. M.

FAITH REFLECTION #31

A number of people influenced my journey to faith in Christ. My parents embodied in their marriage the rich embodiment of being part of "family," and of having a father in whom a sense of honor, duty and love blended in seamless ways. So, when others began to speak of the family of God and a heavenly Father, my interior life had a frame of reference for its meaning. A Methodist pastor uncle, God's Bible School grad, holiness preacher and compassionate inner city pastor, blew negative stereotypes of 'preeachers.' And some friends who passed through my life at key points also bore witness in the quality of their faith and love of the impact of what must be a risen Christ, since no ancient religious crank, however well intended or wound up with passion, could work the changes I saw, and still see in the lives of his followers.

I came to a formal confession of faith at 17 and joined the UMC, the gradual collection of impressions and reflections, experiences and hard thinking by which I was moved toward the One who "has expected my return." In retrospect, the passive voice is the only way to express conversion. I decided to follow Jesus as, in Calvin's description of his own call to faith, "the Lord converted me to himself." My heart was strangely warmed, but not thanks to any matches I struck.

I do not believe in organized religion. I BELIEVE in Jesus, who gave firm allegiance to the organized religion of his day, besotted as it was, as a reminder of accountability, of the community dimension of any living faith, as a prod toward the collective doing of God's will that changes cultures and continents and builds the hospitals and schools and movements for justice that a collection of me-first solo believers can never accomplish. My faith influences my values and relationships, the goals I set, the way I understand and respond to reversal or pain, and the way in which I frame questions of life's meaning and ultimate purpose.

High points are witnessing new births and the active living out of vocations of service to Christ. Low points were a dull seminary culture nearly devoid of creativity, curiosity or any sense of spontaneity and the widespread contentment with and subtle nurturing of shallow relationships cuddled with clichés and predictabilities. Personal prayer is vital; classic prayers help, though often they are read with tedium by congregations and with no sense of excitement or engagement by clergy who parrot them.

Worship services are life. Chapel programs have meaning as they kindle and enable the use of the spiritual gifts of the members of the body. Spirituality is an inner, private sensitivity to the transcendent. Of course, when Barbara Walters asked Monica Lewinsky if she felt she had "sinned," she paused and then replied that "I've not very religious but I am...spiritual." Spirituality without the Son is emotional Valium. Diversity is a descriptive term for a culture or a larger group where substantial differences exist but are not treated as a cause for banishment or punishment. Community is the consciousness of a number of people (including very large numbers) of a mutual connectedness and belonging that brings the fruit of seeking a common well being...or 'commonweal.' I am a UM Navy chaplain. Faith group is not relevant in general pastoral care. I cannot say mass with theological integrity, an LDS chaplain cannot lead Protestant worship that has theological integrity, a Southern Baptist chaplain cannot be required to abide by an Episcopal liturgy without violating his integrity, these being examples of the negative limits rightly imposed by faith group. Happily, in the UM tradition the default setting is for the chaplain to ask, "How MUCH can I do and support and participate in" rather than "How much can I refuse to do, oppose or denounce" where worship styles and pastoral programs are concerned.

Chaplains have been fine colleagues, supportive and caring, occasionally infuriating, and very infrequently a real burden...though in every case of the latter it is been due to personality driven issues rather than profound theological problems. At command functions, secular settings with participants required to attend, chaplains can be required to attend like all others at that command. If asked to offer a prayer, he or she should seek to offer a prayer that is really a prayer, that is true to the baseline beliefs of his or her faith group, and that take all gracious pain to be inclusive of the variety of spiritual traditions represented at "command" events. When I conclude a prayer, "In Your Strong Name, " I as a Christian know exactly what I mean and to whom I am praying. I expect any chaplain, whether Christian or Jew or Muslim, to participate publicly in the same sensitive spirit. I also see no dishonor in a chaplain who feels he or she must be faith group specific in every public prayer to make that known to the command in advance, and leave the decision of whether or not the chaplain is part of the program to be decided in that light. Chaplains have the "right" to pray anyway they want but have no "entitlement" to pray anywhere they want.

-R. P.

FAITH REFLECTION #32

When "L." mentioned this spiritual journey project I immediately wanted to participate, not at first realizing the tight deadline as well as the challenge of writing a whole journey in a short space. I'm not sure how much you want so I hope what I'll write will help you.

I was not born into a Christian family. My mother occasionally attended Unitarian Church. My father was rarely dragged along. There was no real curriculum for children at the church we went to. We usually got to color. One time we were directed to use our crayons on large paper to make prayer mats and to pray to Allah.

As I grew up I became increasingly dissatisfied with answers to my questions. Why are we here, who made us, how did the world get to be? If all this was just a great big mistake, then I wanted no part in a life spent without meaning. At 11 I first tried to kill myself. But no one else knew. In high school I played sports tirelessly but I also threw myself into destructive behaviors having to do with boys, alcohol and drugs. Of course these did not make me happy. When I went away to college I began

seeing a school clinic psychologist for my depression and self-destructive behaviors. Anti-depressants did not help and neither did talking. I tried to kill myself and my family then knew but they didn't have a solution for me. I was diagnosed with manic depression, bi-polar illness and was told I'd be on medicine for the rest of my life.

A really talented boy I was in the art program with came to see me at the hospital once. But instead of pitying me for my feelings and behavior, he told me how mad he was at my selfish self-destructive ways and how I was a heathen going to hell. Indignant, I did not accept that, but I had a feeling from even before that incident, that he and I were meant to be together. We tried one date to the movies, but afterwards he said how terrible he felt, that this just wasn't right. He explained that he was going to heaven when he died, and I wasn't. So he graduated, moved away, and said if I should become a Christian to let him know.

I was still miserable. A friend told me about a church she once went to and they made her feel better. One day I ended up there, crying. Two students there asked what was wrong. They suggested prayer. So we held hands and prayed: for the first time I knew God was 'up there' and listening. They gave me a New Testament. I went home and opened it. It was as if the page was lit up, and I only read from John 1:1 – 1:14 before I repented and turned my life over to God. But as I lay there sobbing, He seemed to pat me on the back and say, "Don't cry. My Son has taken care of this. Keep reading." So I read, and understood.

I called that Christian boy, he came back the next day, and we got married four months later. I have battled since those days with guilt over my family, and have wrestled to keep them out my marriage. From those first days my husband, who is now a Marine, has been my greatest ally and teammate. Since my conversion, my "bi-polar illness" disappeared. We have been married 12 years and I am thrilled to say that at long last God is answering my prayer through my husband's deployments and our seeking His will for our marriage and family. Not of it has been easy. We couldn't have lasted this long without His loving hand of grace. I hope this is what you wanted. Thanks for the chance to tell of His goodness.

-T. J.

FAITH REFLECTION #33

- My Pastor has had the greatest influence on my faith journey.
- I "got saved" at age 20 just prior to my 21st birthday in which I fully intended to go to a bar and get smashed...but God had other plans!
- Christianity is the only faith I have known.
- Faith moves the mountains and pleases God and I need that.
- The highpoints are the answered prayer.
- The low points are when it seems like God is quiet.
- Prayer is paramount...combined with the spiritual discipline of fasting really seems to "increase the power surge" in my life and ministry.
- I define spirituality to mean...that most inner place where no one is allowed except God, His Son and the Holy Spirit...and the Word...I call it "Behind the Veil."
- I define diversity to mean...anyone who is "other" or incredibly different than myself in any number of kinds of ways.

- I define community with the root of it...commune...whenever I am getting together or put together with a group...be it geographical...nautical aboard ship...or together for common pursuits, i.e.- school...I am in a community...
- As a Christian...I am a member of the National Baptist Convention...as a person of faith I am a member of Christ's Body...fitly joined together with MANY...
- Theologically and Spiritually...I am Pentecostal/Charismatic.
- A Chaplain's faith group is very significant because that is the body or organization that permits that servant to enter the military and minister.
- A Chaplain's faith group celebrates a "closed sacrament" for that group only and I was not allowed to participate understandably so.
- Chaplains were very useful to me when I was applying to the chaplain candidate program.
- Yes...and I was very thankful a chaplain visited my family member while I was deployed.
- Chaplains who have given of themselves selflessly...is the biggest blessing of all
- I hope that at command functions where "embarrassing" moments can happen to any of us... I just hope and pray they take the heed to Paul's words that their liberty doesn't cause another brother to "fall."

-R. J.

FAITH REFLECTION #34

I was fortunate enough to be born to parents who made their religious beliefs a part of their daily lives and imparted, as much as a parent can, those beliefs to their children. Until my early teen years my family attended Baptist churches. That included weekly Sunday school and Sunday services, Vacation Bible School, and various church functions.

My father and mother both taught Sunday school at various times and my father was a Deacon. I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was 10 years old. Our minister at the time was Brother G. He was an elderly man, and unlike many fire and brimstone Baptist ministers, was a gentle, kindly man who radiated God's love. Much of what I believe today I learned from Brother G. He taught me that Christianity didn't need to be complicated. The secret was simple faith...our faith in God and His Son and God's faithfulness to us. To this day, that is the cornerstone of my beliefs.

In my early teen years my family began attending a "spirit filled" church. Most people would recognize the term Pentecostal, but I believe that imparts a negative attitude to many people. To me, that was a completely different level of Christianity. Not better or worse, just different. There, I was exposed to many new ideas and parts of the Bible that most people believe don't apply today. I found that at that church I became closer to God, but at the same time I began to lose my faith in "organized" religion. I started seeing that many people of many different denominations or faiths lacked the compassion of Christ. The tolerance and compassion that was central to Christ's personality and walk on earth were overshadowed by intolerance of other's beliefs. It was at that point that I became disenchanted with "organized" religion. But that is my personal opinion, and by no means do I try to push that opinion on others. In fact, I believe churches are essential, especially to children. Children need to feel they are a part of something. And coming together with other Christians is important to children. Parents can impart their beliefs, but children seeing and experiencing the "community" of believers is essential.

My faith is definitely a part of my daily life. I talk to God constantly, and I believe that the primary personal impact of my faith is the way I relate to others. I try to see things and situations through their eyes. That helps me understand, show the compassion that I can, and treat them the way I would like to be treated. I don't have much in material world, so I give what I can of myself. I can't say that I'm always successful or that I give or do as much as God would like me to... but the beliefs are there and I do try to live by those beliefs. To me, that is spirituality, trying to live what you believe. If, by doing that, I've positively impacted anyone in any way...then I have done God's Will.

-D. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #35

My parents had the most impact in my life. I grew up going to a Baptist Christian School and was saved at the age of 5. I believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God by which all things are given to us pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). I therefore, place a great priority on knowing God through the study of His Word. I believe that I have been created for God's pleasure (Rev. 4:11) and as His church are to worship Him as an expression of my love (Ps. 95:6). My worship must be spiritual (John 4:24) and is expressed through singing, praying, giving, and obedience to His Lordship in my life. I look for His love in my life as the supreme manifestation that I truly worship Him. I believe in fellowship (koinonia) of all true believers in Christ (1 John 1:3, I Cor. 1:9). I place high priority on the gathering of the body of Christ together to provoke one another to love and good works (Heb. 10: 24). I understand the importance of body ministry, and each individual doing their part for the whole body and thus every need being met in Jesus' name. I believe in the need for discipleship and training for the perfecting and for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11). The church has bing out called to go out and make disciples, following Jesus and serving Him requires both sacrifice and commitment (Luke 9:59-62). Training means being equipped and not just educated or informed.

I am now a non-denominational Christian. I believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again 3 days later for our sins on the cross. I believe in the trinity and I believe he is coming again. I have not changed religions but I have changed denominations when I was little I was Baptist but now am non-denominational.

God plays a huge role in my daily life-it's all about him from the tiniest little things as washing the dishes to listening to sermons he is always around me guiding me and helping me grow closer to him-for me its not about religion(s) its about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. I don't care what religion you come from as long as you have that relationship with Jesus as your savior. Prayer, worship and church programs are extremely important to me. I believe in the power of prayer, he says, "Ask and ye shall receive, knock and it shall be given to you." Prayer is my quiet time with God and allowing time for him to speak to me. Worship services and church times allow me to fellowship with other believers and be held accountable to someone in my daily walk with God and it gives me an place to meet people of the same faith as myself. I define spirituality as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Diversity is not only seen in the church but outside the church but inside the church I would say it would be that of different denominations which set us apart mostly for little reasons but when we get back to the basics Jesus is the center of it all. That is why I don't care what denomination you are as long as you believe in God-the rest can be debated later.

-T. M.

FAITH REFLECTION #36

What persons had the greatest effect on my life would be that of my parents. (Proverbs 22: 6 "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it"). When people ask how long I have been attending church my typical response is that of I was born in church. I was in attendance when my parents left church to go to the hospital, then... it was to a Catholic hospital... and then I was in church that next Sunday. I attended church until I was in college, where I made the excuse that I was too busy to go. What little did I realize is that IO could not afford not to go. That has been my entire attitude of church attendance.

I was a small boy all of the age of 7 when I made my professions of faith, that there I only ONE Savior and that is JESUS CHRIST. I in a way feel slightly shaded in the fact that I did not have a great "new" feeling that came over me. I think that the reason for this is that I was following in the footsteps of a small child and did not realize the vastness of the "world" yet. (Be in the world but not of it). Being raised Southern Baptist has been a rewarding experience for my self when traveling around the world, and discovering other religious cultures. John 14: 6 states the "I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me". This is on of two major points that all other so-called religions are failing to mention. The other is all other so-called messiahs are and were men and are dead. Jesus Christ is the only true Messiah, and that one of these days "Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord," Romans 14:11. Even Satan and all of his minions are well aware of the validity and the power that Christ holds. Not only do they believe in Christ but also they tremble at the mere thought and word of his name.

When I was in the Navy stationed in Kings Bay, GA I was looking for a church that was not only teaching the word of GOD but also living what it was teaching. After I started to attend, did I realize that I was missing out on a part of life that he had instituted, marriage. I started to pray and look in life what God was trying to give me. Everywhere I look there was a lack of God fearing Christian woman. And I kept praying and recalling the scriptures of how "To every thing there is a season..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9). At this point in my life I was concerned as to what Christ had in mind for my life. On Sunday I was listening to the sermon and it happened to be based on the scripture 1 Chronicles 4: 9-10. This is the prayer of Jabez. Jabez prays that the Lord would not only bless him, but bless him double, increase all of his wealth, let the hand of God be with me, keep me from evil, keep me from grief. These 5 requests are the most general ones Jehovah hears from the average man, God heard Jabez and we have all the right in the world to believe that He will also hear all others who pray like wise from the heart, for He is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11).

After I started to pray the prayer of Jabez, I was amazed of what was happening in my life. He blessed me with a beautiful wife, and fulfilled all 5 points that are made in the scripture, in the Prayer of Jabez. The minister at this point was not a NAVY chaplain, but an Episcopalian minister that was a proud member of the USMC. Father M. was a man that was very understanding. He gave a lot of help and advice to a very trouble and misguided person that had little to no knowledge in how to keep a relationship let alone start one. His greatest advice that still holds true in all situations is, "Always keep your eyes on Christ, build the relationship with your spouse that you have with Christ, enjoy life as it was the first day, and always eat your brussel sprouts". All of that advice sounded good with the exception of the sprouts but it was still sound advice.

