

Have you had a person pop up numerous times and places in your life? Several times in different locations? I have and that person is my good friend Pat O'Connor.

To give some background:

My name is Barney Gallagher, and I'm glad to be a member of our parish because of the active and interesting parishioners and priests we have. I've been a Catholic since I was baptized as an infant and, looking back at this point, it's relatively easy for me to recognize that God's given me more than my fair share of love. I have had a blessed life – loving parents who provided well for me, three siblings that I love and enjoy to this day, a wonderful wife who's tolerated me for 15 years (and claims that she's good for the duration), and two kids who are healthy and are generally trying to do right. So, God has clearly been good to me thus far – I can see that. "Hindsight is 20/20," as one of my high school history teachers, Barney DiBlasi, used to say.

Today's Responsorial Psalm response from Psalm 85 was "Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation." It's been harder for me to see God's kindness active in my life as it's happening, as I am interacting with someone, as I am involved with daily concerns. To the degree that I have allowed myself to see God acting in my life, it's been through relationships. Those people that have been in my life (parents, teachers, teammates, neighbors, acquaintances, etc.) - their temperaments, their passions, their hang-ups, and the activities we've done together – have given me insight into who God is and who he intends me to be.

When Fr. Pat asked for stories of God acting in one's life, my mind quickly went to a particular relationship in my life. I know that I should say that relationship is with my wife Karen! God's certainly been active in that relationship and I am grateful every

day, but my thoughts actually turned to my friendship with Pat O'Connor. Pat's someone that I never went to school with, worked with, or lived in the same town as. However, he is one of the great friends in my life. You could say that I couldn't avoid being good friends with him.

Here's how the story goes...

- As a sophomore in college, Pat's sister told me that her brother was visiting during Spring Break and that I ought to meet him because he was going to do a study abroad program in Ireland the next year, just as I was – so I met him and had a good conversation but not enough to keep in touch...
- While in Ireland, he and I ran into each other once – at the American ambassador's house for Thanksgiving - and had a good conversation but not enough to stay in touch...
- After graduating college, I entered the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and at orientation, who did I run into but Pat?! He and I and several others hit it off pretty well for the weekend of orientation, but then we parted ways to our placements in Alaska – him to Nome and me to Fairbanks. We wrote a letter or two but not enough to stay in close touch...
- After my experience as a volunteer in Alaska, I moved back home to the Bay Area. A couple of months later, my sister and I went to an Irish Festival in San Francisco and who was there? Yes, Pat O'Connor! This time, he and I couldn't get over the number of "random" meetings in various locations, and we decided that we

were somehow meant to be friends. He and I spent a lot of time together playing basketball and having fun and exploring.

- Life changes led him to move back to his hometown of Yakima, Washington and me to move out here to Wisconsin but we have maintained a close friendship over the last 20 years – both of us being in each others' weddings and me being the godfather of his oldest child.

Pat and his awesome wife, Patricia, have six children and they are loving parents who are often overwhelmed by the sheer amount of life around them. However, Pat and I have been able to grow our friendship over the years through “nothing to say” phone calls and almost completely unplanned get-togethers, usually involving one of our common interests, basketball.

- Pat's reappearance in my life were obvious signs to me of God's work, and I am certainly thankful for it. Have you also had a person in your life that has popped up a number of times and places? Why do you think God had that happen? If God has blessed you with your own “Pat O'Connor,” please treasure that friendship. I think in doing so, you are not only honoring your friend but God. In closing, I would like to pray the refrain from the Responsorial Psalm once again, “Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.”