

## Cathy Cornelius Spiritual Journey

Cathy has been an Elder since 2000. She has been married to Carl for the last 35 years and 30 of those years they have attended First Christian Church. They are thankful for a friend who asked them to this great church. During this time they have been blessed with three children, Cari, Carla and Chad, who are all married (spouses Bo, Chris and Meganne respectively) and all of them work as teachers. They have blessed Cathy and Carl with five beautiful grandchildren, Tori, Nathan, Dillon, Chloe and Carson. After working as a secretary for many years at Stelter and Brinck, Ltd., Cathy now stays home and enjoys being able to travel with Carl and spend time with all the kids. She feels blessed to serve in many ministries in the church, which include leading FCC's Prayer Ministry, leading a Life Group, helping out with Care Team, Upward, ALPHA, Walk to Emmaus and getting to visit FCC's wonderful shut-ins.



*Favorite Scripture: Philippians 4:13.*

*Cathy is currently taking a leave of absence from regular Elder duties for health reasons, but she remains a daily inspiration to all around her.*

### Growing Up

My journey begins with my childhood, which is something I've never before wanted to talk about. Then last year I read the book, *The Purpose Driven® Life*. It said, "The very experiences that you have resented or regretted most in life—the ones you've wanted to hide and forget—are the experiences God wants to use to help others... for God to use your painful experiences you must be willing to share them."

So now I know this is what God wants from me and with His love and grace I can do that.

I was the fourth of six children born to Betty and Joe McKenna. Due to my father's alcoholism and my mother's chronic illness, we siblings were not raised together. Two brothers and I were sent to St. Aloysius Orphanage. I remember one weekend when my dad did not come to pick us up (which was not unusual) my brother and I ran away to find my grandmother's house. We did not get very far when we were picked up and taken back. That was my first time in a police car and I hope my last.

At eight years old, I went to live with my Aunt Mill and Uncle Ray. I did not feel loved and was told many times if I did not behave I would go back to the orphanage. As a result, I grew up lacking confidence and self-esteem. In my spiritual life, I continued my Catholic studies, which began in the orphanage.

Many memories I tried to forget came out when I was reading *The Purpose Driven® Life*. As a child, I longed for my father. Now I realize my heavenly Father more than makes up for the absence of my earthly father.

### Marriage & Family

I know it was God's plan for me to marry Carl. We have been married 32 years now—the happiest years of my life. My life with Carl has made all the heartache of my childhood worthwhile.

Twenty-eight years ago, my friend, Karen Renbarger, invited Carl and me to First Christian Church and we've been there ever since.

God blessed Carl and me with three beautiful children. It's such an honor to have them. I always knew He gave them to me, so it was important to me that they knew their Lord and Savior. Only through the grace of God did I turn to Him and let Him help me raise them. Today, they are all on the path to finding their own walk with the Lord.

### A Time of Healing

About 10 years ago I went to a healing Mass with a friend whose husband had cancer. I went to be there for her, but God had me there to heal me. I have never been the same since God reached down that night and took the garbage I was still holding on to and healed me.

In 1993, I went on my walk to Emmaus. I had never felt so much love as on that weekend. In the dark of the night I sat on a picnic table, talking to God. He said, "I will never leave you or forsake you, not just once but a few times."

I wondered why God said that to me. Carl thought that maybe because my parents left me, God wanted me to know He would never leave me. That is true. I never feel alone.

### Serving Through Ministry

I now see how God used my walk to prepare me to be His servant. After my walk I was asked to be an elder at First Christian. I had turned it down twice before, but this time I went to the Word and prayed and felt God calling me for eldership. What an honor it is to help lead people as they seek Him in worship, and help lead our church on the path to do His work.

The Alpha™ course was also helpful to me. It taught me how to pray with other people and led me to a prayer ministry. I feel a true passion for this. I love praying for people in their times of need and watching God's healing hands make them whole.

### Blessed in Times of Trouble

In 2001, I was told I had breast cancer. It was such a shock to me. By then my walk with the Lord was strong, and many people prayed for me. The knowledge of having cancer was scary to me, so I turned it over to Him.

I was amazed at the joy and peace I felt at that time. In the middle of my darkest time I felt His love and peace like never before. Carl took such wonderful care of me for a whole year and always made me feel beautiful and never a burden. I remember telling God if He would bring Carl and the kids closer to Him through my illness, it would all be worth it. Recently, Carl told me he really became close to God because of my bout with cancer. Isn't God wonderful?

### A New Creation

My cancer also allowed me to see the real me: not my looks—for believe me, a bald-headed woman with no eyelashes or brows doesn't look too good—but a woman with confidence as I looked in the mirror and liked what I saw: someone God created and loved. Gone was the little girl who lacked assuredness and self-esteem.

Five years ago, I was able to help take care of Aunt Mill in her old age. I knew no matter what happened in my younger years it was what I needed to do. We enjoyed that time together. Two weeks before she died she told me she didn't know what she would have done without me. I will always remember those words. They were a gift from God.

As I look back on my spiritual journey, I feel I have known my Lord all my life, and He has been loving on me every day. I have a long way to go to be like Christ, but He never gives up. I love Him and thank Him for saving me, for keeping me close and for showing me my purpose in this life: to worship and adore Him, to love all His children and bring them to know Him. I praise Him for giving me the privilege to be His servant. There is no one I would rather be used by than my Lord.