

with great love, and be ready to take whatever He gives and give whatever He takes with a big smile. Let us pray.” The letter was signed in blue ink, “God bless you, Mother Teresa.”

Do small things with great love. What could have been a better demonstration of that belief than her letter? I had asked what I could do to serve God better and she had shown me.

Four weeks later I watched Mother Teresa’s funeral on television. She had not tried to do great things. She did small things with such great love that it touched the hearts of millions. The gift of her letter might have seemed a small thing to Mother Teresa, but the love she shared has changed my life.

From How to Listen to God by Doug Hill, pages 65. Used with permission

Story 2 ***How do I know if this is the right decision?*** **By Ann Lankford**

Small towns are great places to live. This was one of the reasons that I moved to Schulyer, Nebraska after completing a master’s degree in Catechetics and Christian Ministry at Franciscan University of Steubenville. The position was to direct the Faith Formation Program for two Catholic Parishes. Interestingly enough, the two beautiful Churches were three blocks apart. We had over 500 youth who participated and most were either farm kids or Hispanics.

I greatly enjoyed working with the two priests and all the families from the area. Another great perk was that I developed one of the best friendships of my life. Jill was married to a local doctor and I got to know her when she and her husband attended the RCIA process, which I directed. The RCIA is a process of conversion which helps people to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through committed daily prayer and study for preparation to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. Jill’s husband was Catholic and she was Lutheran and they were raising their children in the Catholic Faith. Jill wanted to learn more about the depth of prayer in the Catholic Church and come to understand what her children were being taught about faith in Jesus Christ. Jill greatly appreciated the RCIA process and how her relationship with Our Lord was deepening as she became more committed to prayer. She and her husband began praying together and praying with their children on a daily basis, which brought a great deal of forgiveness, healing and more peace in their marriage.

A few months after Jill entered the Church at Easter, she gave birth to their fourth child. Several months later, to the shock of the entire town, her husband collapsed on the tread mill and died instantly as he was working out in the lower level of their home. One of the priests that I worked for came up after morning Mass and told me. He said that I needed to be with Jill at this time. This was difficult for me as my grandparents had died when I was very young and so an up close experience with death was foreign and carried a lot of fear for me, even as an adult. It was only in response to the priest, whom I greatly respected, that I went to Jill’s house.

When I greeted her, Jill started talking about the RCIA process and, all I could think about was, *your husband just died and you are thinking about RCIA?* Jill purposely stated that God knew this was going to happen and He drew her to the RCIA process so that she could really learn to pray and grow in her trust of Jesus for this difficult time. The more she talked, the more I cried.

At the funeral, Jill kept asking what she and the children should do, as this was the first Catholic funeral she had attended. After the luncheon, as Jill and her children were leaving, God put something on my heart. I told Jill that, when she was ready, I would come once a week to watch the children so that she could spend a Holy Hour with Jesus in adoration. In the back of my mind, even though the words were coming out of my mouth, I figured that I would never hear from her. Interestingly enough, she called me two weeks later.

I started watching her three girls and one boy the next Friday. Since Jill was dealing with grief, I became very close to the children and I think that the tiny baby thought that I was her mother. After a few months, Jill said that the two of us needed to start going out to dinner after she prayed her Holy Hour. This was the beginning of our deep friendship. Over the next two years, I was pretty much with Jill and her four children just about every weekend. Jill spoke about Jim's death quite freely and all the ways that God supported her through the traumatic days and months. Not only were these discussions about death beneficial, but her sharing her family with me became a great blessing. These two components were what established this as a life-long friendship.

During my fourth year in Schuyler, it seemed like there was a nudge from God that it was time for me to move on. However, as I pursued various positions, it seemed that doors kept closing on me. I related the situation to a priest and then said I would stay and coast this next year. Father Whelan said, "Do you really think God wants you to coast?" At that point, I simply said to God in prayer; "If you want me to leave, then help me to know how to move forward."

The best time to leave would have been over the summer, so that a new person would have the time to organize the Program for the next year. However, in the early fall, a situation opened up in which my sister heard from then Bishop Burke of the Diocese of La Crosse about an open position. I called soon thereafter and went for the interview. Everything went well and I really liked the City of La Crosse. However, after returning to Schuyler, I started doubting, primarily because I understood it can be difficult and takes time to establish good and lasting friendships.

In feeling unsettled with the idea of staying in Schuyler and being uncomfortable with the idea of moving to La Crosse, I prayed and asked Jesus to give me a sign about this decision; and I had some qualifiers. If the Lord wanted me to go to La Crosse, then I needed a sign that there would be a woman that would be a good friend and who would share her family with me. A few days later, I received a phone call from Chris Stefanick who was driving on the freeway in Los Angeles. I had been in school at the same time with he and his wife, Natalie, four years prior and she had become a friend as we were part of the RCIA process on campus. Chris said that he had just accepted a position in La Crosse and heard that I had interviewed there also. I told him that

I had cold feet about accepting the position. But when I asked how many children they had, his reply really caught me off guard. Natalie had just given birth to their third child. This phone call felt like an answer to my prayer. I moved forward in the process with an open heart, seeking additional guidance from God and, having received that, ultimately I accepted the position.

As of 2020, I am now in my 18th year of working for the Diocese of La Crosse. It has been a very good fit for me and yet not without difficulties and challenges. This whole experience keeps me depending heavily on the Lord, and in the process, gives me opportunities for personal growth. I do periodically think back to God's guidance to accept this position – remembering the deep experience of peace that God gave me at that time of decision-making. This reminds me that I am where God wants me now, and that He will continually equip me to do the work.