

Tom Schoofs in a nutshell

When I was a child my family attended the Catholic Church

I attended a Catholic School for 5th and 6th grades

It was the only time I hated school. This experience forged a dislike for religious systems and at that time particularly the Catholic Church. I was never abused, but even at that time, Catholic Dogma both confused me and drove a wedge between me and God. It never made sense!

I eventually became agnostic and had no real urge to pursue any form of spirituality. As a young man my core belief was “religious” people were weak and needed God for a crutch.

About 1973 my heart began to change. Today I recognize it as the pull of the Holy Spirit drawing me toward a personal relationship with the Lord.

Two key events increased the Pull:

1. In College as an Engineering student, while in Engineering Physics, when I saw the order in the universe, it got me to the point where I recognized there had to be a creator.
2. Crazy as this may sound, the movie “The Exorcist” came out in 1973, and that movie freaked me out, and convinced me there was a spiritual realm, and I decided I did not want to be on the wrong side of that equation.

At this point I earnestly was seeking a relationship with God!

In the spring of 1974 after hearing and understanding the gospel message for the first time, I recognized my need for a savior, and I turned my life over to Christ. I asked Jesus to be my Lord and Savior.

After this I wandered in the spiritual wilderness for 4 years, because I had no reference point for a “Good Church”. I attended some churches but could not find a church home. I have to say the Lord, through the Holy Spirit really nurtured me through this time.

In June of 1978 Connie and I were married. Connie grew up Catholic as well, and I thought she was a believer, but she was not. At the time she was really seeking the Lord, but in hindsight, had not made a commitment yet.

In the Fall of 1978 we moved to Columbus in a job transfer. Ultimately this became pivotal for our faith.

In the spring of 1979 we found a bible study in Columbus which had sprung from the then growing “Jesus movement”. It was then known as the **“Fish House”**

A good friend (Rick Armstrong still attending Dwell) invited us to attend this “cool” bible study he had found through old Friends from “Young Life Ministries” at Upper Arlington HS.

We were keen to check it out, especially Connie, she was in hot pursuit of a true relationship with the Lord.

- In those days our church was called the **Fish House**
- The first sermon / teaching we attended was on the Gospel of Matthew about the Sermon on the mount in Matt 5, and was being taught by Gary DeLashmutt
- It seemed as though God was speaking to us directly through Gary.
- It was biblical truth taught in such a way we had never heard before.
- We were **HOOKED! Pun intended!**
- **Not long after this Connie asked Jesus to be her Lord and Savior**

At this point we were on the same track, which has led to a lifelong desire to serve the Lord in the best ways we can. Christian ministry / serving; is and will always be at the top of our “To Do” list.

We have been associated with, The Fish House, Xenos, NEO Xenos, Dwell, Freedom Fellowships for most of our Christian Lives. There have been several diversions from that path. In 1980 we moved back to Cincinnati because of a job transfer. We lived down there for 5 years and were part of a Church planting team for a Grace Brethern Church in the Cincinnati area. This was actually a great experience, however, we missed our old fellowship in Columbus. There was always something special about it, especially the relationships we had built there. I think God used this to prepare us for what came next.

In 1985 our good friends Marion and Joe Guzzo, with whom we co-lead a small group, back in the Fish House days, were asked to be part of the plant team for a Xenos plant in Cleveland, OH. They started helping Dennis McCallum establish this church plant in Cleveland. In the Fall of 1985, the Guzzo’s purchased a home in University Heights, and this became the foundation for the “Cleveland” home church. Xenos Ministry in Cleveland was born.

Not long after this Connie and I decided we wanted to be part of this. Of course this called for some serious prayer, and a fair amount of faith, and it wasn't long before we were confident the Lord was behind this idea. We also started coming up to Cleveland for several months checking things out. The company I was working for also agreed to transfer me to Cleveland to open a sales office. Another miracle! We packed up our little family, Connie, Eric (age 5), Lauren (Age 3) and Me, and moved up to Cleveland in January of 1986.

For the next number of years, the Lord really blessed what we were doing, and we experienced steady growth. In the mid 90's we lost Joe and Marion. Joe had been accused of some improprieties and rather than work through the issues he quit and moved back to Columbus.

At this point I had become an Elder, alongside Greg Morscher, John Bogdon, and Mike Durbin. In those days we were still getting teaching and financial help from Columbus. Losing Joe left a serious void in our leadership team, and I / we felt we needed teaching and leadership help. One of the available people who had been coming up on a regular basis was Keith McCallum. Keith like all of the McCallum's, was a gifted teacher and We persuaded him to come up and join us. I think it would be fair to say I was instrumental in getting Keith to come up to Cleveland.

John Bogdon had reservations about Keith which stemmed from Keith being dismissed as an Elder in Columbus several years earlier. We did consult the Elders in Columbus regarding this and they assured us, in their opinion Keith had genuinely repented of the issues that caused his dismissal. We took them at their word, but John remained skeptical. This tension carried over when Keith moved up to Cleveland and resulted in some pretty serious altercations between John and Keith. It ultimately ended with John's resignation. The reason I point this out is that it led to some alienation toward Keith from a number of people close to John, which in turn, led to some of my problems with Keith.

For me things came to a head with Keith in 2006. I'm happy to go into detail about matters if anyone is interested, but for the sake of brevity here; I was concerned with his autonomy, pridefulness, his zeal for authority, and his willingness to write people off, and then demonize them. I did not think these were fitting qualities for a spiritual leader. After much prayer and thought I felt I had identified some pretty serious flaws in Keith's character. My desire was for him to see this and repent. Instead he only dug in harder, and did his best to destroy me. Sadly, I took this to Keith and the body and was told I was wrong. We did not want to create division in the church at that time and thought it was best for us to separate. This led to our departure at that time. Frankly, had Keith put his pride aside, and apologized at the time, we would never have left. For what it's worth I leaned heavily on Romans 12 (

the entire chapter) and my utter faith that the Lord is in control. I found great comfort in that.

When Connie and I left years ago, we landed at Christ Community Chapel and served there in multiple capacities. We served as Community Group Leaders, went on multiple short term mission trips, became part of the plant team for what is now Redemption Chapel. I was a Deacon there for 3 years. We still maintain strong relationships with quite a few folks over there.

In 2020 prior to Andrews wedding I was able to come to peace with Keith. Frankly I had resolved my anger toward him years ago. As one who believes in radical grace, I simply chose to forgive him in my heart. Extended anger or bitterness have never been part of my nature.

For Connie and I reconnecting with our Brothers and Sisters from long ago at Andrew and Erin's wedding was just so joyful, we decided to come back to fellowship. We truly missed everyone, and it gave us great joy to rekindle those old relationships. We are also very tied to our bodies' core beliefs and teachings.

We think there is much good in what we believe and teach. We feel if we can learn from our mistakes, heal from the disfunction that has pervaded us, there will be many blessings the Lord will bestow on us.

To conclude, Our hearts ache for our body today. It grieves us to see the hurt, anger, and confusion. You are all in our prayers. On the other hand we see a bright future ahead for the Body, God willing of course. We are committed to serving God in whatever capacity he sees fit. We are committed to helping the body heal and grow in whatever capacity the Lord chooses. We are anxious to be part of the next chapter of Freedom Fellowships. We can't wait to see how the Lord moves among us.

God Bless you All. Your Brother and Sister in Christ.

Tom and Connie Schoofs