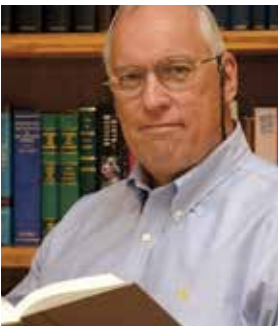


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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



An Unexpected Swim...Home

by Jim Dodge, D.W.S.

Suddenly wet and amused by the mystery of it all, how did I find myself in the Tiber stroking against the currents toward Rome? I had no intention of becoming Catholic. Though my intentions were to love and serve God with every sinew of my existence, I surmised it would be within my Protestant convictions. But quite ironically, at the age of sixty, as I stood among the candidates and elect during the Easter Vigil 2010 at Saint Agatha’s Catholic Church in Portland, Oregon, robed in white, holding a lit candle signifying the light of Christ, it was not as a sectarian Protestant any longer but as a Catholic — a Roman Catholic. So what changed? How did I find myself swimming toward the Vatican against the tide of all I had been taught?

Becoming a “church family”

My parents had no Christian proclivities or background. To the contrary, my dad ordered the local Nazarene pastor off his job site, waving his carpenter’s hammer at him for emphasis. He was, what I characterized in his eulogy, “a severe man.” Life had dealt him severe blows, convincing him to live accordingly. Mom, too, endured hardship as a youth raised by an elderly father and three erstwhile uncles. By those inexplicable mysteries of God, however, they found their hearts pierced at a singular moment during a revival service within the small, Nazarene church near where we lived. How anyone persuaded Dad to attend these services can only be credited to sheer miracle. And suddenly — quite suddenly really — they were changed. I was young at the time, maybe four years old, but recall the turnabout of events. Our aunt no longer drove my younger brother and me to Sun-

day school and church; Dad and Mom did. We attended church together, as a family. Dad remained severe; demanding strict discipline and hard work out of us boys (my two younger brothers and me), but lived thoroughly persuaded that Jesus Christ had delivered him from his many vices — alcohol and gambling prominent among them. For Mom it was more of a struggle, but she persisted in the faith, growing steadily through the years.

From the moment of their conversion, our family became a church family: two services on Sunday, plus NYPS (Nazarene Young Peoples’ Society), Wednesday night prayer meetings, revival weeks — one in the spring another in the fall, and sundry potlucks. Any time the church doors were open, we were there. Family vacations (what few we took) were spent at family camp among other Nazarene families. Summer youth camp rounded out my social life, which

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

was governed largely by the church. The major sins we teens were strictly enjoined from indulging included smoking, dancing, drinking, movies, swearing, and thinking too fondly of the opposite sex. We were further taught to avoid fraternizing with the in-crowd at school, or taking up “worldly” interests, which ranged broadly from attending school social functions to hanging out with Baptists. In other words, the “don’ts” substantially outweighed the “dos.” Looming over them all, however, was the “don’t” enjoining us from Catholics, Mormons, and other “cults.”

Bliss did not dominate our church life, however. Our rather ingrown little congregation endured myriad squabbles, which ultimately convinced my parents to take some time off and let matters simmer awhile. For the better part of a year we attended no church, spending Sundays instead puttering around the farm. I distinctly remember the emptiness I felt, though as a pre-teen I couldn’t articulate it as clearly as I felt it. I missed Sunday worship, and I missed my church friends. Finally, on one particular Sunday I approached Mom about this unsettled emptiness, suggesting that maybe it was time to give the church another chance. She agreed and spoke with Dad who, though a bit more reticent, gave his consent.

A budding call to ministry

As was the habit among Nazarene churches at that time, pastoral changes occurred about every three years. Consequently, shortly after we re-commenced Sunday worship, new pastors were introduced, John and Darlene Kell. I think of them as the focal miracle of my childhood. Darlene Kell became — for me, and our small huddle of youth — Mama Kell. She shaped the trajectory of my thoughts toward God and church by her uninhibited love for Jesus Christ, and her positive engagement with

us kids. She demonstrated the other side of religion, that side abounding in grace, mercy, peace, and those other fruits Paul spoke of as evidence of the Spirit-filled life, all of which were quite uncharacteristic of my earliest encounters with the church. Under hers and Papa Kell’s ministry, I committed my life to God sensing that He had also called me into full-time ministry. Mama Kell especially encouraged my ministerial urges.

All too soon, though, they were called away to another church, and a new pastor arrived. I was at first devastated that my spiritual godmother was gone. Her influence could not be replaced, and I floundered for a while. Nonetheless, God opened my heart and new doors. Gifted with glib, I preached my first sermon at the age of fourteen under the direction of the new pastor, and preached in a variety of Nazarene churches from then through college, occasionally filling in for pastors on vacation or speaking at youth-week events throughout our part of Washington State.

