

## OMC FaithLife Story: Jack Grogan

*Jack Grogan, 20 years old, is a junior at Notre Dame majoring in political science with a philosophy minor. He is the son of long-time OMC parishioners John and Mia Grogan and graduated from OMC Parish School and LaSalle College High School.*

Why am I a Catholic? The easy answer is that I was raised by very Catholic parents who are pillars of faith and strength. They insisted I go to mass every week and gave my sisters and me Catholic educations. I also had a lot of strong Catholic mentors who taught me a lot about their own faith journeys, for example, Father Bob Bazzoli and Sister Mary Kerwin, an inspirational figure who was my grandfather's cousin. My grandmother, who is very committed to social justice, taught me to embrace what we might call the "Pope Francis brand of the Church," one that is centered on service to the poor and marginalized. Finally, I am inspired by Father Bob Coogan, a good friend of my parents who is a missionary priest in Mexico, serving as a chaplain in the prison system.

Father Coogan is from New York and originally introduced my parents to each other. He would visit us once a year and say mass in our home. This was very much a formative religious experience for me. Father Coogan has been a powerful faith witness because he is in constant danger and we never know if he will make it the following year. He was always a framing influence on my faith and made it very personal for me.

The Church's emphasis on service to the poor is one of my favorite aspects of its teaching. The experience of the sacraments and social justice activism are both very important to me, as well. Communion with other people at the Table of the Lord makes me feel that we are His disciples in the modern era. The music is another favorite part of the mass, for me. It gives me the ability to focus my mind on the prayer that we are engaged in and is a lot of fun.

I see Christ in others through the service work I've done and the issues I care about. That has opened my eyes to see how Christ is in me as well. That's what I grappled with in high school – that there is a Christ inside you and He is a Christ to know. There was never a point where I wasn't Catholic or didn't want to be Catholic – but I didn't have a sense of Christ within me until recently.

When I went to Notre Dame, I found that my close friends seemed to know the Christ within them in a way that my high school friends didn't. At LaSalle, many of the students were devout and I had great mentors among the Christian brothers. But high school isn't always a faith-filled time. Other influences creep in and I had friends who were leaving the Church. They were disillusioned and many had doubts about the mere existence of God. Some were pushed away – at least temporarily-- by the Church's position on social issues like gay rights and abortion. Initially, I felt sadness for friends who wanted to leave the faith. But high school is also a time when kids are rebelling against their parents and authority.

The most serious objection that I and many in my generation have against the Church is the teachings on LGBTQ relationships and marriage. Despite my objections, I would never abandon the Catholic faith. I am very attached to the mass, the music, the sacraments. I don't feel there is

a better alternative to that even if I can find points of disagreement between Church teaching and my personal beliefs.

The religious education at La Salle is very strong. There is no question about the school's Catholic identity and there is an extraordinary, sincere dedication to service. An education lacking in service leaves people less aware of the needs of others. Most of the La Salle students did at least one service project in the summer and that makes a big difference. And although it is a typical issue for these years, I think disillusionment with the faith may have been happening at LaSalle to a lesser degree because of the service opportunities.

The senior Kairos retreat at LaSalle is very popular and opens your eyes to faith in a deeper way. It can change your viewpoint on life and it produces a sense of community among the kids who participate. Kairos is based on Ignatian spirituality and it makes people feel that they can examine their spirituality and it's an enjoyable thing to do, not a stupid thing or something imposed by your parents.

We had a visiting professor at Notre Dame last year who is a Lutheran. He was talking about how unique Catholicism was because, at the end of the day, we are unified through our mass and our theology, He said that, despite the tensions between different factions among Catholics, there is consistency in our belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and that is one of the things lacking in his own faith. That makes me very content to be in the Catholic faith because it is a unified faith tradition.