

Catholic Homeschool Podcast

How to Build Community & Friendships – Bonnie Landry

Hello and welcome to the Catholic Homeschool podcast. I'm your host, Paola Ciskanik. And today my guest is Bonnie Landry, and I am so thrilled to be able to have this cozy conversation with her today. For those who do not know Bonnie, I'm going to read the bio before we get, but our conversation today is going to be all about community. What does community actually mean? Do we need community? How many people actually make up a community? And can you actually start one yourself?

So, before we begin diving into community, let's say, hi, Bonnie. Hi.

Hi, Paola. So nice to be here.

Oh, good. I think, you know, both of us as veteran homeschool, moms, we both have seven children. I got married in 1987. Yes.

I got married in 91. No, 1990. Yes. Yes. But I don't know if you know, a bit of background to my story that I had. I had been previously married before I was Catholic. So, my first daughter is actually from that marriage. My husband adopted her. And so, our kids are probably about the same age then, because my oldest is 35.

Yes, he's 34 this year. So Good. Well, let's read the official bio let's dive right in. Okay. So, for those of you who don't know Bonnie, Bonnie Landry is a Catholic mom who lives in the little Hamlet of couple hill on Vancouver, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. I'm here in Delaware she's way over there. She and her husband Albert have been raising and homeschooling their seven children since 1987 with one year left ago. Yay. Joy is her modus operandi. Life is kind of a bust if you can't get along with people, isn't it? So, Bonnie's podcast, as I mentioned, and we will mention several times and put the link in this under this video is Make Joy Normal, cozy homeschooling.

So again, thank you. Thank you, Bonnie, for agreeing to be on this podcast. I'm so excited.

Thank you for having me.

Yeah, we were, we were just, before we hit the record button talking about, you know, community, and I think both of us being veteran homeschoolers, we are, yes. pre-Facebook people.

That makes us impossibly old doesn't it.

And I think in some ways it was easier for us because we did not have that go-to. You, you feel lonely now, you just hit the computer. But in those days, I really literally had to search for somebody. You know, when I decided to do this crazy thing, like homeschooling, it was like, I can't do this by myself. I need some other crazy person with me.

So, tell us a little bit of how you got started in terms of, because you recently did a podcast and I invite everybody to go Make Joy Normal, and it is all about community. And you did it with your dear friends, Brian, and Laurie Denison. And that story. I love that story. Tell us a little bit about how you guys met and how you started community.

Yeah, so we were living up island. I was already homeschooling, and we had, I believe three kids. Yeah. We each had three kids at the time and they, so they lived about an hour and a half away from where we are. And we happened to meet, we used to go to a conference in Seattle and we met up at this conference in Seattle, which was a Catholic Homeschool conference. And even though it was in the states, it was actually the closest one to us.

So, Lori and I had met very briefly a year or two before at a talk. A speaker had come over to the island that we both happen to be at. And we got chatting and we knew each other were Catholic. So, I had that face right. That I had connected with. So then when we ended up going to the Seattle conference, of course I recognized her and I knew they had a few families in their community and whatever that they were living down there, I think three or four families at that time. And so, what happened was we linked up with this conference and then we went back home, they went back home. They said, oh, we'll have to have you guys over or whatever. And we, we had a really nice group of friends, basically our community that we lived in prior to moving here was almost every single church in the area, the pastor and his wife homeschooled kids. Right? So, we were the only Catholics, but there was somebody basically from every church in the small area we were from. And that was becoming somewhat awkward because we didn't share a faith. We didn't share, we shared many things, but, but the nuts and bolts of our faith were different. And so, as the kids were getting older and we're sort of discussing these things, it became difficult.

But anyway, Brian started pestering us. He would phone us over and over again, over the course of several months, he would phone maybe every once a month or something like that. Hi, would you guys like to do something with us? And, and my husband say, well, why, you know why I don't really understand why we would drive all the way down there for people. We have friends. And I said, okay, you know, whatever. But then at some point he'd called us enough times that I thought, you know what? I feel really rude. So, I think we just need to, we just need to go.

So, we decided, okay, we'll just go get it over with kind of thing. And then as you know, from that podcast episode, what happened was Laurie and I, all the dads, we went on a little walk together, pray the rosary at the church, went on a walk together. All the dads sort of went up with the older kids and were on this little hike we were on. And Laurie and I ended up together. The two of us were both nursing, two children. So, we had an immediate bond. I was, she was the only other person that ever met who was tandem nursing. And so, she ended up her and I were having this, developing this great friendship. We recognize that right away.