My life seemed established on a path leading toward pastoral ministry. Everything pointed toward college and seminary. But then something intervened that cast a cloud of doubt on my understanding of the church, a cloud that would persist for over four decades. I was maybe fifteen and president of our little youth group. Our pastor handed me a recently published book, *Why I Am a Nazarene and Not a...* advising me that as president of the youth group it was my responsibility to facilitate a series of lessons from this book. By use of scriptural proof texts, the content of the book dealt apologetically, arguing against other allegedly-Christian groups and for the Nazarene Church. It was my first direct exposure to sectarianism, where my sect (Nazarene) held itself apart from all other sects, assuming superiority over them and lauding itself as the best expression of Christ’s church.

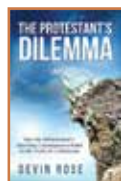
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FEATURED RESOURCES



Deep in Scripture CD

In this classic Deep in Scripture program, Marcus Grodi welcomes former Church of Christ minister Bruce Sullivan to discuss “the verses he never saw,” particularly Genesis 1: 14-19, and the topic of faith and reason.



The Protestant’s Dilemma — By Devin Rose

What if Protestantism were true? What if the Reformers really were heroes, the Bible the sole rule of faith, and Christ’s Church just an invisible collection of loosely united believers? As an Evangelical, Devin Rose used to believe all of it. Then one day the nagging questions began. He noticed things about Protestant belief and practice that didn’t add up. He began following the logic of Protestant claims to places he never expected it to go.

In *The Protestant’s Dilemma*, Devin Rose patiently unpacks tough topics such as the canon of Scripture, authority, baptismal regeneration, and apostolic succession. He demonstrates how Catholicism solves the Protestant’s dilemma through the witness of Scripture, Christian history, and the authority with which Christ Himself undeniably vested His Church. It is the perfect book for non-Catholics trying to work through their own nagging doubts, or for Catholics looking for a fresh way to deepen their understanding of the Faith.

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a \$35 donation.

\$50

Receive *The Protestant’s Dilemma* for a \$50 donation.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *The Protestant’s Dilemma* for a \$75 donation.

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The Lutheran Connection

By Bruce Sullivan

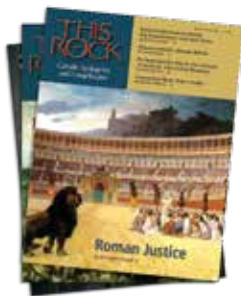
Bruce Sullivan is a former Church of Christ minister who was received into the Catholic Church in 1995.

He has been a guest on EWTN's *Mother Angelica Live*, *The Journey Home*, *Bookmark*, and *Deep In Scripture*. He is author of *Christ in His Fullness: A Protestant Minister Discovers the Fullness of Christ in the Catholic Faith* and *A Layman's Primer of Liturgical Latin* (both published by Coming Home Resources, Zanesville, OH).

He served for several years on the board of directors of the Coming Home Network International and continues to serve as an advisor.

Bruce has recently entered the permanent diaconate formation program of the Archdiocese of Louisville. Bruce wrote the following reflection about a priest and friend who was instrumental in his conversion to the Catholic Faith.

We hope it will be an inspiration to you in considering the ways we can seek to draw people closer to the Catholic Church through our example and encouragement.

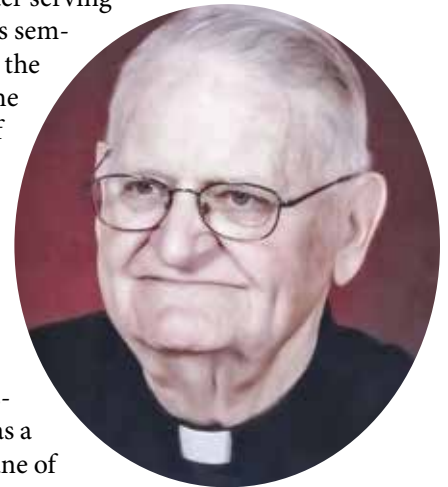


The process of conversion is commonly likened to a journey, and, for many of us, it proves to be an arduous one. Like any difficult journey, the spiritual journey to the Catholic Church is one that is made easier if one has companions and a guide. In my journey from the Stone-Campbell Churches of Christ to the Catholic Church, my primary companion was my wife, Gloria, and our guide was Fr. Benjamin F. Luther, a priest of the Diocese of Owensboro, KY.

A native of Mayfield, Kentucky, Benjamin F. Luther was born on December 14, 1931. Born into a family with a rich heritage in the Stone-Campbell Churches of Christ, Ben Luther began his journey to the Catholic Faith as a teenager. At the age of seventeen he was received into the Catholic Church, and, after serving a tour of duty with the U.S. Navy, completed his seminary training and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky in 1964 at the age of thirty-two. After more than fifty years of faith-filled priestly ministry, Fr. Luther left this life on August 1, 2015.¹

Because of his upbringing in the Church of Christ, Fr. Luther always had great esteem for his separated brethren of the Stone-Campbell Movement² and a great interest in their history (in fact, he is, *most likely*, the only Catholic priest who was a life-time member of the Disciples of Christ historical society). So, when I (as a Church of Christ minister) contacted him in June of 1993, he was more than enthusiastic about helping me explore the claims of the Catholic Church. At the time he was pastor of St. John the Evangelist's parish in Paducah, Kentucky — more than 200 miles from where Gloria and I lived in Hart County, Kentucky. Nonetheless, within a week of our first telephone conversation, we were seated together at a roadside diner off I-65 in Hart County.

