

# BEING PRESENT TO BELIEF & UNBELIEF

My first year at a Catholic college was a wonderful experience. I soaked in all of the theology courses I could and applied my inquisitive mind to the new information and insights being offered. It wasn't too long, however, before my questions led me to a place of real doubt. I felt many long-held beliefs and understandings beginning to crack. Some even crumbled completely. It was a strange time—both scary and exciting.

Fortunately, I was surrounded by professors who recognized the growth that was occurring because of my education. They made it extremely easy for me to explore my

questions, surface my concerns, and give voice to my doubts. In fact, one professor—a religious sister—recognized the struggle and suggested we go for a walk around campus. **What an incredible opportunity it was to walk beside her, pouring out my soul and holding nothing back.**

At one point I exclaimed, "I think I need to become Jewish!" She didn't laugh or argue that I must hold fast to the Catholic faith. Instead, I looked over and saw tears in her eyes. She explained that she was moved by my honesty, my willingness to dive into the search, and my deep desire





# STEVEN ELLAIR

to be authentic. Then she said, "Well, I have the perfect rabbi for you to talk to."

**It's important to continually remind ourselves that our students all come with very different levels of belief and unbelief.** We know that not every student in our school is Catholic and we also know that not every student believes in God.

**Can we be present to all of the students no matter where they are on their journey?** Can we create an environment where exploring questions and doubts is welcomed and even encouraged? If we can, I dare say we

are addressing an essential component of truly excellent Catholic education.

*(By the way, I never did become Jewish. The simple act of having someone present to my belief and unbelief propelled me more deeply into my own Catholic faith. Shortly thereafter, I changed my major to theology.)*

Steven Ellair is the Director of Content Development at Saint Mary's Press and has worked in Catholic publishing for nearly 17 years. His previous work includes being a teacher, youth minister, and archdiocesan educational consultant.

