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When the spouse is a non-believer

Agnes Sandra Wigianti e Taufiq Hidayat -Indonesia-

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WHEN THE SPOUSE IS A NON-BELIEVER

Agnes Sandra Wigianti e Taufiq Hidayat

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TAUFIQ (Speech)

First of all, let us praise and thank the presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the abundance of grace and the joy that we can all be gathered in this place without any barrier, in good health and in peace.

On this occasion, let me be here to share the testimony of our family life experience with different beliefs.

My name is Fransiscus Taufiq and the woman I love beside me is Agnes Sandra. We are from Indonesia.

What I like most about Agnes is that she is beautiful, cheerful, humble, loving, with a sense of humor, good cook, good wife and mother and religious.

Now I feel full of joy and blessed as I have met people here who have the spirit to spread Catholic values and beliefs through families.

AGNES (Speech)

My name is Agnes. We have been married for 21 years and we have a daughter (Ardelia Tifani) and a son (Abelard Anugerah). What I like most about Taufiq is that he is wise, that he is a servant, that he puts his energy and mind at the service of the happiness and well-being of his wife and children.

My feelings now are of gratitude to the Lord Jesus for his grace and for our family that arrived here in good health and full of joy. I too am surprised, touched, happy and excited here accompanied by Taufiq to share God's goodness for all of us here.

Before we got married, we went through a special relationship period for 3 years. In that time, we did not have much time to see each other face to face as we lived far away due to his job opportunity.



At that time, we didn't have much time to go deep, get to know and understand each other's character. However, I felt that everything about her personality was good. I did not understand many things about her family. I knew she was Catholic and that she was different from me, and yet I didn't care. I believed that God gave me her love.

I introduced her to my parents a year before we got married. They agreed that we should get married if she converted to the Muslim religion because the Muslim doctrine did not allow me to marry a non-Muslim girl. Finally, Agnes converted to Islam and tried to practice Muslim values. I understood that it was not easy for her, as she was a Catholic by birth.

We got married in mid-2001 and stayed away from our family. In our culture, getting married is not only the unity and intimacy of the couple, but the unity of two different families, the unity of different rules and cultures. At the beginning of this real life, we enjoy being together happily and charmingly even though we stay in a small rented house and far away from our extended family.

When I became a Muslim, I was honestly disappointed because I had to sacrifice myself to unify our love so that we could live together.

Anyway, I walked as a Muslim for six years. I tried very hard to carry out Muslim worship. When I prayed, my heart and mouth prayed the Our Father and Hail Mary. My heart felt no peace and I would pour out those emotions and my anger on our first daughter who was 5 years old at the time.

Even when I visited his extended family, I had to lie to not pray because I was unable to do so while I was lying. This moment tortured my mind, and I did not want to live in a family style, which did not accept the goodness of my parents, God, and our environment.

Finally, I tried to be honest and had a dialogue with Taufiq to give me permission to go to church. He allowed me to go back to church, and he and our daughter always accompanied me when I went to church. For 6 years we lived away from our extended families, and I felt a pure love and heart without any outside intervention.

I trusted that if we love each other, we need to sacrifice each other. I wanted a blessed marriage without him having to become Catholic. God is very good and opened his mind so that he wanted to perform a Catholic dispensation marriage after attending a preparation for 3 months.

After we got married with Catholic dispensation, my heart whispered to me that I must be honest with his family. I had to face the situation due to my return to the Catholic faith. It turned out that my parent-in-law were very sad to hear this situation. They were very disappointed and felt that I was playing games with the faith. I understood their feeling of sadness, but I stuck by my belief. At



least, I was already honest, and my parent in-law already knew that my belief is Catholic. Therefore, I encountered a slightly different attitude from them.

In dealing with this situation, I felt under pressure, and my parents even asked me to get a divorce. Also, they have kept this situation a secret so that other people would not judge it, especially if they are close to my parents. I think it hurts their feelings.

I think it was the heaviest and most challenging stage of our life. I had to engage our mind and our feelings to avoid any conflict. I hoped that no one would be hurt, especially my mother, my wife, and our children, and I had to make our family grow positively. This was very difficult for us, but it had to continue.

We started limiting the time to talk about our faith when visiting my extended family. This was to avoid any questions about my family beliefs because I believe this was very sensitive and private. When my parents would ask me about this issue, I would give a floating answer to avoid being asked any more questions. This situation went on until no one talked about it.

This period affected our life. I was worried that it would weaken our relationship if I did not set the priority. My priority was always our family and saving our blessed marriage and maintaining respect for my parents. My heart was becoming stronger to have the freedom to run my family life. I feel this is the starting point for us to work together to improve the relationship.

I was proactive in searching for a Catholic retreat that couples of different faiths could attend. Finally, I found the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend, according to information from the Marriage Encounter coordinator at our parish. The Weekend taught us techniques specifically intended to support and encourage an attitude of intimate and responsible living. We believe that marriage should be a deep source of joy and vitality.

Married life needs to be fine-tuned, reactivated, and rejuvenated to enhance life and grow together.

Not least, the Weekend has a Catholic ethos, and is open to couples of other faiths or none, who do not find that ethos a problem for them.

At the Weekend we can also share and learn from the life experience of other couples which can strengthen our relationship and become a blessing to other couples. The Weekend has opened my heart to see that most Catholic couples have something different from other couples of my beliefs. Catholic couples are more open-minded, and this is a positive value for me.



Also, most importantly, the Weekend has made me see that my wife is a gift from God that is unique and accompanies me forever.

Sharing during the family tree makes me love my partner and my family more. I understand and accept my wife's character more unconditionally. I enjoy doing activities as a couple more. Our children always support us if we do activities as a couple. We like to walk hand in hand in public. I have never seen this in my parents. We have become more outgoing with each other. This doesn't mean there won't be more disappointments, but after the Weekend, we can manage and communicate them better.

I believe our children will see what we have done regarding marriage and make it a role model; therefore, we apply what we have learned at the Weekend in our life and make it a habit. Another value we have gained from ME is the continuous prayer to wish our partner and our children God's goodness and grace.

Since 2003, when I started accompanying my family to Church, and after gaining positive value from the Weekend and other spiritual experiences, I decided to convert my belief to Catholic on April 10, 2021, through baptism. Currently, we are active in the administration of people in the parish in pairs. We are happy and joyful to serve people, especially single elderly people, because they need more attention and love. We believe that attention and love will give them zest for life and a more valuable life. Love will be more tolerant and break diversity. The weekend and the family are the peripheries of the Church that Pope Francis tells us about, to spread the love of neighbor in a context of peace and love of God.

We have lived 21 years of married life, a harmonious life to continue to spread peace, love to serve each other in front of our children, even though our faith was different.

During this period, Taufiq has shown his extraordinary tolerance towards us. He followed the church worship even though he was a Muslim. In the last two years he has diligently prayed the rosary. I have seen that little by little he has been changing. I believe this was an intervention of God.

No words can express our joy and gratitude, but we present it with the act of accepting the task the Church has given us and we are both happy to live it. Easter this year has been an Easter that we have been able to celebrate together, as he has become a great Catholic father.

Definitely, God's timing is the best.