

# Young couple finds love and faith in community

Jay Malin and Kaitlyn Baier each found “The One,” but it wasn’t on their timeline.

The Edmonton couple married on Sept. 26 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help church in Sherwood Park.

They met at St. Thomas More parish’s young adults group. Then they saw each other again on a camping trip for young adults a year-and-a-half ago. Their relationship is a testament to having faith, connecting as young Catholics, and finding love particularly when you’re not looking.

“It’s not so much the camping trip,” said Jay. “I wasn’t going there to look for anything specific. I allowed things to happen in God’s time, not mine. I needed to be open to His opportunities, because if I closed myself off to people, I would have never gotten here.”

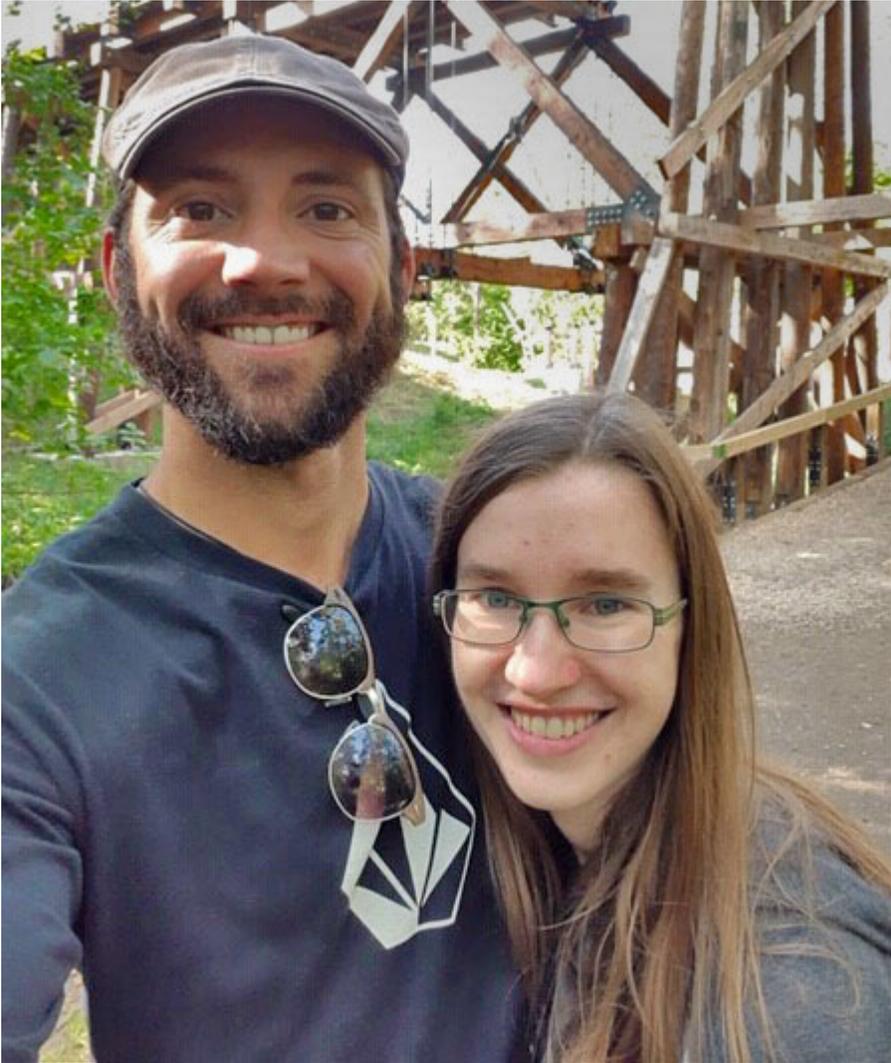
Kaitlyn, 28, is a chaplain at the Edmonton Remand Centre who will graduate from Newman Theological College with a master of divinity degree. Her new husband Jay, 31, works as a carpenter while also studying at the University of Alberta to be a dietitian.

Both were invited separately to a three-day prayer and fellowship camping trip near Drayton Valley on July 26-28. It was organized in part by Rev. JD Carmichael, then still a deacon.

Jay knew the informal group of about 20 people from St. Theresa’s and St. Thomas parishes and Newman Theological College, because the group had attended World Youth Day 2016, travelling together in Poland. Malin had led the young adult group from St. Theresa’s parish until 2017. He also had invited along a few friends who weren’t Catholic.

For their part, Jay and Kaitlyn knew of each other and had similar circles of friends. The pair spent the weekend together, within the larger group, but were always close.

Kaitlyn was attracted to Jay. But Jay was unaware. He was there for tenting, prayer and fellowship.



Jay and Kaitlyn joined other young people camping near Drayton Valley. Courtesy of Kaitlyn Baier

"I was really looking forward to playing guitar, doing some praise and worship with people around a campfire," Jay said. "Some of my friends, they weren't Catholic and I wanted to expose them to some prayer and some Catholic friends that I had. Catholics are cool too."