Our first meeting lasted just a bit over six hours (I've always wondered what the waitress thought about those two guys talking non-stop theology for six hours at her work station). In the course of that first meeting we broke plenty of ground for future discussions on authority, the Scriptures, the nature of the Church, Church history, and the writings of the Church Fathers. Before we parted company at the end of the day, Fr. Luther gave me a box containing various books and articles for study (just a foretaste of things to come). From that day forward, it seemed as if my mailbox was rarely empty. Fr. Luther would send me a book one day, a personal letter a couple of days later and, maybe, a set of audiotapes a day or two after that. He sent Gloria and me a complete set of back issues to *This Rock* magazine that served as a virtual apologetics course of study for us. At his suggestion, Fr. Luther and I traveled to Ohio for the Coming Home Network's first retreat at the Franciscan University of Steubenville



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¹ You can watch Fr. Luther's fascinating conversion story by going to <http://chnetwork.org/1998/10/fr-benjamin-luther-former-church-christ-journey-home-program/> or searching "Fr Benjamin Luther" on chnetwork.org.

² This movement, launched in the early 19th century, was so named for its two most prominent historical figures: Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. They were driven by the desire to transcend denominational divisions and unite all believers in Christ on universally accepted essentials of the faith. Unable to achieve consensus of "universally accepted essentials," the movement eventually split into three denominations: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the independent Christian Churches, and the Church of Christ.

(an experience that was to prove a watershed event in my conversion to Catholicism). Moreover, on almost every Saturday we would have telephone conversations that typically lasted about two hours each (always on his “nickel”). Through it all, Fr. Luther proved himself to be a model evangelist. Therefore, as I compose these words (one week from his departure from his earthly tabernacle), I think it appropriate to underscore some of the qualities that he exhibited and which we can emulate.

Anyone who made the acquaintance of Fr. Luther could not help but be delighted by his western Kentucky congeniality. Though undeniably self-effacing and humble, his erudition was obvious to all who had the opportunity to converse with him. More importantly, he had the gift of being able to take deep truths of our faith and convey them in ways that everyday “Joe Six Packs” could understand and appreciate. These qualities all found their greatest expression in his passionate work for the salvation of souls.

Because Fr. Ben had a passion for souls, he was a very attentive listener. When I say that we spoke for two hours on the phone each Saturday while on my journey to the Catholic Faith, what I should have said is that he *listened* each Saturday for two hours while I talked. In our eagerness to proclaim our faith, we can never overstate the importance of listening to others.

Listening, alone, however, is not enough — and it was not enough for Fr. Luther. Having listened attentively to my questions and concerns, he would then offer thoughtful replies delivered in a characteristically gentle manner (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). Often those replies were offered then and there over the telephone. However, if need be, he would take the time to compose detailed written replies. In fact, in response to my questions regarding the canon of Sacred Scripture, Fr. Luther composed a personal letter comprising fifty-eight pages! Dedication like that should be the norm for those doing the work of an evangelist.

After being received into the Catholic Church, I was privileged to join with Fr. Luther in his ongoing efforts to share the Catholic Faith through any and every means available. On several occasions we were privileged to address parishes and share with them the great graces given to us both in our conversions to the Catholic Faith (all in order to encourage everyone — even lifelong Catholics — to embrace the grace of ongoing, lifelong conversion). For a time we published a newsletter called *Bartimaeus* that was intended to promote dialogue with members of the Stone-Campbell Churches of Christ. On several occasions, our Lord gave us the beautiful gift of being able to share our stories with the entire world through the global broadcasting ministry of EWTN (an evangelist’s dream-come-true).

Consummate communicator that he was, Fr. Luther realized that ultimately the work of an evangelist requires — first and foremost — communication with the Most Holy Trinity and our Blessed Mother. For this reason, Fr. Ben was a true prayer warrior. Moreover, I know for a fact that he enlisted the assistance of other prayer warriors on behalf of the souls whom he served. In fact, one of the most consoling realities of Fr. Luther’s passing from this life to the next is the knowledge that — more than ever — my family and I have the opportunity to be the beneficiaries of his prayers. Such is the beauty and comfort we have as Catholics in light of the Communion of Saints.

Dedicated scholar. Consummate communicator. Gentle shepherd of souls. Dedicated prayer warrior. These — and so much more — describe the life and work of Fr. Benjamin F. Luther. By imitating him — as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1) — we will find ourselves more faithfully fulfilling the words of St. Paul to St. Timothy, “*Do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Tim 4:5). ■

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord.
And let the perpetual light shine upon him.*

...he had the gift of being able to take deep truths of our faith and convey them in ways that everyday “Joe Six Packs” could understand and appreciate.

...he was a very attentive listener. ...In our eagerness to proclaim our faith, we can never overstate the importance of listening to others.

...if need be he would take the time to compose detailed written replies.

“Do the work of an evangelist”

— 2 Timothy 4:5

Convert One and All

By Marcus Grodi

“Everybody should know that we have for our mission to convert the world, including the inhabitants of the United States, the people of the cities, and the people of the country, the officers of the navy and the marines, commanders of the army, the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all! We have received from God what Protestantism never received — viz, not only a commission but a *command* to go and teach all nations. There is no secret about this. The object we hope to accomplish in time is to convert all pagan nations, and all Protestant nations — even England, with her proud parliament and imperial sovereign. There is no secrecy in all this. It is the commission of God to His Church, and not a human project.”

*Most Reverend John Hughes (1797-1864)
Fourth bishop and first Archbishop of New York*

Does this statement come across as arrogant or subversive? Does it sound out of touch with the more sensitive and sensible posture of the Church after the Second Vatican Council? Is your reaction that this may have been how Catholic Church leaders thought and spoke back then, but surely this is not what the Church believes or teaches now!?!

When you Google this statement, you'll find that it is most often quoted on Protestant, anti-Catholic sites as an example of misguided haughtiness, even evidence that their fears were always well-founded: “Those papists are out to get us! The Pope is out to control this country!”

The question is: If the Catholic Church once believed and taught this, does it still? This quote is from a lecture Archbishop John Hughes gave at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral in November, 1850. We certainly don't seem to be hearing very many, if any, of our Church leaders saying this any more, especially in the bold manner exhibited here by Archbishop Hughes!

Let me first say that, as a former Protestant minister, if I had read this statement thirty years ago, I would have most certainly taken it negatively. I would have read into this the nefarious workings of those damned Jesuits, always trying to subvert the true mission of Christ and take over our government!

But as an Evangelical minister, didn't I also consider it my God-given mission — the very reason I had given up engineering to go to seminary to become a minister — to do my part in converting “the world, including the inhabitants of the United States, the people of the cities, and the people of the country, the officers of the navy and the marines, commanders of the army, the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all!” I had no delu-

sions that I myself could do this, but I would have insisted that this was the task Christ had given His followers, in His Great Commission! This was why I got into my pulpit every Sunday, and to which I was exhorting every one of the parishioners: Go and make disciples for Jesus Christ of everyone!

Where I stopped, though, was thinking that it was the mission of my Presbyterian denomination to convert the entire world to Presbyterianism. I did know, however, some very conservative Baptists who thought this — who thought that only active members of their small hyper-conservative Baptist association (they refused to use the word “denomination”) would be saved! But most Protestants I knew did not believe any particular church was equivalent to the Church Jesus promised He would start in His Apostles; rather we believed in the invisible universal church that consists of only true believers, the membership of which only God knows.

So the arrogance of anyone thinking their particular church has been called by God to convert the world!

But is this arrogance, or just a matter-of-fact admission of the very call that Christ gave to His Church? If one believes that Christ did establish a visible Church in His Apostles, to which He promised the Holy Spirit, against which the gates of Hell would not prevail, and to whom He gave the great *command* to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19), then why is it so offensive to believe that this Church is called to convert the world? Is it not God's desire for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), and did St. Paul not say in that same letter that the “pillar and bulwark” of that truth is “the church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15)? Which church? An invisible unidentifiable church?

Member's Section

Member's Section

But if the Catholic Church stills believes this, then why don't we hear it anymore from Church leaders, proclaimed from pulpits or in the media, or even in encyclicals?

My first response to this is I don't know why and don't want to extend an opinion — no one can read another person's mind. However, I do know that in our lifetime there have been — and are — priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes just as committed and bold as Archbishop Hughes, who defend the Church and encourage us all to know the teachings of the Church and live them out boldly.

And this is still the teaching of the Church. The *Catechism* proclaims: "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the univocal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the gospel to all men" (CCC, 849; quoting *Ad Gentes* 1).

Maybe the issue is not that this statement by Archbishop Hughes sounds so brash and outdated, but that we *think* it so. The mission of converting the world to Jesus Christ and His Church is a shared mission, that begins when you and I take seriously our shared responsibility to pray for and witness to the people God has placed into our lives. It may not be "the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, [or] the President", but a person you know might know a person who knows a person, etcetera, etcetera, until someone has the intimacy to talk to that person in the Whitehouse! It may begin with you, or me,

but first it begins with the question, "Are you truly converted, heart, mind, and soul, to Jesus Christ and His Church?"

