

The Coming Home Network

NOVEMBER 2005 NEWSLETTER

Journeys Home

From the Prairies to the Mountains to Rome

by Father Jay Longacre



What can I say: I loved to run. In early December, 1977, Barbara and I were in Hawaii so that I could run in the Honolulu Marathon, but I was determined to pursue “adventure running.” After the Race, one gentleman asked me, “If you could do anything you wanted, what is it you would do?”

Without hesitating I replied, “I would run from Kathmandu to the Base Camp at the foot of Mt. Everest.” He asked, “What is holding you back?” “I need to talk with runners who have been there before.”

To my surprise, this man supplied what I needed by connecting me with friends who had been on the 1976 U.S. Expedition to Mt. Everest. Barbara and I spent New Year’s Eve 1977 gathering information. My plan was to run the Boston Marathon in April and then immediately after fly to Kathmandu, and by God’s grace this is exactly what I did. At 6:00 p.m. April 19, I ran out of Kathmandu on the Chinese Road, headed for Kala Patar (Black Rock) a mountain the peak of which at 18,200 feet looks down on the Base Camp.

During the run, I observed the Sherpas in their various rituals of Buddhist prayer and this perked my interest. Over the next three years, I studied Buddhist philosophy, the teachings of the Buddha, learned a little Tibetan, and, most important of all, began daily meditation. Little did

I know what lay in store for me on a subsequent trip to Nepal.

But maybe I ought to digress a bit. I had been baptized and raised a Presbyterian (USA). My entire family—parents and grandparents—were Presbyterians. My father was an elder and had helped found a United Presbyterian Church in Indiana. We were Sunday church goers, and I was active in youth fellowship. I never felt close to Jesus, however, until I tried living without Him for these two

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years studying Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhism does not have Jesus or God. Buddha was only a teacher who taught the human persons could reach enlightenment through their own resources and devices. I did not believe that. I did, however, learn meditation and since have learned that meditation has always been a part of authentic Christian spirituality.

In the summer of 1981, my son Timothy accompanied us to Nepal to run two treks around the Lantang Himal and around the Annapurna Massif. The first run of 200 miles required 5 and half days, but had little spiritual value. The second run of 300 miles required 7 and a half days and changed my life forever.

It had been raining for more than seven hours. It was pitch dark with no moon and the fog reduced our vision even more. I continued repeating the same plea I had been praying all that night: “Lord, please find it in your heart to keep us safe. Whatever happens, don’t let anything happen to Timothy. Keep us safe, Lord, and I’ll turn my life over to you.”

About 11:00 p.m., I raised my arm and to my surprise felt a brick “wall” on our left, all the time continuing to walk in lockstep up the mountain. This was the first evidence that people were nearby. Almost immediately, we heard two dogs barking nearby, so we started yelling.

We came upon a village of two smalls homes and our yelling had awakened people in both homes. A woman in the second home invited us in out of the dark and rain. She told us that we could sleep on the rocky but dry floor in the food storeroom. Our hostess stoked the fire, dried our running gear, and cooked us food at midnight. What a blessing!

Timothy and I arose early the next morning with the sun shining brightly over the Kali Gandaki. The Lord had saved us! Now what must I do? Was He calling my bluff?

Two days later, Timothy left us to return to school in the United States while we returned to Kathmandu. At the American Center there I located the address of Union Theological Seminary, an interdenominational seminary in New York City. I wrote a letter requesting admittance to the M. Div. Program, and about a month later, I received provisional admission. Barbara and I returned to New York City on January 31, 1982 and the next day I began my seminary studies.

During a brief break from the program in 1982, Barbara and I returned to Nepal to adopt our first son, Dawa Lama

Sherpa. While there a Tibetan friend and I traveled to India to visit Buddhist and Christian communities.

During my next two semesters in seminary, I focused primarily on preparation for Presbyterian ordination but I also did “field work” in radio broadcasting. As a Presbyterian seminarian, I also was expected to take at least one course of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). I chose to study at Ft. Logan Mental health Center in Denver where I spent three months working with persons suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. I became so engrossed in my patients’ religious delusions that I wrote my M. Div. thesis on the subject.

When we returned to New York City in the fall of 1983, I decided to earn a joint M. Div/M. Sci. in Social Work at Columbia University. During this period, I assisted with a developing Protestant congregation in Manhattan.

By springtime 1985, we moved to San Francisco after graduation and sought ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA). I wanted to minister to the very poor people in Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka. There we became immersed in Embarcadero Ministries, the umbrella under which we developed projects. Each semester, I would audit a course at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. In the first class, I heard about Christian Base Communities that were developing in Latin America. Shortly, Barbara, Dawa, and I were in Guatemala City helping refugees develop small businesses in Asientimentos surrounding “Guate.”

In association with church-sponsored missions, I visited refugees in Honduras and attended a Christian Peace Conference in Cuba. I was in a refugee camp in Honduras devoted to Nicaraguan refugees when more than 200 “Contras” approached the camp, laid down their arms, and sought asylum. Death was a daily companion.

