

The Faith of Mike Pence

He's been called a zealot, an extremist, a fanatic and a closet theocrat. Vice President Mike Pence describes himself differently: "I'm a Christian, conservative and Republican—in that order."

To many believers, Pence is an exemplary model of a Christian in the White House, in a nation that grows more and more biblically illiterate every year. Yet Pence has traveled a rough road to evolve into the man of God he is today. That's what makes him so vocal about his faith.

Early Years

Ed and Nancy Pence had six kids—four boys and two girls—with Mike being the third in succession. Raised in a second-generation Irish, Roman Catholic home, the Pence children attended church every Sunday and often several times during the week, once the boys were old enough to serve as altar boys. All of the kids attended parochial school, where they were instructed on how to follow a morally correct life. Those lessons were reinforced in their home, where Pence was taught, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48b, NIV).

The children worked hard in school and faithfully served in the community. But as Pence matured into a teenager, he says he strayed from Catholicism.

"I grew up in a wonderful church family," Pence says. "But I walked away from that when I was in high school. I had no interest in faith. I thought it was for other people."

Pence graduated high school in 1977 and began attending Hanover College that fall. The following January, he pledged Phi Gamma Delta.

Daniel Murphy, a friend and former fraternity brother, says he and Pence bonded over history and their shared Catholic faith, and took multiple classes together. Murphy says Pence agonized over his future calling on whether he should become a priest or go into politics.

Although Pence continued to attend Mass, he admits he struggled spiritually. He was yearning for something more; he just didn't know what.

"Mom and Dad had strong faith, but for me, I found that something was missing as I came up," Pence says. "I went off to college and had largely walked away from the faith that I was raised to believe in."

While at college, Pence began to meet other young adults who seemed to have a different kind of faith than he'd experienced while growing up.

"I began to meet young men and women who talked about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ," Pence says. "While I cherish my Catholic upbringing and the foundation that it poured into my faith, that had not been a part of my experience."

Friend and fellow fraternity brother Mike Stevens, who was also raised Roman Catholic, knew exactly how Pence felt. He personally declared Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior in high school during a Fellowship of Christian Athletes event.

"Mike and I drew that parallel very quickly," Stevens says. "We had a lot of talks about growing up in the Catholic Church. For me, there was an institutional faith versus a personal faith, and we talked a lot about that."

Around that time, Pence was invited to attend an evening Christian fellowship group called Vespers with another fraternity brother, John Gable. The lessons at the weekly service stirred something within him.

"He started asking a lot more questions, and he started reading the Bible a little bit," Stevens says. "I don't think he'd read the Bible very much prior to coming to college. He started digging into the Scriptures, and it started becoming more real to him. It was a different approach to the Christian faith than he had growing up."

One day, Pence noticed Gable wore a cross around his neck.

"I said, 'John, I've decided I'm going to go ahead and be a Christian,'" Pence says. "I said, 'Where'd you get that good cross? Because I want to go ahead and be Christian now.'"

Pence kept bugging Gable about getting a cross necklace. Eventually, Gable turned to Pence and said, "You know you've got to wear it in your heart before you wear it around your neck."

"It just hit me," Pence says. "I think I stood there for 10 minutes because I felt like he just kind of pulled the curtain aside, and he looked right at me and said, 'I see you. I see you for where you really are.'"

A few weeks later, Stevens invited Pence to attend the annual Ichthus Christian music festival in Wilmore, Kentucky. It was there that Pence's life was transformed.

"I heard lots of great singing, and I heard lots of wonderful preaching," Pence says, "On Saturday night [while] sitting in a light rain, ... my heart really finally broke with a deep realization [that] what had happened on the cross, in some infinitesimal way, had happened for me. And I gave my life and made a personal decision to trust Jesus Christ as my Savior."

Friend and fraternity brother Jay Steger says it was a turning point for Pence.

"I will tell you that it was very significant for Mike," Steger says. "It wasn't a step—it was a leap. ... It unleashed a

deep passion in him.”

Political Dreams

After Pence graduated from Hanover, he decided against becoming a priest. Instead, he worked at the college for a couple of years as an admissions counselor before attending the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law. It was during that time that he met Karen. They were married in June 1985 as he was finishing up his last year of law school.

Pence got a job at a prestigious law firm in Indianapolis, but it didn't take him long to figure out that law was not his forte. To stimulate his interests, he went to John Sweezy, who served as the Marion County Republican chairman for more than 28 years.

“What should I be doing now if I want to run for Congress in my 50s?” Pence asked him.

“You should run for Congress now,” Sweezy replied.

After getting over his initial shock from Sweezy's response, Pence accepted the challenge. He ran in 1988 to represent Indiana's second district in the U.S. House of Representatives. While still working his job at the firm, Pence ran a campaign based on personability, integrity and wholesomeness. He won the Republican primary and went toe-to-toe with incumbent Democrat Phil Sharp. Though he lost, it was the closest race in the district's history. He was far from a loser in his fellow Republicans' eyes.