This is the ongoing work of the Coming Home Network International, and if there is anything we can do to help you grow closer to Him and His Church, please ask. But even before you ask, turn first to Him in prayer, and especially visit Him in the Sacrament. ■

EVANGELIZATION CHALLENGE

Please tell others about our work! Feel free to give away copies of this newsletter (keep this inside, member's section for yourself) and spread the word about the CHNetwork. If you know of friends, family, colleagues, or even public personalities that are converts to the Catholic Church, tell them about the CHNetwork and share our website, www.chnetwork.org, with them!

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.

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

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

October 5

Kurt Hoover*
Former Wesleyan Methodist

October 12

Lisa Campbell*
Former Pentecostal

October 19

Joey Duke*
Former Church of Christ minister

October 26

Daniel McCormick
Former Southern Baptist

*Schedule is subject to change.

From The Hermitage

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org

October is the month in the liturgical calendar when the Church remembers in a very special way a private devotion that has been part and parcel of the Church since the Middle Ages. That devotion is none other than the Rosary. The Rosary is probably the most recognizable aid in the Catholic Christian devotional life and one of the most misunderstood by non-Catholic Christians.

The Rosary, like everything having to do with Mary, has one primary purpose. That purpose is to lead a person to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. This is done through meditating or reflecting on the life of Jesus or the life of Mary in relationship to her Son and Savior. The Rosary is in one sense the Gospel in miniature. The annunciation of Jesus's birth, His life, His deeds, the Last Supper, His passion, His death and resurrection, His ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit, His power over death and decay all proclaim the simple message: "Jesus Christ is Lord" and He "came into the world to save sinners" (Phil 2:11; 1 Tim 1:15).



Because the Rosary is as Christo-centric as the New Testament itself, I would encourage you whether you are a Catholic or a non-Catholic Christian to add the Rosary to your devotional life if it is not already a part of it. After all, there is nothing exclusively Catholic about the Rosary. The One to whom this devotional points is the Savior of the whole world. ■

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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 David, a Methodist minister, that God would show him the path he should take as he discerns his future.
- For a Church of Christ minister, that the Holy Spirit would soften his wife's heart and allow him to become a Catholic Christian.
- For a Lutheran minister in Pennsylvania, that the Holy Spirit may guide her home to the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For a retired Anglican priest and his wife, that they know how best to proceed with their desire to come into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For George, a minister in Pennsylvania, that he may gain a deep appreciation and acceptance of the authority of St. Peter and his successor.
- For an Evangelical Methodist minister in Ohio, that God would enable him to successfully wade through the layers of religious and cultural programming which have cut him off from the Catholic Church.
- For Joseph, a Lutheran minister, that the grace of our Lord Jesus would guide him back to full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For a Wesleyan minister in Idaho, that he may find employment that would enable him and his family to come into the Church.

- For Sherry who is in RCIA and loves the Church, that her faith journey bring her ever closer to Jesus.
- For a Baptist in Utah to continue to be open to the Holy Spirit's promptings in her life even though she doesn't feel drawn to become Catholic at this point.
- For Jeffrey, who is discouraged and frustrated at the obstacles he is facing trying to attend Mass and RCIA, that he find good local support for his journey.
- For Kim, who is reading and studying, that she find answers to her questions about Catholic teaching.
- For Betty, who finally has the opportunity to pursue her desire to be Catholic.
- For Eric, who recently returned to the Church, that he be blessed by receiving the graces of the sacraments again.
- For Cassandra, who is praying the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet and is drawn more and more to the Catholic Church.
- For a fallen-away Catholic in Tennessee who is planning to begin attending Mass again, that she come to an ever-deepening love and understanding of the Catholic Faith.
- For Donna, who is close to deciding whether to return to the Church, that her lingering questions be answered.
- For an Evangelical in Pennsylvania, that she find local Catholic support to help her on her journey.
- For a convert who is struggling with fitting into Catholic life and doesn't always attend Mass.

- For a former Baptist in the west whose family isn't speaking to him on account of his conversion to the Catholic Church.
- For a lady in Arizona who is beginning RCIA classes, that her family and friends understand her desire to be Catholic and that she be able to distinguish between Catholic teaching and the witness of bad Catholics.
- For Deb, that all goes smoothly with her and her husband's annulment petitions and they may soon come into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For Barbara, a lifelong, faithful Baptist who is coming to appreciate the beauty and depth of the Catholic Church.
- For a woman in Mississippi who is pursuing her interest in the Catholic Faith while going through a difficult time personally.
- For Linda, who is still deeply conflicted about her journey and is drawn to the Catholic Church but struggles with various issues.
- For June, who and loves her Protestant Faith but appreciates Catholic devotion to the saints and is attracted to the Eucharist.
- For Robert who has been seeking truth his whole life, that he continue to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Laity

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 Primary Members**, Jim Anderson (former Lutheran)
- **Director of Studio/Media**, Scott Scholten (former Presbyterian)
- **Office Manager**, Ann Moore
- **IT/Facilities Coordinator**, Bill Bateson (former Mormon)
- **Publications and Laity Coordinator**, Mary Clare Pieczynski
- **Manager of Outreach**, JonMarc Grodi
- **Financial Assistant**, Wendy Hart (former United Methodist)
- **Developer of Web and New Media**, Seth Paine

