

## “From Roots to Wings”

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As a woman raised in East Texas in a Catholic Lebanese family two values were instilled in the seven children blessed to Tom and Josephine Khirallah. Those two values were faith and education. Coming from an average income environment yet a rich sense of family, faith, and the importance of quality education, I was privileged to attend a Catholic University when I graduated from high school.

At the time I graduated from the only Catholic high school in the county my sister was a postulant with the School Sisters of Notre Dame who were being educated at the University of Dallas and my brother was in Holy Trinity Seminary also being educated at the University of Dallas. The University of Dallas provided the proximity to my family both at school and at home.

More importantly, my formation at the University of Dallas groomed me to become a Catholic educator with a desire to both educate the young and to share my own faith with them.

I met my husband, Dr. Roger Porter, at the University of Dallas where he also graduated. Roger believes that the liberal arts education he received was a great advantage to nurture his compassion as a physician. He was mentored as many current physicians have been by Sister Clodovia Lockett and assisted the process of establishing a scholarship in her name.

Together we have three young adult children: a Catholic school teacher, a nurse studying to become a doctor, and a landman. Additionally, we have been blessed with three grandchildren.

Collectively, I have 13 members of my family including nephews, nieces, and a sister-in-law who have attended the University of Dallas over the years. The University of Dallas provides an integration of faith, living the Christian life, and nurturing the entire person to become disciples in this world. They too were raised with faith and education as high priorities to happiness in this world.

Raising children created a desire in me as an adult Catholic to do more formation in my faith. I reached out once again to the University of Dallas, 20 years after I received my bachelor's degree, to attend the IRPS formation program. My desire was a need to grow in my own faith as an adult to help me live the Christian life more deeply. After I was accepted in the program, I was hired as Director of Office of Religious Education for the Diocese of Tyler in April, 1994.

Thus my formation in the IRPS became a twofold blessing. It satisfied the hunger for faith development both spiritually and theologically I was seeking in my personal life and the sound Catholic teaching I needed in my professional life to coordinate orthodox adult faith formation and catechist training in our Diocese of Tyler in 33 counties.

Over the last 11 years my responsibilities have expanded to formation and coordination of a

Diocesan Christian Initiation process which both initiates and integrates families and individuals into the life of the Catholic Church.

My formation as an undergraduate at the University of Dallas and in the IRPS program created roots that grounded me in the Catholic faith not just as a church I belonged to and attended on Sundays, but a faith that is integrated into every decision and every circumstance of my life. I am deeply grateful for those roots. But with roots also I was charged with the desire to share that with others, to spread my wings to provide others with those same blessings.

My bishop, Bishop Alvaro Corrada, SJ, of the last four years, I believe, shares my values of faith and education as high priorities in the pastoral plan for the diocese. We currently have over 7000 adults involved in some kind of adult faith formation in a mission diocese of only 17 years old with a Catholic population of 59,000. We have over 2000 lay catechists involved in the process of certification to teach. Through the Christian Initiation process we have doubled the number of people we are brought into the church over the last four years.

Additionally, I coordinate the implementation of a recent agreement between the IRPS and our diocese to provide college level theology and scripture courses in English and Spanish for adults seeking to grow in their own faith. We currently have about 75 adults participating in the English sessions and 36 participating in the Spanish sessions.

The roots of faith are being planted and the wings of discipleship continued to be nurtured in our diocese even now through the efforts of the University of Dallas.

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