I had no idea what Albert was doing. And so off he was doing his thing. And Laurie said, you guys want to stay overnight and go to Mass with us tomorrow morning? And I said, oh, I'd love to, but Albert would never do that. And so, she said, well, just ask him. So, then we met up with the guys. I don't know what his experience is, but obviously it was really amazing too, to meet Catholic dads who were really into their family, into their faith. And I said, Lori's asked us if we'd like to stay overnight. And he said, oh, well, we're going to have to stop and buy toothbrushes. And I was like, what? And that was it.

So through. So, we traveled down here about once a month and spent the weekend for, for a few years, probably six years or something before we actually moved here. And at some point, it became more practical for him to commute to his business, you know, up island then and us to, to move the family down here.

Right, Right, right. Oh my gosh. It's very reminiscent of, you know, again, we have friends, and we call them almost like cousins, very similar to that, that close friendships. They really are very close. And it was a similar thing. You know, there was this invitation of just trying to find local homeschooling families. And I remember being at this and I think it was a talk or something. And one of the moms sidled up to me and she's like, um... Paola do you do, do your kids, you know, like, do they get dressed up for Halloween? You know, trying to feel out, like what level, yes, it was funny because again, we were immersed with our beautiful Christian brothers and sisters, but there wasn't this unity of faith, overarching faith.

And so immediately we had this bond, our kids kind of matched up in ages and that's all you need is to relate on like one thing, it's this incredible bond, but then layer that on top of, as you said, the faith. So, one we're saying you don't really need community lots and lots of families, but, but let's just kind of begin with, you know, how would you define community when, you know, when we talk about homeschooling community in particular?

Yeah. I mean, I would say I have homeschool community on, on different layers because there is the homeschool community at large secular, Protestant, Catholic, you know, wonderful families that I connect with, you know, fairly regularly, you know, I'll have a wine and cheese at my house and just invite whatever homeschool family. So that's one level of community. I think that the level of community that we are should really be seeking and it often starts at that more community broader picture level. What we're seeking is people that we can have intimate friendships with, that we can go through struggles with that are going to show up at your door. You know, if your child is sick, that you share an intimate bond, you pray together, you deeply love each other, you know?

And so that is what we're seeking. Does that need to be very many? No. Right? One or two families ample, right. To grow, to have a community, especially when you have large families. I mean, that's not always the case, but it's often the case in our circles, but what a beautiful thing to be able to have that like you might have with a sibling, I come from an agnostic family. So, for my family, I, you know, I don't have the same relationship with my family. I love them to pieces. They're wonderful people, but I don't have the same relationship that I do with my Catholic community, you know, who are, you know, in essence my family.

And so, I would say that ultimately when we're kind of meeting people in our life and expressing our, our faith and our, the way we meet our needs as a family and whatnot, but ultimately what we are seeking as human beings is close interpersonal relationships that we can pray together. We can love each other. Right.

Right. Exactly. Exactly. And then I think is so core to, to, to what we're talking about, community, those, that friendships, because, you know, again, running the Catholic Homeschool Community, one of the big questions I asked is why do you want this community? And very often it is that Bonnie, it is that trying to seek, like-minded like hearted people that you want to bond with. So, I know I have that close relationship with... as my friends, dear friends, always say we're friends for life, we do all that.

So, something, something I think that's worth noting in the sort of defining of community. One of the ways that we've built community is, is that we have this, we do a Catholic Homeschool camp, which if people want to know more about it, they can listen to that episode. It's something that I've been thinking about doing a podcast about, about how to organize a camp, because I think it'd be helpful for people, but there are people who we only see once a year that are some of our dearest friends, right. Because they come to that.

And so, if you lived five hours away from somebody that you felt was, you know, for lack of a better word, a soulmate, you know, that your family's connected. If you only got together for a week or two of the year and just went camping your two families or, or met, you know, somewhere for a little mini holiday, that would be a beautiful thing. A beautiful... your kids would look forward to it every year. Right?

Yeah. I would love to delve into some of those activities because I know for us, we had a local like, you know, swim and gym. And again, it was that larger community. But within that, we found soul sisters, you know, also even found opportunities to stretch and challenge ourselves. Because as you say, you meet families that have different parenting styles than you. So even though you may share the faith, you, you run into all those different, you know, aspects, you know? So, one of the things that I think both of us have experienced in all these years is that we've seen a disintegration of groups or groups that come and go, you know, you mentioned you guys have a really, really special group. What do you think makes the difference?

