



An Open Trust in God

By Emilianne Seza Namwira and Gilles Urquhart, Deacon

Emilianne Seza Namwira was received in the Catholic Church on April 3, during the Holy Saturday Easter vigil held at St. Emile Parish. For the Kenyan-born francophone, it was the final step in a long spiritual journey, and the beginning of a new stage in her Christian life. Testimony of a spiritual journey, with some observations by Gilles Urquhart, the deacon who accompanied her.

You were raised in the Protestant tradition. What led you to the Catholic Church?

Emilianne Seza Namwira: I have always been a believer. My father, Émile Namwira, is even a pastor, like most of my uncles. I was baptized at the age of 13. In this church, baptism is the choice of the person, and not the parents. Once baptized, however, I immediately received communion. The tradition in which I was raised teaches that bread and wine must be *regarded* as the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Of course, for Catholics, the bread and wine are held *to be* the body and blood of Jesus. Completely. It's much more than a symbol.



Are these the kinds of considerations that first attracted you to Catholicism?

E. S. N.: Not at the beginning. When I was a girl, I attended a Catholic school. Although Protestant, I attended the Masses there. I was fascinated by the rituals, and by the fervor of the students. I especially remember the girls who danced in the liturgies. Their joy was palpable. You could almost touch it. And they were so elegant and beautiful in their white dresses!

You were open, then, to the Catholic tradition...

E. S. N.: Yes. As is my father, for that matter. When I told him that I was going to train to become a Catholic, the Rite of Christian Adult Initiation (RICA), he said to me, "Don't be afraid. Catholics are our cousins. We are all Christians. We all believe in God and His son." His reaction is a beautiful mark of openness and trust in God.

He didn't force you to remain Protestant.

E. S. N.: Exactly. Like my fiancé Fiston didn't force me to become Catholic, by the way. We're getting married at the end of May in Africa. Although he was always a Catholic, he didn't want me to convert out of obligation. He never asked me to do that. When we realized that it was getting serious, I told him that I could always take classes to see, and decide. It would have been easy to convert out of tradition, because in Africa, a woman is culturally encouraged to take up her husband's religion. Still, it was important for me to make the decision.

And in the end, you went forward with the RCIA...

E. S. N.: Yes, thanks to the training I received from deacon Gilles Urquhart and my sponsor, Sister Mariette Rivard. When I was received in the Church on Holy Saturday, it was very moving. I'm happy with my choice.

You started your catechumenate in the fall of 2019. Has the pandemic been a pitfall?

E. S. N.: Our first training meetings were in person. Then in March of 2020, we had to do them via Zoom. I insisted. I didn't want any delays, especially since I still wanted to marry in May. Deacon Gilles agreed, and even bought a camera for his computer. Sister Mariette Rivard also participated in the classes. We sang, prayed and I learned, in joy. There were plenty of jokes, too. Gilles is very funny. So it all happened in a friendly, even family-type atmosphere. For us, COVID-19 was not a big obstacle. Even in the middle of a pandemic, you can continue your studies and your spiritual journey. Especially since we have access to so many electronic tools that conversations and learning easier.

What did you like during RCIA?

E. S. N.: On the practical side, how to recite the great prayers of the Church in English, French and Latin. I was found Church history fascinating. I was happy to learn about the lives of many popes. That, and how the Church is structures, its hierarchy.



Deacon Gilles Urquhart, you have been training catechumens for twelve years now. What drives people to convert?

G. U.: Often, as in Emilianne's case, a person wants to marry a Catholic. The event becomes an opportunity to understand the faith of a future spouse. And a pretext to explore an attraction to Catholicism that might already have existed. Others are more intellectual. I have known PhDs who, after delving into history, have been

increasingly convinced about Catholicism because of the very ancient roots of the Church. They read the Apostolic Fathers, like Saint Ignatius of Antioch who, in the early second century, already defended the sacraments, hierarchy and primacy of bishops.

And others are already Catholic by their baptism, but have left religious practice before their confirmation. They come back after many life experiences, or long periods of introspection. Each person is unique. My role is to teach by active listening and inviting the catechumen to deepen his spiritual life. Who is God? How does Christ manifest in the sacraments? Who is my neighbour, and how can I support him? The teachings of the Church touch on all these questions, but they are also deeply personal matters.

Emilianne, is the deepening of your faith important?

E. S. N.: Absolutely. Throughout my training as a catechumen, I was driven by a spirit of discovery and commitment. I was pleased to be able to make known my

commitment on February 21, during the Rite of the Election of the Catechumens at St. Boniface Cathedral. And I was proud when Bishop LeGatt blessed all the catechumens of the diocese.

Even after being received in the Church, I continue my training with Deacon Gilles. I've taken a big step, but not the only one. So right now I'm living what the RCIA calls mystagogy. I'm deepening my understanding of the sacraments. And there will surely be more stages in my life as a Christian. I want to be engaged in my parish, and live my faith with my new husband. This is just the beginning!

Interview by Daniel Bahuaud, Communications Coordinator at the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface