



December 2015 CHNewsletter

"From Cocaine to Christ"
By John DiMascio..... 1

Featured Resources 2

SIGNPOSTS

*"Follow Jesus Wherever He Leads" —
Interview with Charlotte Ostermann*
By JonMarc Grodi..... 3

"From Cocaine to Christ" continued 5

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



From Cocaine to Christ

By John DiMascio

I was brought up in an Italian Catholic home. I don't recall going to church with my family as a child but my grandmother was always praying and taught me to pray. Beyond that, we never really practiced our faith as a family.

I was enrolled in a parochial school in 1969. This was shortly after Vatican II and things were confusing in those days. In grammar school we had mostly "old school" Dominican nuns and were fed a steady diet of fire and brimstone. I remember feeling that God was waiting for me to slip up so He could send me to hell. If I was lucky, I could look forward to a few centuries of purgatory for swearing during recess. In junior high things were different. Matters of faith were reduced to singing "Kumbaya" around the campfire and striving toward a "warm fuzzy" feeling about God.

By the time I was confirmed, I knew enough externals to follow along with the crowd and fake it. The fact is, unfortunately, I was never properly evangelized. Yes, I was told, "Jesus loves you" but no one introduced me to Jesus. Further, His love was presented as being conditional on my behavior. At age thirteen, I suffered the loss of my father. As a result, I developed a rebellious streak. What little evangelization I was receiving, I was not truly open to. It was not long before I fell away completely from the Church.

At age twenty, I was using drugs — I discovered cocaine and it became my drug of choice. I became addicted. A year later I nearly died of an overdose. I had snorted roughly a half-ounce in 24 hours. As

a result, out of fear of death, I stopped using for short periods of time. However, I would return to cocaine over and over again. I had some "dry" periods during which I'd seek out different kinds of highs by starting new jobs or even businesses. After becoming successful, I would find the success as empty as the high the drugs gave. So I'd return to my drug of choice, cocaine.

In 1988 I started to do more and more of the drug and wound up in debt by the end of the year. I had finally hit rock bottom. I knew I needed to change and that I was powerless to do so on my own. As I look back at this period of my life I can see the hand of God allowing this for my own good. Through this experience I was confronted firsthand with what my addiction was doing to me and to other people.

One of my friends had recently overcome his addictions. He had become a "born again" Christian and left the Catholic Church. One evening he shared the gospel, as he understood it, with me. He told me that Jesus loved me unconditionally, that I was in sin, and needed to repent. I could not blame my addiction on anything else but the choices I had made. If I wanted to be free of this pain, I had to take responsibility for my sin and place my life in Jesus' hands. He also

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

made it very clear that he was, and would always remain my friend, whether or not I became “born again.” He assured me that, like Jesus, he loved me unconditionally. He left me with a Bible and that was the end of the conversation. I placed the Bible on the shelf and left it there for a couple of months.

One evening I was sick of being sick and picked up that Bible. I remember being in tears and shaking my fist at God. I challenged Him to reveal Himself to me. I told Him I did not believe what was written in the Bible. I remember saying something like there is no way Noah got all those animals in one boat. But I added that I would read it in an attempt to reach out to God because I knew He could reveal Himself to me through the yellow pages if He so chose.

I read through the Gospel of Matthew that night. Then, for some reason, I decided to skip Mark and Luke and proceeded to John. I noticed there were notes on the sides of the page that led to a series of Scriptures that explained “how to be saved.” They included all the standard evangelical references: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16); “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23); “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For

man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (Rom 10:9-10); “For by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9). And, finally, the story of the Phillipian jailer, who asked in Acts 16:30-31, “What must I do to be saved?” And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.’”

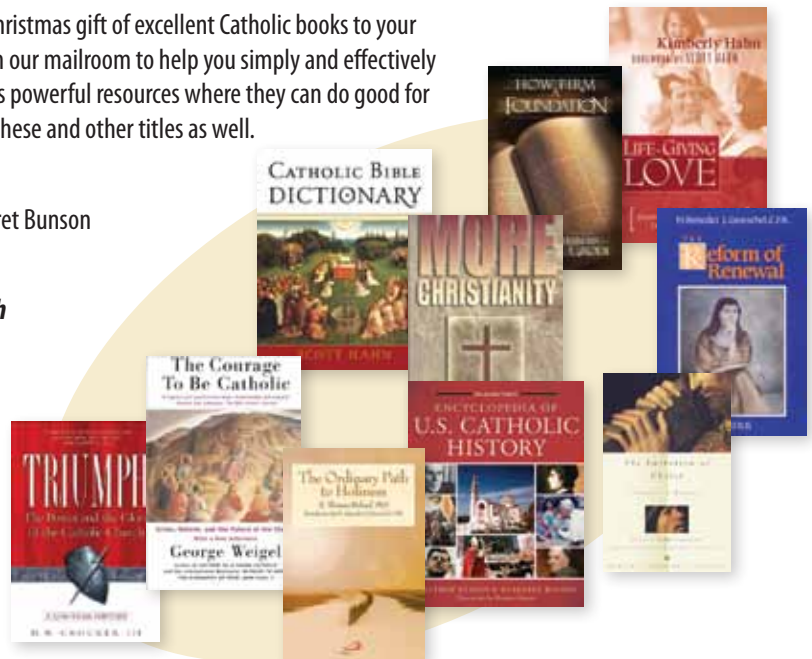
This all seemed too good to be true. The fact that I did not have to earn Jesus’ love and salvation was quite a revelation. At this point, being skeptical, I put the Lord to the test. I said: “Prove it! If this is true, then I don’t have to be a drug addict any more. You can heal or deliver me.” The addiction left me that instant. I felt something jump off my back. And I seem to recall a shriek. And with that, the physical desire for the drug was gone. I never spent a second in a detox center, nor did I ever seek out counseling. Just as the lepers had been cleansed, the blind made to see, and the lame to walk, I had been healed and delivered. Now I must add, that this was a unique grace. For most people dealing with addictions, God helps them to overcome with the assistance of professionals and 12 step support groups. I don’t want to discourage those programs. My case was nothing short of a miracle.

