

Good morning. My name is Joanne Russell and my husband David and I have been parishioners here at St. Mary's for 19 years. Father Matera asked me to stand up today and speak about being a Witness To Our Faith. I had to think for quite some time about what I wanted to say as I wasn't sure I had any great revelations about my faith. I decided I would talk today about who has influenced and strengthened my faith here at St. Mary's and what I have learned.

We have four children and bringing young children to church can be difficult and stressful. For many years we struggled with keeping our children still and quiet while trying to pay attention during Mass. We often sat in the front row because that is where our kids could see what was happening. I remember one morning my son Colin who was maybe 3 years old, threw his sippie cup over the pew and it landed with a large bang right on the sanctuary steps during Father's homily. I was embarrassed and flustered and wondered if we should stop coming to church for a while. After Mass as I was packing up my children, Father Metzler, the pastor at the time, could sense my frustration. He assured me that he was not bothered by the flying sippie cup or the loud children - he wanted me to bring my family back each week. I like to believe that God was speaking to me through Father Metzler. He was telling me that teaching my children about their faith through my actions was important.

I eventually joined a Bible Study here at St. Mary's. That group of women has been a source of great strength and comfort over the years. We have read the Bible and many other books about how to live our faith and how to share that faith with our growing children. We have discussed the difficult times of the church and we have debated why the Catholic Church has rules that we sometimes find hard to follow. We have shared the trials of our children and we have prayed together for strength. That group has gotten me through more difficult times by just reminding me that prayer is a powerful tool.

Lastly, my greatest source of strength is this St. Mary's Community. Coming to church each week and seeing God's love in each person I encounter. Having people ask me about my family, remember my children's names, or ask how I am doing. Seeing so many people volunteer their time and energy to making this parish such a wonderful place to live, raise a family and share our faith.

Someone once asked me what I am most proud of. I could think of my accomplishments in school or my job or the degree that I hold. But I always answer the same: I am most proud of being a mother. Of raising four wonderful children who continue to surprise and challenge me every day. I am most proud of teaching them about our faith. I am most hopeful that they someday find a community like St. Mary's where they feel like they are at home and that God is the center of their lives.