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Raul's Story: A stake in and a duty to the church

by Kate Childs Graham

Over these past five years I have changed and grown. My life's journey has made me think and live out my faith in a way I never dreamed when I first entered college at The Catholic University of America.

I now have different reasons for being Catholic, different hopes for our church. And I started to wonder if those I graduated with experienced a similar transformation.

So, I asked four of my peers to answer a few questions that speak to both their transformation and steadfastness as Catholics.

Here is part three in a series of reflections from 2006 graduates of the Catholic University of America. We continue with Raul.

NCR: Tell us your life story in 150 words or less.

Raul: I was born in Washington, D.C., to Ecuadorian parents. I grew up in Bethesda, Md., and I feel blessed to have had a very close knit and supportive family.

I have had an active life, playing competitive sports -- mainly soccer -- since I was four. Once I started high school, I became an active and very involved member of my parish youth group. I helped lead many retreats and participated in a service camp in the Archdiocese of Washington called *Encounter: the Gospel of Life* every summer until I graduated.

I studied Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America and love and cherish the time I spent at Catholic U. I was a sprinter on the track and field team at Catholic my sophomore and senior year. I spent a year after college volunteering in Duran, Ecuador. I taught elementary school to street children in the morning and co-directed an afterschool program in the afternoon.

When I came back from Ecuador, I was a youth minister for two years in Bethesda, Md., I now teach high school religion in Laurel, Md.

Why are you Catholic?

I guess the simple answer would be because that is what I was raised from birth; however, that would be wrong. I am Catholic because it is the faith in which I most see God at work. It is the faith that most feeds my soul and I find brings out the person God made me to be.

How has your faith changed since we graduated?

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Since I graduated, I think my faith has changed in that I now see myself more as an adult member of the Church. I see myself as having a stake and duty in making sure the Catholic Church manifests in a way that reflects God most.

What is the one thing you'd change about the Catholic Church?

I think the one thing I would change in the Catholic Church is the liturgy of the Mass. Not completely, and I am not sure exactly how I would change it. I do know that what our Church needs is a revival of the Mass, something that is alive and awakens the souls of our brothers and sisters. I would definitely change the music.

What is the one thing you'd keep?

I would keep all our sacraments. I think they are vital to the life of the church and our relationship with God.

What's the biggest challenge we face as Catholics today?

Our biggest challenge is staying relevant in a world that believes us to be irrelevant, without losing our connection to God or ceasing to be counter-cultural.

If you could go back in time, what is the one moment you'd re-live from college?

I think if I could go back in time, the one moment I would re-live in college would be one of the Wednesday night ?Praise and Worship? Adorations.

[Kate Childs Graham writes for ReligionDispatches.org and YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com. She also serves on the Women's Ordination Conference board of directors and the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.]

All the articles in this series

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