- **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 from page 2

Curiosity into the Roman Catholic “cult”

I personally had no problem denouncing the “obvious” cults or even the Roman Catholic Church until I came across what seemed certain poorly attributed sources. Pertaining to the Catholic Church, I recall numerous items that caused me to question the conclusions drawn by this book. For instance, did the Catholic Church truly worship Mary? If the Catholic Church is the authority on Scripture, was it wrong? If the Pope is infallible, what were the limits of his infallibility? I distinctly remember thinking that the authors of this book seemed overwrought in their efforts to abase the Catholic Church and credit their own movement. Not one of the author’s references contained citations from sources other than trusted Protestant theologians. Then, I was confronted by an esteemed Christian leader who made an assertion that bothered me most deeply. This individual avowed that Catholics leave Jesus on the cross (viz. crucifix), because they don’t believe He rose from the grave. Really! I mused, “Can it honestly be possible that a Christian church, or a group that calls itself Christian, advance a doctrine of Christ crucified but un-risen?” At this same time, Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s *Life Is Worth Living* television program began making an impression on me. I found it ironic that his program was wedged between programs hosted by popular Protestant preachers. His messages resonated with me in part because they seemed so faithful to things I learned in Sunday school; in part because of the spirit in which Archbishop Sheen delivered them; and more so because he frequently affirmed the risen Christ. His commentaries stood in direct contradiction to claims made by this book.

Unfortunately, I was born with an over-heated curiosity, a kid who could not tolerate leaving stones unturned, literally. As I roamed the fields of our hay farm, I avoided common sense warning me against tempting fate, and would indiscriminately roll over any rock I came across. Similarly, I couldn’t bear simply letting my questions go without adequate answers, even if the answers unsettled my preconceptions. Alas, however, I was forced to file my Catholic questions under the heading “Teenage Impertinence,” since it was considered impertinent at that time in our culture for teenagers to question the authority of our elders. And, if nothing else, I was properly raised to respect all people, those older and wiser most especially. Nevertheless, it was the Catholic perspectives contained within this book, the claim against the resurrection and the dismissive attitude among other respected elders toward Catholics that bothered me; they were the ungainly creatures beneath the rock that niggled at my mind for decades.

Owing to these events, and this rather divisive emphasis even toward other Protestant groups, for the first time in my young life, doubt encroached into sacred space, smudging the patina of my religious idealism. And though a curious kid, I was also a hopeless — and hapless — idealist. I terribly wanted what I understood to be right, so much so that small chinks in the armor

of my tradition troubled me deeply. Unity in the church seemed not merely a goal, but what deserved to be considered its state of being. Didn’t Jesus emphasize unity in His concluding prayer with His disciples — that we should all be one? (Jn 17) What could be more unsettling to a naïve teenager than the awareness that the universe of the church was not aligned? That some planets were on a different orbit? Or worse, that not everyone who called upon Christ was in solidarity with one another? We weren’t one, but *many* — the shattered and scattered and, yet by some unseen means, the Church.

God’s love and the doctrine of entire sanctification

A short while after puzzling about the apparent anomalies the Nazarene Church held toward Catholicism — and other genuinely Christian groups — I bumped head long into what for me became a thorny problem within Nazarene theology — the doctrine of entire sanctification. It should not be assumed, however, that the church was wrong, but rather my inability to grasp its meaning made it a strangely difficult issue for me. It seemed untoward, awkward, and impossible to validate — and even more impossible to live by. I couldn’t find explicit evidence for it in Scripture, and the books I consulted left me as lost at sea as ever. Accordingly, this singular tenet of the church distinguished it from other Protestant movements, classifying it within the “holiness movement,” and even more a particular reflection of holiness doctrine. The Nazarene Church professes an amalgam of the Dutch pastor/theologian Arminius and the father of Methodism, John Wesley. Wesley proffered the notion that initial sanctification that resulted in forensic justification, regeneration, and adoption was followed by what the Nazarene Church interpreted from him as a second crisis work of grace — viz. entire sanctification that eradicated the sin nature, filled one with the Holy Spirit, and set one apart for God’s purposes.

As stated, I puzzled over this doctrine throughout my teens for reasons beyond the scope of the doctrine itself, such as the methods and evidence indicating this crisis experience had indeed transpired, which was typically validated by an impactful emotional experience. What it left unaddressed was the painful worry that if a person sinned after this encounter what became of his salvation? My peers and I worried that sin was impossible to avoid but sanctification was just as impossible to hold. We dreaded the semi-annual revivals. We knew beyond doubt that each one of us hyper-hormonal, acne-faced teens had sinned a thousand times, and the emotional appeals of the evangelist only confirmed that reality, which drove us into deeper guilt and galvanized spiritual doubt. Even if we didn’t feel the tug of the Holy Spirit we, nonetheless, felt impelled to race to the altar to renew our salvation — surely we had lost it. The evangelists backed the hearse up to the church door, and we kids knew it had come for us. This whole scene made it almost impossible to view God as loving. Instead, we worried about offending Him and incurring what we knew we deserved most: His wrath. How could we claim

...Journeys Home Continued...

entire sanctification if our very salvation was at stake? How could we walk with a God of love who seemed unloving by offering a doctrine that didn't work? Again, I do not fault the Nazarene Church, but my misunderstanding of this central doctrine.

