

**FaithLife Stories: Jason Santini**

*Jason and his wife, Nicole, have been parishioners at OMC for 12 years. They live with their 7-year old twins, John and Lucy, in Lafayette Hill. Jason works as a commercial insurance broker, specializing in health care and higher education, in the Center City office of Marsh USA. Jason is also a member of the OMC Pastoral Council and has served as a lector at the 9AM mass.*

“I grew up Catholic in Oreland. My father was from an Italian background and mother was from an Irish one. We went to Mass every Sunday and to CCD, but I don’t recall ever having a conversation about religion with my parents. Practicing our faith was just something you did.

“My mother’s brother is a De LaSalle Christian Brother and is a man of strong faith. I went to public grade school and then to LaSalle College High School, where my uncle taught some of my classes. His subjects were American history and the Civil War, and he was one of the most loved teachers at the school.

“I worked and lived at Ocean Rest throughout my summers in high school, the order’s retreat house in Ocean City. My uncle was assistant director and those six summers were some of the best times of my life. I worked with friends in the kitchen all morning, and then served dinner in the late afternoon. Mass there was fantastic, and the homilies were phenomenal. There were two Catholic churches in town, but everyone came to summer mass at Ocean Rest. After being a real presence there for decades, it was a big loss to the people when the Christian Brothers gave up the summer retreat property about a decade ago.

“I went to college at Penn State, where I went to mass maybe once a semester even though I lived with four guys from LaSalle. I was very self-absorbed, and I think I would have made better life choices if I had gone to Mass regularly. Looking back, my religious slackening was part of my faith journey. At that time, the Church was different; I didn’t think many young adults were motivated to go to Mass just because the rule says you have to.

“I don’t think I got a good “education” in Catholic faith and belief. When I was in high school, the emphasis was on world religions because it was assumed, we had a good foundation in Catholicism. I had good faith examples from my family, I don’t know what would have happened otherwise.

“I lived in Center City for ten years. During that time, my father passed away and then my Irish grandfather passed away the following year. These deaths affected my outlook on life. I needed to stop being selfish and think about the things that matter in life. I started to mature and joined St. Patrick’s parish, going to Mass more often. Between the two deaths in my family, I met my wife Nicole. She also grew up Catholic, but we rediscovered the faith together.

“I wasn’t really focused on the church scandals until I read the Pennsylvania grand jury report about clerical sexual abuses. I was blown away by the depravity of it. I couldn’t mentally get my head around how a human being could do that to a child. Children have a trust and a desire to be loved.

“This is a clear failure of Church leadership. We’re doing the right by having the parish conversation about making OMC a safe place to learn and grow in faith. But there are a lot of bad people in our culture right now. As a result of all this, I came to realize that I can make a difference at the parish level.

“Pope Francis is necessary for our times. He’s a wonderful example of life rooted in Catholic faith, being humble and serving. He might not be successful but he’s trying to broaden the scope of what people regard as the Catholic faith. I appreciate his approach. The Church is much more than moral teachings about sexuality. Even more conservative people have gotten past that. We can disagree on the solutions to our immigration problem, but its not Democrat or Republican to empathize with people who are trying to get into the country but are being treated inhumanely.

“I am Catholic because to me it comes down to the teachings of Christ and the Church’s interpretation of what He was trying to teach us. It’s been helpful to me to look at the resources available online, such as America Magazine, the Oblates and Christian Brothers online posts, and the videos of Bishop Robert Baron and James Martin.

“Its an easy way out to find reasons not to practice and many of us Catholics know more fallen away than practicing Catholics. But it’s a form of spiritual laziness. I avoid having conversations with them about it. I think evangelization is a skill, and it’s one I don’t have right now. We often talk in parish council that we as Catholics don’t sell our beliefs very well. There is a reluctance to speak out because it makes us personally vulnerable. There is an intimacy to it. We are hesitant to be intimate with people about faith, religion and Christ.

“What’s important for me is to grow my faith to give my kids a better faith foundation. It will be infinitely harder in life when they have to make big decisions, but I want them to have faith in and knowledge of Jesus. If we don’t make the next generation more Christ-like, we are all very worse off.”