Continued on page 5 ➤

FEATURED RESOURCES

This month, we would like to invite our members to make a Christmas gift of excellent Catholic books to your local parish. We will send you a special selection of books from our mailroom to help you simply and effectively build up the Faith in your area. We want to get into your hands powerful resources where they can do good for the Kingdom! As a premium, you will receive selections from these and other titles as well.

- **Catholic Bible Dictionary** by Scott Hahn
- **Encyclopedia of US Catholic History** by Matthew & Margaret Bunson
- **The Courage to be Catholic** by George Weigel
- **Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church** by HW Crocker III
- **The Ordinary Path to Holiness** by R. Thomas Richard
- **Life Giving Love** by Kimberly Hahn
- **How Firm a Foundation** (Third edition) by Marcus Grodi
- **More Christianity** by Dwight Longenecker
- **The Imitation of Christ** by Thomas a Kempis
- **The Reform of Renewal** by Fr. Benedict Groeschel



\$50

For a donation of \$50 you may receive **one book**.

\$100

For a donation of \$100 you may receive **three books**.

\$150

For a donation of \$150 you may receive **five books**.

\$250

For a donation of \$250 you may receive **ten books**.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain premiums by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/premiums

“Follow Jesus Wherever He Leads”

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLOTTE OSTERMANN



This month, the previously announced “Signposts” interviews are being officially released. In these interviews, CHNetwork members share the story of their initial conversion to Christ as well as some of the things that later opened them to the Catholic Church. Visit chnetwork.org to watch and share all these inspiring interviews.

In this issue, we present an interview with Charlotte Osterman. Charlotte is a home educator, freelance writer and editor, poet, and spiritual mentor with the Apostles of the Interior Life. She’s the author of *Souls at Rest: An Exploration of the Eucharistic Sabbath*, *Souls at Work: An Invitation to Freedom*, *Catholics Communicate Christ: How to Serve the Church as a Writer*, and *Making Sunday Special*. Charlott’s website is charlotteostermann.com. She was a guest on the *Journey Home* program February 23, 2015. — JonMarc Grodi, Manager of Outreach



CHARLOTTE OSTERMANN

Thanks for joining us Charlotte! Why don’t you start by talking about how you first came to know Jesus?

I was a young professional with just one child and a husband, working full time and very proud of myself — very tough and professional.

A girl came to work for me who was a sweet, dear Christian. She was my accounting clerk and would go off and pray during lunch or pray for people who were sick. Everybody else in the office made fun of her. We had our field day laughing at her behind her back!

But, to make even more fun of her, I decided to go with her to her Bible study, that she had continued to invite everybody to, all so that we would have more material to laugh about behind her back — I know that sounds awful but God got me anyway.

So I went to this little, tiny evangelical Bible study where they sang prayer choruses and had apparently been praying for me — her tough-minded, hard-hearted boss — for months before I got there. They had been praying that I would just come. When I did it melted my heart in a way that made me feel vulnerable and angry — I didn’t want my heart to be melted, I didn’t want to be vulnerable. But something happened in the course of that night and I knew that I had to follow up on it.

I felt God just pushing at me to do more, to take the next step, so I asked the girl what the next step was. She said that “you need to read about Jesus, you need to read the Bible.” So I snuck into a Christian store and demanded a Bible, got out as quick as I could with the first one I grabbed, and hoped that no one would see me with a Bible. Reading it, I realized that, “oh, I’m having a born again experience.” It was just funny to me that I didn’t think it was a positive thing. I felt I had almost been “sunk,” because now I was one of the “born-again Christians,” neither fish nor fowl, didn’t fit in and didn’t fit out.

The next thing that seemed to be a requirement if you were going to be a Christian was to get into a church. So I called around demanding to know what all these different Churches were all about and found one that was “to my liking.” The pastor was sweet and sincere and the people there were very beautiful. So, I began my life as a Christian in the Nazarene Church.

Looking back, talk about how God was working on you in and through that community. I take it that at least one of the gifts you received there was a knowledge of and love for God’s Word, a love that persists to this day?