The Foot Prints in the Sand is a meaningful descriptive that still has some very smart people very confused. And in a good bit of sound comments, I would much rather ask for help on a daily basis,

than not to have the help of the Lord. Some people say that religion or better yet Christ and the whole idea of salvation are just merely a crutch to “get me through this life.” If you don’t think that you need a little help just ask, you will be surprised as to what can happen.

-W. S.

FAITH REFLECTION #37

My name is A. F., and I am originally from Newquay, Cornwall in England. You might already see the connection? The connection is with L. R. whom as I found out last summer, was stationed in Cornwall. I am a 35-year-old mother of two boys (I. 9 and C. 3,) and have been married to my husband P. (Capt. USMC) for 15 years. We met while he was stationed at St. Mawgan in 1986.

I was baptized in a Methodist church, but unfortunately that was the extent of my interactions with the church. My parents divorced when I was 8 and my mother remarried not long after. Growing up in England in the public school system was really my first initiation to religion. When I was young, we would have assembly, and we would sing hymns and recite the Lord’s Prayer. Later at the comprehensive school, it was mandatory to take religious education studies for the first two or three years. I remember going through the Old Testament and learning about the stories. I enjoyed learning about the history, but yet that was the extent of my knowledge of the bible.

I never really had a home that was very loving. I knew my mother loved me, but she was not very demonstrative with her feelings, but at the same time she could be rather over protective. My stepfather was generous with material things, but he was not there for me as a father should be. I only saw my biological father once early on when my Mom remarried, and then later when I was 18. As a teenager I had a lot of freedom, and as a result I ended up drinking under age, and became sexually active. I had been exposed to some things as a young child, that I believe now had triggered this behavior. There was also verbal abuse that clearly had troubled me also, and that is why I went down the path that I had chosen. It was during this time that I had met P., my husband. He was raised in a very devout Catholic home, and to cut a long story short, he ended up turning me around. We got married at my husband’s church in Wisconsin. I felt that it was the right thing to do, because after all I was not affiliated with any church, and my parents did not object. My parents came over, and I went through some classes because I wasn’t Catholic, and then we were married and set off to Camp Lejeune. My husband, although raised in the Catholic Church had some issues, and never went back. The only time we found ourselves at church again was when we attended friend’s weddings!

As the early years went by, we met many friends who were Christians, but yet we were steadfast in our own self-centered worlds. We would make excuses, and would state that yes we did believe in God, which we did, but yet we did not have time to go to church or we just hadn’t found the right church. When we had our first son that was when I began to question a lot of things. My parents asked, “When are you going to get him christened?” I would reply, “What’s the point! I was baptized, and yet you never took me to church!” They were not happy, and retorted that if he were to die then he would not go to heaven. I then went into a depression. All that came to mind were all the things that had happened to me as a child, and how they had raised me, and I became very angry. I tried to seek help. My husband at the time was going through the MECEP program at the University of South Carolina, and he was about to get his commission. Life was going to be good, or so I thought. I called the mental health line and was told there was no one to take my call and that should I call back. I then made an appointment to see a doctor down at Fort Jackson, and she wanted to put

me on medication. I declined, as we were getting ready to move, and thought that a fresh start would do the trick.

Nine years, another child and five moves, I was still not happy. I felt so guilty. I had a successful husband whom I adored and whom adored me back. I had two beautiful children, but yet there was something missing. We had been to churches in that time and “shopped” around for the right one. I was still empty inside. My husband and I would often talk about some of our friends who were Christians, and we’d mention how we would like to be more like them. We were all talk and no action! I started to do things for myself instead. I took personal interest classes; I read the latest self-help book that was featured on Oprah. Nothing worked! Then it was time to move, and I vowed that

this move would be better. I would get yet another fresh start!

Well, we moved back to Camp Lejeune, third time’s a charm! I was excited to come back, we had met some lovely people over the years, some active duty, and others retired. There was one couple in particular. R. was a retired veteran from Iwo Jima, the Chosin Reservoir, and Vietnam, and his wife M. was the sweetest southern lady you would ever meet. Unfortunately, R. had developed senile dementia and really started to fail physically. The day we moved into our house was the day he passed on. I was devastated. R. and M. had always taken care of me in the early years. They would call when P. deployed, and he would accompany me to the airport when I would pick up P. He was a good man and a respected one too. That was evident at his funeral, which I hasten to add was the very first one I had attended in my life. I was deeply touched, and I vowed to M. that it was our turn to take care of her. Shortly after that my parents came over.

One morning they went off on their own and were gone for a couple of hours. They came back, and had big smiles upon their faces. “You’ll never guess who we’ve been talking to at Dunkin Donuts?” A little dumbfounded, I replied “no.” They mentioned that on going into the shop they noticed a M. M. outside with Cornwall on it. Well low and behold it was L.! They chatted for some time, and L. gave them her phone number and address to give to me. When I looked at the address I said to my mother that I knew exactly where she lived and that it was only a few streets behind ours. Well I decided that there was no time like the present to go and say “hi.” We walked over there, and L. was refinishing a table in the garage. We had tea, and she asked me if I would care to join her on Tuesday afternoons along with some other ladies for tea. I obliged, and started going for tea. I noticed immediately that these other women were Christian friends of hers. They would chat about their churches and bible studies that they attended; all the while I kept quiet. Sure I would respond to questions regarding daily things, but I didn’t really respond to anything to do with religion. I started to question myself as to whether I should continue going. I felt like I was on the outside of a window looking in. One particular Tuesday, October 7 to be precise, was the day of reckoning for me. It was the day of reckoning between me and God. I was not feeling very comfortable while I was there. I felt hot and flustered, and then it was time to leave. However, as I was getting ready to leave I looked at K. (a very good Christian friend and neighbor of L.’s,) and I immediately felt the need to explain to her how I was feeling. L. at the time had to answer a phone call and was pulled away from our conversation. I said to K. that I felt like I shouldn’t be there because I felt like I didn’t really belong. I told her that I believed in God, but that I hadn’t accepted Christ into my life. K. went on to tell me when she had been saved, and it was by then that I started to cry. I felt so overwhelmed at that moment, and so helpless. I explained that I thought the problem with me was because of never having had a relationship with my biological father. It was then that I realized that it was not my

earthly father that I was mourning, but my Heavenly Father. K. led me into prayer along with L., and I asked Christ into my heart.

I will never forget that day, nor K. and L. It will forever remain etched in my heart. I tried to put into words when I returned home that evening of how I felt. To quote myself "I felt at peace for once." I felt absolute joy, relief and sorrow. The sorrow was brief, for I was saddened by how long it had taken me to get to this point in my life. I really felt that I had become a new woman, with new eyes. Everything around me looked different, even my children. It was all good. My mind no longer drifted off to that tawdry place that would cast thoughts of how unfair things were. The only place that my mind drifted off was to a place of wonderment that I felt. I felt so free and so alive, and I couldn't wait to share my news. My husband was actually out in the field that week, but when he returned I told him what had happened. He was elated, and relieved. He had tried so hard over the years to help me, but I was not responsive. After that day, I can only hope and pray that those I love will too feel the comfort that I felt. I knew then that there would be times that would be a test of my faith. I knew that I could trust in God and that I would never be alone, and that He loves me no matter what. That was what I was always looking for deep in my heart, and at 35 years of age I finally found it.

Prior to that day since R.'s funeral, my husband and I had been attending Northwoods United Methodist Church. We have both become very active in the church along with our children. We made a commitment to them and to God by becoming members of their congregation. Our life has become so enriched since attending church. I also have attended CREDO. L. had invited me to attend last November for a Personal Growth Retreat, and a few weeks ago I attended the PGR2, which included the "Life Balance" seminar. As you can see L. has been very instrumental to where I am now. Although I feel like I'm spiritually young, I am finding that I am surrounding myself with people who share in God's love, and I am eager to grow. I feel that I already have grown so much in such a short time, and I'm anxious to see what kind of person God will have me be 10 years from now. Right now though, I take each day as it comes. My husband will be going to Iraq in August, and I know that during that time I will be relying on God to help me through that, but it is such a relief to know that I'm not alone.

-A. F.

FAITH REFLECTION #38

I was raised in a Southern Baptist family. My mother still has very strong Southern Baptist views. I have had a struggle defining my faith and exactly what I believe. Though I attended church regularly for most of my life I found that I often felt as if I didn't belong or that there were things that were happening that I didn't agree with. I have found that I fit most comfortably in the Episcopal community. I enjoy the Anglican style of worship and have strong memories of the First Episcopal Service that I attended when I was in high school. I wasn't entirely sure of all the symbolism but I felt very much at home in that service. As I grew into adulthood I have felt that same sense of comfort and familiarity as I read the Nicene Creed or follow a Rite 1 service from the Book of Common Prayer. Following a prayer and knowing that people have said these same words and used these same ceremonies to express their faith over time. A minister in San Diego described it quite well. She was talking about types of spirituality and she said that often people who tend to be open and flexible in their ideology crave the structure in services. That the two types fit together with a greater purpose and quality than either type alone.

I find that often people are excluded from churches. He shouldn't be here. Look at his clothes. She doesn't belong here, she's gay! I have truly struggled with acceptance and fellowship. I have finally found a home where I feel like anyone is welcome. Where I can bring my friends to worship with me and I don't have to worry that they will be hurt or offended by what is said or done. What would be the point of sharing your faith if people will be hurt and confused by your message?

How the military affects my faith is huge. Anyone who has dealt with the military for more than two seconds knows that the military lifestyle itself is an ultimate test of faith. Having enough faith to pack up and leave everyone and everything that you know to live and work in new places the world over. How could you do something like that on your own? As I see military families struggle with the life they lead I am again and again thankful for my faith and my ability to rely on it to help me with those transitions. Chaplains have not had a huge affect on my life as yet. In the past we have always attended worship services in the town that we were in. Not that the chapel was especially unable to meet our needs but we wanted a service that was Anglican in style but not Catholic and that doesn't seem to happen in the chapel services too often.

-D. S.

FAITH REFLECTION #39

I am a Naval reservist, HM1 P. C. I am from a broken family, parents divorced with seven children at the time I was 14. I am the 2nd oldest. My parents raised us in the Catholic faith. When my mother remarried she married a decent man but has no belief in God. I always believed in God yet, thru my high school years I was basically separated from him in many ways. I later married a very good Christian woman, P., soon after I enlisted in the Air Force. This was probably the best and most important thing that ever happened to me, she was raised in the Church of God (Indiana). We also married within that Church. While in the USAF a military Chaplain tried to have me sign a document stating that I would raise my children in the Catholic faith. I resented his attempt to do this, without even asking me to first consult with my wife. To this day I've never forgot his motive. Well during my USAF career it was hard overseas to always attend church since we never seemed to fit or enjoyed the military service. Yet we remained faithful to God. Now that I am out of the USAF I joined the USNR. I live in Grand Rapids MI. Here many faiths are alive and well. I and my family of P. (wife) and two children A. (18) and G. (15). All attend church regularly. My children are very knowledgeable of Jesus and are believers of which I am proud. I attend a men's group at the church.

A very influential person in my life is L. S. who has led our men's group with much courage. We are currently finishing the book *Wild at Heart* by John Eldridge I believe. This has been one of the most powerful and direction filled books I ever read. I am currently At FMSS School learning to be a combat corpsman for the Marines. I am 46 years old. My heart asks why I am even here. To a few tell them it is because God has instructed me to be here. I study hard and work out all the time. I'm not here to win an award but only to serve God. Yet I am accomplishing things here I would have not believed. This yet still furthers my faith. I do not know what my future will be or how God will use me. Yet I do not worry over such things. Since if God is with me who can stand against me. I have had visions of war and myself being there. This may be my calling. If so I can only say that I'm proud to be a Christian above all things, a husband & father next and finally a soldier in God's Army.

-P. C.

FAITH REFLECTION #40

Chaplain Alkula, I have tried to describe my own journey to you, but have found that it is impossible. Impossible because when I begin to describe my own beliefs, they fail to fit what I perceive is your set of faith expectations. Like most people I want my faith articles to be shared by others. If something I believe isn't precisely what you believe then the exercise is moot. Suffice to say that because Jesus became man, lived, died, and resurrected I have a champion. There is no place, time, set of events or conjectures that He doesn't inhabit and manifest himself in some way, shape or form that shows the truth of Him to me.

In all my life there have been sorrow, crushed expectations, alienation, violence, drunkenness, and disappointment. In all those things Christ reveals Himself as the 'Man of Sorrows' who understands and correctly points back to the fall of mankind. But He gave me cause to lift up my eyes to see Him on a cross and revealed in all His truthfulness and He lifted me up with Him and will not let me fall.

I belong to no faith group other than the one that confesses with their lips and believes in the hearts that He is risen and is the Son of God. Pastors, priests, deacons, and the like are just like me 'fallen short of the Glory of God'. They need to be working out their own salvation in fear and trembling. As they are now, they are forfeiting their right to approach ordinary people on a commonality background. They no longer do the same things that working people do and are placing themselves above the flock instead of within it.

There is only one high priest, one sacrifice, one intercessor, and one champion. One hears about Him by hearing the gospel (truth) of any matter. If the truth of the matter is that a child is starving then in that truth you have met Christ and in that child you have seen Him.

Belief/faith comes through hearing and then experiencing something. Christ gave us the only show and tell that has ever made any sense to me.

Sorry to take up your time with my goings on. I hope you can derive some sort of meaningful demographic, etc out of this.

-D. M.

FAITH REFLECTION #41

Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. Isaiah 49:1 (NIV)

A Hallmark card I recently received provided a detailed analysis of the origin and etymology of the name H. The card described "H." as "bubbling with energy... proud and independent" and "a woman of the world who loves luxury, festivities, and travel." I could not help but love the card! It went on to state that "H." also had a "vulnerable side and was easily hurt by an unkind word." While my faith does not lie within a card intended to broadly define many in this world, I could not help but reflect on how intentional God is when he creates us. He thinks well in advance, making plans and provisions for our gifts, our paths, our flaws... everything right down to our names.

Influences on my early spiritual formation began within a family seeking to serve God and model Christian life and from within the First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem. While I always understood Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I vividly recall accepting him into my heart on a Middler Retreat at Camp Brainerd under the guidance of Rev. D. H. Mission trips to Costa Rica, summer work camps, High School Choir and regular church attendance helped to teach and discipline my growing faith. Those years were peaks in my spiritual journey that slowly lead into a deep valley as the end of my senior year of High School approached. The next three years of my life were filled with spiritual battle, depression and an eating disorder. During those years of struggle, I was often spiritually dry, battling with questions concerning my faith and my life. I refueled by returning home after the second semester of college and becoming actively involved in Youth Ministries at First Presbyterian Church and seeking the protection of the unconditional love of my parents. In Youth Ministries, my energy and creativity came alive and I was able to closely relate and understand the struggles that teenagers faced. Still seeking healing and direction, I went to Costa Rica to independently study Spanish for three months. There I found spiritual guidance through the D.'s and through the Church of Tirrasses. It was there that I began to see ministry as a possible direction for my life. However, I still had to go through the process of healing and forgiveness before I was ready to truly listen to God's call.

When I returned to Georgetown to finish my degree I quickly discovered that the Lord had other plans. I needed to be completely healed from my depression and eating disorder before I could get to the task of determining what I was to do with my life. As I struggled through counseling I slowly realized that the only way to fully heal was to relinquish all control to God. Fortunately, God understands that I am a fiercely independent and proud person... he made it crystal clear that I needed to be molded into a more humble and disciplined servant.

My final year at college was a year of spiritual growth, self-discovery, and joy. International prayers for my healing came true and I began to thrive on the Word of God. That summer I was lead to be an adult supervisor for the Presbyterian Youth Triennium. There I responded to the call to seek out more information regarding ministry opportunities and seminaries. Later that summer I had a chance to speak with Rev. E. B. regarding my life, my struggles, and the direction that the Lord was pulling me.

As I prayed about the sense of call I felt, I also prayed the relationship I was in with my soon-to-be fiancé. With a strong sense of joy and peace, we became engaged before I returned for my last semester as school. I continued to pray for guidance and I continued to feel that the Lord wanted me to use my gifts in ministry. After feeling called to begin the Inquirers process, God clearly opened the doors and I entered feeling a sense excitement and confidence. However, I felt unsure on how God would bring together my desire to work in ministry, my new marriage to a military officer, and the nagging sense that I was to look at Theological Seminaries. After my marriage and move to North Carolina, God continued to open doors (in his own time) for me to work in ministry. It was such an amazing experience to see his plans fall into place! I am now working part-time on the Marine Corps Base as the Director of Religious Education. I am in charge of developing and running the Sunday school program, Children's Worship, Youth program and Adult Education Programs. I recently was lead to visit Duke Divinity School and Union Theological Seminary and I have been looking to God for guidance through this process. God continues to open doors, answer prayers, and provide clarity as I move slowly through this process.

I move forward with a sense of true call, knowing that God faithfully answers my questions and prayers. Even though he has not yet made it clear where he wants my ministry to go, he has made

provisions for my ministry to begin. As I decide on which program and seminary to apply to, I trust that God will direct me. I thank God for my gifts, joys, pain and struggles because I know that he has made plans to use it all.

-H. K.

FAITH REFLECTION #42

M. H., a Pastor for a small country church (Pine Creek Church of the Brethren) in Northern Indiana arrived around 1968 to a farming community trying to accept the turmoil our Nation was in. As a nine year old, he always had time to talk to me as he led our church, weeded his garden or mowed his lawn. Memories of his leadership has guided me most of my life though most of the difficult decisions concerning business to family trauma. My faith was established at age 23 when the thought of being alone for eternity snapped me to my senses from the 3 years I claimed I was atheist. I had never felt more alone and depressed as that time. Every day I think about the Lord and how fortunate I am to receive his blessings and guidance.

The Methodist church in this community my wife and I attended in the past has been more concerned with business and money than carrying on the spirit of Christ. This has turned me off of many organized religions when I see the elderly pressured to leave an endowment while the reverend drives off in his new, tax-free luxury automobile. The church does have a wonderful pre-school program my son attended and I notice some change starting to take place in the ministries. I hope to attend in the near future so my 6 year old may have the foundation laid for his own religious belief.

I am not of the Armed Forces of these US States, but respect a Chaplain's position caring for the Soldiers and Sailors through spiritual guidance through these times of war. May God bless this Nation and us all.

-P. B.

FAITH REFLECTION #43

I was raised Catholic, and we went to church every Sunday like clockwork. Good parents -very moral, very upright - nice people raised me in a good home. After I went off to college, I stopped attending church, and so did my parents, eventually. I didn't see the point in being a part of something I really didn't agree with 100%. But then, all college students are idealistic, aren't they? Fast-forward several years, and I am engaged to a Marine (S.) and the man who married us was my fiancé's brother's father-in-law. My brother-in-law to be and his wife were both Christians, as was her whole family, and it was then that the seed was planted in my life. We talked a little with the pastor about faith and religion, and attended his church whenever we were in town for counseling. I was absolutely amazed that someone could (would) actually take a passage from the Bible and preach about how it related to my life. My experience as a child was nothing like that. I knew no Bible stories, nor could I even tell you what John 3:16 meant.

We moved to Hawaii, away from family influences, and were met at the airport by our sponsoring couple. God knew what we needed, because they were both strong Christians. The guys went off on a short deployment, and she (T.) took me to church with her. I grew to love the service, the music,

and the people, but still didn't have a relationship with the Lord. My husband attended with me when he returned home, but wasn't as enthusiastic as I.

6 months after I first attended that base chapel, we had a revival. My husband was deployed to Okinawa, so I was free to attend each night. On the final night, one of my acquaintances stood up and gave her testimony. She described her perfect life - kids, husband, house, and hobbies - but said there had been something missing. She went on to explain how she and her husband were led to Christ by a godly friend of theirs. I was shaking inside when the chaplain gave the altar call. I didn't know what to do, but my legs walked themselves up to the front. I tapped him on the shoulder and told him that my faith wasn't what it needed to be.

He asked me if I died that night, would I be going to heaven? I replied that yes I would. He asked me why, and my answer was that I had always been a good person and tried to do the right thing. His response: Romans 3:23 (For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.) He explained to me that no one is righteous enough on their own to work their way into heaven. It is only by God's grace that any of us can have eternal life. I accepted Christ at that moment, and I felt as if a big weight - that I hadn't even known was there - had been lifted from my shoulders. Suddenly I wasn't alone. Suddenly I had someone to consult before making decisions! Suddenly I had someone who loved me even more than my husband or parents. That someone always had - it just took me opening my eyes to see that. I called my husband that night to tell him what I had done. I told him that I was told to read the book of John and later he told me that he had started reading John after my phone call. (We had received Bibles from his brother and wife for Christmas that year.) 6 months later, my husband prayed for Jesus to be his Lord and Savior.

In the years that followed (8 years now), we have been surrounded by godly people everywhere we turn. The duty stations we've been at since then are filled with Christians. God must really think we need extra help, because we always seem to live near all the chaplains! I love the godly advice and wisdom that we gather from these men of God, and I feel like we have really grown in God's love with the help of all those around us. In fact, we are moving this summer to Northern Virginia, near where the chaplain lives who led me to Christ. I am excited to see what God has in store for us in this next chapter of our lives.

-K. C.

FAITH REFLECTION #44

Background: 73-year-old male, reared in a small town (1500) in Missouri. Education: Six years of college (student body 1600 – Methodist college) Professional Life: Consisted of military (Marine Major USMCR), Federal Civil Service, School Teacher.

It would be correct to say that religion has always been a part of my life. My father was a Deacon as long as I could remember. My Mother was a teacher in the church. Attendance was regular and I knew all the things normally taught in Sunday school - Bible heroes, Bible lessons appropriate to the age, summer camp, etc. Salvation came at age 12 - not necessarily an awe-inspiring event but never the less very real. I married immediately after my 4 year college adventure _ a lovely young lady, seventeen but mature and wise beyond her age. Her religious background through 12 years of age had been Pentecostal, and I will speak to that later.

I joined the Marines, went through Officer's Training, was commissioned, and a year later went to Japan and Korea - the cease fire in Korea had been called while I was on my way overseas. Contact with Chaplains was minimal. I simply did not attend chapel services - Probably a form of rebellion for having been a regular for 23 years. The remainder of my service time involved living off base and attending a community church. One other incident involving a Navy Chaplain remains in my memory. Our fourth child died shortly after childbirth. The delivery was at Bethesda Naval Hospital. I was stationed at Headquarters, Marine Corps. Burial was at Arlington National Cemetery. A Navy Chaplain was in attendance, said a FEW words and prayed. There was no follow up of any kind, and my wife especially, was in need of further help.

There is no question that my wife, V., had the most influence in our religious life. She was God's choice for me. The high point or defining experience of our spiritual journey came some 12 years after our marriage. Our family was complete with 3 children, I was a Deacon in the Baptist and Sunday school Superintendent. V. was in the choir and taught 3-4 year olds. When the Church doors were open, we were there. Yet each of us felt that something was missing. She, having been reared in her early years in the Pentecostal Church, was really concerned with the "once saved - always saved" question. Her answer came in a series of meetings held by D. B., a full gospel Episcopalian minister from Seattle, Washington. Her discovery was that she wasn't saved. She had been relying on the faith of her mother. She found salvation, the Lordship of Jesus, and the Baptism of The Holy Spirit and she literally glowed from God's love. My immediate reaction was disbelief, even anger. I felt maybe that she maybe had gone off the deep end, so to speak. My missing part or troubling part centered around the question, "Is this all there is, religiously speaking?". I had read of devotion, joy, praise, worship, and miracles associated with the early church. I had discussions with my father - why do we not see those things today? His reply, which wasn't satisfactory, was that those things, especially miracles, were needed in that time to establish Christianity and the Church.

Obviously, God was working on me. I finally realized that salvation I had, but I had never really recognized the Lordship of Jesus Christ, i.e., that He had to be the true leader of my life, not me. With that acceptance of the Lordship of Christ, and through an unexplainable set of circumstances, I also experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (not really a Southern Baptist belief, but very real).

Since that time, for both of us, our spiritual understanding was multiplied; there was joy and enthusiasm in our journey; we have seen miracles of God; and our ministry bore fruit. After fifty years together, V. is with the Lord, and as I draw nearer the end of my earthly journey, I do have concerns for organized religion and the future of our nation.

1. I am concerned that more than ever before, churches and people are interpreting God's word to suit themselves. The truth is that a sin remains a sin and God won't change that to suit churches or people. The Bible is relevant yesterday, today, and forever.
2. I am concerned about reaching the younger generation. From all I know it seems to be more and more difficult for church and church programs to be of interest to that generation. In this regard, I wonder about the emergence of modern religious songs and concerts. Is it truly spiritual or is it entertainment?

I am concerned that this is overly lengthy, so I will stop. Sufficient to say that no road is completely smooth - without potholes and rocks - but God's way is the best!

-D. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #45

Last night, with foam gliding the risings of His fury on either side of me, I stood on the jetties here in Galveston, TX. I Love God, I really do; I hate this life and this world. I just want Him to take me up there to be with Him, that is the intense and incredible prayer flowing from me as I step back into that moment last night. It is where I am right now in my walk. I want Him for me, that is what kind of Love I have for myself...God is the essence of what we know as Good...He is perfect, warm, giving...indefinable...I want to be with that, with Him. This world and my own sin separate me from His Purity...from Him. Jesus' blood will bring me into perfect harmony with that beauty when it is time...I asked Him for that time to be right then, He said no.

I am an Army brat. My early story is quit long with many dark changes towards more darkness, only one truly good change to speak of. When I was 4 my parents separated and the division sent shock waves through their personal surroundings, unfortunately my brother and I being their closest were impacted the most. Divorce. Dad transferred from NC and went to Indonesia pursuant of his career, mom moved to AL to fight her mother for killing her dad. Mom "lost it". P. (my brother) and I went to live with dad across the deep. We moved every three years from then on. Almost every summer and Christmas we would go to AL to see mom. She was living a shroud of darkness and spent all of her time writing...she was completely obsessed with revenge and diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic. P. got involved with a gang in Norfolk, VA in the 9th grade. He soon thereafter moved to AL to live with mom. He "lost it" and became a drug addict...with-which the severity overtook him in his 20's. In my 9th grade year, angered at dad for moving from South Carolina to North Carolina, I went to live with mom.

Mom was INSANE. To make a long story short, I found myself in Wilmington, NC in the 11th grade after attending 4 High Schools (I hated them all). The reason for my many different school experiences was excessive absences from depression...darkness, an empty black vacuum never filled by anything. I was getting more into drugs, parties, sex, and all kinds of stuff that leads to destruction in an attempt to get away from the disparity. Those were long intensely disturbing, tear wrenching times with cycles of anguish, which I tried fighting my way.

Then one night after sleeping all day, I picked up a bible and started reading it, I read the New Testament almost all the way through in one sitting. I realized what I was becoming, what I had become, where I was going and despised, feared the notion. After reading, I believed those stories about what Jesus did and Faith begun to grow inside of me. I prayed. I then read psalms 4:5. "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your faith in God". I did. I decided to stop the drugs, at least as much as possible. A few months later, I was sitting on a trampoline with my best friend and a dove lighted on me. Only things did not change over night...the secular has not wanted to loosen its grasp.

My senior year I moved to Alabama, went to a community college and graduated H.S. with a Home School diploma bringing me to a total of 5 High Schools. I soon thereafter joined the Coast Guard. I got away from mom...that was all that mattered! I signed my contract Sept. 10th 2001.

Boot Camp was a trip. Quitting smoking cold turkey and having so much stress put on top of me was no fun excursion. Through God's Grace I made it through. One of my fondest memories there was the chapel. The Chaplain was a pretty nice guy. There was an instance around week 4 that I was really worried about my mom and the chaplain let me call home from his office. That was a

tremendous help. Choir nights were also a HUGE encouragement. We actually had some bible studies in the squad bays (just a few of us recruits). God was present there, I talked to Him often, when I felt like there was no way I could keep going, I did. In high school when I felt like that, I stopped all normal living.

I took a lot of leave after boot then reported to CGC Decisive. What can be said for the first few months aboard that ship...hell. I hated it there. I was already an arrogant little punk and when I got there, I had no idea how to respond to the attitudes of the crew. They were meaner than hornets it seemed, they're humor mostly consisted of screaming and cursing at each other and nasty sex jokes. What was I to do? Well, I tried joining in. It didn't exactly take. Many of them hated me, I think I was expected as the new guy to be quiet and take their harassment, I didn't. Rejection always is tough, but on that ship, it was hell. I was being ignored as a positive social entity, but ridiculed and forced to do back breaking work with no explanation of how to do it because they hated me. Through this whole experience I cannot remember praying except once. I never even knew there was a chaplain close by. For four months, I did not even hear the Word Jesus uttered. I honestly feel that was a major factor in such a dark experience aboard that ship. When we got underway, I had to mess cook. Fully withdrawn the whole time and unable to do any kind of decent job is the best way to describe me in those days. I was seriously contemplating murdering one of the cooks. We stopped in Key West on a port call. While there, I met a girl named R. that will come into play later. I was cleaning the CO's shower and just simply cried out to God, finally I prayed and felt that I could not handle this anymore, please God help. He heard me and answered immediately. I got an idea. I went to the XO and calmly said that if he did not get me off that ship I was going to hurt someone or myself (I had contemplated that one too). He said ok, they checked me into an ER. I was then sent to Mobile, AL ,for evaluation and discharge.

Thank God for Mobile, Alabama!!!! I worked for a really nice Chief...Chief J. I also had an aunt there. While waiting to get out, I attended a Methodist campus ministry called campus C.H.A.O.S. at Christ United Methodist Church. I learned a lot there about Whom Christ really is. I came closer to Him. On a side note, I went to speak with the chaplain over there occasionally and he always seemed too busy to sit down with me. I also had communication with that girl R. B. via email. Come to find out, her soul cried out for me after we met in Key West. She said that she prayed for me like she has never prayed for anyone...funny coincidence that I finally prayed and left the ship the next day. She and I emailed occasionally. Then time came for the discharge.