Most of the people, Catholic and Protestant, with whom I worked in Latin America were “liberationists.” They believed that Jesus Christ has made a deliberate option in favor of poor persons all over the world. I recognized that they believed this because they were typically communists or socialists; I knew better and was neither. Wanting to learn what was behind liberation theology, I went to Barcelona, Spain, to study at the Roman Catholic Faculty of Theology of Catalonia. It was a wonderful experience. I was beginning to understand how easy it is to be a heretic—one had only to say something heretical, which was easy to do when one knew little about the Tradition of the Church and the teaching of the Magisterium.

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WORLD YOUTH DAY 2005



⊕ Clergy ⊕

- ✠ Quo Vadis Youth ✠

- ⊕ Laity ⊕

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In two my of my courses in Barcelona, I had to read and write about John Henry Cardinal Newman, a 19th century Anglican priest who had become a Roman Catholic priest of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. As an Anglican priest, Newman had been seeking a theological middle path between Catholicism on the right and Protestantism on the left. Through his study of the Early Church Fathers, however, Newman realized that he should be seeking “truth” and not the middle way to anything. That hit me like a “ton of bricks!” I had not been searching for truth. In seminary in New York, I had focused on learning enough theology to pass the Presbyterian ordination exams. Only later would I read for “truth.” Following Newman’s train of thought, it became clear to me that I too was a Roman Catholic. However valid the grounds for the Protestant Reformation, times have changed and the Catholic Church has purified itself with the help of God. More important is the unity provided us via the Holy Spirit. Christians are called to unity in the most complete Church--the Catholic Church. Denominations and non-Christian religions have varying amounts of truth, but the Catholic Church is the most complete Church.

As a Protestant (Presbyterian), I did not have the “baggage” that many Protestants carry about the Catholic Church. I always understood Mary to be the Mother of God, because she was the mother of Jesus, who is God. I always understood the Catholic Church as the first Church and the oldest Church. The main question I had concerned submission to the authority of the pope. I surmounted that when I realized that his infallibility is limited and that he does not have an army!

So now what was I to do? I was almost to the end of the 2nd year of a three-year licentiate program and we were in the process of adopting three more boys—two from Nepal and one Tibetan Indian. I decided to take a leave of absence from my studies in Barcelona to return to Buffalo, New York. I kept myself busy with a late-night radio talk show—Dying to Live—talking on the air with persons suffering serious problems. I also became active in Operation Rescue in Buffalo.

At the first major demonstration in April 1992, I was arrested along with 250 others. We were jailed for 24 days. For the first week, we could not change clothes, bathe, or have any contact with friends and relatives. But I did learn the Rosary

While we were in jail, Mother Teresa sent a letter endorsing our activities. Supporters had the letter published in the Buffalo Evening News. On our release, I wrote Mother

Teresa thanking her for her letter telling her about our visits to India. Though we had never visited Calcutta, we knew what her sisters were doing in Guatemala and in Sri Lanka. She replied, inviting us to come to Calcutta to see the work of her sisters there. As soon as we could, we went and while there, she introduced me to Canadian priest who had become an Indian citizen. He was extremely helpful in answering most of our remaining questions about becoming Catholics.

In May of 1993, I completed my studies and returned to Buffalo determined to find a priest who would bring us into the Catholic Church. Shortly thereafter, I read in a Human Life International (HLI) newsletter that an ex-Presbyterian minister, Dr. Scott Hahn, had conducted a seminar at an HLI Conference in Houston. Retrieving their phone number, I called the Hahns in Steubenville, Ohio, to see if they could help us find a priest who could assist us into the Church. This is how we met Father Ray Ryland, a former Episcopal priest (and Vice-President / Chaplain of the *CHNetwork*) who, through the pastoral provision, had received the dispensation and was now a Catholic priest. Through his kind and patient assistance, Barbara and I were received into the Catholic Church in the chapel at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, on September 29, 1993, along with my Aunt Mary Louise Longacre who had been away from the Church for 52 years.

In the fall of 1996, I entered graduate studies at a seminary in Bangalore, India. One day the seminary president pulled me aside and asked if I wanted to become a priest. For years I had been searching for a bishop who would help me, and suddenly here I was introduced to the Most Reverend Gregory Karotemprel, Bishop of the Diocese of Rajkot in the state of Gujarat. After a pleasant four-hour visit, he agreed to initiate the process with the Vatican.

This process still required a boat-load of patience, but in time I learned with great joy from Bishop Gregory that Pope John Paul II had signed his petition to ordain Jay married to Barbara. On June 15, 2002, I was ordained into the Syro-Malabar Rite, in Prem Mandir, the year-old Cathedral in the Bishop’s compound in Rajkot. The next day I went into Rajkot to the old cathedral, which is now a parish church, and said the Latin Mass in English.

Since I first heard the call from the Lord to the ordained priesthood in April 1982, I have tried to do whatever the Lord expects of me. Given my circumstances, there is one thing of which I am certain: I could never have become a priest by my own design. Clearly, it was the work and mercy of the Lord.

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