As an aside, until my adult years, I understood the altar as a kneeling rail stretching across the front of the church on either side of the communion table. Evangelists called it the mourner's bench; the place a sinner went to die in order to be reborn; where a backslider went to repent again and be restored to faith; where a confused teenager went to insure the odds were in his favor. It was not the table from which the Body and Blood of Christ would be served. That understanding would come much later in life. (And thankfully it did. It's at that altar I have discovered anew and again a loving God through the grace and merits of the Paschal Lamb.)

My one and only pastorate

I entered Northwest Nazarene University (then College) still conflicted. For a ministerial student intent upon serving in the Nazarene tradition, the inability to firmly accept an important core tenet of the church created a steep hurdle for me. Twice, my inability to affirm the doctrine of entire sanctification netted me an invitation to my academic advisor's office to discuss it. It was even suggested that perhaps the Nazarene Church wasn't the place for me. I dismissed the suggestion. Even if I didn't understand her, I loved (and still love) the Nazarene Church, and was resolved to serve God in her.

Amid the confusion, a beautiful young woman caught my eye. We were newly installed junior class officers who barely knew one another. She was the chatterbox who sat behind me in chapel (assigned seating), disrupting the services by prattling with the girl seated beside me. I began to see her in different light. She was politely assertive, cute, and a distraction from all that nagged me about the church — and my personal failures. Judy became for me that remarkable reflection of the simplicity of knowing God. Unlike me, she had no doubts. A new Christian, she could care less about doctrine. What mattered to her was to know God and love Him with her entire life. Ha! So simple! So refreshingly simple! We married immediately after college and headed for Bend, Oregon where I took up my first and only ministry assignment.

Bend Nazarene was a small church — at the time, less than one hundred worshippers on Sunday mornings. It had, however, what was characterized to me as a vibrant youth group. I was so successful with this group I managed to lose all but two kids. The rest vanished. Why? I asked the surviving two one evening. Why don't the other kids come? Gus, an unvarnished country kid answered, "They don't want to know God like you want to know God, Pastor Jim." But, he and Linda did. That began a new journey for me — and them. Over the ensuing months Judy, Gus, Linda, and I met and prayed. By the end of the school year over one hundred young people were gathering with us throughout the week — most of them new Christians who came to faith in our home or in the town's parks. They were hungry,

eager, and hopeful youth who took faith seriously and who, like Judy, simply wanted to know God and love Him forever.

A path I could have never foreseen

Eighteen months into this ministry, it became apparent that Judy and I had accomplished all that we felt called to do. It was time to change course. But where would we go next? Despite a marvelous experience with the youth, one marked by grand encounters with God that shaped each one of us, I had no sense of direction. Fortunately, a couple of father figures in the church offered timely counsel and prayer. One man in particular strongly urged me to find work outside the church and let God speak to me from an entirely different milieu. Honestly, the thought of a career path other than traditional ministry never entered my mind. At first, I was repulsed by the idea. Nonetheless, he discerned something I hadn't, and saw in me a potential that entirely escaped my view.

Consequently, at my friend's urging I put on my best suit and started knocking on doors, banks mostly. In a small Central Oregon community, there weren't that many doors to knock on. Moreover, a badly flagging economy shortened the list even further. But God opened one door that quite surprised me and a new career path emerged, one I would follow for nearly thirty years. In short order, I moved from bank management to consulting with banks as the industry expanded under bank reforms that opened new horizons for them. For nearly two decades, I traveled the country as a marketing executive working in a variety of capacities, helping bank leaders develop new delivery systems for non-traditional products. Though my career took flight, my heart remained in ministry. Yet, those doors seemed off limits. A quick look back over the years, however, reveals God's fingerprints smudged into every feature of my journey — most especially in an unexpected twist that led me home to Rome.

I likely would have never found the profoundest experience of my journey had I not dared step outside the church walls into the marketplace where God frequently surprised and amused me by the cleverness of His genius. I cannot even begin to recount the stories of people with whom I had the privilege to pray, counsel, and offer hope in offices, airplanes, and restaurants. Neither did I have the slightest wit that God might be aiming me toward the Catholic Church. Apart from early misgivings during my teens, I was mostly indifferent, but not defiant toward it. Nonetheless, a number of oddly inexplicable events transpired that relentlessly nudged me into the Tiber and toward the historic Church — despite the fact I was entirely clueless that this nudging toward Rome was even happening.