I do, I love the Bible so much. I love the words of Scripture and I felt them changing me. I felt God’s power coming through the words of Scripture. We read it so much in the evangelical churches the Bible became part of our vocabulary.

I love the old holiness hymns — I still have my Nazarene hymnal — and I love to sing those foursquare holiness hymns!

It was a beautiful gift to me that the first place that He called me to as a Christian was a place that spoke of holiness and the whole, full development in the Lord of perfection and freedom.

Continued on page 4 ➡

What prompted you to begin looking at Catholicism?

Well, I was really dissatisfied with some of the answers I was getting from my Calvinist church I was attending about free will, about where the Bible came from, about where do we base our decisions that we make, whose interpretation. So I was frustrated. I also felt like I was not able to ask good questions about the history of the Church, or the history of the Bible without feeling like I was being divisive or argumentative.

I had been influenced, I'm sure, by having a friend who was very Catholic and went to adore in front of the Blessed Sacrament. She would often be late to gatherings and come in saying, "I'm sorry, I was adoring Jesus" or "I was adoring the Blessed Sacrament," this seemed very strange to me but it made me think, "well, if you really believed He was there, wouldn't you want to be there?" So I'm sure I was influenced by her sweetness and her example.

But just the need to figure it all out. I somehow thought I could — if I went back to the roots of things — ferret out who was finally right, where to put my loyalty.

From reading the very beginning of the Catechism I was challenged to understand by what authority we even have the Scriptures. And again, I loved the Scriptures so much I was not going to follow anybody that didn't also love the Scriptures. I was surprised to find out the Catholic Church not only did love the Scriptures but gave me the Scriptures in the first place — it was by their authority that I even had a Bible.

If you were to offer a few words of advice to someone coming from a similar background, what would they be?

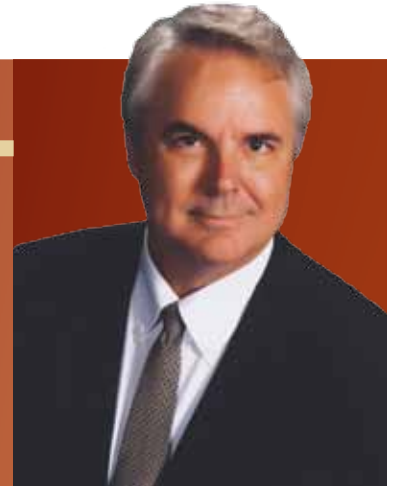
If I were where I was a few years ago — loving Christ, loving the Scripture, wanting the fullness of holiness and spiritual growth — I would just say to that person: keep following Jesus wherever He leads, even if it's somewhere that seems a little scary to you — like the Catholic Church — because He won't lead you astray, He won't lead you astray. He will lead you into all truth if you first are willing to obey. The problem is that if you limit where He can lead you, to what you already understand or are willing to obey, He can't get you any further. So just trust Him to lead you and He really will. ■

THANK YOU!

Thank you for your prayers and support of our work!

— Marcus Grodi

PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702
740-450-1175
chnetwork.org



NEWSLETTER DONATION

The CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication. We request a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter and remain a supporting member of the CHNetwork.

NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to family and friend. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are copyright © 2015 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.



VISIT www.CHResources.com

OR CALL 740-450-1175 FOR THESE AND OTHER GREAT RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CATHOLIC FAITH.

Our Cup Overflows

By Mary Clare Pieczynski | Publications and Laity Coordinator

2015 is drawing to a close and the Coming Home Network International's staff wants to extend to each one of our members our grateful thanks and appreciation for your partnership in our work. Our apostolate could not exist without your faithful support, monetary and prayer, as we journey day by day beside men and women who feel the Holy Spirit's tugging at their hearts to explore more deeply the Catholic Faith. As a small token of our gratitude, we want to share with you a few of the encouraging notes we have received recently from those on the journey or recent converts who have been in communication with the CHNetwork.

You might have seen prayer requests in previous newsletters for some of these individuals and perhaps have faithfully lifted them up in your prayer time. Thus, we also wanted to include for your edification some of the joy and gratitude that is often expressed by those who have received assistance and support from the CHNetwork and, in turn, *you*.

You make our dialog and ministry to them possible and we are incredibly blessed to have members who believe in our mission to share the good news of Christ and His Church with those who are seeking the fullness of the truth. May our Lord Jesus reward each of you in His own best way.

From Mark, on the journey

I cannot adequately express what the CHN means to me. Your encouragement, friendship, and advice, along with the staff's support and generosity, the impact on my life and my family is immeasurable...And one day I would love to help another on their journey. You guys are a blessing from God. I'm humbled and honored to know you all.

From Julie, on the journey

I have been using your website. I have continued to watch Journey Home stories, have read a little on the bulletin boards and I read your emails. Thank you for including me in the prayer list. I have also been reading a great deal about the Catholic Church...Thank you for your prayers and your website. I continue to find the Journey Home stories inspiring and thought provoking.

