I was in my office preparing for ministry when I received a phone call from a friend who was medical director of a hospice. She asked if I would mind visiting with a patient of hers. It seemed that the young patient had isolated himself from his family members and had not spoken to them for some time.

“This book is dedicated to my mom and dad who have always inspired me to look beyond the ordinary. They challenged me to look for opportunities I would never have experienced without taking a leap of faith. This story is not that different from what my entire family experienced every year during Midnight Mass in our community church.

A good friend once told me that everyone has a story to tell; all we need to do is listen. I have been a parish priest and a hospice chaplain. The tired, often pained expressions I encountered in the places where I ministered told a thousand stories of lives filled with untold hardships, of wondering and wandering in search of the meaning of it all. Far too many do not realize that they are in fact looking for God. Their desire was to find someone trustworthy to whom they could communicate their troubles and woes. They had no interest in nor would they necessarily comprehend complex theology. “Just be,” is the way my friend phrased it.

Some bore the visible and invisible scars of pain, rejection, loneliness, abuse, and turmoil that they had endured. For those hurting souls, the path to a new life became possible and clearer only when their ears were opened and their eyes were wiped clean. It is through faith awakening that they began to discover that there may be more than trials and tribulations to this life.

I am no longer a chaplain in healthcare; my current ministry is to help feed the hungry. I continue to believe my calling is to help open up to people the wonderful mysteries of a life filled with God. We are all called to the incredible task of helping introduce those who are lost and wandering to the Divine; to bring them face-to-face with God.

I have endeavored to write my stories with all these folks in mind, especially those who do not walk the common path. Moreover, it is my fervent hope to help people discern more clearly God’s presence in their lives. I am not different from most of the people I talk about in these stories. If they learn from me, that is wonderful, for I also learn a great deal from them. They help me understand that the most important piece of ministry is not so much what I say, but more of how much I listen. Not so much that I tell them about the God I know, but that I help them understand the God they know. He is in all of us; sometimes we just need help identifying Him.”

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Manuel

Manuel Casias was raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico’s South Valley. He attended Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, received his Masters of Divinity in 1996 from the Oblate School of Theology, and Masters in Management in 2002. Manuel was the Vice President/Director of the Albuquerque Hispano Chamber of Commerce from 2009 to 2012. He is currently the Vice President of Development for St. Felix Pantry in Rio Rancho, New Mexico. The Pantry provides food for nearly 52,000 client/households annually.

Angie Casias, mother of the author, painted the pictures in this book and has studied art and painting in Albuquerque for 35 years. She has a B.A. in Business and has been a lifelong New Mexican. Angie is the mother of five children, including twin Manuel. She paints mostly New Mexico churches and has painted portraits of all twelve of her grandchildren. Book illustrations are a new challenge to her because they involve telling a story in pictures.