I was meeting with the administrative officer of a company one morning when our conversation diverged to faith. She fairly gushed her love for Jesus Christ, frequently calling Him "my savior." I joined in with similar enthusiasm. When I asked her what church she and her family attended, expecting to hear one of the evangelical Protestant denominations, I was taken aback when she chirped, "We're Catholics." My reaction must have caught her

by surprise: “Something wrong?” she asked. I shook my head, no. But there was something wrong. I had preconceptions about Catholics that clearly didn’t fit the impassioned witness of faith I had just observed. Our conversations continued and over time this godly lady began to dispell my ignorance toward Catholics.

Gradually transforming into a Catholic

A year later, I picked up a book authored by a Quaker minister, Richard Foster. Its title intrigued me: *Celebration of Discipline*. It would be impossible to properly describe the transforming effect it had on my spiritual life. To that point the only disciplines I knew of amounted merely to reading my Bible and daily prayer — and we called them devotions not disciplines. The notion of inward, upward, and outward disciplines — properly rhythms, based solidly on Scripture and early Christian tradition — had never been brought to my attention. But then neither had evangelical Protestantism enjoyed their bounty before Foster’s seminal and classic work. I was enthralled by the devotional masters Foster cited; so much so that I began accumulating their works and earnestly devouring their content. I craved the intimacy with Christ they portrayed. It wasn’t long before it struck me that each of these masters was Catholic, most who lived during the nadir of the Church’s history at the height of the Middle Ages. To describe this discovery in any other terms than transformative would be misleading. I didn’t resist the truths because they emerged from Catholic tradition; instead, I embraced them because they facilitated the intimacy with Christ I so craved.

Shortly after discovering the devotional masters, we moved to Portland, Oregon where I took up a significant career opportunity. Maybe a decade later, I happened onto a Benedictine Monastery in Mount Angel, a half-hour drive from our home. Along its ascending, winding road were simple, small gabled structures, housing intricately carved figures of Jesus — fourteen, all told. I had never heard of the Stations of the Cross, but as I walked the trail, pausing silently before the figures, it was as if I were mounting the Via Delarosa amid the crowd as Jesus drug His cross to Calvary. This would form my introduction to the monastery, but my introduction to Catholicism came by way of its Oblate Director and Guest House Master, Fr. Pius X. Harding, OSB. For several years, I walked the stations, studied in the magnificent abbey library where I conducted much of my doctoral research in the ancient catechumenate, and sat contemplatively in the abbey church, often alone. The time came, however, when I felt an impetus to consider becoming an oblate. Fr. Pius and I met ostensibly for that purpose. What actually transpired can only be attributed to the mystery of God. For nearly three decades, I had imperceptibly and unintentionally inched toward Rome.

As Fr. Pius and I talked, it became immediately apparent I was speaking not only with a man intellectually formed in his faith, but a brother transformed by the merits and mercy of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the most jolting moment in our discussions came after I asked why the Roman Church referred to Mary as co-Redemptrix. Wasn’t that, I reasoned, elevating her to the

same status as her Son? No, he insisted. That she was regarded as co-Redemptrix did not imply equality. It stood for *cooperation* — that, by her surrender — “be it done unto me according to your word” — she agreed to become the bearer of the Messiah under extraordinary means. She, in her sacrifice, became the first among disciples, the one who would show the world how to love her Son. In this way, she cooperated with God’s plan to fulfill prophecy by sending His Son as our savior through a handmaid overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. I remember distinctly how I felt as Fr. Pius tenderly, unapologetically unpacked this mystery. My heart was strangely warmed (borrowing from Wesley) and suddenly I saw Mary in brilliant new light.

For several months, we met and Fr. Pius patiently answered my many challenging questions and quandaries, faithfully pointing me to the cross and to the risen Savior. Nearly three years later, after dozens of conversations with him and the pastors and scholars to whom he referred me, and devouring books by Catholic theologians and Protestant converts to Catholicism, I sat down with the Retreat House administrator one morning for a lay perspective. As she recounted her journey from Anglicanism to Catholicism, I was overcome by the peace countenanced in her words and spirit. Quite unexpectedly, I sensed God asking, “What will you do with all I have shown you?” Not an emotional sort, I was immediately stunned to find myself inconsolably weeping, knowing I had arrived at a life-altering threshold. By the mercies of God, I received the grace to take the plunge. And now, three decades after a fateful conversation in a client’s office, a book that introduced me to the devotional masters, and a series of in depth conversations that produced not only answers, but a lifetime friend and brother, I am home. Catholic theology resolved my issue with entire sanctification, offering a biblical perspective with far more explanatory cogency than what I observed as a naïve teen. My wife, Judy, was, and remains, very supportive of my move to Rome. She has not become Catholic but attends Mass with me each Sunday, and has done so for nearly three years. We journey together in seeking a closer walk with our Lord Jesus

Now home, I am at peace. ■



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BLOG

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