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*the joy  
which comes  
with the work*

WHY I WENT INTO CHURCH WORK • 1

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ONCE when I was a senior in college someone said to me, "Well, what are you going to do next year, work for the Church?" I never have been more stunned. I was astonished that the question had been asked. I remember giving it no further thought, really, except to reflect that I knew no woman doing church work, and to wonder fleetingly what it would be like to teach church school all the time!

And so, for the next three years, I went on with my preparation for work with underprivileged children. Then came what seemed to me a surprising turn of events. I was elected an adviser to the student Christian movement at a midwest university. A few months later, I was asked, "Why, if you are concerned about these matters, aren't you working for your Church?" Months of deliberation followed: one week I thought, *why not indeed?* and the next week, I was content to serve in an interdenominational way.

The day finally came when I was almost ready to say *yes*. A friend and I were crossing downtown Fifth Avenue in New York against noonday traffic. Above the roar of horns and mad rush of noise, my friend said succinctly, "If you love the Church as you do, and since you understand the great need for trained women, why not?" And with a sudden shove, she pushed me out of the path of an oncoming bus.

I have told her since that she tried to frighten me into a decision! But beneath the confusion and whiz of cars veering around us, I calmly thought, *Yes, of course, if they will have me, I would rather do this than anything else in the world.*

It is fun to look back sometimes, and to see how you make various choices and decisions. In my case, when I think back to my childhood, I cannot remember a Sunday when I missed church. I accepted this as I accepted the routine of school. My family simply went to church as a unit. No comments were made, no questions were asked.

All the way through high school, church was the only place in which I could forget my painful shyness, for I had complete trust in God's goodness and loving-kindness.

And then the awful day came. I was a freshman in college when someone suggested that God lived only in my imagination; since I could not prove His existence, was I not fooling myself? Vividly and horribly, the world crashed around me. I was miserably lonely and lost. I could not say my prayers. I was too reticent to ask for help from others. And as I listened more and more to others it seemed to me that few people cared about these things.

Thanks, deep thanks, to a college friend who called me early each Sunday morning, I

continued going to church. I searched the library shelves for everything I could find on prayer and worship and Christian doctrine. I continued working with the campus religious organization with the sole motive of finding again God whom I once loved and trusted. Very slowly, and for the next years, this became my most important concern.

My friends, who knew little of my doubts, were intrigued by my daily trek to chapel, but gradually they began coming with me. When we were off skiing on weekends, we joked about it, but, in retrospect, I think we were quite honestly trying to know God, and to be known by Him.

After I graduated from college, I had a job working with convalescing crippled children. Here I learned a good deal about God from those who knew Him. Later, while taking my master's degree. I unconsciously distinguished myself by being the only student in the graduate college who went to church. As a result, I was asked to give a little time to the undergraduate students who were working with the campus religious organization. I was bewildered to find that many of them had even more questions than I.

After graduate school, the vacancy that I had hoped for in a social work job did not occur. By then, after three years of tre-



mendous assistance from clergy and Church members, I was not surprised that I wanted to continue working with students who were concerned about the Christian faith. Perhaps it was during that next year on a midwestern campus, that I began to lose my fear of people in the strange awareness that God was somehow managing to work through me in my work with them.

Even though I started studying in theological school and working with the Church with great anticipation and enthusiasm, I did not dream that it could be so exciting, so full of compensations, and yes, so much fun! Over and over again, in these past seven years with the Church, I have marveled at the joy which comes with the work.

How could I have known, for example, what it would mean to work side by side with concerned, loving, forgiving people? How could I have known what it would mean to have people praying for my work? I was amazed the first year when I traveled around New England as a roving college worker to find that people were remembering the work in their prayers.

And all the while, something else was happening. This concern of so many people gradually made tangible the meaning of such words as "fellowship," "blessed community," "the Body of Christ." How can I find words

to express the joy of realizing that one is, in a very real sense, a member of a concerned community; that one is never forgotten and need never be lonely; that so many others are sharing their questions and problems.

Above all, the reason for the work has been the source of my deepest happiness. What could possibly be more important, more worthwhile, than helping to spread the Christian way of life? What greater joy could one have than to know that God does use us, even as we are, to bring others into the life of the Church, into the blessed company of all faithful people? What greater joy can one have than the privilege of helping someone to know Christ, to know the reality of life in Him, and to know all the consequent happiness of giving oneself to Christ.



*This folder is one of a series written by active workers in the Church today. Trained women are constantly needed for work in parishes, rural areas, overseas, on college campuses.*

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