

I converted to Catholicism in January 2015 and was baptized in April 2016. A month later, on the day of Pentecost I went to live in a discernment house for young Catholic women called the Lisieux House.

My name is Stéphanie Baghoumina, and I was born in France. I was raised Protestant and received catechism lessons when I was in primary school from an American pastor coming home every Sunday. However, as a child, I had never been to church with my family and so understandably, I myself had never felt the desire to go as an adult. But in January 2015, while I was a student at the University of Washington since 2012, I realized the church might be what would allow me to have a better life. I did not really know which church to turn to but my sister, who lived in Bellevue and had been Catholic for a number of years, spoke to me about the Newman Center at UW. I immediately fell in love with this church because it was a place where young students like me would gather. I attended daily mass, joined the rosary group, and other church events as soon as my student schedule allowed me to. Before the Easter celebrations, I even spent an evening with other students watching the Passion of Christ and it was precisely that evening that my conversion took place.

I felt for the first time a compassion and deep love for Christ so much so that it was difficult for me to fall asleep that night. My conversion was very strong. I now wanted to become a full member of the church, so I started taking RCIA classes in the fall of 2015. At the end of one of my classes, while I was about to leave church, I came across a flyer about Lisieux House. It proposed living in community with other Catholic women inspired by the spirituality of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. I, who was now filled with this burning love for Christ and who was thinking of devoting my life to the church, felt that this opportunity came at the right moment. It was exactly what my soul sought. So I sent a very enthusiastic email to the girls to tell them of my desire to live with them.

I attended an open house they organized, and it was immediately obvious that I would be the 9th and last girl to join the house. It was on the day of Pentecost, just after my baptism, that all the conditions were met and I officially joined the community. What struck me at first was the peace that reigned in this house. I felt really privileged to live there. I was able to draw from the presence of Christ, the life of prayer, and the support of the women of the community. I was able to obtain the necessary strengths to finish my studies and graduate UW with my Bachelor degree in Integrated Sciences. I'm especially grateful for that because I had to be a student in good standing to maintain my immigration status. Otherwise, I would have to leave the country, without being baptized. I trusted God, but I would have been extremely sad if that would have happened. At the house, I also took the time to think about my vocation and even had the opportunity to be in touch with the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy located in Boston. Although my discernment is not finished I have acquired solid bases which will be very useful to me now that I am back in France.

Looking back, I realize that I received a succession of graces from the Lord. I was baptized in the Year of Mercy with Saint Faustina as my patron saint. Then, the community life at Lisieux House that followed my baptism allowed me to realize very quickly that it is possible to combine active life and love for God. Thus, at a time when many Catholics, especially young people, tend to compromise or relegate their faith to the background, I was able to strengthen it. And here it is priceless because today I'm neither ashamed nor afraid to defend my faith.