I was a different person by this time. I went and interviewed with an Air Force shrink. He recommended me for discharge; I did not want out. I just knew that through Christ I would be ok to stay in the Guard. I cried out to Him. I got an idea. I went to the new XO of my old ship (there had been a change of command when I was in mobile) and asked him for another chance. I got it. Being aboard was still tough, but I was reading my bible every day and receiving encouraging emails from R...I made it. A few months later the list for ET -"A" school opened up wide and I took it. I called R. before I went to Petaluma. When I got to Petaluma for training, I became the class-leader; that was a miserable position! The chapel out there was kind of a sad event. Only about 5 or 6 people ever came to it on Sunday mornings. I never felt like the Baptist Chaplain was properly trained to lead a successful church. Despite that, he was a really decent person and a huge encouragement to me; we all would go eat after the service, I loved those meals. There was also a seminary student there in the process of ordination...J. E. He was a cool guy, we talked a good bit...he taught taekwondo for free. They tried this video coarse called "ALPHA" as an outreach...it was horrible. There never seemed to be enough resources. J. was constantly doing something as well as the other

chaplains. Through prayer, God used me to start a Bible study there. The chapel was graciously encouraging in our efforts. The Bible study started with 2, when I left, there were about 15. Thank you Jesus! The whole time I was in Petaluma, R. and I talked on the phone almost every night. I loved that girl....at least what I knew of her. She came out to my graduation.

After graduation, I transferred to ESD Galveston where I am currently stationed. I like it here. I went to Ohio to see R. when I first got here, the devil attacked nastily. We have not spoken since; I have missed her terribly. God has used that pain from separation as fire to purify me. I almost immediately after getting here met a campus minister (M. F.) that had been tasked with bringing a dead campus ministry back to life. He and I hit it off well and have been working together for Christ since. We have recently implemented the Coast Guard as a fifth campus here in Galveston. Please pray about this, I want to see local churches doing more for the military and the military doing more for local churches, especially my Coast Guard brothers and sisters. The chaplain here, Chaplain T., has been a good friend. He is full of wisdom and always eager to talk, though not for too long...he is BUSY. He doesn't even have an R.P. like the Chaplains serving Navy and Marine Corps do. He talks to me as a break in doing monotonous, though essential, paperwork. He does not seem to be anywhere capable, due to time, of outreach to seamen hurting as I was.

One really great thing God has blessed me with is I moved my crazy old mom in with me. She is changing, I am SO thankful! God is really doing a work in her. The psychiatrists have NOTHING on Jesus...His Truth and Love change what they only dream of changing through meds.. My brother is still an addict, though on methadone now! That is one condition I thank God for allowing doctors to produce medicines to treat. Dad is happily working at a tackle shop in Florida. As for me, I just want to be with The One True Creator of the world, serving Him is part of that. Why? Because He is Good. How do I know? I have lived psalm 107 :10 "Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in affliction and in irons, 11 for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of The Most High. 12 Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down with none to help. 13 they cried to The Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. 14 He brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder. 15 Let them thank The Lord for His steadfast Love, for His wonderful works to the sons of men! 16 For He shatters the doors of bronze , and cuts in two the bars of iron."

I thank you Lord for your steadfast Love! To all chaplains I say, pray for the little ones, ya'll were not there for me when on that ship.

In Him,

-J. S.

FAITH REFLECTION #46

I was born into a family of believers. My mother early on told me that God had sent me to her because he knew that my grandmother would die within a few months after my birth and that she would be lonely and missing her mother. So as a very young child and throughout my life, I knew that I had my beginning with God because He had been the one to send me to my family. I was taken to church and gave my heart to God when I was in the third grade, but I really didn't know what I was doing. I went to the altar because my brother and mother had gone. The minister came to me and asked if I wanted to give my heart to God, and I said yes. I think I was baptized at this time.

I continued to go to churches of different faiths because at this time, my dad had to use our only car in his work, and he had to work on Sunday. So I attended the church whose followers would come by to pick me up since we lived in the country—Baptists and Church of Christ. Daddy's work schedule changed, and we had the car to attend our Methodist faith once again. Different youth leaders undoubtedly picked me out as a leader. It was at their insistence that I became President of my UMYF group; I had never given it a thought. We had an evangelist come to our church to hold a revival. During this time I re-dedicated my life to God and renewed my vows of commitment and faith.

I had some prayers answered during my high school years, which increased my faith. I was faithful to pray, but I really didn't believe that God would answer my prayers with a yes, and when He did, my trust in Him increased. He had been so good to me; I didn't think I had deserved His blessings. Every time I turned around, more blessings kept coming my way, and I was surprised at the bountiful supply...but it increased my desires to live wholly for Him. I grew in knowledge of His ways. He had proved His promises that His Word was true.

God was very important to me. I had seen Him work in my life for me as He used me to help others and carry out His plan. I wanted to go into full time religious education. I was so open to God's leading that when a high school speech teacher who was a strong believer, as well, encouraged me to go into public school teaching by telling me how I could reach far more young people. I was convinced that it was God using her to get the message to me. I also had a high school basketball coach who was a bold Christian...so the people I loved best just so happened to be very strong Christian followers...and they led me onward on my journey of faith. It kept getting stronger...and my life kept getting better and better. Blessing poured out and doors opened up to me.

I went off to college in 1950 with God providing the way. My folks didn't have the money. In December, the folks I was working for in exchange for my room and board told me their company was moving them during the holiday season. I wouldn't have a place to stay when I came back after December. I just knew I would have to drop out of college. I still don't know how it came about, but my newly wedded brother and his new bride took me into their one room efficiency apartment...someone rented a roll-away bed for me, and I rode to the college campus with my brother since he also was enrolled there. For three weeks, I lived with them until the end of the semester at which time I moved into the dorm. Where the money for the dorm came from, I do not know. I was just told not to worry about it.

My faith was challenged when I moved into the dorm. My first roommate was the daughter of Presbyterian missionary parents to Ethiopia. She had been born there. Her father was a theology professor at Oklahoma City University (a Methodist college) and he had a church at Yukon, Oklahoma, a suburb of Oklahoma City. Well, she was a prodigal daughter and was trying her wings. Instead of being the ideal roommate, she challenged me with her weird behaviors. I then got another strongly convicted girl of the Baptist faith, but she, too, disappointed me in the way she lived her life and tried to live mine for me, as well. So when, my home town superintendent of schools asked me to do my practice teaching in my home town my senior year (last semester), I asked and was given permission to go off campus to do my practice teaching which Oklahoma University had never allowed before. My girlfriends thought I was crazy to leave the campus since I was not engaged to be married...and I was leaving all the eligible men behind. My mother wrote that if the good Lord wanted me to have a husband; he would have one waiting for me in my hometown of Altus, Oklahoma. And that He did! Little did I expect that!

I fell in love with a young man who had graduated with me from high school. He had enlisted in the US Marine Corps upon our graduation. He was getting out of the Marine Corps and beginning his college education. I never cared for him in a romantic way in high school, never had a class with him, and truthfully was pretty disgusted when my best girl friend in high school “horsed” around with him. I kept telling her to quit wasting her time on him. She kept telling me he was a great guy and lots of fun. She didn’t date him, but they were just high school friends because they had classes together. Our courtship was turbulent. I didn’t like him, but he was persistent. To this day, we don’t know who asked whom to marry; it just suddenly seemed like the right thing to do and in a very few months we were engaged and another few months we were married. We will have been married 50 years this September 17th. My mother was right. If God wanted me to get married, he would have a husband waiting for me...and I believe God provided me with my present husband. As I look back now, I am so glad I relied on God’s choice of mates rather than my own. We have been so happy and life has been so good. It continues to be good to this day, and we are both 73 and 72.

While a newly wed, we had a very terrifying experience, and it was then that the Holy Spirit visited me and made His presence more real than every before. I was held at gunpoint for 2 1/2 hours with the 45-caliber pistol cocked and jammed into my rib cage. The details of the episode are not as important as the guidance of the Holy Spirit that night. There were 11 of us that night held captive as one by one we dropped into this situation unknowingly. My mouth was going continually, as the others were locked into a bedroom. The young man made advancements toward me, which I declined. For some reason he did not push the issue. We sat on the couch talking. I was pleading with him to give himself up to the police...that I would go with him and take a stand for him. I talked to him about his salvation. God made me bold that night. I was so scared I really didn’t know what I was talking about, but the Lord was doing my talking for me. A peace came over me like I have never had before. I calmed down; I wasn’t a bit afraid of him. It was like we were almost friends. He took me captive (we were in our over the garage apt) and he took me down stairs into my in-laws home where we walked through the house wiping down his fingerprints. He was preparing to leave. I once had thoughts of trying to hit him over the head with a lamp to knock him out when he jerked the phone line right out of the wall. I thought I don’t want to claim any heroism with that kind of strength; I was content just to let him go. He tried to get me in the car with him—wanted me to back it out of the garage. I kiddingly told him I was so scared that I knew I wouldn’t be able to do it; instead, I would likely go through the front of the garage. He got in and backed out. The law enforcement people said had I gotten in the car, he would have taken me with him.... more of the Lord’s leading. I know that I was protected and guided that night by the Holy Spirit. I was not afraid to die. I thought he had already killed my father-in-law since he was lying face down on the couch with his hands tied behind his back; I felt like he would kill us all before the night was over. But as time progressed, I think my talking to him about God, showing an interest in him, was God’s way of searching for his soul. He was caught, tried, and found guilty, paroled, and finally shot to death as he attempted to rob another filling station...but I wonder if he ever thought any more about our conversation. My Savior was by my side that night, and my faith was stronger than ever. My husband and I agreed before marriage that God would be at the head of our household. We have dedicated our children to God and promised to raise them in a Christian environment. We have dedicated our house to God’s glory and use. We recognize that nothing belongs to us, but everything we have belongs to Him that He has just loaned to us for our use. We have kept our pledge to Him...and He has returned our faithfulness by blessing us with an extremely good life. Our three children have been healthy and whole and pure blessings. We now have nine grandchildren, and they are being raised in Christian homes and in the church.

Two other times in my life have God made his presence vital and real. At the time of my father's death in 1962, you wouldn't believe the timing of things unless you were a believer. We lived in California and they lived in Oklahoma. I went home to be with him; my husband joined the children and me at the most opportune time. I didn't know he was coming, but everything about it was right. He was there for me at the actual death, and he freed me up of the children so that I could be with my dad and my mother. We don't even know how we got through things, but we operated mechanically with the envelopment of the Holy Spirit shielding us and getting everything done that needed to be done. Death had been something I had always feared, but God allowed my dad to see all of his grandchildren the day of his death. He knew them and talked to them, and that night he went peacefully to sleep and joined Jesus with my mother on one side of his bed and me on the other side holding his hands and caressing him. I had not been spending the night in the hospital with my mother since I had very small children...almost babies. We thought they would need me, but this night I chose to stay. We had no idea that God would call him home that night, but He allowed us to see that death can be beautiful.

Then, my mother who had lived with us for 38 years died in our home. For weeks, she had been telling us that Jesus was coming for her. She insisted on getting my two daughters who live in the same town as we do out of bed at 11 PM with their children. She wanted to say goodbye to them and to let them know that she loved them. They all came running. She was 95 when she died. The evening of her death, we had walked her around the den for exercise about 4 PM. We fed her dinner, gave her medications, had bathed her, and my 10 year old granddaughter was trying to feed her applesauce. My husband sat in his recliner on one side of her. I was sitting in another chair reading the paper, had dozed off. Our ten-year-old sat feeding her. I thought what a beautiful picture it painted because Liz was caressing the side of her face pleading with her just one more bite. She looked at her granddaddy and said, "I can't get her to swallow." He looked at her and said, "No wonder, honey, she is dead." She didn't make a sound. She left this world with a full tummy, her nightly medications, freshly bathed and exercised...just went to sleep. Only days before while friends were visiting, she interrupted their conversations by sitting erectly tall and saying, "I want to see my Jesus." My friend said, "Did you hear that?" I told her she had been talking that way for several weeks. I am convinced that Jesus had been preparing her for the journey home...and us for her death. We have the sweetest memories and know that death is just a convenience to get to heaven. From birth through death, and the blessings in between, I know there is a God. He is a God of love. My parents, the clergy, my teachers at school and church have introduced me to my Lord and Savior. He has been evident in my walk; I have felt His leading, His love, and His protection. I have studied His work and I see Him actively in my world. He is a faithful God; His word is truth, and I highly recommend Him to be your Savior, too, if you don't know Him I'll go with Him all the way. I just pray that I will always remain faithful and true to Him, serving Him every day of my life.

-J. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #47

Reflections of my faith journey through life. Raised catholic, attended grades 1-7 in catholic school. Confession, communion, confirmation, altar boy, CYO, the whole bit. Great foundation in "the church". Weak foundation in what Jesus gave us.

Things I have come to learn:

1. At 46 I know now that my faith is in God and not in any man. When man gets involved it undoubtedly turns ugly at some point. Not to say that mankind is not good for fellowship and sharing worship with. Just don't trust them to be perfect, they never are. Expect to be disappointed, so you won't be.
2. Try to do better and forgive yourself when you're not. How on earth can you ever forgive some other poor sap, if you can't forgive yourself. Stay close to God and he'll stay close to you.
3. Worship is whatever you do to bring yourself closer to God. You know what works, enjoy it. Can you tell I'm Methodist now? I have been on pitch black city streets at 5 AM riding my bike in the rain in the wintertime singing "How Great Thou Art". Is that worship? You bet it was!
4. Are there people filled with evil operating on the devil's behalf in almost every Christian church? Yes! Does Satan rejoice over it? Yes! Can you tell I am a fan of Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis? My father's last wife attempted to murder him and two of her other "beaus". She attended the church of God and would "display" certain in vogue behaviors that people thought were "gifts of the spirit" and then go home and drug her husband and permanently disfigure him in her lame attempts to kill him. I forgive her because I know there is one unforgivable sin, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, and she is "goin' to the hot place!" She's still out there. The last religious man she tried to kill would not press charges! Satan rejoices again!
5. Be careful what you pray for. I never pray for success, I pray for my ability and the proper conditions so I can expend the effort that might make my success possible. God makes gifts available to you. You have to pray for the ability, courage and "proper weather" to "walk over" and accept them.
6. Your spouse is such an important gift from God, act like you are "such an important gift from God" to your spouse!
7. I pray that the times I've made my kids stumble will only heap tiny embers of burning coals on my head, and God's forgiveness will pour cold water up there really quick. I know he will, he said he would.

Hope the 20 minutes or so I took to write this does your project some good. It certainly did me some good!

-J. W.

FAITH REFLECTION #48

My faith journey, T. J., Missionary and Minister, Jamaica, West Indies.

My journey of faith started in my 26th year while I was living in South Carolina after moving from Florida and North Carolina. In April of 1986 I moved from Florida with my wife E. to North Carolina to live and work with her father in Horticulture and Nursery operations.

I was also escaping a life of drugs and running with and then from, the wrong people. I was in several rock and roll bands in Florida and was really in with the wrong "professional" crowd. Drugs and the

whole nightlife scene was a way of life and one thing after another began to happen until I found myself a drug dealer and smuggler of cocaine and marijuana from Columbia, South America to South Florida. (I assure you if I hear back about this I will deny all of it).

In 1986 the big guy in Florida was busted and the whole ring was to be exposed. Everyone went down except for me and one other guy. I was already wanting out and I was in Horticulture school at PVTI when it happened. I was the Federal Firearms License holder for the operation. My name was all over the weapons seized in the bust. When I learned of the news I was gone to the mountains of North Carolina. But parts of it followed me and I ran from there to my sister's house in Charleston, South Carolina.

I arrived in Charleston by myself, mentally and emotionally a wreck. I was waiting to be busted at anytime for my involvement in Florida. My wife joined me a few months later. While I was in South Carolina I began to have emotional problems. For years I was depended on drugs and drug sales for my way of life and support. I now had to get a job and be a real person. My sister D. and her husband E. took me in. They were Christians and attended a small church called Central Christian Church just down from my apartment. I used my horticultural schooling to get a job as a termite inspector with Terminx but was fired because my Florida driver's license was "unavailable." You see I had several "aliases" and I was never the person I said I was.

Many different things were happening to me because my past life. I was a stranger if you will and I needed an identity. I was pulled over one day in Charleston and when I pulled out my wallet 2 different Florida drivers licenses fell out. The police officer took them and said he would check into them and contact me. I came unglued. I couldn't wait for what was to happen next so I said to my wife, "I'm tired of running, I need a SC driver's license to get on with my life and to start fresh, and I'm going down to the DL office tomorrow and apply for a new one. If I get busted fine, I start there, if not I move forward." I applied and when they put me into the computer they came back to me 3 times and said "the system doesn't find you so here is your new license" and away I went. I never heard from the cop about the other licenses so I was spared. God had a plan.

I told no one of this. And the whole time I was going through this mess, and there's more to it then what I am writing, my sister was working on me about my life with God. As was my wife. After a few months and a few visits from ministers, elders, and their friends, I decided to give my life to Christ, as did my wife. We struggled for a few years with our new life and with our old life, but the new life was beginning to take over. Within 2 years I opened a landscape company in Charleston. Joined the SC Army National Guard after hurricane Hugo. I helped start a new church in a city outside of Charleston with the same ministers and elders in 1990. I began to return to playing music in the church and started a worship band where today I am still active. The business began to take off after a few years making me a nice salary and providing everything I needed. I began to work in youth services with the church and in 1993 started a second church in downtown Charleston.

In 1995 after a bazaar incident with a tow truck and my wife, we received a settlement and my wife wanted to go to Jamaica to vacation. I resisted as I always did so we delayed and finally we set a date of June of 1995. We went to Jamaica for a week at Sandals. There I met a Jamaican man by the name of S. who has a Horticulturist as well as I was. Something happened to me that week. I wanted to return to Jamaica and open a childcare facility as my wife had earned her Masters in Education. God was working on me though. As we returned to Jamaica several times to look into this new venture, we

always went to see S. and his family. The more we helped out S. the more we lost interest in the childcare facility venture even though we would have made millions!

After 3 years of doing short term missions work we totally dropped the venture and started to fund, through my business, the Caribbean Christian Relief Organization. We did humanitarian projects and preached when we could. All of this was coming to a head when on December 28th 1998 I prayed to God on the top of a mountain in Delve land, Jamaica. "What do you want me to do, I need to know now?" Within 3 days after returning home to the US the phone rang and I had my first job as a missionary to Jamaica. God wanted me in the ministry full time in Jamaica. From 1998 until August 2000 I prepared for full time service. I graduated from 3 different seminaries, Summit Theology, Johnson Bible College and Columbia International University with missology and theology degrees.

We sold our corporation, our home and all of our personal belongings and moved to Jamaica in March of 2002. I am the Director of Outreach Ministries for the Jamaica Christian Mission and we live in Frame, Jamaica. We are church planters and we are currently building the first contemporary, non-denominational Christian Church in Jamaica. We are located 45 minutes east of Negro and only 12 miles from where I prayed that day. I am a teacher of the Bible, construction and computers. The senior minister of the Savanna-la-Mar Christian Church. My wife teaches adult literacy and children's Christian education, is the minister of our children's worship and a mother of two. Check us out on the web at...

Hoping the past never returns, this is the first time I have talked about it in a long, long, time.

Respectfully,

-T. J.

FAITH REFLECTION #49

Thank you for the invitation to write about faith. I was brought up in a home where God was honored and Jesus was someone to be worshiped. The Word of God was a part of everyday life and my parents honored the fact that they were part of God's family. Early in my life I gave my life to Jesus Christ and He has been the source of my hope for now and the future. I am thankful for the heritage God has given my seven siblings, two of whom are with the Lord and me. With Him there is joy in living, a shelter in times of distress and a comfort for what tomorrow brings because He is in control.

Blessings on you,

-V. H.

FAITH REFLECTION #50

My parents didn't really go to church, with the exception of attending weddings and funerals. My father's mother had been a fundamentalist Baptist who would wake him up in the middle of the night to say his prayers. Her influence on him resulted in him never wanting to go to church or be a part of any organized religion. And later on, before he finished high school, he enlisted in the American Air Force. (I think he did this so he could get away from home sooner vs. later.)

My mother's church experience was that she was christened and later confirmed in the Church of England. Before she could marry my dad at the local parish church, Mother said that it was a requirement that they had to meet with an American Air Force chaplain. She said it was a brief meeting, something was mentioned about the challenges presented when two people marry and they are from different countries/cultures. (Ten years later, they divorced. Afterward, I remember Mother saying that they really were so very different people and their personalities never really had meshed. Mother thought his quiet spells were him being deep in thought... turns out he really didn't have that much thinking going on after all.)

After the wedding, they didn't see a need for them to attend church until after I was born. Their next visit to church was when I was christened in the Church of England, before I was a year old. The event was a joint christening, my cousins and mine. I think it happened because "it was the thing to do." My mother's family expected that all babies were to be christened as soon as possible... just in case something should happen. Godparents were appointed to me, to guide my spiritual upbringing; and a few months later, we left England, with my father who was returning home after his three-year tour in England. All through my life, my dad did not go to church... except for weddings or funerals. He has always been kind of a loner, never feeling a need to be a part of a faith community. I think my mother had the need to join one; however, it never happened.

My brother was born when I was two. (Later, he was baptized at the same time his own children were baptized.) As we children got older, I remember my mother taking us to Vacation Bible School in the summers. What fun it was to go to VBS!!! I remember my mother buying new clothes for us and taking us to church for Easter and some Christmases. I can remember my dad one time saying that he didn't mind me going with my mother to church, but that she should leave my brother at home with him. Mother disagreed for a while. Later, none of us went to church. When I was in the fifth grade, the neighbors across the street invited me to go with them to their Baptist church. I went, and I had so much fun: Sunday school learning, children's choir singing, VBS. I would visit their church a lot. Other times, I would go to other churches in our very small town. I would just get myself up on Sunday morning, get dressed, and take myself to church. I really enjoyed meeting new folks, and I remember they always made me feel very welcome. One time, when I was visiting my neighbors' Baptist church, I remember the preacher inviting people to walk up to the front of the church and invite Jesus into our hearts as our personal Savior... I felt like I just had to go! Later on, I was baptized.

Throughout my school years, I attended a variety of churches. I enjoyed learning about what they had to teach. When I started college, I was having a lot of confusion about people worshipping Jesus ALL the time... and not giving God any of the worship, praise, and glory. It all seemed so strange/wrong. At that time, my understanding of things was quite limited, and there didn't seem to be anyone around with whom I could talk about this. I started going to the synagogue with my friend. There, they prayed directly to GOD. Whew! I was so relieved! I understood the prayers; I felt them; my soul felt so right about my worshipping there. Then I met and became engaged to a Jewish fellow. I began to study Judaism with the cantor. What an amazing rich history I was learning about! When my engagement was over, my time of studying with the cantor stopped too. I was in college, and life was busy.

After college, my neighbors in the apartment where I lived were members of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). They were the nicest people ever! They invited me over for dinner. They seemed to like me and have a genuine interest in my welfare. They invited me to dinner one

night, explaining that some missionaries from their church would be there too. I went along and really enjoyed hearing about their beliefs; I asked lots of questions. They stressed the importance of praying to God for direction and guidance in my life. I felt very comfortable with them. They encouraged me to really focus upon my spiritual faith walk. I began to learn more about Jesus' life, his teachings and his relationship with God. I learned about the gift of the Holy Spirit. I was so touched that when one of my neighbors said that he had prayed and fasted for me and my spiritual walk. No one had ever done anything like that for me before. I am embarrassed to say that after about a year of becoming a Mormon, I stopped going to church because of my relationship with a fellow. "Nuf said. I was young, in my twenties, and it was the time of the "me generation." I tended to "me" for a while.

Then, I realized that it isn't all about me. I began attending the Central Christian Church. Spiritually, I felt like was mellowing into a good "middle of the road" Christian. I was confident and comfortable in being a Christian; I believed the words of the Apostles Creed; I understood about the Triune God. I so appreciated the gift of the Holy Spirit!

I began working for the Civil Service overseas. I was traveling, meeting people from all around the world. I was becoming confident in my career field; I was being acknowledged for my effectiveness and professionalism. I met my first husband at an Army post in Italy. We fell madly in love in March; in August, we married. I was 31 years old; I had waited a long time to get married; I had waited for the right man to come along (the right one for me). Before we could get married, we had to visit with the Army chaplain. He asked some very good questions, which really made us think. I remember the chaplain saying, "you could just get married in a civil ceremony, but instead you want to be married in the church... why is that? He asked other questions too, but I do distinctly remember that one. I remember being surprised that my fiancé was so reticent about describing his faith journey. I had no trouble talking about my faith, so I was very talkative (and he wasn't...). He said that it all was a very private matter and remained rather quiet.

We married. We honeymooned in Switzerland. We had a fabulous marriage until the day ten years later when he said he did not want to be married anymore. It turned out that he just didn't want to be married to me anymore, since he later remarried someone we both knew during our marriage. After I pressed him for a reason why he wanted a divorce, he finally admitted that he really liked me and thought that the real love feelings would "kick in" after we had children. Well, we never had children, and I guess those love feelings never kicked in... hence, the need for a divorce.

It's funny how you are thinking something and don't even know you are thinking it until... That first husband got out of the Army and went into seminary to become a minister. I was shocked at his desire to do this at first, especially since he didn't want to talk about religious stuff and our pre-marital counseling, claiming it was all too private. However, I rallied, and whole-heartedly supported his quest. As time passed, I really felt that I was meant to be a pastor's spouse. Imagine my surprise when four years later, he claimed that his in-depth spiritual journey had revealed that he never really had wanted to marry me; it's just that he didn't want to wait any longer before starting a family. His parents had their children when they were young; and he wanted the same thing: to enjoy his children while he was young and had lots of energy to be with them. There I was thinking that I had some kind of divorce immunity since my husband was in seminary studying to be become a pastor. I was the loving wife, the supporting wife. I was a good person; he was a good person. We were so much in love! (A friend really struck a nerve when he said, "oh, you are just like me... I was thinking that I was happily married until my spouse informed me otherwise!") Well, my first husband had informed

me otherwise. He wanted a divorce. Or rather it felt like he was saying he wanted an annulment, since he was saying that he had never really loved me in the first place. As it turned out, it had all been one big charade! Mmmmmm. What does one do when one's entire world is blown up into microscopic pieces... a bunch of "me-debris" floating around the universe?!!

Well, when everything felt like it had been stripped away, I felt like it was just me... and God. In my concept of the universe, there was the "me-debris" and God. Nothing else made any sense. And, with time, and God's infinite love, grace and mercy, I learned that... "Me and God" or rather "God and me" is quite enough. My relationship with God is everything to me!

I remember the day when I felt that all the color had drained out of my world... it was that day that I felt the atomic bomb of my former husband's rejection of me and "an us" that had, in fact, never existed. AND I remember a day much later on when I realized that I was seeing the world in color again. Enough time had passed; enough love had been showered down upon me by God... that I felt plugged back into the world again. My desert journey with God was an amazing time! I didn't have the distractions of the routines of life because my routine had gotten blown right out of the water. I had been plunged into a desert experience. And today, because of it, I am all the richer for it!

What got me through the depths of despair about the ending of my marriage was my attending a weekly support group at a local church. It is called DivorceCare. (Its web site is <http://www.divorcecare.com/>. I heartily recommend it!!! It is a fabulous program to help folks recover from the hurt of separation or divorce.) It was my lifeline; I was able to get through another week because I knew that on Wednesday nights I could be in a room with others who knew exactly what I was feeling! I learned that I had to go through the pain to get through the other side. This program helped me to do just that. And when I emerged on the other side, I realized that I was stronger than I had ever been... and that my faith journey was stronger than it had ever been too!

Life seemed so much richer. I had begun to really appreciate ALL the blessings of God each and every day. One day, I re-met a fellow I had known a few years before. We met in May; we married in November. Looking back, I can see God's hand in our meeting, our courting, and now in our being married. It turns out that God did call me to be a pastor's spouse. I felt the call when my former husband had been in seminary. And now, years later, I am married to a most marvelous man... who serves as a pastor. Day by day, I learn what God has in store for me... being a child of God living in His Kingdom... and being a pastor's spouse. Currently, my husband is serving as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. We have lived in some amazing places and had some amazing experiences. And we have had some soul-wrenching experiences.

At one tour of duty in a remote, isolated part of the world, I experienced soul-searing disappointment when the base chaplains seemed unconcerned that my spiritual needs were not being met. The one-size-fits-all Protestant worship service on Sunday mornings did not feed my husband and me spiritually. There was no liturgy; there was no Great Thanksgiving celebrated with communion. The base chaplains seemed disinterested in this Sunday worship service. Each week, it seemed that it was something to get through.

My husband was told that he could participate in the worship service as long as he followed the other chaplains' prescribed order of service, or lack thereof. His suggestions to try a different way to celebrate communion and to introduce some element of liturgy into the service were flatly rejected.

The two-hour general Protestant service would continue as it always had. Afterward, the three-hour Gospel service would begin.

We began to attend the Catholic services since we recognized the Great Thanksgiving and were fed by the liturgy. The executive officer of my husband's unit expressed his anger and frustration with "his" chaplain not attending the Protestant worship service on Sunday mornings. My husband explained that we were not being spiritually fed by this service and his attempts to discuss this with the base chaplains were met with cold disdain and apathy. We were a long way from home. We felt like we were living in a spiritual desert. It was a very difficult time for us. The one big lesson we learned from that time is that meaningful worship is defined by each individual and that chaplains really should listen to the spiritual needs of the community members and either provide or facilitate meaningful worship opportunities for them. If people feel that chaplains care more about their own spiritual well-being than that of their flock, then there can be disastrous consequences for the members of the flock.

Now, as I look back on those days, I believe that the base chaplains really did the best they could do at that time, given their belief systems and the way they viewed the military chaplaincy at that time. I am relieved that they are no longer in the U.S. Navy. They have returned to the comforts of their individual denominational confines.