I think there are two things really. I think it's the dads being really involved, right. That we're friends as families, right? So, I'm talking about our, at this point, our larger Catholic community, which are primarily homeschoolers, some of them are not homeschoolers, but if we were to get together to pray a rosary or have a, you know, a party of some sort, these would be the people we would invite. So maybe there's, you know, 10 or 12 families, right. Varying in age range, you know, some of them are second gen, right.

And, and I think that the, all of them, the dads are really involved, but I think even, even more than that, and I think the dads being involved as related to this, is that these are all people whose deepest desire is to, to increase their own personal holiness and to draw closer to God and to get to heaven. And so that to me has to be the thing to prevent the undoing, you know, because there's been differences in our community, there's been difficulties, right.

But there's always been a willingness to work through them. And I think that that's, what's the beautiful thing. And, and, you know, a lot of times it's very easy because there are different parenting styles, there's different ideals or different way of living your life. But if we all desire to understand the other better and see Christ in the other, that's, what's going to carry you through that. Right. And, and, you know, there was some wonderful examples of holiness that, that, and marriage that drew me up, you know, and made us a, an example of, to really, really know and desire what it is Christ wants for the body, his body, his church.

And that's kind of how, I mean, again, you began that in terms of, I do believe we are created to relate, God made it on purpose that we're not alone. So, there's this longing and desire for that unity within us. And so, you mentioned that about, but, but I think it is in terms of, I don't know, I'm, I'm a better person left to my own devices. I tremble.

Yeah. I know. I often wonder if we had stayed up where we were before moving here, you know, what would it have been like, maybe it would have been okay, but we don't know. And I suspect that we were not always being called to the mat would, and only by examples, not like people were calling us out, it was by example, you know, how did you work through that difficulty in your family? How did you work through your marriage issues? How did you deal with that child who's wandered from the church, right?

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. That's, that's exactly so well said. One of the things I'd like to think about is that people, you know, people will say, I want to be a part of a group that a don't even know how to start one. So, what, let's talk a little bit about that, but also that everybody has something to give some value, to give, so unpack that a little bit for me, in terms of how do you even start and, and what have you experienced in terms of how people give and, you know, contribute?

Yeah. Well, I think that everybody has something to offer somebody, even if you don't see yourself as a, as a starter or whatever, if you have some passion, maybe it's gardening, maybe it's foraging, maybe it's, you know, wild flora and fauna in your area. Maybe it's antique trains. I don't know whatever it is, knitting. It doesn't matter if you just invite a few people or I can guarantee that somebody will be interested in, in what you do. And if you're passionate about it, they're just, you're passing on your passion. So, you know, if you're a birdwatcher and you say, hey, I want to go out birdwatching. And I wondered if a few families might like to come along with me, even if only one other family came, that's something. Right? That's something, I think another thing that is really valuable is actually, are you familiar with the Sienna Institute?

The Sienna... uh no. Tell me.

So, the Sienna Institute is, is a, an Institute organized to help individuals discover their charism.

Oh, right!

Yeah. And so, I think called and gifted is called right called and gifted is really...

Prominently for adults.

I have reached them... reached out to them for teenagers. But it's an adult.

It's really geared for adults. But as, as homeschooling parents, we do need to set that example for our children is we're going to try. So, so it's one of the ways that you can discover as, oh, okay, man. Maybe I'm not meant to organize field trips, but maybe I could have another family or two over and I could teach English, you know, or do a movie study or a book study with, with another couple of families. Right.

So, it helps you discover where your charisms lie and that maybe you're, you're not using them in the best way. You know? Cause if it's, if you're using your charisms, you're using your natural gifts, your supernatural gifts, you're going to be, it's going to be life-giving right. So, they're going to gain the people attending, but so are you. Right? And praying, praying, always, you know, being prayerful about what, what are you calling me to Lord? You know, what are you calling my family to?

I think one of the other things that you mentioned that I love too, is this idea that you don't have to do it perfectly. Right?

I don't anything perfectly, but I do get lots of things done. What's there's this, there's a saying the enemy of perfect. What's the saying the enemy of done is perfect.

It's something like that.

Something like that. Yeah. I'll have to, I'll have to find the quote and you can put it in your show notes, but it's so true that if we, if we think that that's, it has to be perfect then, well, you know, you're almost, you're almost done before you start.

Exactly. And that's advice. So, it's like, just try it. And you know, it may be a disaster of a gathering and, you know, to be honest, there were, there were some, some situations where there were family, you know, I invited a family over and for us, we would do things as simple as, you know, we always slowed down on Sundays, we'd go to Mass and we would just have a brunch, you know, brunches like simple, easy. We can always scramble up a bunch of eggs, get some orange juice, a few rolls...

