

“Dick Rhem Spoke to Me”

I grew up as a middle child of 8 kids (4th) in a devoutly Catholic family. Our daily life consisted of following the church doctrine...Catholic schools, Mass more often than not, confession, communion, etc. I lived on a block in my neighborhood filled with Catholic families and we socialized with Catholics. However, much as I was immersed in the total Catholic life, I had doubts and questions beginning in middle school. I remember one day in particular, I was 14 years old, and my mother was talking about communion. I said to her, "Well, it's just a symbol of God" and the look in her face was shocking. She, in a held breath, said "It is NOT a symbol, it is the true body of Jesus". I simply couldn't agree with my mom or the church for that matter, and that's where my religious quest and questions started.

Fast forward 20 years of wandering through various churches, traditions, university classes and books on religion hoping to find something/someone that held a perspective that was similar to mine. It was a frustrating journey. I simply wanted to find someone who validated that I was not alone. I didn't have to follow a prescription or a method to become closer to my reality of God, nor did I have to have a specific vision of God, but I simply wanted to follow a path that worked for me.

Then one spring day, after having a brave discussion with a parent volunteer in my children's school, she suggested that I attend Christ Community Church. That Sunday, in May of 2000, I sat in Christ Community Church and heard Dick Rhem speak for the first time. He spoke of grace and acceptance. He spoke of a non-threatening diversity of thought. He spoke of a God who loved us for who we were, not who we HAD to be. He spoke of a church free from dogmatic law. **DICK RHEM SPOKE TO ME!** I remember turning to my husband when the service ended and said "I am never leaving this place".

Dick was the first person who understood and welcomed my questions. He was the conduit for me to find religious peace in my heart, mind and soul. He sparked intellectual conversations between my husband, our children and me that stay with us today. He helped

us to become people who live with religious integrity. I will forever be grateful to Dick for what he did for me, my family and the religious community of West Michigan.

Madonna Kramer
Former member, Christ Community Church