From Barb, a recent convert

I'm a happy Catholic. Once again, I appreciate your help along the way. I'm not sure I would have become Catholic without the help you provided — putting me in touch with [her CHNetwork helper], answering questions, and gentle encouragement.

"Our Cup Overflows" By Mary Clare Pieczynski	A
"A Year of Mercy!" By Br. Rex Anthony Norris	C
Prayer List	D

From Ken, on the journey

Thank you for CHN's help in the past. Especially for introducing me to [his CHNetwork helper]...The Journey Home, and CHN have been a big help to me. My wife and I enjoy watching the programs and reading the testimonies so much. Things shut down at our house when we hear the theme music for the Journey Home program! Time to watch others with whom I have so much in common. Keep up the good work. Thank you for the prayers of your group. May God bless you richly.

From Carol, a recent convert

Thank God there is God... and His Church! I feel very blessed that by His grace I'm now a part of it. Peace and joy are so much more a part of my life. The Catholic beliefs make so much sense to me now! EWTN, particularly Journey Home, was and is a huge part of that. I'll definitely pray for you all.

From Dawn, on the journey

Thank you for your message and prayers. I always appreciate your support and the ministry of the CHN. It is frustrating at times because I feel pulled in many directions...I appreciate your prayers for my husband and I to continue on our spiritual journey both together and as individuals.

From Luci, on the journey

Thanks for your interest. I am doing well and will be going to my 3rd RCIA class this Sunday. I am also attending a Prophets Bible Study at my local Catholic church which is good. You put me in touch with a young lady [her CHNetwork helper] and we have been communicating...I am trying to read other books as well and of course I watch Marcus Grodi every week!! Thanks for your prayers.

From Dan, a recent revert

I have fully come back to the Catholic Church. I completed my first confession in 21 years about a month ago

Continued on page B

Member's Section Member's Section Member's Section Member's Section

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and have been attending Mass regularly and receiving the Eucharist regularly since my last confession...It has been such a joy to be back in communion with the Catholic Church! I can't believe I ever turned my back on mother Church! I want to thank you for all your help and support. Also, thank you for putting me into contact with [his CHNetwork helper]. We have met in person and keep in contact. It is still somewhat of a struggle being on this journey without my wife, who is a non-denominational Christian, but she has been fairly supportive and I feel the work of the Holy Spirit! Your e-mail reminded me of all the help the Coming Home Network has provided me on the journey home whether it was your support and help through e-mail, connecting me with [his CHNetwork helper], the wonderful conversion stories, the information provided, and the Journey Home.

From Bernard, on the journey

Many thanks for your email. It's good to know of the support the CHN provides to people like me who are on journey to explore, understand and embrace Catholicism. Thanks for the links to articles on various subjects that I am looking into.

From Amber, on the journey

I have finally decided to join the Church!! Lord willing, I will join this next Easter. After years of studying and praying, I knew it was time to join the Church. I am so happy and excited. I want to thank you all so much for your emails and literature and most of all, your prayers. I am so thankful for organizations like CHN.

From Tina, on the journey

Yes, the newsletter is very helpful. I love reading the conversion stories because I can identify with many of their journeys, especially the converts who used to be Protestant. This has been such a great comfort for me, since there aren't many people I can talk to about the issues and questions that have come up from practicing in the Protestant faiths. Even though I'm not actually talking with the converts in the newsletters

and on the Journey Home program, it almost feels like it. Because of strong anti-Catholic views in most people around me, I'm not comfortable talking about God with them. And, the articles in the newsletters have been very informative as well. This is another resource that I use to learn about the Catholic Faith, along with the many programs on EWTN. Sometimes the converts and reverts will drop a seed by mentioning an author, or Marcus Grodi will mention the name of a Church Father...The deeper I go, the wider it gets though... and I wish I could consume it all in one sitting. The Catholic Faith has turned out to be nothing like I've been told or "warned" about. Shockingly, I've found more Catholic articles, books, CDs, and tv/radio programs that focus on living a Christian life rather than directly trying to convert people with arguments about doctrine. A while back, maybe a year ago or so, you sent me several suggestions of resources (such as websites and book titles), and I want to thank you. That information has multiplied and now I'm trying to devour all I can without being too overwhelmed. It has been very helpful in my pursuit to find truth.

From Bob, on the journey

Doing very well,thank you! Attending adoration 3-4 times per week. Praying the rosary and praying the Divine Office. Attending Mass some...We have been received very warmly at church. Members of our adoration team have been very welcoming and encouraging.I can honestly say that coming home to the church of my youth has given me healing and roots again! I will never leave again! This has all been a miracle! Your show, the other programs on EWTN, and the leader of our adoration team being so welcoming. Had she spurned me, had you spurned me I may have never returned to this sweet, wonderful gift of our Catholic Faith!...There may come a day that we sing that sweet song "Taste and See" and I can get through it without crying. ■

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television and radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

December 7

Andrew and Heather Bowen*
 Andrew-former Atheist
 Heather-former Baptist

December 14

Jessica Stuart*
 Convert from Judaism

December 21

Eric Neubauer*
 Former Interdenominational pastor

December 28

Randy Hain*
 Re-air from 12/26/2011

*Schedule is subject to change.

