



“My mother told me two things,” Lisa explained about her upbringing. “Don’t drink and don’t date a Catholic,” she said, smiling at her husband while she fed Lexie. Nevertheless, on her first day at Colby Community College in Kansas, a mutual friend introduced Baptist Lisa Kough to Catholic Kriss Schroeder. “We hit it off instantly because Kriss had bought some land down by my family’s farm, so we talked about farming. I later found out he was Catholic, but by then it was too late. I already liked him,” she said.

However, the barrier of religious differences antagonized both of them. “I would accuse him of the regular anti-Catholic things, like worshiping Mary,” Lisa revealed. “And I wanted answers out of the Bible.”

Lisa’s accusations led Kriss to search out his own faith. “Whenever I’d go to her house, religion was a frequent topic of discussion,” he said. “Her family wanted to know why Catholics did this or that and they’d ask, ‘Where does it say this or that in the Bible?’ They motivated me to find the answers so I could share with them the right things.”



Father Dana Clark blesses the Schroeders at Lexie’s 2006 baptism

Several months into the relationship, Kriss called it quits because he thought the religious barrier could never be overcome. But the breakup only lasted three days. The couple decided to start studying the Bible together and that brought Lisa’s prejudices to a halt, so much so, that she began the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program and became Catholic shortly before she married Kriss.

Blessings by the dozen

By Donetta Robben

In March, Kriss and Lisa Schroeder welcomed their twelfth baby, Lexie Rae. “We’re not really models for natural family planning,” said Lisa. “We just don’t practice it. We believe that as long as we’re healthy, God should decide how many children we have.” Arriving at this conclusion, though, was a painful struggle for the Schroeders.



Kriss and Lisa’s family 1994

Welcoming life

Yet fully embracing Catholic Church doctrine took the couple several more years. Not raised a Catholic, Lisa didn’t believe contraception was against God’s will. Kriss said he knew the Church taught that contraception was wrong, but he lacked the strength to push the issue. Looking back on this time in their lives, the couple believes the Holy Spirit was working on each of their hearts separately.

By that time, Kriss was a licensed veterinarian. While attending a veterinary conference in Las Vegas, he picked up a medical text on reproduction and it initiated a private study that led him to understand how the birth control pill can act as an abortifacient.

At the same time, Lisa was reading the book *A Full Quiver* by Rick and Jan Hess, which was given to her by a Protestant friend. She also had been reading *Celebrate Life* magazine and began understanding how contraceptives truly worked.

Eventually, on one January night, Kriss was driving Lisa and himself home from a Bible class about the Holy Spirit. It was late and their three children were asleep with a caregiver watching over them. In the darkness of that night, the light of Christ pierced their



Christmas 1989



Laura, Kurt, Danielle and Julie



Chelsy, Danielle, Julie and Laura



Josh holds newborn Lexie



Nikole with Justin and Danielle



Kriss with his boys

souls and Lisa brought up contraception. They discussed the topic and by the time they drove up to their home, they both had concluded that contraceptives must be eliminated from their marital relationship.

The next day, with Kriss at work, Lisa sat in the family's home office. She picked up her birth control pills, threw them away and began crying in fear. After all, it is no easy task to manage several children, especially during pregnancy. "I just knew I was going to have a lot of kids," Lisa said. "Once I had a baby, I was fine. But being pregnant, I have pain, it's uncomfortable, it slows me down and I have other children to take care of. I knew having a lot of children wouldn't be an easy path," Lisa admitted. "I knew it would be difficult financially, mentally and physically."

Next, the couple took classes on natural family planning. All things considered, they didn't have a good reason to practice NFP. Therefore, Kriss and Lisa decided to love each other and let God determine how many children they would have. "The fifth child was probably the hardest to adjust to," Lisa said. "There was no support system. I prayed to God that he would give me friends to talk to, and now He has blessed me with an abundance of friends."

"Some people think we're idiots," Kriss said, laughing as he recalled a farm conference by someone from Cornell University, an Ivy League school in Ithaca, New York. "The instructor was anti-family and he made many comments that the higher educated in society have fewer kids," Kriss explained. "When we broke into a small farmers' group, he said that only dumb people have large families. People's

comments used to bother me. But not anymore."

"The hardest part is entrusting everything to God—even your sexuality," Lisa said.

God's provision

Kriss's biggest concern was providing for the family. Sometimes he thought it would be impossible—but somehow it always works out. He gave up his veterinary practice in Greeley, Colorado and moved back to the family farm near Colby, Kansas because his father was having trouble hiring labor. Several things seemed to indicate that God wanted Kriss and Lisa to stay in western Kansas. When some land became available, the Schroeders bought it and began their own farming business. At one point, however, the family was near foreclosure on their farm. The family's banker helped them by going through the Schroeder home and listing everything he could—the piano, guns—anything that would increase their assets and it bought the family another year on the farm. "That year we had great crops," Kriss said, and since then, farm debt has never been a problem.

In 1996, it was time to build a home. Kriss and Lisa had six children and were living in a small three-bedroom house. Afraid to increase their debt, the couple decided to pray before building and Kriss asked God for a sign. If he was meant to build a new family home, then Kriss asked God to send an abundant corn crop.

A good non-irrigated corn crop in northwest Kansas amounts to about 100 bushels an acre. That year their corn averaged 150 bushels an acre. Kriss

took that as God's sign, so he commenced construction and, one year later, the family was able to move into their new five-bedroom home.

Lisa believes that God blessed Kriss with a good head for business. As a farmer, he provides for the whole family. Kriss also keeps his veterinary license current, but he no longer practices on a regular basis. What he does practice on a regular basis is his faith. Both Kriss and Lisa believe it is important to pass the faith on to their children, so they rise daily at 6 A.M. and pray the Rosary together.

Kriss also teaches high school CCD classes where he makes sure each student receives a Bible and a Catholic Catechism. Furthermore, he hosts weekly adult Bible study in the family's home.

In addition to all that, the family gathers weekly after Sunday Mass. The little children are allowed to go to the playroom while everyone who can read has a Bible in hand. Kriss gives his children about 15 minutes to look up Sunday's readings. Then he discusses the readings with the family, asking them questions to probe their minds. Kristi, the eldest Schroeder child, is now in her second year of college. She recently moved out of the family home, but still returns each Sunday to attend Mass with her family and participate in the weekly Bible lessons.

The family's pastor, Father Dana Clark, has a special understanding about the matrimonial necessity of being open to life. He is the second of 17 children and he is especially proud of the Schroeder family. "They are an awesome Catholic family, a beautiful example of openness to life," Father Clark

said. "There is a spiritual calmness and peace that I observe in the family, which has to come from their deep Catholic faith and their prayer life at home. They are a great family. I love them all!"

The feeling is mutual as two of the Schroeder children, Laura, seven, and Julie, eight, rush out of Mass to give Father Clark a hug.

Kriss and Lisa believe that two things changed their lives dramatically and brought them closer as a couple; namely, ending contraception and praying the Rosary together daily. "This also has allowed me to fall in love with the Church," Lisa said. "Mary, who at first was such a road block for me, has become very special to me. The Rosary is a major bond in our marriage."

Kriss and Lisa believe each of their children is a special blessing from God. "We have so many people to love and hug unconditionally," Lisa said. "When we were engaged, I used to ask Kriss how many children he wanted. He always laughed and answered 'a dozen.' I used to give him a soft punch in the arm knowing he was just kidding."

"Neither of us really expected this," Kriss said. "But, if you allow God to lead your life in everything, he will bless you more than you can imagine." Will the Schroeders have more children? "That's up to God," Kriss said smiling.

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