My hope is that military chaplains will understand and embrace their charter of either providing or facilitating opportunities for all of their community members which will enhance (and not detract from) their individual faith journeys. (I don't believe it is the chaplains' job to convert others to their ways of thinking/ believing.) I hope that chaplains accept that it is okay to not do it "all" themselves. I challenge them to reconsider that a "one-size-fits-all" service is "good enough."

I hope that some military chaplains move away from the notion that they are the ones who must be accommodated/served. I hope that military chaplaincy becomes a collegial enterprise, which is in service to all members of the military community (not just to those who have pledged their allegiance to their particular denominational brands.) I hope that chaplains will respect the ministries of their fellow chaplains. And most of all, I hope that military chaplains recognize what a wondrous gift it is to be in service to military members and their family members at this time in the history of the world.

Yes, we do have an awesome God! He has a plan for us all. Praise be to God!

- G.B.

FAITH REFLECTION #51

My title for this would be: Nature & Nurture.

The age-old debate as to what are the predominant forces, which guide and shape the behavior, morals and values of an individual. This is particularly relevant as I am a twin having a twin brother, who although having been brought up in identical circumstances had a life style very different from my own in almost every respect.

Born 18th March 1933 in a terraced house in Smallthorne, an industrial suburb of Burstem, one of the 5 towns that comprise what is known the "Potteries" part of North Staffordshire. Whilst adjacent to

green fields and within cycling distance of very pleasant countryside, the area was very industrial. Seep mines, coalmines, clay quarries and steel works that gave rise to the main industry of pottery esp. fine china & earthenware “Royal Dowhou.”

One sister 4 years older, father only surviving child of two and mother was the oldest of 9. Father was an underground mine foreman who through night school qualified as a mine manager, mining engineer. In 1937/38 took a position as a mine under manager at a coalmine in South Derbyshire 40 miles away and the family moved into a large company house. Both parents may be said to be “Chapel folk,” although mother’s family was an Irish Roman Catholic background.

In 1939 having disagreed with the mine owner the family moved back at very short notice to Smallthorne. In what was initially thought of as a short term expedient my maternal grandmother (of Irish ancestry) sent brother and I to the school on the other side of the terrace street where my grandparents lived. This was a combined Roman Catholic Church and School and is my first abiding memory of faith. I can still remember “Father O’Connor”, attending church and being taught to make the sign of the cross with my right hand and saying grace before meals (which I still do). On reflection I believe in the old saying of the Roman Catholic Father (Priest) “Give me the child until he is 7 or some say 11, and he mine for life.” Although as you will read, this was apparently not so for my twin brother.

As far as I know, at my father’s insistence and in spite of entreaties by Father O’Connor who apparently promised guaranteed entrance to the Roman Catholic grammar school (a very valuable inducement) my twin brother and I were moved to what as far as I know was a conventional Church of England school. Faith wise I can vaguely remember attending a Methodist Chapel Sunday School – obviously did not make much impression.

In 1944/45 father again moved to South Derbyshire as a coalmine under-manager (the working condition underground were far better than North Staffordshire). After 12 months, in some sort of family job mix up twin brother and I were moved back from the Grammar school in Ashby de le Zouch to Wolstanton Grammar School near to my paternal grandparents. I can only assume that this was initially intended as a short-term stay but we were to stay for 4 years.

Our paternal grandparents were very committed “Chapel folk” – Primitive Methodists. Note: In England in the 1940 & 50s faith was very sectarian. As “Primitive Methodists” we rarely mixed with “Wesleyan” Methodists, Baptists and would never have considered even going into either a Church of England Church or especially a Roman Catholic Church. In fact it was possibly in the 1960s before such barriers were overcome and even today still exists within the Roman Catholic Church.

So in 1946 twin brother & I were welcomed into a very warm, friendly and most supportive small family chapel. We became what was known as “thricers.” i.e., we attended Sunday school on Sunday morning, afternoon and evening service. A very close-knit working class suburb of terrace houses, which have now long since been demolished for new housing. I have always been grateful for the people and fellowship we received there. I also seem to remember being a Sunday school teacher.

In 1950, I left grammar with a good school certificate but not good enough to get me into university. In 1950 went to work underground as a workman, which must have caused my father much pride and pain as he had wished for me to go to college. However, I prospered as a skilled workman and indeed became a very highly paid craftsman. During this time I attended the local technical college on a day

release basis. Whilst I did make some half-hearted tentative inquiries I never did attend chapel – so no faith input. In 1956 met a girl who was Church of England and I started to attend a C. of. E church – must say I did not really like it esp. same preachers every week, different hymn tunes, not as friendly as chapel.

Married in 1957, two ladies, a gentleman and I were co-opted onto the Parochial Church Council to introduce change and provide support for young people. In fact, we used the Parish room to run disco dances (none profit making) – it was the time of the Beatles. Also in 1957 sent by the National Coal Board as full time college for 12 months and subsequently chosen as a senior management trainee. Active on the Parochial Church Council as a “handyman,” maintenance etc. but did not read lessons or prayers. By this time fully integrated into the Church of England style of services.

Son in 1960 and daughter in 1963. Became more active in Church in the 1960’s. Happily I and others decided to “as it were” to make the church more visible by actively ringing the tower bells and replacing the church flagpole to fly the diocesan flag at every opportunity. Son became a server and acolyte, and daughter joined the church choir. Unfortunately, by this time marriage was not a very happy one, wife tended not to attend church – difficult times. As the church had an excellent organist and choirmaster they were privileged to sing in services by invitation, at a number of cathedrals and other churches. As I normally always went along with them after a time I became their traveling Crucifer and subsequently acted as Crucifer in the normal Sunday services.

Left the mining industry in 1968 and after 2 years in local government in the city of Leicester became a senior lecturer at Derby College of Higher Education in the school of management. Very happily in 1972 my wife decided that she did not want a normal married life preferring to have a different sort of life and relationship. This caused me great trauma, but decided that the two children were of paramount importance so since then wife & I have lived separate lives, still living in the same house. Happily I do believe that my faith and very good colleagues in college has enabled me to deal with it.

A very happy and successful life in college was idyllic after working in the mining industry. I was able to spend long holidays with the children particularly 8 weeks every summer in Porthcothan and my son & daughter grew up very close to me. The college in the mid ‘70s merged with an Anglican College of Education and in fact the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the whole college was the Arch Deacon of Litchfield. Also written into the constitution of the college was special provision to preserve the special relationship between the Anglican Church and the College.

One day by a chapter of accidents and coincidences I was summoned to a meeting called by the College Director; who incidentally was a very devout Roman Catholic. The local Diocesan Director of Education (a priest on secondment) had requested that the college provide seminars and training on “Team & Group Ministry.” As the Dean of the School of Management was a Methodist, my other management colleague also invited was devout Roman I was asked to undertake this work.

Happily my wife’s cousin was Archdeacon of Durham, a very well known cleric, and I was able to use his good offices to prepare and operate courses for the clergy. Needless to say this caused much hilarity from my prof. Management colleagues. Initially it was very difficult as I had and still have a profound respect for the clergy. Difficult to say but it certainly deepened my faith and understanding and I certainly learned a lot. Went on various visits, courses and under took the same task in another diocese. Also with a senior college colleague undertook two church consultancy jobs. If any clergyman came to college with any request in terms of management studies he arrived at my desk.

St Helen's Church served for 21 years on the Parochial Church Council, very active in the day-to-day affairs, bell ringing, putting the flag up, and doing all the odd jobs. Retired from being the Crucifer, (like I was) we must bring in younger people in active roles. Not so active in St Eval and St Mawgan Churches apart from bell ringing, taking part in the social functions when I am there.

Formally retired from what is the University of Derby on half salary indeed linked and large tax-free lump sum in 1988 on the early retirement scheme. Since then have worked freelance incl. back in college as a sessional lecturer. Had my private life been different I may have become a lay reader or even a non-stipendiary minister. On balance I have indeed been most fortunate and only hope that I have been able to pay back some of the fellowship, support and understanding that faith has so generously given.

-B. T.

P.S. My twin brother died some 5 years ago from cancer but as far as I am aware did not attend any place of worship; neither did he take good care of his two children.

FAITH REFLECTION #52

I have been a Navy JAG active duty for over 14 years, and at various times served as a Jewish lay leader. My duties have me working closely with Navy Chaplains. My strong religious life and practice have also had me in close contact with Military Chaplains. By and large the over all experience has been great in a general way; however, when specific Jewish religious practices or assistance has been needed, the non-Jewish Chaplains have been unable to fulfill those needs. Do not interpret this the wrong way. The most non-Jewish Chaplains attempt to help with things and with outward manifestations, but miss the spiritually aspects.

The vast majority of Chaplains I have worked with are bright, enthusiastic and well educated within their own faith. Liturgical Protestant Chaplains work well with Liturgical Protestant service members, Non-Liturgical Protestant Chaplains with Non-Liturgical members, Roman Catholic Chaplains with Roman Catholic members, Eastern Orthodox Chaplains with Eastern Orthodox members and so forth. The inability of the Chaplain increases greatly the further one leaves the Chaplains faith. I have seen a fair bit of difficulty when even Non-Liturgical Protestant Chaplains attempt to work with Liturgical Protestant service members. Mixing Roman Catholic Chaplains with Protestant members and vice-a-versa becomes more strained. Generally, Protestant and Roman Catholic Chaplains have had been unable or reluctant to assist Eastern Orthodox service members.

My own experiences as a Jew have demonstrated that most Navy Chaplains have a basic understanding and appreciation of Judaism. In fact, the vast majority of Navy Chaplains have been a great help in obtaining the necessary supplies; equipment and food along with obtain the space to accommodate Jewish religious practice. I have seen numerous Christian Chaplains intervene with Commanding Officers to provide for religious needs for Jewish service members. Most Non-Jewish Chaplains have been eager to learn about the Jewish faith. However, most Christian Chaplains once they obtain the tangible items, hurriedly hand the items over and leave the vicinity and offer little help and support to the Jewish lay leader and the Jewish congregation.

The one difficulty I have experienced and have experienced many time is the inability and often reluctance of a Christian Chaplain to counsel or assist with the spiritual needs of Jewish service

members, and in particular the families of Jewish service members. The Roman Catholic and Liturgical Protestants have been somewhat more helpful, but still leave a great deal to be desired. The pastoral counseling when a family member is lost is particularly important. This is an area largely unmet by Christian Chaplains when Jews suffer a loss. This is particularly distressing when the concept of the resurrection of the dead comes from Jewish theology and is in the daily prayers. Navy Chaplains need to reach out more to help those outside their own faith with spiritual needs. This is particularly important with a shrinking Chaplaincy and more members stationed in locations without congregations of their own faith.

-A. B.

FAITH REFLECTION #53

My name is D. A. and I am 67 years old, I don't belong to the US Navy but did attend Church at St Mawgan for a couple of years, hence being on L.'s list.

I started life in the Church as a choirboy at the age of 7 approx, this was at St Anne's parish church at Aigburth, Liverpool. I was subsequently married at the same church some 46 years ago. After having 4 children, one of which we lost at childbirth, we moved about the country with my job in the construction industry. Always attending the local Church of England Parish Church local to where we stayed.

This led us around the UK including a stay of 3 years in Scotland. I was then asked to go as the company's representative to SE Asia, and we lived in Singapore for 3 years. During this time my wife, A. was very active in the Church being a member of the choir and ladies bible group, I in the meantime was away from Singapore as much as I stayed there, as my area of responsibility was the whole of SE Asia.

We were then transferred first to Iran and then with the arrival of the Ayatollah I transferred to Dubai; here I set up a new "Joint Venture" company and ran that for 3 years. Meanwhile my wife was again involved heavily with the local church, where among other things she met and made tea for the Queen! After Dubai we returned to UK but by this time the company, which by the way was American (HQ Pittsburgh), would not let me live a "normal lifestyle" so I found myself setting up another 2 companies in Nigeria. This time I left after my stints abroad with the company, which finally finished with me being held up at gun point and robbed in Nigeria I decided that working for a multi-national was too hectic so I resigned. You could say I retired at the tender age of 46! After that we sold up and moved down to Cornwall, which after all was the roots of the A. clan.

We then bought a restaurant and ended up working harder than ever, we had that for 5 years in a place called Fowey and made quite a good success of it getting in the Michelin Guide and the Good Food Guide. All this time we attended the local Church of England parish church. After we sold the Restaurant we had a year off, living in Fowey, during that time I bought a rundown cottage and renovated it for my daughter and husband. After that my eldest son decided that it was a good idea and could I do the same for him. Having rebuilt 2 cottages in a year and making my offspring something like 30000 pounds each I decided that I should be doing the same thing for myself. This is how we ended up in St Mawgan, on the other coast of Cornwall. I bought a derelict mill and associated buildings, with my brother and took 3 years to rebuild completely into 4 rather grand decidedly different homes. We had one each and sold 2 on the open market.

It was at this time that I became somewhat more involved with the local church. Long story short I became the chairman of the Fabric Committee as this was a 13-century church and always needed work. Suffice to say that I eventually became the churchwarden and got completely involved with trying to bring it into the 21 century. All this time my wife was heavily involved in prayer groups and choir. My big problem came when the local community, not the congregation objected to the plans for a meeting room , lavatory and kitchen. After a lot of bad will the Bishop was called in and instead of standing his and our ground gave way to non -church members and shelved the scheme. I was not best pleased so resigned my position of Church Warden and me and my wife also resigned from the Church. By this time my wife had been diagnosed with cancer and was undergoing Chemotherapy.

As 2 lost souls we found our way to the St Eval Services chapel and attended the RAF services we then decided to join in the US Service and where welcomed with open arms the first person who talked to us was L.!! After that we had 3 really good years with you all, and then I went and had a heart attack. We decided to leave Cornwall as it was so far away from our family, so we uprooted to Herefordshire where we spent 3 years and rejoined the Church of England, refreshed but determined to not get too involved with the workings of the church.

We maintained good connections with Cornwall and our friends from the US, they even came to see us and helped with the move. Sadly my wife died and I found myself alone , but supported by my new church.

The final chapter is that last year I went on holiday to the beloved Far East and after a whirlwind romance, not on holiday but because of it, I met R. from East Malaysia and we got married last month. We attend the local Charismatic Church and enjoy it as if we had always been members, I think without meeting the folk at St Mawgan Chapel I would not have seen my life through to this time. R. and I have bought a house in Sabah, East Malaysia and I have also sold up in Hereford and bought a house back in Cornwall, so hope to renew a lot of friendships when we return for the Summer in about 3 weeks time, I am at peace at long last and thank God for it.

-D. A.

FAITH REFLECTION #54

My first remembrance of the love of Christ is from 1957 when I was a 4-year-old child living in Niagara Falls, NY. My family had suffered severe hardship due in part to our socioeconomic standing and in part to my father's alcoholism. We had been evicted from our home and were currently living in a condemned hotel, reopened for the purpose of housing other evicted families like mine. It was a cold, bitter day in November with a bleak beginning and a much bleaker end.

