

PARISH NEIGHBORS

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ROB MANGAN

A CONVERSION STORY

By Kim Hedzik | Photos provided by the Mangan family and Nancy Maschek, NM Photography

Born to a 19-year-old Catholic teenager in Illinois, Rob Mangan was put up for adoption at birth. His Aunt Peg adopted him immediately. Six months later, his birth mother stepped in and took him back. Until he was 18, Rob was raised by his mom. He didn't know his father and probably never will.

Rob's inauspicious start could have kept him trapped in a life without Christ's presence, but through his Uncle Paul, an Evangelical Christian, and his Aunt Jane,

a Catholic, he took a journey that led to him becoming a passionate Catholic.

"My first moment of change came at 17-years-old when my Uncle invited me to his church, Grace Baptist. That led me to a Christian Youth Center retreat where I learned about Jesus and his unconditional love for me," Rob says. After high school, Rob attended Moody Bible Institute for two years. "I became an Evangelical Christian and for 20 plus years, I strived to follow Christ," Rob

says. He was working for a Christian ministry when he faced his first real challenge to his faith.

One evening, he was playing volleyball at a local bar/restaurant, where alcohol was being served. The next day, a fellow believer said he was 'in violation of the Bible's clear command not to be in a situation that could cause a brother to stumble (with regard to alcohol addiction).' This was the first time Rob asked himself, "Who decides how to interpret the scripture? With foundational questions brewing, Rob continued his work but stored this thought in the back of his mind.

A few years later, Rob found himself living with his Aunt Jane's family and building a career in information technology. He was making more money than he ever had, but something was missing. "When a friend of mine from Moody Bible Institute offered me a non-paying position at a Christian Youth Center, I took it. I felt like working for a ministry would be more fulfilling," Rob says. He supported himself with a series of referee and substitute teaching jobs. He eventually earned his bachelor's degree and moved to Texas to live with his cousin.

When his Aunt Jane's son, Chris, took his own life, Rob left Texas for Illinois to comfort his Aunt and her family. He hoped to witness to her during her time of grief while he ministered to her needs. He believed that if she would come to see the false teachings of the Catholic faith and enter into a relationship with Jesus, she could overcome her grief and lead a more fulfilled life. But when he asked her why she was Catholic, she said two things: two thousand years of Church history and the Eucharist. This led Rob on another path of discovery.

He found a book by convert David Currie called, *Born Fundamentalist, Born*



Again Catholic. "David Currie found something 'more' in the Catholic faith and this surprised me," Rob says. "I began to see some of the things that were missing in my own faith life even though I never knew they were missing." He likens this to not missing having an earthly father--you can't miss what you never had.

The missing parts revealed themselves as he began a historical study of Catholicism. "I considered the Church's 2,000 years. There was no history for many of the Protestant denominations before 500 years ago. I looked at the writings of the men who lived just after the Apostles (Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement, and Justin Martyr). Their beliefs were in line with Catholic theology," Rob says, adding, "these are (some of) the people who decided what letters would go into the Bible we read today."

His next area of investigation was Biblical interpretation. "Christians didn't necessarily agree on what scripture said, as evidenced by the many different Protestant denominations. And none of these (scriptural interpretations) could be traced back to a reliable source," Rob says. Looking back on his non-Catholic days, Rob says, "At times, I would interpret scripture in a way that fit my own wishes.



There really wasn't anyone who had the authority to tell me otherwise."

It took Rob four years to become Catholic. During that time of discernment and conversion, he married Elena and had two sons, Konnor and Kayden. Elena is an Evangelical Christian, and she struggled with Rob's conversion. This led to some difficult conversations, but Rob and Elena have a supportive marriage and allow for differences in individual choice.

For instance, Elena agreed to have the boys baptized in the Catholic Church. When they moved from Illinois to Georgia, she supported them attending Saint John Bosco Academy. Rob was open to the boys attending Perimeter Presbyterian School at another point, although it never came to pass. In fact, Rob has homeschooled his boys for most of their lives. Rob often attends multiple

faith services each weekend: Catholic Mass and a Christian service with Elena and the boys. When Rob told Elena it was important to him that their marriage be con-validated by the Catholic Church, she agreed. "It isn't always easy, but our differences have forced both of us to become better Christians, and to work hard on our weaknesses for the sake of our marriage," Rob says.

Family has always been an important part of Rob's life, despite not having a father or any siblings. He recalls the joy of spending every Thanksgiving and Christmas with his many aunts and uncles from his mom's side. Eventually, his mom returned to the Catholic faith she had left after Rob's birth. They have a close relationship and stay in touch regularly.

Rob's boys are 9 and 10 years old and recently began attending public school. This has opened new opportunities for Rob to return to the workforce. He is acquiring his network engineering certification for that purpose. Additionally, he is involved in the Regnum Christi movement, is a member of the Knights of Columbus at Saint Brendan's, and is a weekly volunteer at RCIA.

Do you know a fellow parish member who has a story to share?

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