"I actually decided to go to specifically spend more time with him, but he did not know that yet!" Kaitlyn said.

"And that was definitely not my intention," Jay added. "I was glad that she was going, but I didn't know her very well yet. I didn't really know what to expect. It wasn't like I went on the camp trip solely to steal her away or anything, like what happened."

On that Saturday, it was raining. Most of the others had gone into Drayton Valley. Later, Kaitlyn decided to go for a nighttime walk along the North Saskatchewan River and Jay didn't want her to go alone.

"We're looking at the river and, in the darkness, it seemed to me like Kaitlyn was somehow moving closer. I was standing still," Jay recalled. "I took a step back and it took her maybe 10 minutes. We were there for quite a while. We were kind of talking, but most of the time just listening to the river."

Kaitlyn inched closer. Jay moved slightly. Then she moved even closer and he knew it was on purpose.

"You moved close enough that you were nearly touching me. I could hear you breathing," Jay told Kaitlyn as they recall the story. "She's obviously doing this on purpose."

"Jay is a narrative communicator, so when he says we stood quietly by the river, that's not what was happening," Kaitlyn laughed.

Jay talked about snowboarding, sports injuries and road trips. For him, the conversation was scaled back because he didn't know her that well. "I was trying not to be 'that guy who talked too much.'"

# Beginning of Mass



# End of Mass



Friends knew that Jay and Kaitlyn would make a great couple. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

On the Sunday, the campers went to Mass at St. Anthony's parish in Drayton Valley. On the drive there, Jay's friend Lincoln Ho confronted him. Later, others did too. *(Full disclosure: Lincoln is a communications coordinator with the Archdiocese of Edmonton).*

"We get in the car and as soon as the door shuts, Lincoln's like 'Who's Kaitlyn?'" Jay said. "He said 'Jay, you've spent almost every waking moment of the camping trip with her'. And I said 'No I haven't' because it felt like I hardly got to see her. It really didn't feel like, I really didn't feel like, [it was] that much time together."

In the church, Kaitlyn left a space beside her so that Jay could sit down. By the end of Mass, Jay was scrunched against the handrail of the pew. "She's sitting so that her arm is almost on top of my leg.

"That's when I really knew 'I need to do something here because she's clearly interested'."

Back at the camp site, Kaitlyn helped Jay pack up the huge amount of camping gear he brought.

"I laughed at how funny God's timing is," said Kaitlyn. "I had been on a few dates in the past month trying to use Facebook dating to meet some people. And here was Jay. I felt like God was saying 'Stop it. Here, I just gave you one.'"

"I was like, 'OK, I would really like to get to know you more, but it's seven-o'clock now. We need to leave,'" Jay recalled. "And she said 'What are you going to do about it?' and I was like 'I don't know. I'll ask you out'. She said 'You should do that'."

Jay and Kaitlyn went for her birthday dinner only days later. Looking back, Kaitlyn said the camping trip was an opportunity for them, as young adults, to talk openly about faith together.

Both of them have, and they continue to experience that. As a couple, Jay and Kaitlyn are now members of the young adults group at St. Thomas More parish – although the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily stopped the in-person meetings.

"There are lots of little groups as young adults, but there's nothing tying them together," Jay said. "I think that has a lot to do with the nature of young adults in general. Our lives become busier and busier as we get older. This age, from 18 to 30, in hindsight doesn't really last that long.

"Even if you've been attending a group for five years, the people that come into that group and that are revitalizing that group, there's a big age gap there. There's not a large chunk of the same-age people because it seems like, in Edmonton anyway, there's a lack of structure bringing those age groups

together.”



Jay and Kaitlyn were married by Rev. Jim Corrigan at Our Lady of Perpetual Help church. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Jay said there are “tons” of young adults who are interested in faith, but it’s keeping them that’s the challenge. As a former young adult leader at St. Theresa’s parish, Jay said more than 30 people attended their first meeting in 2016. Now it’s less than 10. At St. Thomas More, there is a consistent group of about 20 but the group doesn’t see each of them consistently.

“You never want a young adults group to be about the group,” Kaitlyn cautioned. “It’s never just about fellowship. You have to convince young adults that they need Christ and that the best way to grow closer to Christ is to be journeying with other people who are also trying to get to Him.

“You don’t go to young adults for socializing. You go to young adults for sanctification. If you’re going for socializing, you’re go to give up if ‘the right people’ aren’t coming. If you’re going for sanctification, you’re going to be the right person, so more people keep coming.”

The new couple hope their love story shows that life doesn’t always happen on their terms.

“For me, it’s being reminded that it’s OK to trust God take care of you,” Kaitlyn said. “I was going out of my way to try and find someone to be my companion. And this one was waiting for me already.”