My family was quite large then—mother, father, 6 brothers, 4 sisters and we were all crammed into small rooms on the second floor of that hotel. That cold, bitter Saturday in November started like any other. I played blissfully in the streets all day with the several other children who lived in the hotel (one neighbor lived there with his wife and all 8 of his children). I went to bed worn out as usual, but happy and secure in my childhood fantasies. But a few hours later my world would be turned upside down and there would be few childhood fantasies left for me. At about 4:00 a.m. there was a loud explosion and the Moonglow Hotel was engulfed in flames in a matter of seconds, becoming an inescapable inferno. I lost all six of my brothers and my 5-month-old baby sister. The neighbor that I mentioned earlier lost his entire family-wife and 8 children. There were 2 other adults who lost their

lives also, bringing the lives lost to 18. This would prove to be the worst casualty loss in the history of Niagara Falls, NY to this day.

I know that God sends angels of protection because I was literally thrown out of a second story window with nothing to catch me but the ground. His angel wrapped his wings around me and I suffered no injuries. Other than a minor broken nose suffered by one of my sisters, we who survived were all unharmed and walked away. I think about that now and still wonder why God saved me. Why not my 5 month old baby sister or any one of my 6 brothers to carry on the R. name? I don't believe it was a coincidence or fate. God works in mysterious ways, and I believe in His will and that all things work together for good to them that love Him.

My father's life changed dramatically after the fire. My mother developed cancer of the liver and died almost one year later. She was only 39 years old. He remarried a few years later and my stepmother ended up being mentally unstable—rumored to be from a spell cast on her by a man from a previous relationship. My father resorted to witchcraft and voodoo to try to help her and was finally introduced to the Lord by a woman minister in the community. He accepted Jesus as his Savior and eventually became a minister himself when I was about 10 years old.

From that point on my life was all about church. I was a little too young to appreciate the love of God at first, but I came to accept Jesus as my Savior when I was about 13. Since then I have unfortunately looked back a few times and followed old paths I had forsaken, but God was never far away. His promise is that He will never leave me nor forsake me. There were times when my faith was tested—when my oldest sister died of colon cancer in 1986, when my next older sister was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1991 (she has survived), when I came to realize that I would never have children, when my marriage ended in 1993, and when my beloved father passed away in 2002. But through all that, my faith remained steadfast.

Now, as always, I have so much to be grateful for. The Lord enabled me to complete 20 years of service in the United States Marine Corps, retiring as a First Sergeant in 1998. During my time on active duty there were three chaplains who helped to make a difference in my spiritual journey. They are Chaplain A., Chaplain C., and Chaplain K.

Chaplain A., who just left active duty this month, was chaplain for the Marine Corps Engineer School when I checked in there in May of 1996. He has a kind and gentle spirit and always seems to know the right things to say. He held weekly Bible studies in the chapel during which we were encouraged to open up and discuss issues. He even let me cry on his shoulder, so to speak, when I was having personal problems. You may say that it is a chaplain's job to listen, but Chaplain A. made it more of a personal commitment than a job. I have even asked him to officiate at my wedding next year (if I make the final decision to get married).

Chaplain C. has an untiring spirit and a boundless energy that he exerts for such good deeds as running a stable dedicated to helping those in need. His agency is called Miracle Meadows, which he runs from the ranch he lives on and owns. One can't describe the peace and contentment on the faces of the physically and mentally disabled riders who receive such special attention from the C. and the volunteers who offer their time there. Chaplain C. is also the pastor of a church in the nearby community that I have attended several times. His oldest child is mentally disabled and he takes great care in providing for her. All this and he is still on active duty. One can't help but admire his fortitude and his love for others as well as his love for the Lord.

Chaplain K. retired last year as a Navy Captain and is currently the Assistant Chaplain for the United States Senate. He has what I can only call a sweet spirit. His love for the Lord shows in everything that he does and says. He has an unparalleled way with words and an ability to clarify that seems indiscernible. I enjoyed the weekly meetings he held at his home that included worshipful prayer sessions. He believes in the laying on of hands, which he did once for me when I was facing major surgery. I was not only healed, but did not have to undergo surgery. His wife S. is also much anointed and provides a fine complement to his ministry with her own. I was honored to be invited to attend his retirement ceremony in Springfield, Virginia last August.

All three of these chaplains have opened up their homes to me and I have had, and continue to have, fellowship with them in different ways. Whenever I feel I need an encouraging word, or a prayer, or just to talk, I can call any of them at any time. I will often call one of them before I call my close friends because I know that they can provide a spiritual support that some of my friends cannot.

I continue to work on my faith walk daily, never ceasing to pray, never ceasing to trust and rely on the Lord. I reflect on my life often and all the things that my father taught me. He taught me courage and respect and how to have strength. My experiences, along with my father's teachings, have taught me to never take anything for granted and to thank my dear Lord for all that I have and for all that I am. My father was my mentor and my rock. When Alzheimer's disease robbed him of his faculties in 1993 I was devastated, but he had taught me that God is my ultimate Rock, my Refuge and my Strength. When I was a child, I sometimes tired of all the praying my father had us do...after all there were trees out there to be climbed, but now I don't start my day or end it without praying to the Lord. God bless you, daddy.

I have told my story many times hoping that it touches someone's heart. I usually end with a final thought such as this: no matter what your circumstance, never underestimate the love and power of God. He will guide and keep you and make your path known to you.

-A. B.

FAITH REFLECTION #55

Since conversion I have so many opportunities to grow in Christian maturity and to minister where God puts me. I desire to serve in full time ministry. My calling came as I served with the U. S. Navy Chaplain's Religious Educational Development Opportunity (CREDO) team that facilitates healing of individuals facing personal and spiritual challenges. I believe a part of my calling is to continue in Biblical ministry to the needs of people and families recovering from the cycle of addiction.

I was converted at a Promise Keeper's Conference in Washington D.C. May 24, 1996. I was 41 years old, had served in the Marine Corps for 18 years and, at that time, my life was a mess. A month and a half earlier I resistantly sought help from my unit Chaplain. Through his Godly counsel, I was assured that I was not alone. Later that year I met many of the men that prayed for my salvation since March of that year. For the first time, as a babe in the faith I experienced God's peace and my habits started changing as I began to understand the meaning of repentance. I found a home church, Potomac Alliance in Dale City, Virginia. Worship services were Sunday morning and we had a Men's Bible Study Wednesday evening. The Wednesday Bible study gave me a chance to share and grow in discipleship.

Many ungodly habits have been replaced. The first habit to go was my foul mouth. About the same time my lustful desires for women were checked. At this time I had been separated from my wife for 1 1/2 years. I was encouraged to let the situation heal and be tender towards my wife whenever we had contact. I became hopeful that our relationship would heal and I shared that with my wife. In November 1996 she filed for and was granted a divorce and she remarried in 2002. Even so, we have found ways to care for our three children: S., 17, T., 15 and B., 13. The separation from my children has taught me to trust God, even with the care of my children. My fourth child, N., was born in June 1996 out of wedlock.

The relationship between N.'s mother and I has been guided by mediation in the Church which has helped us to honor our responsibilities to care for N. Much prayer and Godly counsel has been the blessing that keeps me moving forward as a responsible father to all of my children.

In July 1997 I participated in a Personal Growth Retreat. That time revealed hurts, anger, resentment and bitterness that I had been carrying around for many years. A lot of sinful 'stuff' came up and out on that retreat and a friend reminded me that the redeeming power of Christ would heal these hurts. In September 1997 I stopped drinking. At a weekly prayer meeting I shared with my pastor and one of our elders that I couldn't stop drinking. They read James 5: 13-16, put some oil on my head, prayed and my compulsion to drink left. Shortly after that I became active in Alcoholics Anonymous, a very rich mission field in the military community.

I moved to North Carolina in 1998 after retiring from the Marine Corps. God continues to bless me with active fellowship with other Christians. I was reunited with the Navy Chaplain that led me to Christ and he continues to be a blessing in my spiritual development. He's been a source of Godly counsel, which has guided me through many difficult life decisions. The accountability that he provides contributes to my continuing growth and is a reminder of my need for day-to-day repentance, Biblical truth, healthy living and seeking the Lord in all circumstances. I grow in confidence, assurance and joy as I stay in the Will of God, remain in open and honest fellowship with other believers and work to bear witness to the wonderful promise that God has for all of us: salvation, sanctification and glorification through Jesus Christ. I desire to follow God's leading into ministry and have recently been accepted into seminary. We'll have to wait and see what comes next; but I pray that my friendship with my Chaplain friends continues for a long time.

-S. Z.

FAITH REFLECTION #56

Growing up as a young child, I primarily attended church when I visited my grandparents (maybe once every few months). Although, I had a friend who was Catholic and another whose father was a Baptist minister. Occasionally I would attend church with them. I remember enjoying it, but my experience was minimal. As a teenager, my mom and I began attending a United Methodist church in downtown Denver that we found while taking photos for a school project. The pastor was wonderful and gave very meaningful sermons. When my husband, C., and I decided to marry, I knew that this was the church in which I wanted to be married. My mom and I joined the church, for the unfortunate purpose of getting a discounted rate for their wedding services. My husband and I were baptized together the week before Christmas and had an absolutely beautiful wedding on Good Friday the following April. At that point in my life, I had no clue what it meant to "be a Christian" except that I "believed in God." As an adult and a parent, I always had the impression that families that went

to church were much more tightly knit and that the children were better behaved. Having felt this though, I couldn't convince C. or bring myself to get up early enough on a Sunday morning to attend.

In December 1994, we gave birth to our second child, J., who was born with a congenital heart defect. He was strong, happy, and virtually healthy, but required open-heart surgery in July 1995 at the age of seven months. Just following surgery, the doctors told us that it was successful and that he would go the remainder of his life without having to undergo another. The next day, he went into cardiac arrest due to a small hole that the doctor was aware of and left uncorrected. Following 40 minutes of CPR, he was revived and taken back to surgery. During the next four days he was very critical and fully supported intravenously. On the fifth day, the doctors determined that his kidneys were beginning to shut down and that he would require dialysis the next morning, but that night would be the most crucial. We were moved into his room to remain as long as wished. My mom and stepfather were there with us in addition to our 3-year-old daughter, C. We read to him continuously and saw positive readings in his stats during this time. Prior to C. going to sleep, she asked me, "Mommy, is J. going to die?" I answered her very confidently, "No, honey. J. is going to be fine." C. and my stepfather stayed awake the entire night reading to him while the rest of us slept.

At 5:55 a.m. I awoke to hear the nurse say, "I need a doctor now!" I realized then that he wasn't doing well. Apparently, the nurse noticed that the sheets beneath him were wet and learned that the arterial line placed in his chest was leaking. Without requesting the assistance of a doctor and 30 minutes prior to the end of her 12-hour shift, the nurse took it upon herself to disconnect his IV lines in order to move them to another previously placed arterial line in his neck. During the transition, she proceeded to untangle the lines and then had to determine which medications were compatible with one another to reinsert them. This took over 5 minutes causing J. to go into cardiac arrest again. The nurse and the respiratory therapist began CPR and then called for the doctor. They conducted CPR for another 40 minutes unsuccessfully and he was pronounced dead at 6:35 a.m. At some point after his passing, the hospital's chaplain approached us to offer his condolences. I vividly remember him asking, "Was your son baptized?" My initial reaction was "Oh my goodness, he was never baptized and now where will he go?" The chaplain reassured us that he was still under the age of accountability and that he would certainly go to Heaven.

During the shock of losing J., I became very angry of God. I couldn't understand why He "took" our son from us. Although we all have the preconceived notion that Heaven is a peaceful, wonderful place, I was not comforted. As any parent may agree, one doesn't know that their children are okay unless they can see them or hear their voices to make that reassurance. This is how I felt about J. being in Heaven. I have obviously never been there so I wasn't confident that it was the way it is portrayed and I didn't have an established faith to draw this conclusion either. Following the funeral services and burial at the National Cemetery in Colorado, we returned to our duty station in Washington and tried to put our lives back together. Shortly after returning home, I decided to attend the local United Methodist church for the first time. Something made me think that that would be the place where I might feel closest to him. I went alone, as I definitely couldn't convince C. to go with me. He was angrier than I. The first few Sundays were hard as there were a few infant baptisms. It was exceptionally hard when the pastor carried the baby around the sanctuary for all to see. I cried but it felt okay. I did feel close to him while I was there. I felt his presence.

In 1998, while stationed at JMF St. Mawgan, UK, C. came home from work and told me that the new Chaplain and his wife had arrived and that G. approached him to share what they had planned for our small military community. We took that as a personal invitation and began attending chapel every

Sunday with Pastor R. Our children loved their Sunday school classes and nursery. It was then that I met L. and soon began attending a Bible study with her, rearranging my work schedule to accommodate it. During these studies, I learned so much about what “being a Christian” really meant and how one should live a God-centered life versus a self-centered one. L. shared with us many testimonies of her walk with the Lord, using vivid images as analogies along the way. She opened my eyes to see that Heaven really must be the peaceful and eternal homeland that we are all dreaming of. It was because of L.’s inspiration that I took my first baby steps and began my walk with the Lord. I abolished the anger I held toward Him and realized that He didn’t “take” J. from us. I slowly began to realize that we are all placed on earth to serve a certain purpose. J. must have been pretty amazing to accomplish this in those short 7 months of his life. Many people strive decades for this, some without realization. I’m now at peace knowing that J. didn’t have to suffer and didn’t have to live a life that may not have been like the one we intended for him. With the lengthy periods without oxygen during his two cardiac arrests, he may have suffered brain damage that may have lead to a life with little or no quality. God protected him from that. I have redirected the anger into thankful energy. I’m learning to live my life for the Lord’s will and not for my wishes or myself.

Although I have developed an individual relationship with Christ, C. is still hesitant. I learned about two years ago that he was still holding onto the anger. He shared with brother, my sister-in-law and me that the night before J. died, he went to the chapel in the hospital and stood before the cross. He asked God at that point to take him instead of our son. He didn’t want me to hurt and he wanted our son to have the chance at a long, happy life. When J. passed on, he was angry that God didn’t answer his request. He has wondered over the years how I can be so strong and why I seemed to be at peace. I share with him my feelings, and over time he is beginning to feel some of the same things.

Since J’s death, we have been shown the ways that God has possibly used our experience to help others. In July 1999, our friend passed away following a brain aneurysm. His wife was left to raise their two young children alone and attempt to find the answer to the inevitable question, “Why?” One morning she found a bird in her dining room. There were no windows or doors left open during the night, which made her wonder how it came in. When she noticed that it was covered in soot, she realized it must have fallen or flown down the chimney. She said the sight of this bird gave her a sense of peace but she didn’t know why. As we spoke, I shared my thoughts with her. I felt that God had sent this bird to tell her that J. was okay. At the top of the roof there were two chimneys side by side and this bird knew which one to enter. She said that was all she was waiting for was a sign that he was okay in Heaven. A few months later, she and her children moved to L.A. and began attending church again.

In October of that same year, the two-year-old daughter of another family we know was killed in a tragic car accident in Texas. They knew our story of losing J. and said they thought of us immediately when their need for support arose. Although we certainly weren’t able to take away the pain, we were there to share our reluctances and to hopefully reassure them that A. was in a better place. Unfortunately, they had a long legal battle to endure as well, which left the healing on hold for a few years. I feel that had we not experienced the loss of a child, we wouldn’t have been able to be of any assistance to them. I think that that may have been another purpose of J’s life in preparing us to help others go through the grief process. This family, as well, has become very active in their church and developing their own personal relationships with Christ.

