



# CONVERSION OF THE HEART



## Because there's hope in your heart. . .

The Holy Spirit can use anything to bring light to a person. A conversation with a friend at work introduced Eric Melvin to apologetics. “The friend was not Catholic, but apologetics really set me on the path toward the Catholic Church. Even before I discovered 88.3 FM, the St. Gabriel Radio station in Portsmouth, I became a fan of Fr. Mike Schmitz and Bishop Barron.”

*St. Gabriel Radio became a companion on the path when Eric saw a radio banner outside the office of Fr. David Huffman in Ironton, Ohio.*

Eric enjoys music – whether he’s listening or playing guitar and piano. He says, “I used to listen to music on the radio – a lot, but I lost that joy of music when I lost several people I loved.” Into that musical void stepped St. Gabriel Radio. It became a companion on this path when Eric saw a radio banner outside the office of Fr. David Huffman at St. Joseph church in Ironton, Ohio.

“I saw that 88.3 FM sign and decided to check it out. During my commutes, I started listening more and more. The programs lifted me up. On my lunch breaks, I listen to *Take 2 with Jerry and Debbie* (noon weekdays). I enjoy hearing the callers’ questions and conversations. I feel compassion for what’s happening to them and pray for them.”

### “WHAT CAN I BELIEVE?”

Eric is a husband and a father to a 3-year-old. Many husbands and dads ask, “What can I believe? Who can I trust, especially in relation to marriage and raising a family?” The early afternoon programming on St. Gabriel Radio helps Eric connect the dots on many of these questions. “I especially like what I learn from Dr. Ray on *The Doctor Is In* program” (1 P.M. weekdays).”

Eric says, “I grew up a Baptist and Methodist and drifted away from faith throughout college. There, a number of atheist friends challenged his wavering beliefs.

“While searching for the Truth of Christianity, I read many great apologists. First, I read Protestant Josh

McDowell, then C.S. Lewis, and G.K. Chesterton shortly after. Even the fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien spoke truths to me that pushed me closer toward *The Church*.”

*“Father Riccardo is authentic. You know that he really believes what he’s saying.”*

In 2013, Eric decided to attend Mass. “I still remember how strange yet reverent this first Mass seemed to me. The priest, Fr. David Huffman, introduced himself to me and

invited me to RCIA. I began attending Mass and RCIA (Right of Catholic Initiation for Adults) regularly.”

Eric also discovered the work of Bishop Barron (Father Barron at that time) and Bishop Fulton Sheen. He began listening to St. Gabriel Radio programs like Fr. Mike Schmitz (4 P.M. weekdays). “These folks gave me logical reasons to hold onto my faith. I listen to Fr. Riccardo’s *Christ is the Answer*, (7 A.M. weekdays) often in the morning. He’s authentic. You know that he really believes what he’s saying.”

After steadfast reading and prayer over several years, Eric became Catholic. The turning point was in RCIA where he asked himself, “What do I really believe? I realized that this is the true Faith. I realized that the Eucharist is in the writings of the Church Fathers. I accepted that the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ and that I wanted to receive Him. I thought, ‘Where else can I go?’

### “I AM THE WAY. . .”

“St. Gabriel Radio has helped me when I have been trying to figure out what I believe. The programs definitely helped to move me towards the Church.” Fr. Mike’s evening radio spots and *Catholic Answers* (6 P.M. Sunday through Friday) are particularly helpful to Eric. “Fr. Mike thinks about these things deeply and then makes them relatable. *Catholic Answers* covers a broad spectrum of questions about the Church’s positions on dogma and social issues. This is helpful especially for people who are thinking about becoming Catholic – and helpful for even atheists.

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“All my family and friends are Protestant,” Eric continues. Fortunately, his wife, a Baptist, respects his decision to convert. “Initially, my mom worried about my conversion but there is no friction from my family.”

Eric’s wife has become very supportive ever since she realized how important the Catholic Faith is to him. “She realizes that it’s not just what I believe, it helps me become a better person. She helps me free up time for Confession. I can go to Confession when I’m struggling, and I like to get advice from the priest. Her spiritual journey has been different from

*“My Catholic view has changed the way I approach these relationships because the Sacrament of Marriage is a source of grace.”*

mine. She has always been a woman of faith, close and connected to the Baptist church. She talks to the priest at St. Joseph and wants to be involved in the Catholic community of the parish. My wife and I try to go to Mass as a family with our son who is three. We do night-time prayers, and our son tries to repeat those prayers.

“Listening to St. Gabriel Radio has made me a better husband and dad. I prayed for my family before my conversion. Now I pray more. My understanding of marriage, family, and children has deepened. For a Baptist, marriage is viewed with reverence but it is not sacramental. It seems that society in general no longer values these relationships. My Catholic view has changed the way I approach these relationships because the Sacrament of Matrimony is a source of grace.”

On January 6, 2018, one month after his son was born, Eric’s dad passed away. Then, within several months, he lost a dear great aunt and his grandfather, followed by a beloved cousin who took his own life. “I struggled with grief and faith for a long time. I was even angry with God for a while. I met with my parish priest several times just to talk about it.”

**GOD’S PLAN IS VAST AND FULL**

“I remember the night in February 2020, talking to the priest at my parish and a Dominican priest about the loss and grief I had been through. I remember them praying with me and then blessing me. I remember going home that evening with a sense of peace that I did not have before. It reminds me now of the moment that Jesus appeared in front of the disciples after the Resurrection and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”

Eric explains, “I learned so much throughout the process of grieving those losses. Like so many other people, I tried to understand why God allows so much suffering in the world. I realized that there is a point at which we can’t fully understand the entire picture of God’s plan. God told Job, ‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’ I realized that, like Job, the vastness and fullness



of God’s plan is just too great for a human mind to comprehend.”

Eric added, “We believe God allows suffering and evil because He can bring about some good from it and often we might never see or understand what that good is during our lifetime. But then comes God, The Son, Jesus Christ. God Himself came not to take away suffering, and really, not even to help us understand why we suffer, but instead suffers for us, and

with us. Jesus transformed suffering, so that now we don’t suffer alone, but we can unite our suffering with Christ and, somehow, He can use that to bring about a greater good.”

The idea of redemptive suffering changed the way Eric grieves. “Because when you turn grief, or any kind of suffering, into a prayer – when you offer it to Christ – He uses the suffering in ways that are too amazing for us to fully understand this side of the Kingdom.”

**GRIEF OPENED THE DOOR TO JOY**

Eric entered the Church on the Epiphany of Our Lord. The official feastday is January 6th but in 2021, it was celebrated on January 3rd. “January 6th is the date my dad passed away. So now every year, I get to celebrate coming into the Church twice during Christmastide: on January 3rd and on The Epiphany, which will usually fall on the day of my dad’s passing.”

It resonated with Eric when his priest said the day you die on earth can be like your birthday in Heaven. “So, while I’m celebrating entering full communion with the Church, I am also praying for a celebration of my dad’s birthday in Heaven.

*“And when the days are long and it all falls apart Don’t grieve like the lost, because there’s hope in your heart.” - Eric*

“Throughout this journey, especially the last three or four years, listening to St. Gabriel radio has really helped me. I thank the radio station for all for the work that it does. I

could talk about other things but the grief of the losses I went through and how Christ has healed so much while on my faith journey toward the Church is such a big part of my life.

“I didn’t even realize, until just this moment, that perhaps choosing that day to enter the Church, and forevermore celebrating as such, this might just be one way Christ has transformed suffering and brought about a greater good. Glory to Jesus Christ.”