

Andrew (Andreas) Kunzel

My faith Journey:

I was born to a spiritual free-thinking Catholic woman, much ahead of her time, a Lutheran Father who studied the Catholic faith but was unable to fully believe in its doctrine and being honest to himself remained a non-practicing Lutheran. I was also fortunate to have a wonderful maternal Grandmother who was a devout Catholic.

My first real experience of the Catholic faith came, when my Grandmother would take me on holidays to a Convent town that was co-founded by my Grandmother's Aunt, a Josephite Sister. The Convent was physically built by the Sisters and surrounding farm folks. We would stay in the Hospice run by a beautiful and compassionate Sister: the convent was totally self-sufficient, caring for the physically and mentally handicapped of all ages. During this time, I would witness the compassionate and loving Nuns, as well as the not so kind, perhaps angry with life Nuns.

Coming to Australia as a young teenager I would attend Sunday Mass celebrated by a German Priest at St Patricks in Adelaide. When my parents moved to Salisbury, we attended St Augustine Church in Salisbury, until one hot summer's day I attended Mass in Shorts, short sleeved white shirt and knee high socks. As I left the Church the then Parish Priest told me "I don't want to see you again in Church dressed like this". He didn't. I stopped going to Mass except on rare occasions at the Cathedral. Later when I met my wife Nora this would be on a more regular basis.

We were married by Nora's Uncle who was a Franciscan missionary Priest in Pakistan and came to Australia for this occasion, a most holy and compassionate man. By this time, we would attend Mass each Sunday at the Church of the Annunciation in Hectorville. When our eldest son started Sunday School Nora would assist in teaching the 'little' ones whilst I would sit in the car reading the Sunday Mail waiting for Mass to start.

One day there was a knock on my car window and a smiling little Nun (Sister Mary Canny) asked me if I could assist with R E as there were some older boys who might respond better to a male. This was the beginning of 23 years teaching R E, mainly for children who were older and had missed 'the boat' as one would say in those days.

In 1980 we made a break from Hectorville as we had built our new home in Para Vista and Nora had been attending Prayer meetings at John the 23rd for some years. My first impression of the Church building, we arrived 10 minutes early, was not complimentary however this was only for a very short time. Once people started to arrive and the person who moved next to me introduced himself and welcomed us. Father John was the Parish Priest and until then I had never experienced a Holy down to earth inspiring Mass, with participating parishioners, rousing Hymns and fellowship after Mass. Finally I had found my spiritual home.

15 years ago I was asked by a Parishioner, who was the Catholic Chaplain to the Royal Adelaide Hospital, if I would become a volunteer there, reluctantly I agreed. After more years of study, during which I met a holy woman who taught Spiritual Pastoral Education, I applied for a position as Pastoral Associate with an aged care provider with strong Catholic ethos and ties to the Church. In this position I have the privilege to meet elderly residents of

all walks of life, some religious, spiritual, agnostic and professed atheists. All human beings created in the image of God. As I welcome these people into our aged care homes and assist them to adjust into their new environment and they entrust and share their life stories with me I come to understand more and more the wonderful plan of our God. As well I have the honour to encounter wonderful unselfish and devoted Priests and Ministers of religion who give so freely of their time to spiritually care for these residents who are no longer able to attend Church services in the communities they used to belong to. One of the most heart-warming experience is to witness the removal of denominational barriers, as all are invited to attend one another's celebrations.

In my senior years I realise more than ever that is in our human foolishness we erect barriers to one another in order to protect ourselves from those we don't know, but how much wiser it is to listen to each other and accept and appreciate the vastness of God's varied creation.

At times I ponder if it is in our imperfections that our God has created perfection. We all have the opportunity for the holy and the sinful and it is by the grace of God that 'I' am.