

## **JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY** **by Ruth (Sharenda Roam)**

One night I dreamed I was at a music and art festival in a big grassy field. In front of me were three circles of people dancing.

One circle, the largest one, was full of Christians. But it was disorganized with gaps between people. I didn't know whose hand to hold.

In another circle, crystals sparkled as the New Age dancers held hands and moved together. And in yet another earthy goddess worshipers with painted bodies leaped in a rhythmic circular dance.

In the dream God told me, you may not dance in any other circles except the Christian circle. I have allowed you in the past to dance in other circles, because you have such a curious mind, but now you only have enough time to dance in the Christian circle. When I woke up I knew I had to passionately seek God's will for my spiritual journey.

There have been several stepping stones, in addition to my "3 Circles Dream," that have led me to the Orthodox Church.

I had been spiritually homeless for many years, after leaving the United Pentecostal denomination, not belonging to any community of believers. I grew up in a wonderful family. My dad and grandfathers were pastors. We pastored churches in Oregon, Ohio, and Missouri. We were in church every week, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Friday night. I loved church!

After intense soul-searching my Dad decided to leave the denomination we were part of and our family helped him start a non-denominational church in Arizona in 1993. After several years, my Dad went into eternal rest at 62 years old and we eventually turned the church over to another pastor. It is still a church today.

Interestingly, my sister and I decided to visit the church my Dad pastored in Portland, Oregon and found that today it is a Greek Orthodox Church. I see this as a stepping stone God placed for me, towards Orthodoxy.

Through the process of leaving the Pentecostal church I had quite an existential crisis that led me to questioning everything I had ever been taught. I began searching for truth in sacred texts of all the world religions and in spiritual experiences. I also began teaching World Religions and other religious studies courses for Maricopa Community Colleges.

Although I didn't find satisfactory Ultimate Truth in these other spiritual traditions, this dissatisfaction nudged me forward on my journey which eventually led me to the arms of Orthodox Christianity.

Interestingly, about 12 years ago I brought my college students to St. Katherine's Orthodox Church for a field trip. Little did I know that this was another stepping stone God placed for me on my journey, and that I would be here today.

My journey into Orthodoxy accelerated in 2020 after I lost my precious Mom and could feel my soul longing for a deeper connection with the Divine. Even though I believed in Christ at a certain level, I was now without an earthly father or mother and felt a deeper spiritual homelessness.

And God placed another stepping stone for me on my path to Orthodoxy.

The Chair of my department at Glendale Community College asked me to train a new professor and give him tools to teach a World Religions course. This teacher is an Orthodox Christian. The more he shared with me the more intrigued I was.

I began a search for more information about Orthodoxy and found that St. Katherine's was offering catechumen classes in a few weeks. With each class I attended, I felt a powerfully beautiful storm brewing within me. I could feel my will, my free will, sort of bucking, fearful of trusting my own choices of faith. I could also feel my own soul and she was so happy. It was as if my soul was dancing through fields of lilies.

**I decided it was time for my will to rest and my soul to lead. My soul was on the Royal Path of Orthodoxy**

After completing the catechumen classes I asked Fr. Timothy Pavlatos about the next steps in becoming an Orthodox Christian. He was extremely patient with all of my questions. And I was baptized into this Loveliest of Faiths.

Today I feel as if I have entered this elegant Palace full of powerful spiritual truths and gardens of flowers and trees of colors so vibrant, so pure and lovely. Through my Orthodox studies and practice I am receiving keys that unlock the most intellectually satisfying and expansive truths. I am experiencing a way of being I have never imagined.

**My spiritual homelessness is over. I am finally home. St. Katherine's Orthodox Church is a sacred space where heaven meets earth and I get to partake in this wondrous Paradise on Earth.**