

OMC FaithLife Story: Mike Florian

Mike and his wife, Anne Frances, live in Sellersville and travel 40 minutes each way on Sundays to attend Mass at OMC. Mike works as a salesman at the Chevy dealership near their home. He attended LaSalle University, Bucks County Community College and graduated summa cum laude from DeSales University in Allentown with a major in business management. For over 25 years, he served as a volunteer EMT.

“My wife and I first came to OMC by accident. We were driving down to the St. Patrick’s Parade in Center City one Sunday years ago and decided to stop at OMC for Mass. I knew where the church was because I had dated a girl from Chestnut Hill when I was young. An incredible woman named Janice, who was so warm and welcoming, greeted us at the door. She even asked us to bring up the gifts, which immediately made us feel like we were part of this community. After several years as visitors to the parish, we asked to become members a little over 12 years ago.

“For us, the appeal of OMC was that this is such a friendly place, everybody talks to each other. From that very first visit, we never felt like strangers. And of course the Oblates certainly have a lot to do with the kind of parish it is.

“I was born in Chicago and moved to Bucks County when I was in 4th grade. All of my education through high school was at Catholic schools. I am the only surviving sibling of a sister and my brothers Roger, Brian and myself. Roger’s death was the most difficult because we were very close.

“But I came to accept adversity and loss in my life as part of a building-up process. Step by step, including back-steps and missteps, everything builds on what happened before. It’s like God in his wisdom was saying to me, ‘Okay, let’s see how you grow and mature even when I take something away.’ Since nobody knows your life story like your siblings. When they are taken away, all of that shared history seems gone.

“In January of 2015, I had a very serious accident. What I’ve experienced since then has opened my eyes to understanding life and faith as a journey. It and what had gone before changed my own sense of purpose.

“On Sunday the 18th of that month, we were getting ready to go to Mass. The pavements were icing over and I went out to spread salt on our front steps. I suddenly slid forward, slid over the steps and suffered a subdural hematoma, a concussion, and broken bones around my left eye. I whiplashed backward and got another subdural hematoma and broke the bone in my left ear, which damaged my hearing.

“That scene was the last thing I remembered until I finally regained consciousness two months later. I had been taken to St. Luke’s ER in Bethlehem, transferred to the ICU and while there suffered a stroke in the vision center of my brain. Twenty-seven doctors worked on my case. The lead doctor told my wife and mother, ‘He will likely survive, but we don’t know how much, if any, recovery he will have. He may be profoundly disabled.’ The doctors kept saying this for weeks.

“When I regained consciousness, I couldn’t talk or think. I could barely see. I couldn’t hear out of my left ear. And I couldn’t sit-up or feed myself. I had to learn how to do everything from scratch. But I did manage somehow to do this a step at a time – how to use a fork, how to take a shower, how to do everything that you take for granted. In school, I had always been the smartest kid then suddenly I’m an infant again who has to learn everything all over.

“I had the extraordinary luck of being blessed and gifted with the constant prayers of so many people, including Anne, my friends at OMC, the Sisters of St. Joseph, the IHM’s, and a number of others. I was put on many prayer lists, too. Father Bob and his friend, Father John Fisher, visited often and gave me the Sacrament of the Sick – and I didn’t even know it. This spiritual outpouring is what got me through.

“When I was finally released, I realized that I was the exception and not the rule. During my time in Physical Therapy, my therapist told me that most of the other hospital trauma patients who come for PT wrap themselves up in a shell of pain and anger. It’s very hard to make headway with them.

“After two years of recovery, I went back to visit my PT therapists. They told me that I had shown a gift for making conversation with the other PT patients, that I was able to draw them out of their shells. So I offered to come back as a volunteer and just do what I do naturally – tell stories, make jokes, get to know each person wherever they are emotionally or spiritually. I think God wanted me to realize that, through my two-year ordeal, I have been given a special empathy that the PT technicians don’t have. I have a unique understanding of the rehabilitation process.

“My catechism is a simple--the catechism of being there for others. I’ve been on a two-year retreat to learn that. My life is not better or worse, just different. God alone knows where he is going to take me. But I know I have a purpose because He performed in me a miracle.”