

## Parishioner Story: Shawnda Muir

I was born in Winnipeg, daughter to Connie and Isabelle Bossuyt, and baptized as a Catholic soon after. I was fortunate to be raised on a farm in Oak Bluff with uncles, cousins and grandparents nearby. Some of my fondest childhood memories are enjoying time with family, working hard on the farm, and attending church every Sunday.

In 1990, I married my husband at Mary, Mother of the Church and have been a parishioner ever since. The next 25 years were a busy happy blur, as my husband and I started our new lives together, built our careers and raised two boys, now 20 and 21 years old.

In 2007, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. Six weeks later my dad was diagnosed with cancer too and passed away just three weeks later. Then five months later, I was also diagnosed with cancer. What are the chances of three people in one immediate family being diagnosed with cancer within six months? Not high, I thought. What message was God trying to get across to me, I kept wondering? This was the start of my spiritual journey to determine my real purpose in life.

Thankfully, with prayer, God helped my husband and me overcome our cancer. And God gave me the inspiration to use this cancer experience to help others. I spearheaded a grassroots hockey and ringette fundraiser which raised over \$1/4 million dollars for cancer research. I wrote a book, *Cancer Scores a Hat Trick*, about my cancer journey and lessons learned. (You can find a copy in the library if desired. Please read and pass on to other families impacted by cancer.) And I gave presentations to various groups about my cancer journey.

During this time, I also left my corporate senior level job in order to better align with my principles and priorities – a balanced life with family and helping others.

Then in 2013, just when I felt I was living my ideal life, I encountered another major hurdle – a marriage separation after 25 years. Adjusting to this reality has been even harder than surviving cancer, as I do not believe in divorce. However, with every challenge in life, there are silver linings.

The events of past three years have developed my spiritual strength more than I could ever have imagined. While I have been Catholic since birth and have always attended church, in the last three years I have learned how to have a real RELATIONSHIP with God. Church friends took me under their wing in the first few months and prayed for me when I was too distraught to pray on my own. They taught me how to have a relationship with God by praying and talking with God every day, sharing my sorrows and asking for strength to get through each day. And then slowly but surely, over time, I've gained back my strength and the ability to survive on my own. Thankfully, once again, I believe that God has an incredible future for me, based on His timing and His plan.

My key coping strategies have been prayer, my spiritual support groups from MMOC and my community, and surrendering my marriage, career and life over to God. This has been the most significant test of my faith as well – Let Go, Let God. While I miss my husband, I focus my energies on moving forward and carrying out God's plan for me by using my experiences to help others: leading them to God and fostering strong family relations.

When my separation journey started, there was little “separation and divorce” support available in the church. So I set out to use my knowledge gained from other divorce classes in Winnipeg to set up a “Marriage and Separation” Support group at MMOC, which eventually expanded to a “Friends in Faith” group. Recently, we’ve also started a “Catholic Singles Night” group, to provide a safe environment for Christian singles to socialize and strengthen their faith.

Currently, I’m enrolled in Life Coaching Courses, which follows what has been my passion for many years – helping others live happy and healthy lives, following God’s purpose. I’ve also taken on the Parish Council Chairperson role, and am presently in the midst of leading the Parish Renewal and Growth initiative.

Each day, I am thankful that God has surrounded me with a supportive Christian community at MMOC and elsewhere to help me through my life challenges. I pray daily, remembering to thank God, and I talk to him continually throughout the day. I’m also working on remembering to go to God for help first, rather than as a last resort after all other avenues have failed.

Now, I am looking forward to my future and living out God’s will for my life, wherever that may take me. While it has taken a while to get to this stage, finally I am not scared of the future, as I know God has me wrapped in his arms for this temporary time on earth until we meet one day in heaven for eternity!