So it came as no surprise to anyone when, six months after his first campaign, Pence filed the necessary paperwork to make another run for Congress. This time, he quit his job at the law firm and committed to campaigning full-time.

Somewhere in the race, however, Pence lost his way, putting aside his faith and wholesome image. Ambition got the best of

him, and he stopped seeking God's guidance and listening for His "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12b, MEV). Instead, Pence chose to listen to Washington insiders. They advised him to go negative and personally attack Sharp. The persona Pence had built during his first campaign went by the wayside. As a result, the race is remembered as one of the nastiest in Indiana history. He ended up losing to Sharp by 19 points.

After the campaign, Pence fell into a dark place emotionally and spiritually.

"It was a terrible experience—a bloodbath," Pence says.

He takes full responsibility for the campaign and says he's still disappointed in himself for allowing it to get out of hand.

"We lost the race and lost our mission—to honor God and love your neighbor as yourself," Pence says. "We scarcely did that."

It was, he admits, a moral disaster.

Steger says Pence's confrontation with his campaign behavior in relation to his faith was life-altering.

"It was a huge turning point in his life to say, 'What kind of leader do I want to be? What kind of person am I?'" Steger says. "And effectively, he just realized, 'I just threw the whole spiritual side of me out the window because I wanted to be a congressman.'"

God convicted Pence for the way he handled the campaign, and Pence acutely felt that conviction in his soul.

"He was in real pain during that time," Steger says. "There was very serious soul-searching as he worked his way through that loss and the behavior. He thought about what he should have done versus what he did, who he was listening to [and] who he should have been listening to. He was humbled."

Pence prayed, "Lord, what was I supposed to learn from this?" This post-election reflection took some time.

"This wasn't something that took a week or two or three to figure out," Steger says. "This was a long, difficult ... dark [time]. *I've lost my way, who am I?* Mike said to himself, *What do I really want?*"

Pence felt separated from God because he knew he'd sinned against Him and his opponent, Sharp. In his repentance, he asked God for His forgiveness and then felt compelled to personally go to Sharp and seek his forgiveness as well. It was then that Pence made a spiritual commitment that no matter what, his faith in God would come first, above and beyond all things—and he says he hasn't wavered from it since, in or outside of politics.

Because of that, Steger says the aftermath of Pence's second congressional run changed him forever.

"He went from being a talented, articulate, hard-working, pretty aggressive young man to a humble adult and ... a humble Christian," Steger says.

Changed Man

Shortly afterwards, Pence was offered the job as the first president for the Indiana Policy Review think tank. During his first year, he wrote an essay titled "Confessions of a Negative Campaigner." The essay received national attention for its humility, transparency and remorseful tone. Pence began the essay with 1 Timothy 1:15 (NASB): "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." That verse would go on to grace the walls of his office for dozens of years to come as a reminder to walk righteously before the Lord.

After a successful career in radio, Pence was approached by

then-Congressman David McIntosh, who wanted to run for governor of Indiana. He wanted Pence to run for his congressional seat. It took months of prayer and convincing for Mike and Karen Pence to agree to run a third time. This time, Pence won the seat. When giving his acceptance speech, he made sure to point to God.

“My faith in Jesus Christ, the God of second chances, who granted us not so much victory as the grace to run a campaign of integrity—we’ll give Him the glory first,” Pence said.

After serving 12 years in Congress, Pence ran for governor of Indiana and led the state for four years before he was asked by presidential candidate Donald Trump to run as his vice president.

Though Pence’s convictions have cost him the backlash of secular media and left-wing advocates, conservative evangelicals across the country have praised his biblical stances. I interviewed almost 60 people—friends, family and colleagues from both sides of the aisle—for my book, *The Faith of Mike Pence*, and they repeatedly said Pence is genuine, godly and loving to people, regardless of their diverse beliefs.

Regarding any future ambitions, Pence says it’s not his decision what happens next. That’s up to God.

“As a Christian, when I made a decision to put my life in God’s hands, it was part of what I think is really a transaction, in which a believer says, ‘I will endeavor now both on my knees and opening up the [Bible] to discern what You want me to do,’ as opposed to getting up every day and deciding what I want to do,” Pence says. “For me and my house, we serve the Lord. And we will always make every effort, with deep humility, to discern whenever we can what God requires of us, what our faith requires of us in any situation, and then put feet on that and make that real.” {eo}

Leslie Montgomery is the author and ghostwriter of over a dozen books, including *The Faith of Condoleezza Rice*. She has written for *Focus on the Family* for over 20 years. Her new book, *The Faith of Mike Pence (Whitaker House)*, releases in August 2019. For more information, visit .

CHARISMA is the only magazine dedicated to reporting on what the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of believers around the world. If you are thirsty for more of God's presence and His Holy Spirit, subscribe to *CHARISMA* and join a family of believers that choose to live life in the Spirit. [CLICK HERE](#) for a special offer.