A Year of Mercy!

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which Catholic Christians celebrate on December 8, marks the beginning of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy called for by Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* (“Merciful like the Father”) issued April 15, 2015.



In the Pope’s letter he states, “I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 4).

The ministry of the Coming Home Network is a small but important manifestation of the Church’s desire to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ — the very mission for which Christ established His Church — *in a new way*. Seeking to engage in *the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning*, the Coming Home Network seeks to serve the women and men in and outside of the visible confines of the Catholic Church with the fullness of Christian truth, bearing witness to the faith once delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 1:3) with *enthusiasm and conviction*.

As this 2015th year of Our Lord draws to a close and the Jubilee Year of Mercy begins, I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your ongoing prayers of support and your financial contributions to this ministry of which I am so blessed to be a part. Because of your generosity, we of the Coming Home Network continue to do our part to help Holy Mother Church *be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world* by helping women and men separated in one degree or another from the Catholic Church come home to the fullness of Our Heavenly Father’s merciful Embrace.

From my hermitage to your home I pray you will have a Blessed Advent, a Merry Christmas, and Blessed Year of Mercy.

In His tremendous love, Brother Rex ■

RECENT CONVERT?

Have you been recently received into the Catholic Church? If so, please get in touch with the CHNetwork office so we can update our records.

Former non-Catholic clergy/academics — please contact Jim Anderson at jim@chnetwork.org

Former non-Catholic Laity — please contact Mary Clare Pieczynski at maryp@chnetwork.org

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CHNetwork

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Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Ryan, a former clergyman, who is still discerning how best to serve in the Catholic Church.
- For an ordained denominational leader who yearns for the Presence and Body of Christ and yet does not feel that he is given leave at this time to abandon those he shepherds. Pray especially as he leads this flock through conflicts about the nature of Christ, Holy Scripture, and social issues.
- For Allan and his wife who are suffering from health issues.
- For Jeff, a Methodist minister, that the Holy Spirit may calm his heart and replace his apprehension with joy as he rediscovers the truth of the Catholic Faith.
- For a non-denominational seminarian in Scotland, that the Lord would show him the proper path to follow as he prepares to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For Daniel, an Anglican priest in New England, that his interest in ecumenism would open his heart and mind to all to which God is calling him.
- For a Methodist minister in North Carolina, that our Lord Jesus would grant him the grace to accept fully the fullness of the faith of His holy Catholic Church.
- For a former Seventh-day Adventist minister, that God would guide him to financial stability.
- For Tony, a Baptist minister, that our Lord Jesus would grant him the grace to see and accept all the truths of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

- For a Pentecostal lay minister in Pennsylvania, that, as she rediscovers the Catholic Faith of her youth, the Holy Spirit will show her that she belongs home in the Catholic Church.
- For Alan, a minister in Canada, that, as he continues to discover the richness of the Catholic Faith, our Lord Jesus would give him a hunger for Him in the holy Eucharist.
- For a former Mormon elder in the Southwest, that, as he discovers the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church, God would also open his wife's heart with joy.

Laitly

- For Jim who recently returned to the Church after a long and difficult journey, that his wife become open to the Catholic Church.
- For Donna who has come to a much better understanding of the Blessed Mother and is planning on coming into the Church.
- For Trisha who was received into the Church a few months ago, that she be able to find transportation to church and regularly receive the sacraments.
- For Greg's wife who is not Catholic, that he know how best to gently convey to her his Catholic Faith.
- For a Presbyterian as he discerns where God is calling him in his journey.
- For Jeff who is intrigued by the Catholic Church, that he know how best to proceed with his journey.
- For Teresa who is going through RCIA, that her family be able to accept their differences in faith and all draw closer to Jesus.
- For Christine who wishes to attend RCIA but is encountering difficulties on account of her health.
- For Christie who is waiting on word regarding her annulment petition, that she receive a favorable decision soon.
- For a convert from the Lutheran Church who is struggling with doctrinal issues, that she find answers to her questions.
- For Doug, that he be able to admire the Catholic Church from more than a distance.
- For a convert in Virginia, that she find good friends in her local parish.
- For Susan who is attending a Reformed church, that she know how God wishes her to proceed with her journey.
- For Dennis who is beginning RCIA, that his wife continue to be understanding of his desire to be Catholic even though she doesn't share his interest.
- For Rhonda who has many questions about the Catholic Faith and no one in her family is supportive of her interest in Catholicism.
- For Michael who is moving in the direction of the Orthodox Church, that he continue to seek God's will in his life.
- For Lorrie who has encountered obstacles in her faith journey, that she be able to move forward in RCIA and with her desire to become Catholic.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org.

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

Please also pray for the Coming Home Network International's staff and Board of Directors.

