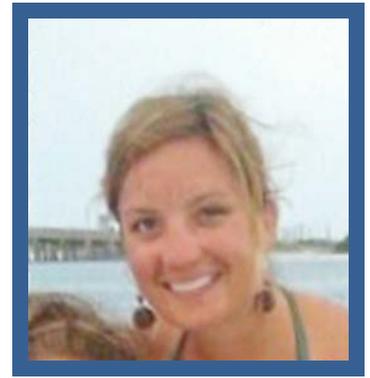


Greetings St. Leo Community!

I am so blessed to have found such a unique community so close to home. My interest in St. Leo has grown immensely since my initial contact with Angela regarding my eagerness to help with a children's liturgy program. I am passionate about my faith, and it is a blessing to introduce children to the grace of God at a young age. It is through a relationship with God (and one starting as a child) that I personally have found peace in the happiest and worst moments in life.



My story could not be told without a few important characteristics. At the center point of everything are the relationships in my life, I am a daughter, a sister, a friend and an aunt. Growing up and now living back in Northern Kentucky, I am blessed to have so many of my close relationships in the same area. The highlights of these relationships include: watching my seven young nieces and nephews grow, dancing with my friends, and exploring new areas with my family. Laughing, sharing life's milestones and just spending time together are so precious. I am blessed to have a strong network of people so close to home.

While studying Accounting at the University of Kentucky, I took a semester abroad at the University of Notre Dame Australia. Living with students from Zimbabwe, Singapore, Belgium, China, and Kenya to name a few was rewarding and eye opening. I fell in love with Australia so much that I went back after obtaining my degree to be a nanny for a family of four. Stepping outside the U.S "bubble" was a huge milestone for me, and I truly realized the beauty in diversity.

Shortly after returning to the States I was laid off my first "real" job which was a big wake up call to corporate America. I knew that if I were to be successful I'd have to take ownership of my own strengths and passions. In just a couple years, I completed my Masters, gained management experience, and landed my now recent employment with a small company that does marketing for retail.

Amongst a lot of growing up experiences throughout my twenties, my greatest life story occurred just weeks before starting my Master's program on October 10, 2009. My fears and faith met eye to eye as I lived through a plane crash into the tallest mountain in Virginia. I was sitting behind my mom with my rosary when that foggy October afternoon turned dangerous for us all and my dad, the pilot, crashed us into the side of the mountain. When the plane was flying into the trees and crashing into pieces, I felt the peace of God. I wanted the crashing to end, and to die quickly before the mental and physical pain worsened. The next sets of events were miracles, and each led us to survival. Many things happened that day that were unexplained and inconsistent with the reality of the situation. The plane didn't catch on fire, and somehow we found safety while injured and lost in the forest for hours some three hundred feet up on one of the tallest mountains in Virginia. Emergency crew was baffled at how we survived, because no other plane crash in that area has had survivors. Doctors were amazed at my ability to stay alive and especially walk down the mountain while suffering severe internal injuries. It is important for me to share that I felt the connection of God before and after the crash. I carried my rosary on this flight, because I had a strong feeling of this event, and I knew to put it in God's hands. Prayer had everything to do with this experience.

Later juggling the start of my Master's program while going through intense surgery from the crash brought me closer to God. I am a stronger person because of this event, and I value my life in a different way. Throughout this event and each one of my life's stories, I have felt the presence and grace of God through prayer. I know that it was the early lessons of prayers that paved the way for

my strong faith. It sincerely is a blessing for me to help children reach the same understanding of faith that I was once taught. It is my belief that a foundation of faith will enrich each child's life. I look forward to my continued work at St. Leo!

- *Tara Lonneman*

P.S. Recently, my father experienced another plane crash and God has protected him once again. We are grateful for God's grace and continuing care as he watches over us and are always thankful for the miracles he is doing in our lives.