

## **Miraculous moments**

### ***Signs mark road to conversion for local Catholic***

by KATIE MOORE  
staff writer

*Editor's note: This is the second in a series of conversion stories.*

CHARLOTTE — Gail Buckley is the founder and executive director of Catholic Scripture Study International. She serves on the board of directors of Catholics United for the Faith and on the steering committee for the Catholic Leadership Conference — all impressive accomplishments considering she was 45 years old before she discovered the Catholic faith.

Growing up in a small coastal town in North Carolina, Buckley was raised in the Methodist faith.

Although there was a Catholic church in her town, she admits that she knew little about Catholicism.

“I would often see the nuns, dressed in their habits, walking to the Catholic school,” said Buckley. “I considered them to be very holy, although I knew nothing about the Catholic faith.”

When Buckley was 15, she went with a friend and her family to the beach at the Outer Banks for Mother’s Day weekend.

“It was the first Mother’s Day I had ever spent away from my mother and I knew that saddened her,” said Buckley. “But I was too excited to think about that; all I could think about was myself.”

A storm had recently hit the Outer Banks, leaving many of the houses demolished. While Buckley and her friend were searching through scattered debris in the sand dunes, something shiny caught her eye. She thought it was a charm.

“I picked it up, looked at it and although it had an inscription on it, it didn’t make any sense to me so I just put it in my pocket,” said Buckley. “My mother later told me that she thought it was something Catholic.”

## **A charming journey**

During the next 30 years, Buckley turned away from her relationship with God. She sought happiness from material things, a practice that left her feeling empty and unsatisfied.

“One night when I was at my lowest point, I fell on my knees and prayed for the first time in many years,” she said. “‘Lord,’ I said, ‘I can’t handle my life anymore; I want you to take over my life.’”

That marked a turning point in her life.

“The next morning I awoke a brand new person,” she said. “I couldn’t stop talking about Jesus.”

Buckley started reading the Bible and other religious books.

“I went through these books like a starving person, devouring every word,” she said. “Yet I never realized that all the books I was reading were Catholic.

In one book, Buckley recalled reading about a miraculous medal.

“I was thoroughly intrigued and determined to get myself one of these amazing medals,” she said.

But before she went to a Catholic bookstore in search of the medal, she had a realization.

“I glanced over all the books I’d recently been reading. All of a sudden the thought came into my head, ‘all these books are Catholic,’” she said.

Buckley thought that perhaps God was trying to send her the message that she should become Catholic.

“‘If that’s what you want Lord, please make it very clear to me,’” she said. “‘Have someone say to me, ‘Would you like to become Catholic?’ and then I’ll know for sure that is what you want.’”

When Buckley arrived at the Catholic bookstore, she realized she had no idea what a miraculous medal looked like.

She explained to the saleswoman that she wasn’t Catholic and asked for assistance. The saleswoman asked her if she would be interested in RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). Not knowing what that was, Buckley explained to the woman that she wasn’t sure.

“‘Oh,’ she said, ‘I’m sorry. What I’m trying to say is, would you like to become Catholic?’”

Buckley was amazed.

“Just twenty minutes ago I had asked the Lord if he wanted me to be Catholic, to have someone say those exact words to me,” she said.

The next day, Buckley began RCIA at St. Ann Church in Charlotte. She was confirmed at the Easter Vigil in 1994.

“The day I was confirmed was one of the happiest days of my life,” said Buckley. “I felt like a new bride.”

“Three years after entering the church, I was on the phone talking to a friend about my conversion when I remembered finding that Catholic ‘charm’ on the sand dune 33 years earlier,” said Buckley.

When she found the “charm” still in her jewelry box, she realized it was a miraculous medal.

When Buckley looked back on that Mother’s Day weekend and her trip to the Outer Banks, she thought about how she had chosen to go on the trip despite her mother’s wishes.

“I had forsaken my mother on Mother’s Day to pursue my own selfish interest, but my heavenly mother had not forsaken me.”

“I believe God sent her on that Mother’s Day and that she has been with me throughout all these years, gently guiding me back to him,” she said. “It took 30 years and many wrong turns but, thanks be to God, I’m finally home.”

### **Growing in faith**

Buckley launched Catholic Scripture Study in August 2003.

For that first session there were about 60 classes nationwide. Now there are approximately 15,000 participants in more than 40 countries.

The mission of Catholic Scripture Study International is to bring people closer to Jesus Christ and his church through in-depth Scripture study.

The program strives to help Catholics grow in knowledge of their faith by providing user-friendly materials, ongoing one-on-one support, and comprehensive online resources. During the past six years, Buckley has continued to grow in her faith.

“Jesus is the center of my life and everything revolves around him and his church,” she said. “I feel extremely blessed to be able to serve him through the mission of Catholic Scripture Study.”

“I tell everyone this is his program; not mine,” said Buckley. “He’s just allowing me to be the steward of it and I pray that he will continue to use me as long as I am on this earth.”

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