

## **“From Age to Age” – Oral History Project of the Church of St. Francis Xavier**

### **Ep. 2: Ann & Kristin - "It was the music that drew me in"**

#### **Introduction music plays –**

A segment from the song “Here I Am, Lord” by composer Michael Ward as performed by the Choir of the Church of St. Francis Xavier plays.

“Here I Am, Lord,  
I come to do your will.  
Make of me what pleases you.  
Here I am,  
Here I am,  
Lord.”

#### **- Podcast series introduction –**

Welcome to “From Age to Age,” an oral history podcast series about the parish history and hopes for the future from the Church of St. Francis Xavier in New York City. We're recording in the second-floor parlor of our parish and because of that, you may hear sirens, dogs, or a steady hum of construction.

My name is Michelle Jung and I'm a parishioner of St. Francis Xavier and a member of the Oral History Ministry. The Oral History Project was conceived to preserve the unique history of this church by inviting our long-time parishioners to share their personal stories with a newer generation, illustrating why this parish is distinctive, unique, and a very special place.

#### **- Interview section –**

KRISTEN: Hey Ann!

ANN: Hi, how are you?

KRISTEN: I'm good how are you?

ANN: Good to see you.

KRISTEN: It's good to see you too. How did you first hear about this project, and how did you end up being part of it?

ANN: Well, I remember the Pastoral Council talking about wanting to do an oral history just to see where we've been and get a sense of that from parishioners. And I thought it was a great idea, but I did not expect to be called to do it. To be honest with you, there's so many folks at Xavier that I figured, you know, probably would. But I took a

day or two, to sit with it, to see if it was something that I was really being called to do, and when it felt good.

KRISTEN: What about it felt good to you?

ANN: Well I think it's great to have histories of where folks have been. And I think the whole idea is to find out what that history was like at Xavier. And for me, it was a chance to hear about parts of the church that maybe I don't really know anything about, you know, from other people's perspective, and other people's, um, experience. And I think it's always good to have those kinds of things. I think of oral histories and families, where families talk about what their origins have been and unfortunately in the African-American family we don't have that. Because it only goes back so far. And in certain cultures in the African-American community, you have folks who don't talk that much about it. So this was an opportunity to find out from, you know, a religious point of view, what that history has been for me, for other people, what the experience has been in a church like Saint Francis Xavier. So, um, it just felt like a really cool thing to do.

KRISTEN: No, I understand that. One parent tells all these stories about her history. My father is very silent and it's always interesting when just a little bit comes out. You're like, I didn't know that. That changes a lot about how I see this group, in this family.

ANN: Exactly. And continue to ask them questions because what I found in my family, I ask certain questions, but when you're a kid they tell you, 'That's not for you to know' so as you're growing up you don't remember to ask the questions and then they die and I said to myself, 'My God, I had so many more questions to ask my mother, so many more questions that...' and now they're gone and I can't get answers to it. But the answers will come when I meet them on the other side. (laughter) I'd rather had them on this side of it but...

KRISTEN: You said earlier when we were talking, that you came here, the first time you came here was Pentecost. Um, how did you end up here on the first day of Pentecost of all days? (laughter) First of all, and what was that like?

ANN: Good question! I was actually brought to Xavier by very, very close friends of mine. I don't know if you heard in the Prayers of the Faithful a couple of weeks ago about the death of Rose Allocca. Rose Allocca and I had been friends for almost 50 years. And she brought me to Xavier. Rose and I became friends when we were teaching together at Brooklyn Tech. And she heard me talking about having gone to a church in my neighborhood for a year, and it really didn't work out very well. So she said, 'Well, I have a church for you' but I, before she even said that to me I had decided to give up on the whole thing. And she said, 'Oh, please don't do that. We have a church to go to.' So she brought me to, she invited me to come, and I think it was Pentecost because I remember there was a great deal of celebration going on. But

there was one thing she did not tell me. She didn't tell me I was going to fall in love with the music. And that's exactly what happened. It was the music that drew me. I could not get over the fact that you had a living church composer as the music director. You know, I'd never experienced that before, and I said to myself, 'Oh, I need to come back here and find out what the rest of this place is like.' But I was only going to come and sing. And I actually just did that for, I didn't get involved, and I would come on Sundays. If there was a choir, we would sing. It was Michael Ward who was the composer of so much church music. He was the music director here. You know, how often does that happen? And I was amazed that he would hand us the alto part for something and the ink would still be wet. (laughter) It was great having that kind of person as a music director and, uh, it was wonderful just to be here. And Pentecost was a great day to be there. It was wonderful that Sunday. And that's basically all I remember about that day.

KRISTEN: That's similar to how I ended up coming here.

ANN: Really?