- **President/Founder**, Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor)
- **Manager of Outreach**, JonMarc Grodi
- **Manager of Primary Members**, Jim Anderson (former Lutheran)
- **Financial Assistant**, Wendy Hart (former United Methodist)
- **Director of Studio/Media**, Scott Scholten (former Presbyterian)
- **Developer of Web and New Media**, Seth Paine
- **Office Manager**, Ann Moore
- **Financial Advisor**, Kevin Lowry
- **IT/Facilities Coordinator**, Bill Bateson (former Mormon)
- **Spiritual Advisor**, Brother Rex Anthony Norris
- **Publications and Laitly Coordinator**, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Board of Directors:

- Marcus Grodi (President)
- Msgr. Frank Lane (Chaplain)
- Dr. Robert Geiger (Vice President)
- Dr. Marian Schuda (Director)
- Donald Brey (Director)

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

After this experience, I began attending my friend’s Charismatic Baptist church. Soon after, I was enrolled in a local Bible School and was granted a minister’s license. My congregation hired me as a part-time administrator/staff minister. You could compare the position to an associate minister and I conducted services and Bible studies from time to time both in the church and at nursing homes.

So there I was, an aspiring young minister of the Word; ready to take to the world for Jesus. I had dreams of being an itinerant preacher some day. I began to minister in other churches and para-church groups. I was actively involved in evangelization, music ministry, counter-cult outreaches, and Christian apologetics.

At this point in my ministry, the Evangelical leader and author Chuck Colson had heavily influenced my attitude towards fellow Christians of other denominations. His book *The Body* had become a sort of *Magna Carta* for me. I often would quote his saying, “If Jesus Christ is one, then the Church by definition must be one.” This was similar to my pastor’s attitude and that of our congregation. We believed in an invisible mystical body of believers that inhabited the various denominations including the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Thankfully, we were by no means anti-Catholic, at least not in the classical sense. In fact, our church was the epitome of denominational diversity. The name on the door said Baptist but my pastor, his wife, and I all had ministerial credentials through a Pentecostal fellowship. This diverse tradition in our church led my pastor and me to become active in the local Ecumenical Association of Ministers and Priests. Moreover, I was encouraged to make myself available to anyone who wanted to share Jesus.

The Lord opened up an opportunity for me to play the bass and guitar in a charismatic Catholic music ministry. This was my first exposure to “life” and “fervor” in the Catholic Church. I began to meet Catholics who were on fire for Jesus and the Scriptures, but just as important they were on fire about their Church. Up until then, the Catholics I knew made excuses for their Catholicism. Many of them were cafeteria Catholics. But these new friends were different. They were unashamed and unabashedly Catholic. Further, they were willing to talk to me, answering my questions about what they believed and why. This was all done in a respectful manner and was not about winning debates and proving each other wrong. It was genuine faith sharing in love.

It was around this time that various new “movements” were spreading out of control in non-Catholic Charismatic churches. I began to see many excesses coming from pulpits that I had once held in great regard. I began to question the whole Protestant system. Particularly I was concerned with the authority structure or rather the lack of one. I asked myself: Where was the authority to take the pulpit away from these preachers who were getting caught up in the latest wind of doctrine? Who were these men and women accountable to? Why was everyone using the same Bible and coming up with different answers?

This eventually led to questions about doctrine. Specifically, I began to question the standard charismatic belief that the “initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit” must be speaking in tongues. Not that I objected to tongues or any of the spiritual gifts. In fact the Lord has graced me with some, including tongues. My questioning of this “doctrine” became a point of contention with both my pastor and his wife. We would argue the point for hours. All I wanted was one verse of Scripture that stated that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” must be accompanied by tongues. We all believed in *sola Scriptura*. But their arguments were all reading *into* the Scriptures not reading *out of* them. Finally, in frustration the pastor’s wife said: “John, if you won’t accept the scriptural evidence we present, you must realize we also know the initial evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is tongues from tradition and experience.”

I was now faced with the realization that everyone had a tradition no matter how much they denied it. The question then became: whose tradition carried authority? This question now became a thorn in my side. It began to affect my thought process and every aspect of my ministry.

As Providence would have it, the very next week I was scheduled to work on a project that entailed living for a few days with a local cult called the 12 Tribes or Messianic Communities. The idea was to spend time with them and learn what they believed firsthand to accurately record and report their beliefs. This group insisted that the Church fell into apostasy with the death of the last Apostle. Further, they believed that God after nearly 2000 years was restoring the true Church through them and their self-appointed “apostle.” In our discussions I posed them a question, which I would soon have to ask myself. The question went something like this: “Let me get this straight, you folks insist the Church fell into apostasy at the end of the first century; further you recognize that the Bible was not canonized till the end of the fourth century by this same Church. Don’t you have a problem claiming the Bible as your only authority if it was canonized by an apostate Church?”

The cult leaders stumbled for an answer; I looked at the other two Protestant ministers whom I was assisting. They both looked at me as if to say: why didn’t we think of that, it’s such an obvious question. I realized that the question was not a result of my brilliant intellect or apologetic skills. Rather, God placed that question on my heart because as a Protestant I was essentially doing the same thing. I was discounting many Catholic doctrines on the basis that I could not find them in the Bible, yet I knew the Catholic Church had canonized the Scriptures.

Subsequently, I began to do two things. The first was to go back to the Bible and see how much of what I believed was the result of my tradition. As I probed the Scriptures I came across some verses that I’d simply read over before. For instance, Hebrews 11:39-12:1 states, “And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so

...Journeys Home Continued...

great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.”