To this day, I thank L. for introducing me to the loving God that I know today. I don’t think that I would be where I am without her. She is an amazingly strong person who truly lives every day of her

life for Him. During the period of time when G. was serving in Iraq, I spoke with her to see how she was doing. She very matter-of-factly said, "I know that if God intends for me to see G. on this side of Heaven, then that is the way it will be. If he does not, then I believe that he will prepare me accordingly." She said that she compares worry to that of a small child holding a rattle (symbolized as worry). If that child wants to pick up another toy (symbolized as faith), he/she must let go of the rattle to pick up that toy. "I must let go of the worry to hold onto my faith," she said. In reference to the risk of him losing his life and where would she be, she said, "If men in blue arrive at my door one day, I'll simply say to them, 'I hope that you brought someone to watch the children while we talk.'" Her strength is just unimaginable. I pray that someday I will have just half of that strength as a Navy wife myself. She is an incredible person, friend and a true child of God.

Although I know that I have just begun my walk with the Lord, I believe that I am on the right track and have many around me that will help keep me focused. I am concentrating on teaching my children the importance of developing a relationship of their own and how to lead a God-centered life. As of now, C. doesn't feel that he is worthy enough to get to Heaven, but heard somewhere that as long as I go, he can "tag along" with me. I have explained to him that it's an individual journey and stressed the importance of having his own relationship. God is a forgiver. Whatever has been done in the past will be forgiven if it is brought before Him. I pray that with the continued influence of the wonderful church that we currently attend and with my dedication that he will build a lasting relationship with Christ and will feel the love that I feel daily. Then, he will have the confidence that he too will have eternal life in Heaven one day.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to put my journey on paper. When I initially responded to L.'s email, I didn't think I would have enough to be worth your time. I hope that is to the contrary. I wish you God's blessing and the best in your endeavor.

God Bless,

-K. C.

FAITH REFLECTION #57

Looking over my Childhood Memories album, scrawled in big, shaky writing for my first grade entry on "When I grow up, I want to be..." are the words, "a preacher or a preacher's helper." This is interesting since my parents didn't take me to church. If they had taken me, it would have been to a Baptist church near my hometown of Honor, Michigan. I believe I came up with this aspiration after visiting my mother's brother, a Pentecostal minister. Of course, to a six year old, 'denomination' has no meaning... you either know that Jesus loves you, or you don't. My parents did take me to the church of which I spoke for vacation bible school, and I loved sitting and listening to the stories of the Bible, about David and Goliath, and Jesus healing the sick, and then rising after his death. I also loved the prizes we were given for just sitting and quietly listening. My closest cousin, T., had a book that someone gave her... it was a children's Bible storybook, and from it I learned of Daniel in the Lion's Den, and of Sampson and his hair, Moses and his basket, and others. This was when I was in second grade, and I read the book because my teacher wanted us to make a list of books we read, and there were supposed to be several each week. Incidentally, The Lord's Prayer was in that book, and I memorized it so I could pray like Jesus. I learned to ask, 'forgive us our debtors as we forgive our debts.'

I don't remember going back to the church until third grade, when a benevolent elderly man and his wife (Mr. and Mrs. M.) asked my parents if they could stop on their way to church and pick me up. Each Sunday in the fall, they would stop for me in their cream Cadillac with velvety seats. I enjoyed the sense of belonging to the Church, the group of children to learn stories with, and being around the M.'s (they would still take me to church and even to their home). As many retired Michiganders do, the M.'s overwintered in Florida, after which I no longer attended the Sunday services. I remember Mrs. P., my Sunday school teacher, saying over and over, 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... hold the horse 'til I get on' as she taught us the Gospels. Again, I loved the stories of Sunday school (incidentally, when the children went upstairs for the sermonizing, I would drift off to sleep until the congregation stood to sing). Occasionally, T. would come with me to church. Eventually, she made a friend whose family attended the very same church, and when I would sleep over at T.'s house, we would ride with her friend to church. It seems as though this was the case through sixth grade.

Eventually, I stopped attending the church. I know I went off and on over the years, and T. and I attended the Vacation Bible School, which required the older children to memorize Bible passages. T. and I were awarded more points than the others for verses memorized. We were given our very own Bibles for our efforts. When I was in ninth grade, and started the science requirements, I began to question the existence of God. I became very confused, and even though I still celebrated Christmas and Easter, and I truly wanted to believe in an afterlife, I couldn't integrate evolution and creation in my mind. I didn't discuss this with anyone, but my teachers were a strong influence in my life, and evidence pointed out contradictions to God creating the world in a week and creating man in his own image. I began to have panic attacks when I realized that without a God, death was a permanent blackness... it would be after life just as it was before life. These panic attacks remained with me for years and years, but I continued to consider myself atheistic (I didn't know that agnostic was a better term for me). I attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan... a top-notch private school, which was Christian Reformed. I chose this school because my teacher highly recommended it, not even realizing it was a religious school. As such, religious studies were required for graduation, and I remember sitting in my Christian Origins class when a classmate made the statement, "I don't know why someone would come here if they didn't believe in God." Incidentally, this was my favorite class of all my undergraduate studies, and we delved into the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and discovered who Jesus was. My teacher was an Episcopalian minister, a female. I didn't speak up and admit that I didn't believe there was a God, I remained silent and vowed to be open-minded.

One friend at the time was Catholic, and I attended his church but felt uncomfortable with the ceremony and the fact that they memorized responses and I didn't know the proper responses, or when to sit, stand, or kneel. In fact, I refused to kneel and just sat stiffly on the pew. And, they chanted The Lord's Prayer (which was the only part I did know, but they even changed the wording to "trespasses"! Throughout college and then dental school, I promised myself that I would eventually get my religious thoughts straight, and I occasionally attended services with friends. I continued to feel scared stiff at the thought of death. I accepted a Navy scholarship to dental school, and after receiving my dental degree, was stationed in Mayport, Florida where I met my husband. Did I mention that the dental school I attended, the University of Detroit Mercy, is a Jesuit school? I didn't even understand what that was at the time, only that a Sister ran the school and I was accepted into the class. Anyways, my husband was and is Catholic, and after we accepted orders to North Carolina, we became engaged. I realized that I was ready try my faith again, and insisted on attending church with my fiancé. Since he was Catholic, it made sense for me to become so also. Initially, we attended services in town, but felt better about attending on base, and the pastor was

wonderful. It was easier on base because there was a bulletin that described the readings, and a Missalette with all the readings and responsorials. We both attended RCIA classes, and Father L. was an enlightening teacher. He showed us maps of Jerusalem, and pictures of the Temple there and of Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica, and taught the meaning of the Creed.

I readily embraced the Church, the time was right for me to turn to the Lord. K., my fiancé, and I were both deployed with a Marine Expeditionary Unit to the Middle East/ Horn of Africa, in February 2002 for six months. A Navy chaplain, Father M., was part of our group. On Easter Sunday, he and I walked out into the Gulf of Aden, the southern end of the Red Sea, where he baptized me in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I was confirmed into the Church that Easter, on the desert sands of Djibouti, Africa in the 100+ degree heat, and received my first Communion. It was the highlight of our deployment, and a highlight of my life. I attended Catholic services on the ship each Sunday, and whenever the priest made it over on the holy helo from the big deck. Upon our return home, K. and I were married by Father L. at Camp Lejeune. I continued to attend the Adult Education classes he taught, and returned this past fall... you can never know too much about God, and every week I had a new revelation. I loved the knowledge I gained, and continue to pray for greater understanding and stronger faith. I still struggle, I can't deny that I do. Probably, I should talk to our new pastor about my struggles with my faith, but I continue to look forward to Mass on Sundays. I feel my faith continue to grow, though at times it wanes a bit. I expect that this is normal, and the battle within means that this is an important matter to me.

-S. L.

FAITH REFLECTION #58

As a child, I had to survive the perils of teen-aged and young adult siblings. The youngest of my ten brothers and sisters was nine years old when I was born. I grew up learning about music and Shakespeare instead of rock and roll and comics. I also ran a gauntlet of fear and confusion when faced with the drugs and behavior problems of these self-important soon-to-be-adults.

It was a chaotic childhood. I learned early to read the signs that warned of emotional turmoil or danger. As a result of these experiences, I am hesitant to trust people and satisfied to be alone. I became happily self-reliant.

Where was God in this struggle? All around me. Although the environment around me was loud and confusing, God was in the quiet places. I have survived dangerous drug-induced behavior from my family, and abuse at the hands of the people I was supposed to be able to trust. It has taken me time to come to terms with all that has happened in my life, but God has protected and sheltered me when the humans in my life could not.

I have things to learn. I know that I am not nearly as self-reliant as I wish I could be, but God is in this as well. Over time, I am becoming more comfortable being with and interacting with people. I have learned to accept people for who they are, even when I see how far they are from the ideal person God designed.

God was there in the moments when I gave up and couldn't think of any reasons to continue. God has been with me as I struggle with self-image and reason for being. I am – because God has a place for me. I am alive and in a position to help people in need. From the terrified child with no

opportunity for escape, I have grown into a woman who is prepared to do what ever is needed to bring peace into any situation.

In periods of weakness, God has been there for me, in me, around me. Look in the quiet places – they are full of the radiance of true Life and Love, of supply and peace. Through God, I have learned to take my strength from the quiet places; now I am being prepared to walk into the storm and bring the quiet to others. It is only through God that I have the strength and courage.

-K. R.

FAITH REFLECTION #59

Hello, this is my response. I am a Catholic, having attended Catholic school up until eighth grade where that was the last grade available in Jacksonville, NC where my Father was a Master Gunnery Sergeant in the Marine Corps. I am sure if there was a Catholic High School was available myself and my five siblings would have attended there also. Our family is Catholic or at least mostly was. My mother is still a practicing Catholic. My father stopped attending church and I would have to say that he stopped sometime after his back-to-back tours of Vietnam. He did go into a Catholic Church when I had my 6-year-old son Baptized in the Catholic Church but I am pretty sure he didn't make it to P.'s Confirmation. My sister is still a practicing Catholic, she has two sons. My other sister who has 4 kids and whose husband is in the Navy rarely if ever goes to Church anymore but I think that is just because it is very hard for her to commit to services. Her husband who is back active duty Navy I am not sure he ever went to Church but they do all believe in God. My other brother has converted from Catholicism to being a Born Again Christian and his entire family two kids and a wife are very evangelic and missionary in their beliefs. Currently, they are in Japan where my brother a former Marine Chopper pilot is now a Counselor in the DOD schools. My brother an Air Force pilot and in the White House currently involved with Military Affairs is doing I suppose whatever he has time for. He is remarried and has 3 kids all teenagers from his first marriage. None of us children wanted to stray from the church I don't think. Three of the five children are divorced, all for very good reasons. My mother has had her marriage annulled after my father gave her plenty of reasons to dissolve the marriage. In my father's defense, I assign blame for the dissolution of that marriage to the 8 years of separation he was sentenced by the military service in Vietnam. My mother is remarried to a Baptist now and they appear to have a very good union, however perhaps the honeymoon is not yet over. Both of those senior citizens have lots of children from their previous marriage. Her new husband lost his first and only wife to cancer and perhaps his depression was only lifted on the Internet where he met my mom and they married shortly thereafter. My experience with Chaplains most recently, now about 11 years...was that remarriage counseling that was delivered to my ex-husband and myself. There were not enough sessions. I should have been more attentive to the signals I was receiving in those 2 or three sessions. In this first one, the Chaplain resurrected a very touchy conversation with my ex-husband that should have made me realize, the buried issues he harbored and the news of earlier marriages I had not been aware of ...I should have gotten out of that relationship immediately. The Chaplain preformed the marriage ceremony for us and yet as my mother stated so matter-of-factly, his face looked like he didn't want to marry us. He should have stuck to his guns or faith, and I should have listened to mine. Chaplains should be strong enough to insist on No when they mean No. I don't blame the Chaplain, but it might have been the stronger warning that would have caused me to listen to that little voice and have the faith to continue on my own without that hurtful relationship. I now have had 11 years of "hell" enduring the relationship I must because that man fathered my child. My faith is now practiced with meditation and prayer with God always asking for two things,

everyday for Him to oversee my healer abilities and second, to give me the ability to continue my life despite daily endurance of that regretful relationship with the affected ex-husband. That relationship proves to be the cross I bear, finding a way to continue every day is the challenge I practice my faith with every day. As well, I am now boldly asking for another item, the right to be happy in this life. This is something that I did not feel I was worthy of for having made such a terrible decision is relating with that man. If faith works, I will someday be happy, even while I am carrying my cross.....

-P. J.

FAITH REFLECTION #60

Here's my two cents for your thesis. Born and raised in a First United Methodist Church in Carson City, Nevada. I never had a falling out with the "church," so I never had a "tribulating" return to it. To wit, "I had been doing drugs for fifteen years and while I was in the gutter that night, having just been rolled by a pimp for the fifty I owed the hooker, the rain coming down on me, I remembered that hymn my distantly removed aunt used to sing to when she would visit my step-father, step-mother and I on Thanksgiving and then it all made sense and I found Jesus."

I have always enjoyed sermons more than songs and the hymns I do enjoy and find meaningful tend to have been written before the 1930's.

I haven't been exceptionally active in the Navy churches as I've traveled around the world for I've found them lacking in intellectual food and overbearing on emotional sugar. There seems to have been a trend toward what I would call Suburban Charisma based worship. Lots of singing (usually accompanied by a guitar, or even electric guitar), lots of sharing our story and ensuring we can all tell that Jesus loves us. There seems to be a trend toward music in which a single phrase is repeated ad nauseam and a message that sits with the season and relates a personal experience and a bible verse (usually taken out of context).

I seek deep theological training. In my opinion a good bible study should start off not with Genesis, but why we should believe the bible in the first place, or what are the merits of the Koran or other great spiritual works. We always seem to hit Genesis, split into those who believe the literal word of the bible and those who don't understand how you can have an earth that is "formless and void" and yet have an earth; in other words, a division between those who want to feel the spirit (feel good), and those who want to study the word (ask questions that require research beyond the bible).

An additional factor for my church attendance, or lack thereof, is my spouse who has several charismatic evangelical conservative brothers and sisters who have beat her over the head with their religion so that she is gunshy about going to any kind of "Christian" service. Taking her to our normal modern day sea-service churches would probably create more revulsion than trying to show her by my own actions what a Jesus centered life is like.

Which brings me to my current state. I believe that Jesus is God (I see this as a matter of faith, I feel there is overwhelming historical evidence to the fact (see Josh McDowell's Evidence that Demands a Verdict)), but don't think of myself as a Christian. My beliefs tend to differ enough from what I see around me as Christian beliefs that I don't think I fit into that profile; strangely, however, I still consider myself a Methodist. I am not a regular churchgoer as I have previously stated, but I continue

to read the bible, books on the bible and focus on living by was of Jesus-like virtues. I see more studying in my future, and as a sceptic, I am always ready to investigate other religions and abandon my “Christian” view points for a different religion or theology if someone can bring forward compelling evidence refuting the resurrection – I just haven’t see any yet.

Not sure if this is what you’re looking for, but there you go.

T. G.