

Girls who tea

Monica is 21 years old. On a turning point, she rediscovered her faith and shared these discoveries with some of her cousins and friends.

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My name is Monica, I am a 21-year-old wedding photography entrepreneur. I grew up in Edmonton, Alberta in a family where our faith was central. Many of my friends, however, did not share the same values and upbringing and,

particularly during my teenage years, cooled my faith.

I trace my turning point - that moment when I took ownership of my relationship with God - to the trip I made to Madrid and Rome for Blessed Alvaro's beatification. Those memorable days gave me an opportunity to grow closer to a friend who was very committed to her faith. I was also impressed by the joyful and optimistic attitude with which the group faced the expected (and unexpected) challenges that come with traveling. Perhaps what stood out for me most was when we prayed the rosary while walking through the streets of Madrid because it showed me that you can live out your faith in your everyday life and circumstances.

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I kept in touch with Westwood (the Opus Dei centre in Calgary) through my friend. Little by little, I introduced “meetings with God” into my daily schedule: times of prayer, attending weekday Mass once or twice a week, doing a silent retreat (that helped me a lot!), visits to the Blessed Sacrament... and since all these practices were helping me grow, I noticed I was more joyful and self-confident. I shared these discoveries with some of my cousins and friends.

After graduating from college, I moved to Calgary in May 2017 to start my business. Being in Calgary allowed me to attend formation activities on a regular basis. As I grew in my faith I realized that my friends in Edmonton didn’t have the same opportunities as I had in Calgary.

I knew there was a need for my friends to learn about their faith on a regular basis and in a friendly setting. I chatted with my grandmother about this and she offered to host monthly gatherings in her home. I invited my friends and provided them each with a notebook, my grandmother provided the tea, and I "contracted" various friends to lead the classes and discussions. We called the gatherings "Girls who tea" and we've covered topics such as prayer, God's love, truth, the centrality of friendship in our lives. An average of about twenty friends attend.

I wanted to be sure that "Girls who tea" was really helping my friends so I welcomed their feedback and suggestions. Many of them commented that they found strength and encouragement in being with so many other young women who are also interested in growing in their

faith. They also found answers in the classes to questions they had been harbouring for a long time.

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As lent was approaching, I had the idea of writing a letter to a friend or family member every day for forty days. This was one of the ways I thought I could live lent well. I bought stationary and stamps, and addressed all the envelopes in the days leading up to Ash Wednesday. Beginning with my parents and siblings, I wrote to each family member and then to over twenty five friends. Each day, I would spend ten to fifteen minutes (sometimes longer) writing to a different person.

These letters were my way of telling my family and friends how much they mean to me and how wonderful they are. They also allowed me to reconnect with friends I hadn't been in touch with for months. After receiving the letters, many of my friends were surprised and grateful and some even responded with letters! Many asked to meet for coffee - which led to so many great conversations.

I've learned that being friends requires overcoming fear of rejection. Many friends have told me they are afraid of even inviting another person for a coffee chat. Seeing how much I valued my friends through a "random" letter (it wasn't their birthdays or an occasion such as Christmas or even Easter) gave them the reassurance that I valued our friendship and really cared about them as a person.

And this is perhaps my invitation to you, if you are reading this. Think of simple ways to show your love to the people around you because they will notice it - even if it's in small details like offering someone a ride. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there and become part of their lives.

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As someone who is naturally more cautious, I had to overcome my initial fears. Since then, I've realized how much I enjoy being around people and growing relationships. Watching my friends become more confident and happier as their own relationships with God become stronger brings me a lot of joy. Focusing on the good that comes of making the first move in friendship,

helps me conquer my fears of rejection.

Of course, God has been my anchor and my guide. Putting trust in God and developing my prayer life has helped me cultivate the friendships I have today and placing my trust in Him to make me not give into fear.

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