All of a sudden I saw what I had never noticed before. I’d never made the connection between Hebrews 11 which expounded on the lives of Old Testament saints now dead and Hebrews 12:1 which spoke of this great cloud of witnesses. I had been violating a fundamental rule of scriptural interpretation — context. Moreover, when a verse starts with “therefore” you need to look back and see what the “therefore is referring to.”

I read further on in Hebrews 12 and discovered verses 22 and 23: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” These verses describe new covenant worship. They seem to be saying that we are connected with worship taking place in heaven. Verse 23 talks about the spirits of just men made perfect. The implication here is that we are united with the righteous souls of the dead in heaven. Just as important, the text says that the spirits were made perfect, not simply declared righteous, as Luther and his successors have been teaching for nearly five hundred years.

How could I have missed this? This was the Catholic understanding of the uninterrupted Communion of Saints. This was the Catholic understanding of justification. And these verses also seemed to validate the Catholic notion that the Liturgy on earth is the same Liturgy going on in heaven. I must have read these verses scores of times. But my tradition would not allow me to see the implication.

Along with re-examining the Scriptures, I began to read the writings of the early Church. Clearly, I was still struggling to hold on to *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). However, I could no longer discount the importance of what the early Church had practiced and believed. Beyond that, I had already come to realize that everyone reads Scripture through the glasses of their own tradition. Therefore it only made sense to read and research the earliest traditions.

I sought out the earliest writings I could find so it was not long before I discovered Ignatius of Antioch. As I read his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, I was confronted with belief in the Real Presence. I remember telling myself, “Well that’s just one guy, they all couldn’t believe this.” So I studied further. I came across Justin Martyr; he not only talked about the Eucharist being the flesh and blood of Jesus but mentioned the fact that it became

Jesus by the action of a bishop or priest saying a prayer. The more I read, the more I had to abandon, or at least seriously question, my Protestant beliefs.

Another major stumbling block for me was the Canon of Scripture itself. I knew that the Catholics had more books in the Old Testament than Protestant Bibles. As a Protestant, I was led to believe that the Council of Trent added these books after the Reformation. One of my Catholic friends then confronted me with a list of books written by St. Augustine around AD 385. It was identical to the Catholic Canon. I objected, saying this was just one man. He then informed me that various Church Councils starting with Rome in 382 and subsequently the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) canonized all these same books. He then gave me a simple challenge.

“John,” he said, “you know all the ministers in town and in fact you have a very good professional relationship with the Orthodox priest. Why don’t you pay him a visit and ask to see his Bible. The Orthodox split happened in 1054, surely if the Council of Trent added those books in the 1500’s then the Orthodox surely don’t have them in their Canon. They reject anything after the seventh ecumenical council.”

I took my friend’s challenge. I must say that my motivation was more to talk to what I perceived as an “independent third party to the conflict.” Surely my friend already

knew the answer I would get. At this point part of me wanted to be proven wrong. After all, I now believed in the Real Presence and I was not going to receive it where I was.

So off I went to see my Orthodox colleague and friend. I started by telling him I had been reading the early Church Fathers. He grinned at me and warned me that was a dangerous thing for an Evangelical mind. As I expected, I found out that the Orthodox accepted all the books the Catholics did. The good father was very understanding, answered my questions, and never once suggested that I should become an Orthodox. He did, however, recommend an Orthodox Study Bible.

I continued to study and pray. I even took a fairly good look at Orthodoxy. But the more I pondered it, the more I saw it as a different twist of Catholicism. They seemed to be hung up on the papacy but had no convincing arguments against it.

At this point I decided it was time to go to the horse’s mouth. I bought a Catholic *Catechism* and made a life-changing telephone call to *Catholic Answers*. I explained my situation to the receptionist who took my name and number and said someone would get back to me promptly. I did not expect to hear from them for weeks. Five minutes later Jimmy Akin called me back. He was very understanding as I tentatively told him of

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...Journeys Home Continued...

my search for the truth. I was not convinced that the Catholic Church was the place for me and told him so. He did not pressure me in the least. He just answered my questions as best he could, seeing as I was blurting them fast and furiously. Further, I was jumping from one topic to another and then back again. He empathized with my predicament and then broadsided me when we ended the conversation. He said, “God bless and by the way welcome home.” That last comment simultaneously struck fear and comfort in me. I knew he was right. I yearned to be “walking in the truth,” but I was in fear of the changes in my life that the truth would bring.

From July 1995 to Pentecost 1996, God brought me on a whirlwind trip of discovery. I’ve only given a few examples of doctrinal stumbling blocks that I had to overcome. The others included everything from justification to Mary. But, as Scott Hahn put it, “at a certain point God takes over and it all takes on a supernatural dimension that surpasses intellectual study.” Every time I had a question, God would provide me with an answer. Mostly, He brought lay folk to me who were devout and not afraid to share their faith. Other times, I’d be struggling with an objection so I’d turn on the TV to relax. As was now my habit, I’d flip on EWTN or Boston Catholic Television, and there would inevitably be someone talking about the subject I was struggling with.

