

## Bob's Story

I was raised in the Church of Christ (instrumental, and not of any larger affiliation--congregationalist I think you'd have called us). I love my baptism memories--at twelve, at a church camp in the woods of the coastal mountain range of Oregon, I was baptised in a crawdad hole by the light of a coleman lantern while about a hundred kids sang old songs. Around the time I was 25 or so, I felt very much called to ministry, and began exploring my options while in the military. This was a gift, because this calling gave me a focus while simultaneously going through a war and a divorce a year later. I had something to look forward to in my life beyond the personal devastation I was experiencing. The deployment also taught me to love living light (all I owned fit under my rack), something that has played strongly since in my life.

After six years of military service I was discharged honorably in 1991; I intended to enroll in a college. I worked for two years while searching. All of the bible colleges I wanted to attend fell short on the fiscal end, so I opted finally for a secular, local community college. I didn't see myself as a potential pulpit preacher, and my love of music pointed me towards the possibilities of music ministry. During this time I met often with my minister; we had great talks about things the typical person in the pew weren't so interested in. During this time I discovered a great desire for confession and saw it in Scripture, but no means to exercise it. I wasn't satisfied by my pastor's answer to my questions, but "Catholic" even then wasn't on the radar.

Commuting back and forth an hour each day to college became "radio preacher time" for me. I looked forward to listening to each minister as he spoke of what he knew of the Word of God. I quickly discovered favorites, mostly men who were in my local area or in the Northwest.

After two years of school I decided my debt load was unacceptable, so I took a truck driving job, long haul. This gave me plenty of hours of listening to radio preachers. I compared doctrine to doctrine, and listened to the merits of each.

About three years into my driving career I became involved with a Catholic woman who would NOT convert, though she couldn't argue doctrinal issues with me. She knew what she believed, but not why, and any pressure on my part created great sparks. In my desire to convert her, I decided to read the Catechism to pick it apart and show the errors of the Faith. Instead I was introduced to the theological equivalent of Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound", the Catholic "seamless garment". I was blown away. I wanted in!

Unfortunately it was already Lent and I couldn't find a priest who would give me individual instruction. I fought this in my mind, but then realized I needed to submit. Though thoroughly ready to convert in the early spring of 1998, I waited to go through RCIA and entered the Church in Easter 1999. It was so hard. ...I cried on my girlfriend after Easter '98 like a man who'd lost it all. I really broke down right there in the parking lot in my car. I was so ready. It was my first lesson in obedience.

My second lesson in obedience came in the form of having to seek an annulment for my marriage which eventually was granted.

My third lesson in obedience came as I realized I now had options to ministry that I'd never dreamed I had as a non-Catholic. I felt strongly that I should be open to those possibilities. After a three years of wrestling with vocational issues while in a serious, committed relationship my girlfriend and I separated.

This marked a very difficult time. A dark night. A night I've only recently emerged from. I tried for a time to quiet the voice that called me. . . thinking like Johah to put myself at least out of practical reach, because the storms I'd been through had overwhelmed me. Like Elijah, I ran to the mountains and hid in a cave of sorts, and God fed me when I wouldn't feed myself. Recently God's granted me courage and impetus (meaning a good, firm, gentle kickstart) to begin again to look at and be open to the possibility I'm called to religious life and possibly priesthood. Or to married life! But to be open to both, and to be active in seeking answers, and active in listening to his still, small voice again. Shshsh. ..hear it? ;o)