

**Pastor's Notes: Interview with Kevin Doerge on Ecumenical Outreach - Part 1 of 2**

May 23, 2021

On May 1, 2021, I interviewed Kevin Doerge, a Basilica parishioner who is involved in ecumenical outreach among friends. The first part of our interview is presented here.



**Fr. Carter:** We welcome Kevin Doerge, a parishioner of the Basilica, and one who has become more and more active over the years. I first met Kevin when he was involved with our Haiti parish, and that ministry and outreach to our brothers and sisters down on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean. They're hurting so much. But in addition to those charitable activities, Kevin also has a rich life of faith and joins me for a lot of our Liturgy of the Hours - morning prayer, evening prayer - that we sing in the Church. So I'm grateful his for his sharing his voice in the praise of God. But in particular, he's been taking his faith on the road to the community around, and we're going to talk a little bit about that today. So, Kevin, have you always had a zeal for your Catholic faith? Or have there been times in your life where your faith has waned?

**Kevin Doerge:** Yes, it has certainly waned. Mine's an all-too-familiar, cradle Catholic millennial story: being brought up in the faith, falling away a little bit in high school and college. In college, I attended Mass the first couple of weekends but really didn't go back with any regularity until a year or two after graduation. But even in these in these past six or seven years, I've certainly had periods that I wasn't walking in the straightest paths, and Lord knows my many flaws and weaknesses and the times that I've veered off in the path that leads to Him, but by His infinite mercy and His infinite goodness, He always keeps reaching out and inviting me back. The one painting I own is Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son", and it's a figure I've always seen myself as more than any other in the Bible. And there are many screw ups in the Bible that I can relate to. But you know, God still chose to use their fallen nature to make His love and His glory known, and I just pray that He uses me and this fallen creature to do the same.

**Fr. Carter:** Well, what brought you back?

**Kevin Doerge:** God's grace.... I'd say what initially brought me back, the fruit of this, is with Haiti. I was a year or two removed from college and I had everything, from a worldly standpoint, that should lead to my happiness. But I wasn't happy, and I didn't have peace. I knew there was an emptiness. St. Augustine said, "our hearts are restless until they rest in You, Lord." And I felt that, and then I was kind of reaching out trying to figure out what could bring me that fulfillment. I knew I'd had it in past mission trips. So I actually just was looking into going into a third world country, and there were some secular opportunities that fell through. And I remember at that point turning to God in prayer, the first genuine prayer I had in five or six years, and saying, "Lord, I don't know if you exist. And if you do exist, I don't know if it's the means that I was taught growing up. But I do know, if you do exist, that you would take delight in my service of the poor, and for me to have an opportunity to travel for mission work." And sure enough, that prayer prompted me to go back to Mass, and it was actually right when I went to the Basilica for the first time. And if it wasn't the first Mass, it was the second. And Father Tijwa, the former pastor of our sister parish - may he rest in peace - he was at the pulpit and in his strong Haitian accent, I probably understood five or six words throughout the homily. But I understood vividly his invitation at the end to come visit and join the brothers and sisters in Haiti. And, of course, we founded that that group, and that was just a way into the door. And the rest of my 20s really was just filled with discovery of all these rich traditions and encountering all the apologetics for the first time, the original actual Tradition of the Catholic faith, and reverent sacred liturgy. Recently I discovered sacred music and the constant outpouring of the sacraments. I can't stress enough the importance of community as well: meeting young adults who are really taking their faith seriously, growing in virtue and faith, and to my surprise, were actually somewhat normal people! All that's just been a great journey since, and God's grace really encapsulates all of it.

**Fr. Carter:** So I know that you've not only been interacting with those of the Catholic faith, which we would say has the fullness of the Christian revelation handed down from the Apostles, but you're also interacting with the majority of Christians in our area, especially our Protestant brothers and sisters, and that you're involved in kind of an ecumenical prayer group. Can you describe its makeup and then also how you got involved in it?

**Kevin Doerge:** I don't know if I'd call it an ecumenical prayer group, per se. Its purpose isn't really ecumenism. It's more of a Bible study group. There are about eight to ten people who meet in a house weekly, Sunday nights for dinner, and go through three-hour marathon Bible study sessions. And these are Christians on fire with their faith. They're striving to live out the loving message of the Gospel. And when we hear that, three hours of studying anything can sound intimidating, but it's second nature to this group. They know their stuff. They have a zeal. They know their Bible. I'm the only Catholic there and probably the first Catholic that many of them have interacted with on a regular basis. I admit, I had some hesitations, and I even declined a number of invitations at first, mostly because they coincided with Catholic Chatt meetings that I was a part of Sunday nights. But I'm grateful for their persistence.

**Fr. Carter:** That's the Catholic young adult ministry that's in the Chattanooga area.

**Kevin Doerge:** Yeah, in Chattanooga we're very blessed with a thriving young adult group of Catholics really striving and growing in their faith.

*In part 2 of his interview, Kevin shares what happened within his ecumenical Bible study group. Read the conclusion in next weekend's pastor's notes. The video of the interview is available on the Basilica's website.*