People can Dodge early if they're not having fun.

Exactly! So, it was always a great, easy way for us to get to know other families, even just to become well-acquainted people in our parish. But it was definitely sometimes you just, it didn't, you know, it just didn't click. And that was okay. That was okay to do that. We, we invite, and I guess that was one of the other things, the importance of invitation. Yeah.

Yeah. And that does not have to be formal. You can say to another family, hey, you want to meet us at a park? We're going to bring sandwiches. You know, you don't have to have people over for dinner. If you feel like that's going to stress you out, don't do things that will stress you out, but do things that will de-stress you, right.

Yes, exactly. And I think especially one of the things I really wanted to bring this into the conversation is because again, as we're, we're going to be broadcasting, this, this is going to be close to the time we're having the spiritual conference, which really got started in the middle of lockdowns and shutdowns and loneliness. And people are really that much more hungry for togetherness. So, I really, really wanted to just get people to be able to... you know, be inspired by your, your mission there, your experience and our experience, as well as the beauty of just having friends for life by just the simple invitation. So, what were some of the activities that you guys would do together? I know you talked about what was it maybe a gym day or...

Yeah, we always had, have had a gym night and I mean, COVID has been the first time that has not happened. Right. So, there's always, and, and, and it's an event that we're doing. It's, it's, you know, run by Catholics. It's very informal, but if there were other homeschoolers in the community or whatever that wanted to come or other people from our parish who weren't homeschooling, who wanted to come, that was fine. As long as they understood, you know, that this is, you know, this is what we do. Right.

And however, that plays out, you know, just be content with it, right. Well, our regular things where like a gym night, we had a lake... or our parish still owns it, but it has unfortunately been locked down the last couple of years, we had a, a property on the lake that was like a park. And so, our rectory was there. So, the priests lived there, and we would just meet at the lake on hot nights. We have tried to open up our yard to some degree, of course, this all happened with a pandemic, so that hasn't worked out. It was only worked out a few times.

But when we get back, we're just leaving on a long road trip. But when we get back, our plan is to have like one evening a week that everybody just gathers at our, you know, in our backyard, we pray a Rosary and have fun together. So that kind of thing, but also just meet ups at parks and that sort of thing on the day-to-day.

The other kinds of things that went on was like, I've always run a co-op. So, in some years it's different, like at whatever, you know, whatever I've got in front of me and whatever I want to accomplish with my kids, I just say, hey, do you want to, you know, you have a dozen families, your kids want to learn how to write an essay or do they want to do some speed charts or whatever.

So, and there were other parents who did similar things, Hey, they're really into biology. Hey, I can run some labs, you know, would your kids like to come that sort of thing? And then we had some annual things that were, were really special and like the camp that I was telling you about. So, it was like a week-long camp. I hired a cook, so the moms didn't have to cook.

And the beautiful thing, we have a Christmas ball, my husband and I ballroom dance. So, over the years we taught all our teenagers to, to ballroom dance, like our own and, and the community. And so, we thought, well, if we're going to teach them to dance, we might as well give them a, a venue. And so, we have this beautiful Christmas ball every year, which is fantastic. And again, you know, right. From babies to grandparents' kind of thing, come to that, you know? So that, that sort of thing, if something's very sort of big and splashy and some things just really simple little, you know, do you want to get together?

And with, you know, my friend, Lori, that was in the podcast episode, her and I used to get together, and we would make like, pre-made breakfast, we'd make a bunch of banana bread. And we make a bunch of crisp topping and things like that, just so we could get together, the kids could play, and we could actually help our homeschooling by the fact that we had just gotten together and made a bunch of breakfast, right. Like 30 breakfasts or whatever, you know, so it can be simple or complex. Right?

Right, right. Very, very reminiscent our area. We would get together on first Fridays. And it was really also a really great way because a lot of families had hard times with many children to get to them, to confession. So, we would round Robin to all the different churches in the area. And so, this way the families would get to experience confession as a family together, if it wasn't readily available. And we always needed at a really great family time. So yes, it was that ability to do things that are up to the faith, sometimes more of an academic nature. So yeah, the door is wide open. Yeah. I really see Bonnie, it came from your heart, it came from the needs of your family, and you just extended those invitations.

Yeah, really. It was that simple.

Right. So, I know, as I said, I had mentioned before you are going to be speaking at the Catholic Homeschool conference, give us a little bit of a taste of what is that going to be, you're going to be doing a workshop, correct? Yeah.