KRISTEN: The first, the parish I was baptized in and got my confirmation in was the parish my parents, they were baptized, got married there. My mom got her first communion there. They never imagined that they would outgrow that parish. But when I was little, I hated the music so much, it drove me crazy. (laughter) And, um, that was part of the reason I stopped going. And one day when they passed by Xavier, they're like, 'Kristen, the music here is nice, we think you might like it.' And the only thing I remember was that I didn't hate the music. I was like, 'Oh, this is different.' A church where I go and the music doesn't make me angry. (laughter)

ANN: Music should never make you angry!

KRISTEN: Especially not music in church!

ANN: There's something about Xavier and you just know it. You don't necessarily know when you know it, but you do. I never even thought about outgrowing the place. First of all, I had been away from church for almost 20 years. There was so much to learn because when I came back in, I hardly recognized it, you know. There were things that were happening after Vatican II, that since I wasn't in church, I didn't know about. And it was a learning process to find out how long it was going to take me to learn all the new stuff that was going on in church. I didn't know that Catholic churches had cantors. I mean, I know Jewish temples have cantors, but Catholic churches have cantors? When did that happen? So it is not only learning the music, but learning all the things that changed about the church in Vatican II. Now I had gone to church a few times, so I didn't know certain things, but to be on a regular basis and to have to learn everything. When I first got here Xavier had a program called Displaced Catholics. And the name made me shudder a little, but a few folks who were here said to me, 'You know, that might be a good place to start because it's a place where you can ask questions.' And I don't remember who was on the parish staff. I remembered the name Sister Virginia Blend, but she wasn't here that long, but she was like the moderator or

facilitator of that program. And so I decided to go, and one of the first things I said was, 'That is one awful name for a program where you want people to come and learn and ask questions.' 'Displaced' I said, 'I'm not displaced, I've always known where I am.' It's the Catholic church who didn't care when I disappeared. But it was a great way to find out what was happening and all the questions we wanted to ask. And I met some wonderful people in that program. And I stayed in it, I think, for about a year and a half and then I was asked with a couple of other people to facilitate. Just to have someone asking questions, 'Why did you come here?' And some of the same kinds of questions about church, and um, 'What drove you away from church and what's bringing you back?' And all of them talked about Xavier being a place that was welcoming, that was friendly, that was inclusive, that had priests who gave great homilies, you know, nobody's beating you over the head with fire and brimstone and making you feel guilty because you haven't been to church in X number of years.

KRISTEN: How long were you facilitating Displaced Catholics?

ANN: Well, actually a couple of things happened. I met the man who would become my husband in 1986. So that was about a year or so after I had started coming to Xavier. And when I talked to him about coming to Xavier, he had his own issues with church and he had been a seminarian. That didn't work out and what not. And he was very angry with the church. So he would meet me outside. He would never come in. And after a while, after we started dating, after we realized how involved I was getting he began to say, 'Well, maybe I'll meet you inside one Sunday.' And Sister Mary Galeone was the Pastoral Associate on staff at that part, at that point in time. And she had a wonderful way of inviting people to do things. So while I was singing, Tom was sitting in the back pew, and she would say, 'Tom, could you help us with the collection this Sunday?' And of course he wouldn't, nobody said no to Sister Mary! She was the kind of person that made that invitation say you 'Yes, I want to do that.' So, that was part of it. And he decided to come to the Returning Catholics Program, we changed the name at that point. And so when he saw me facilitating, he had a lot more background in church than many of us did having been a seminarian, so he explained a lot of things that people had questions about. So the two of us began to facilitate one year, and I think we stayed in for maybe, I stayed in for two and a half years. He was probably in for about a year. And it was kind of fun to do that because a group of us who were in that program stayed together after another group took over and started to do their thing. And we had this group called Conversations with Catholics, and we would meet at somebody's home, we would talk about whatever topic came up, and we would just talk about it. Sometimes the discussions were very heated, and sometimes they weren't. It was a great way to continue asking the questions, and seeing what answers we could come. Before we left to do that, when Father John Bucki joined the staff as one, a Pastoral Associate, the Associate Pastor actually. He used to come to the Returning Catholic meetings and of course everybody would ask Father, ah questions. He would never answer them. He would stroke his beard and he'd say, 'Well, let's see. What do you think?' So the first time I heard him do that I said, 'Oh, this is not my grandmother's Catholic church!' (laughter) This church, after Vatican II, and because it's a Jesuit parish, I think, there is more responsibility on the parishioner to find out who God is for

themselves. And to walk whatever path God is speaking to you. But we do it together. And once I learned how to be an adult Catholic, really means learning what my relationship is with God. And once you understand your relationship with God, in relationship to other people, that's how you begin to build the kingdom, and to build the community. But you have to start somewhere and this is a great place to start. And that's what I would tell people, 'If you're looking to find God, and looking to find that relationship with God, and extend that to community and then outside of the walls of church, this is a place to start doing that.'

KRISTEN: Do you think you've become a good adult Catholic? Because I feel like I'm constantly bad at becoming an adult Catholic as I go.

