

## A FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO SERVE

By John Gannon

It is no secret that Catholics are leaving the faith in greater numbers today than at any time in the church's history. Indeed, the statistics are striking and can be a source of discouragement for the faithful who remain in Christ. But in the midst of crisis, there is hope as well.

We are blessed to be able to highlight the Stoffel family, Jess and Chuck and their children Morgan and Charlie, who have graciously shared their story of evangelization and conversion with us.

Jess is a "cradle Catholic" who says that in her formative years her involvement in the faith consisted mainly of weekly Mass attendance. Chuck attended various churches as a child, but did not have a firm grounding in any one denomination. They married in 2009 and welcomed their first child, daughter Morgan, that same year. Shortly after they settled in Mundelein in 2011, their son Charlie was born. Chuck and Jess joined St. Mary so that Charlie could be baptized and they quickly felt at home in the parish. They continued to attend Mass on Sundays, but that was the extent of their involvement in the parish. All that changed in 2016 when Chuck entered the RCIA program. In the months preceding his decision to become a Catholic he came to realize that God was calling him to enter into full communion with His church.

Chuck is a branch manager at a Mundelein bank, and one day a customer who was also a parishioner at St. Mary, pointedly asked Chuck why he had not yet become a Catholic, since she had been seeing him and his family at Mass for a while. Having no answer, Chuck nonetheless mulled over the question. Not long afterwards, a seemingly chance encounter with a friend's mother whose son had been killed in the military freed Chuck from the burden and responsibility he felt for encouraging her son to enlist. The young man's mother assured Chuck that he was not responsible for her son's death and that the military had been the best thing that had ever happened to him. The very next day, as if by design, Fr. Jerry walked into Chuck's office to do some banking. Chuck realized in his heart that these occurrences were not random, but rather the quiet yet persistent promptings of the Spirit. Chuck knew that it was time to become a Catholic.

Through Chuck's participation in the RCIA program, Jess too gained a deeper understanding of her faith.



*Jess, Chuck, Morgan and Charlie Stoffel have become a family of dedicated St. Mary volunteers. Chuck, who was confirmed at St. Mary in 2017, is now co-chair of Country Fest, and Jess is the powerhouse behind the redesigned parish website.*

Even though she had never considered herself a "church person," Jess, who runs her own business, Epic Media, Inc., which specializes in social media marketing and website design, recognized God's call when she read an invitation on the parish Facebook page to join the new communications team. Since joining that team, Jess has jumpstarted the parish's social media presence and played an integral role in marketing Country Fest 2017. Most recently she has taken on her biggest challenge to date, designing and implementing the new parish website. Jess says she is honored to be able to tackle this project and excited for the parishioners of St. Mary to see the new website when it debuts in March.

Shortly after Chuck was received into the church in 2017, he joined the planning committee for Country Fest. Inspired by the success of the event, Chuck volunteered to be co-chair for this year's Country Fest and is excited to be a part of planning an event that does so much to build a greater sense of community within the parish.

Jess says that the experience of participating in the Triduum during Chuck's RCIA process was a moving experience for their family. When asked what Lent will bring for their family, participating in the Triduum is a must.

**“The Easter Vigil Mass is already on our family's 2018 calendar. We love Vigil, and we don't want to miss it.”**

Jess and Chuck Stoffel and their family are a tremendous blessing to St. Mary of the Annunciation. They are evidence of how, if we are attentive to the promptings of the Spirit, we can all use our God-given gifts to the greater glory of Him from whom all blessings flow.