Yeah. So, I'm going to, it's going to be one of the live workshops and it is on high school, which is lovely because I think that homeschooling is such a gift and something I've really found joyful, being able to homeschool your kids through high school is just a really remarkable thing.

And I don't think nearly as difficult as what you would anticipate. Right. And I feel like it was those opportunities, those conversations that I had with my teenagers and those nighttime, you know, chats with my husband and I, that closeness has really played a well in their adult life, you know, and feel so grateful for that, you know, and grateful to be able to provide them with a beautiful education as well.

But it was the relationships that I think were, were, you know, really awesome. And another thing is in there's bumpy times, you know, in the teen years and young adult years, there's bumpy times, they're figuring out who they are and what kind of person they are and what they're going to keep and not keep from, from, you know, how they've been raised. But if you can ride those bumps with them, you will come out stronger than the other end. Right. So, like your toddler toddlerhood is great, great training for teenagers.

Yes, yes. It is in a very different way. But, but you, you know, the point of the matter being is you really do have a limited amount of time with your children and, and they are, I love the teen years just seeing them, trying to, you know, be the little birds, trying to test out their wings, but still staying relatively close to the nest. And can't say, this enough, you can't underestimate our children's needs to get to know us.

Exactly in a more adult way, for sure. You know, it plays right back into community too. When you're talking with teaching high school, homeschooling high school is that if you go back to that community, that effort that you made when they were young to develop community, those are the kids they go off to college with. Those are the kids they take holidays with. Those are the kids, they, they become, you know, part of their social circle.

And we're seeing that now because our, you know, older kids are all having babies and they're getting, you know, they're, they're developing their adult friendships as mothers now, you know, and... my son's on a road trip right now with one of the boys he was homeschooled with, you know, they're 22, 23 and, and they're driving across Canada, you know, and you just can't undervalue that, like what a beautiful thing to have those kinds of high school bonds, right?

Yes, absolutely. And we have seen the same exact thing in our own family as well.

Yeah. So, I guess snapshot of the talk, I guess, hoping for, to kind of encourage people and lift them up about creating a joyful education for their high schoolers Yes.

And, and you're right. I agree. It's not as difficult as you think. Of course, we have that lofty position because we now have married kids in this and truly believe us. It really isn't as hard as you think. And really, when you think about it. I always say to people tend to look more at the curriculum and I love Bonnie that you brought right there in the forefront. It's really about relationships, relationships with God and relationships with parents, with other friends, it's really the most important.

So, I will also be speaking any moms panel at the conference going live.

Oh awesome, ok.

Yeah. With Jen Macintosh and Danielle Bean, and I will be answering questions in the Q and A kind of mom panel. So, we're really, really looking forward to that as well. I do want to, again, mention that Bonnie has a podcast Make Joy Normal. Where can people find you Bonnie? What is the best place for them to find you?

Yeah. It's just, well, if you can go to my website, BonnieLandry.ca there's a direct link to the podcast there. The podcast address is www dot Bonnie Landry... No, it's not! www.makejoynormal.buzzsprout.com.

Okay, great. But we will put the links, so you don't have to worry and write it down under this video here. We do appreciate you coming to speak with us. One more thing. I would just like to say, if you're meeting a young family who wants to form community, what would be just one thing I know to kind of sum it up that you would like to leave this little talk with for that young family that says I want to find community.

Yeah. I mean, the first thing I would do is, is pray about it. Right? Always pray about finding community where, where lead us Lord, right. To where we need to be. But I think the second thing we can do is to, to find out which churches in our area, and it might not be the closest one to you where the homeschoolers hang out, because there's often a church within a, you know, an hour's radius where they will tend to migrate towards, you know, and often that starts because there's just two or three families homeschooling that go there. And so that's where people end up and that's usually where it'll start. And then it might turn out that, oh, actually you live in my neighborhood, even though you're coming to this church, you live in my neighborhood, so we should start getting together. Right. So, a good place to start.

That is beautiful. Yes. And I also do want to mention to the people who are watching this, that, you know, there is the Catholic Homeschool Community. We do have the feature in the community that you can find members near me. And we are starting, we've started a group of homeschool leaders, and this is a small group. And again, to share some of the things, and I hope Bonnie to invite you into that group as well, you had mentioned about, you know, how to run an event and things like that. We can share tips and guides and learn from each other. So, there will be, it's a free group it's within there and homeschool leaders from around the world and build each other up again.

Thank you so much for joining me. Thanks for having me. Thank you. And may God bless you abundantly.

Thanks! God bless, Paola.

Bye. Bye.