ANN: Oh, it's filled with all kinds of tensions. I still have questions to ask, I still have doubts. You know, things still run through my mind, what if, you know, somebody said to me, 'What if all of this stuff is not true anyhow?' If I was a younger person, that question would throw me. But now the question is well, 'So what have I lost?' Nothing. I've gained an awful lot in terms of my understanding of who I am as a Christian person. And I certainly have gained an awful lot of other people who are doing the same thing. So you know, I haven't lost anything.

KRISTEN: And you said you came here with the intention of only doing music ministry and nothing else.

ANN: That's right! (laughter)

KRISTEN: What else have you gotten involved in since then?

ANN: Um, Tom and I got married here in '91. He died in 1999. And it was really devastating because I don't even marry eight years. And talk about someone who was angry at God at that moment. I just couldn't make any sense out of that, at all. And my first question to God was, 'Okay, what's up with this?' You know, all I get is eight years? I waited until I was 52 and you only gave me eight years? Interesting though, once you begin to process that in terms of going to grief counseling, it was also I think, the second year that Father Ned Coughlin was introducing the Spiritual Exercises to the parish. Tom had done the exercises in '98, so you know, I didn't pay any attention, that was his thing, so I let him do it. I had no idea what I was getting into when Father Ned suggested to me, 'You might want to consider doing the 19th Annotation of the Exercises.' And I said, 'Okay.' I said to myself, 'What's that supposed to do for me?' Not going to bring my husband back. Well, it did an awful lot. Even though I had no idea what I was getting into. What I found was, it was a way to find out where God was at that moment when I was so angry with God. Did I just toss God out the window? Obviously not. I also realized that God was giving me a way to use the rest of my gifts. I had been a counselor in high school. And so what came out of the Exercises for me is the beginnings of a conscious, intentional relationship with God. But also the desire to help other people find that. Because I know what it was doing for me, I didn't want anybody else to miss out on this, you know, so to speak. Pass it on kind of thing, you

know, let everybody know about it. So I said, again to my friend Rose, 'You know I think I want to be a spiritual director.' She says, 'Well tell me what that is.' I remembered something that happened early on when I was here. There's a program here called Lay Spirituality. I was never able to do the Lay Spirits Program, but they used to do weekends of all kinds of things spiritual. And this one weekend was devoted to spirituality, to spiritual direction, all kinds of it. How it's done, and so on. And it got filed way back here someplace. And when I was questioning God about not having a husband any longer, God was bringing all of those things to the forefront and showing me that I still had a life. And I came to the conclusion, that if Tom had lived and I had lived my life as a married couple, I wouldn't have become the woman I am today. And when you think about, how God works she said, 'How how would he have figured that out?' Well, because God does that. It's a very, very, it's not even easy to explain in a sense, but it's one of those ways that when you're in the kind of place that gives you the kind of feeding, the kind of community, the kind of communion with others and with God that Xavier does, you find gifts you didn't really know you had. I knew I could be a counselor. I didn't know I could be of spiritual director because they are different. And when I was telling Rose what I knew about it, when she asked me that, 'Well let's find a place to go.' So we did. That very same place I found in a cut out that I had saved from the Xavier bulletin announcing a place for spiritual direction, a place to be trained for spiritual, I said, 'Oh my God, I had this in my apartment for years.' And I found it when I was cleaning up, cleaning out papers and what not after Tom died. And I'm saying to myself, 'Well I'll be darn.' So we started our training unbelievably, the day the towers came down on 9/11. And I said, 'I know I'm doing the right thing.' There are people who are going to need to talk to a whole host of folks once this day passes. And we try to make sense of what just happened to us, as a country, as a people. Becoming a spiritual director was the next phase of my life after not having a husband. And that's a ministry that I absolutely love. Because sitting and listening to someone else's story, a sacred story, just like all of our stories are sacred, and watching God work in that life can only make you smile and only make you grateful for the gift that we have in this church that allows people to grow that way. To see their own growth, to watch themselves grow, and to help others do the same thing. It's remarkable. I feel like I talk too much about myself and not enough about Xavier because you're not the same place...

KRISTEN: You're a puzzle piece in Xavier. You're a link in a chain.

ANN: Well i'm glad to hear that, you know. Xavier's changed a lot since I've been here, a tremendous amount. I think the one change that I find is, is great to see is the change, is the Family Faith Program, and the growth of that. That's the big change that I noticed for myself, because we didn't have any of that when I first got here. And it's wonderful to see. What I sense in my own head is the church goes on, as we watch those children grow up, and watch those families and what not, so...

KRISTEN: It was nice to talk to you Ann.

ANN: It was wonderful to talk to you.

KRISTEN: Definitely talk more.

ANN: I hope so!

- **Outro music plays** –

A segment from the song “Here I Am, Lord” by composer Michael Ward as performed by the Choir of the Church of St. Francis Xavier plays again.

“Here I Am, Lord,  
I come to do your will.”

- **Michelle Jung reads outro text** –

The music you are hearing is provided by the Xavier Music Ministry. “From Age to Age” is produced by St. Francis Xavier Church in New York City.

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