



FINDING GOD IN A GENERAL STORE *in Downtown Frankfort*

STORY BY CARLOS BRICEÑO

Think of any Western movie you've seen, and you can probably picture a general store in your mind's eye. These kinds of stores are not common any more. So, when you do encounter one, it's got to be a little special. Kathleen Littleton owns one, right in downtown Frankfort, and she will be happy to tell you how special her Family Hearth General Store™ is.

It's located at 119 Kansas Street, in a building that was actually a general store in the 1870s. It's even got the original wide plank pine flooring.

Walk in, and you will feel as if you stepped back in time and find Victorian replicas, vintage décor, quilts, candles, antique samplers and jewelry, classic books, hand-milled soaps, old-time candy, ice cream and bottles of pop. There's a reading room, where you can play checkers or type on your laptop, and a fireplace. Feeling thirsty? Kathleen has fresh gourmet coffees and teas available.

The non-profit storefront ministry also has a Christian ecumenical feel, as Kathleen is not shy about sharing her love of God and Jesus with others. The store, which celebrated its fifth anniversary last month, offers a special

emphasis on honoring home, faith and family life, featuring inspirational gifts for special family occasions, such as weddings, anniversaries, and new babies. The shop also offers Scripture studies, faith formation book studies, and spiritual guidance, among other forms of evangelization.

Kathleen used to be the director of religious education at St. Anthony Church, in Frankfort. She was replaced by a deacon in that position, and so she turned to evangelize another way — in a missionary discipleship kind of way, taking it to the streets as Pope Francis has encouraged Catholics to do.

"I believe each and every one of us has an obligation as a Catholic to share in Christ's redemptive, salvific mission through our



This is another in a series of articles about Missionary Discipleship in response to Bishop R. Daniel Conlon's

recent Pastoral Letter on the Need for Missionary Disciples in the Diocese. If you haven't done so yet, please read or listen to the bishop's pastoral letter in the November 2018 issue of the magazine by going to this site:

www.dioceseofjoliet.org/bishop/

baptism," said Kathleen, who has a law degree and a master's degree in pastoral theology. "We are called to do as He did to bring souls to Him. We can all do that in our own unique ways. We don't have to [start] an apostolate or do something large. We can do it in our own social milieu in the circumstances where we find ourselves. I found myself in downtown Frankfort, and I wanted to do something where I live in my own hometown with the people who come through the door at my store."

With that in mind, it makes sense that many of the programs she offers at the store are aimed at helping people grow in faith, such as a book study group educating on the nature and dignity of women; a DVD study program based on EWTN's Johnette Benkovic's television show, "Full of Grace"; a Scripture study led by her husband, James, a Catholic radio host and lay evangelist; and the Littleton's own Forming Faithful Families Marriage and Family Life Study group.

Forming Faithful Families™ (www.formingfaithfulfamilies.com), the Littleton's own 501(c)3 nonprofit public charity,



has been endorsed by Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki of Springfield, IL. Their website provides books, radio podcasts, and television programming amongst many other resources to strengthen families in the faith, which the Littletons have produced, most of which are available as free downloads.

As the mother of 14 children, who range in age from 33 years old to 13, Kathleen knows something about families.

"We believe the home is the center of our faith," she said. "God gives us home life, which is our means, all of us, as parents who are forming families to live centered in our faith and in our family life. That's why we call [the store] the Family Hearth. Back in the olden days, it was the center of the home, where families would gather around the fireplace, form their children, pray with their children, evangelize their children, and, with God at the center of the home and family, the children would be raised faithful to the Church."

Kathleen grew up in a faith-filled Catholic home. But she drifted away from the faith in her college and young adult years. She was pursuing her own interests, and her husband was in the same boat as she. God was not at the center of their lives.

"I was working full-time as a lawyer, downtown," she said. "Faith wasn't important to us at all. We had bought into the whole secular culture of working hard, moving up the ladder of success, making a lot of money. That kind of thing. I found it to be kind of empty after all. I was 24, 25, 26 years old, and something was missing. I had my career. I had my husband. I had no family. I had no children."

Her husband then went through a reversion back to the faith. James started to pray

the rosary and also started to attend daily Mass. He encouraged her to do the same.

"We started to focus on what's important in our lives and what our marriage is supposed to be, and it's what the Church tells us, and that's God's truth: the procreative and unitive aspects of married life – meaning husband and wife unite, and they try to get each other to heaven, but we're also supposed to be open to life, and that was missing," she said. "I felt the Holy Spirit was telling me that, even though I didn't know it intellectually because I didn't know my faith."

The couple stopped using contraception and started having children. They also started learning more about the faith. Attending daily Mass and praying the rosary became important to them. The sacraments, in general, became important to them, she said.

Getting closer to God's love did not mean that life became easier. There were financial difficulties over the years. James battled chronic lymphocytic leukemia, which included chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant, and serious complications, including kidney failure and pneumonia in both of his lungs. Their faith sustained them and increased through all those trials. James is now cancer free.

"We relied greatly on the mystical Body of Christ, His Church, not just the sacraments, but God's people," Kathleen said. "God's people are the Church. People we don't even know came to help us."

She views her store as a place that can help others, to give back to God's people and share hope and encouragement. She purposely made the store ecumenical and non-denominational to make it accessible for all

Christians. Kathleen wanted people to enter as well who might not enter a Church. But her Catholic faith does shine through in the sense she has free Catholic items, such as Divine Mercy cards, rosaries, and holy cards, available for people to take, and prayer intention slips they can fill out and which are prayed for during the family's holy hours of adoration.

Because of how peaceful the store is, evoking the simpler days of the past, Kathleen said some people feel comfortable enough to open up and share some of the difficulties they are going through.

"It's beautiful to be here for a number of years now where I can re-meet people and share in their spiritual growth," she said. "We have given spiritual guidance to young adults, wives, mothers, fathers and businessmen, formally and spontaneously, all of whom open their hearts, seeking hope and encouragement and to grow in a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. ... I believe every

single soul is worth touching. That person has a ripple effect on the world, just like evil has a ripple effect. ... You have to know that God loves you before you can share that love with others. You need to know God, love God and then you need to share God."

She added: "It's not a step-by-step process. It can happen in a moment. It can happen in one enlightened moment. God wants us to share Him every day wherever we find ourselves, even if we don't think we're ready. It can be done in simple ways, even just by being a good wife or a simple witness of being a good mother, just trying to be obedient to God's will, and you're evangelizing. It doesn't take a big missionary outreach. It just takes a caring heart and a true love for God and knowing that He has loved you first." †

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FOR MORE INFORMATION about the Family Hearth General Store™, the storefront ministry of Forming Faithful Families™, contact Kathleen Littleton at familyhearthfrankfort@gmail.com, or call 708-334-1988, or check out their website at www.familyhearthgeneralstore.com.