Somewhere in my journey, I discovered a 24-hour adoration chapel. At that point I had come to believe that was Jesus in the monstrance. If I could not receive Him at the altar, I could worship at His feet like I’d never done before. I recall the irony: here I was a Protestant minister praying the Rosary at all hours of the night in front of the Eucharist. It was during this period that my prayer life began to change. My prayer changed from “God, what do I do” to “God, how do I do it” and then finally “How are you going to do this for me, Lord?”

On the Eve of Pentecost 1996, I played in the music ministry at a charismatic Mass. The cardinal of the archdiocese was the celebrant. After Mass, I was dragged over to him and introduced. My friend mentioned to the cardinal that I was a Protestant minister who was considering Catholicism. The cardinal smiled, gave me a few words of encouragement, and recommended Dr. Scott Hahn’s work (by then I was familiar with Dr. Hahn. His series on Romans had been instrumental for me). Then the cardinal laid hands on me and gave me a blessing. I felt something, something very strong. I felt a connection with the whole Church throughout history. I was aware that I was being blessed by a successor of the twelve Apostles. I also knew that I’d be home soon.

The following business day my pastor called me into his office and said: “We need to talk. John this is not working out very well, this is a Protestant church and you keep on referring to the Reformation as The Great Rebellion. You are making your views very public. You are free to believe what you want and stay here; we only require that Jesus Christ be the Lord of your life, for you to be a member. But you can’t preach this stuff and remain in the ministry here.”

At that point I told him I needed to be a Catholic. He said: “Yes, I know, but you’ll be back. You know we don’t teach that the Catholic Church is apostate. You also know that I’ve always said that there are many Catholics who are genuinely saved and true Christians. But I’m convinced you’ll find that the Church you’ve been reading about does not exist in practice.”

With that, he gave me his blessing to leave. One week later, after a few phone calls to the chancery and my local parish, I was received back into the Catholic Church. I was at a weekly adoration hour and I asked the priest to hear my first confession in over 25 years. I also was finally able to receive our Lord in the Eucharist that same night.

I will forever be grateful for all that God has lead me through. I do not look back at my years as a Protestant with regret. I owe my love of Scripture and the desire to evangelize to the wonderful training I received from my former pastor, his wife, and dedicated teachers in Bible School. I’m also grateful to the many people that God brought my way, who patiently answered all my questions and willingly engaged me in fruitful dialogue. Were it not for these Catholics willing to defend their faith, I might never have found mine. I must also thank people like Jimmy Akin and Karl Keating at *Catholic Answers* for their support during my journey. Last but not least I am grateful for my grandmother who taught me to pray as a child. I’m sure she was praying for me every step of the way.

In closing, we need to respond to Pope Paul VI’s call to evangelize the baptized. It’s not enough to teach our children to go through the motions of Catholicism. We not only need to tell them about Jesus, we need to introduce them to Him. We need to minister to people who have fallen into serious sins of addiction, tell them Jesus is the answer. Yes they should seek professional help, but it is the anointing of God that breaks every yoke of bondage. And it is a shame that I had to learn that from someone who left the Church, rather the hearing it from a Catholic. We need to be willing to reach out to our separated brethren, in unconditional love, and build relationships. In that process, we can share the full Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I’ll end with the words of the Apostle Paul from Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.” ■



John DiMascio is a first generation American, born in 1960 of Italian parents who immigrated to the U.S. in the aftermath of World War II. He has worked in various settings, including ministry, real estate, and insurance and mutual fund sales. John is currently disabled and cares for his 90-year-old mother. For the past 19 years, he’s been helping “seekers” enter the Catholic Church, by practicing apologetics on the Internet.

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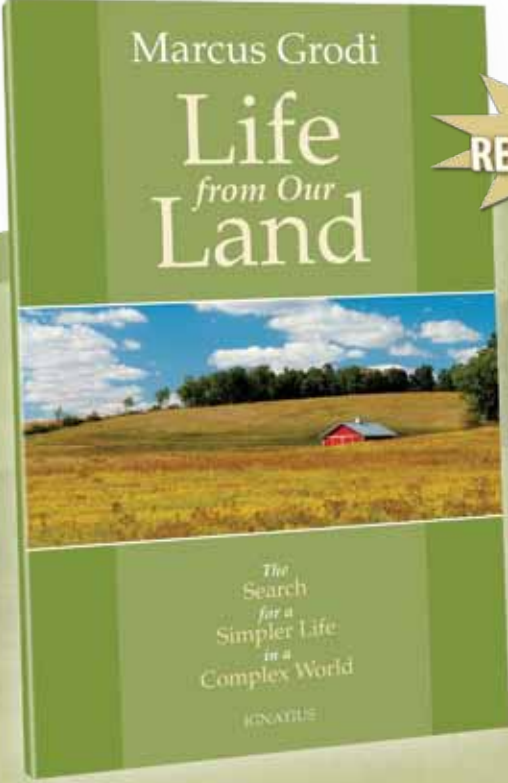
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