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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Journey To Joy

By Dr. Allan J. Cease

After 51 years as a Protestant and 28 years as a United Methodist clergyman, I have come home to the Catholic Church. To my delighted surprise, I have found it to be a “pearl of great price.” Let me share with you my faith journey, my journey to Christ and with Christ and my discovery of the fullness of the Church. In so doing, I wish to highlight the joy which emerges through struggles and hardships and, in fact, is made all the more exuberant because of them. My story is a journey to joy!

Some people who come to faith in Jesus Christ have a “Paul” experience. Like St. Paul, they have a dramatic conversion when almost instantaneously they are changed from unbelief to belief and in a moment are brought from darkness to light. These testimonies are wonderful to hear, but they represent a small percentage of the people who have been won to Christ. Most of us have a “Timothy” experience rather than a “Paul” one. St. Timothy was a protégé of Paul, whose mother and grandmother were Christians. He was brought up in the faith and, so far as we know, did not have a dramatic conversion experience. I am one of those rare individuals who has had both a “Paul” experience and a “Timothy” experience.

My childhood was a “Timothy” experience. I was brought up in a devout Methodist home in Northeastern Pennsylvania. From my earliest days, my mother and grandmother read the Bible to me, prayed with me, and sang hymns for me daily so that I came to know the love of Jesus at a very early age.

### Call to Ministry

By the time I was in fifth or sixth grade, I had a steadily increasing sense of God’s call to ordained ministry in the Methodist Church. I also had a consistently Methodist education in prep school, college, seminary, and, after entering full-time ministry, in another United Methodist seminary where I completed a Doctor of Ministry program. Starting with my second year in seminary, I became a pastor. Over the course of the next 26 years, I would pastor several United Methodist congregations in Northeastern Pennsylvania and the Binghamton, New York area.

In 1976, I met a young lady from Endicott, New York named Lynne Hess, who was also studying for the ministry. Lynne and I fell in love and were married in 1980.

### “You’re Not Playing Bingo!”

Several years later while I was serving a congregation in Binghamton, Lynne was having a spiritual struggle that led her to become a member of the Catholic Church. When *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I came home one day, she told me she was planning to become Catholic. I voiced my objection, not by lifting up some esoteric point of dogma or theology. No, the first thing I said, believe it or not, was, "You're not playing Bingo!" I did, in fact, strongly object to the idea of her becoming Catholic. Indeed, I took it as a personal repudiation of me and my ministry. I had never considered myself to be anti-Catholic in any degree, but I believed that Catholics had added certain unscriptural and unnecessary elements to the pure faith in Christ, which Protestants, through Luther and the Reformers, had restored. Over time, however, I began to see how happy Lynne was as a Catholic and how greatly the Catholic Faith was helping her spiritual life as well as how she was taking great pains to be active in my congregation and be supportive of my ministry with the approval of her priest. These realities helped me to accept her decision, although I still had no conscious inclinations toward Catholicism on my own part. Lynne was journeying to joy!

Two years later after we moved to Scranton, Pennsylvania, our son Christian, who was attending a Catholic parochial school, told me that he too wanted to receive First Holy Communion and become Catholic. When I asked him why, he said, "Because I want to have Communion every week, not just once a month, and besides, it is really Jesus!" I then gave him my blessing, amazed that such words would come from an eight-year-old Protestant boy! In retrospect I now realize that the blessing I gave my son was a tacit admission of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a truth I was not yet ready to acknowledge. Yet, through this conversation my son had sown a seed that, I believe, played a significant role in preparing me for the Catholic Faith.

In 1990 we moved to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, so that I could pursue a position as a resident chaplain at the Williamsport Hospital. The itinerant system by which we moved every few years and other pressures of pastoral ministry were taking a toll on our family. We hoped that by my entering institutional chaplaincy we would be able to live in one place for a longer period of time and bring more stability to our family life.

At the same time I was growing disenchanted with some of the liberal theology of the United Methodist Church and especially its pro-choice position on abortion and its continual controversies over the ordination of homosexuals. So although I was intending to become endorsed as a United Methodist chaplain, I was actively looking into transferring my orders to some other Protestant denomination. I considered the Lutherans, Episcopalians, and the United Church of Christ, but I soon discovered that they were having the very same problems with these moral issues that the United Methodists were, and, in the case of the latter two, the situation was even worse. There seemed to be a lack of consistency with historic Christianity on several key matters and no central authority to prevent the church from voting every four years on whether abortion or the practice of homosexuality and remarriage after divorce were right or wrong!

### A Life-Altering Weekend

In August 1993, one month before I was planning to appear before the United Methodist committee which I was hoping would endorse me as a chaplain, my wife told me she wanted to attend the National Sacred Heart Conference at Franciscan University

## FEATURED RESOURCES

### Deep in Scripture CD



Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid joins Marcus Grodi on this Deep in Scripture to share a few of his own "hard verses" that were difficult for him to understand. Learn how Patrick wrestled with issues such as: call no man father; does Christ save all people; and the Catholic teaching of the sinlessness of Mary.

\$35

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



### Now What? A Guide for New (and Not-So-New) Catholics — By Patrick Madrid

You've joined the Church or rediscovered your faith: Now what? If you're at a loss about how to participate fully in the Church, connect with your local parish, and understand all those "quirky" Catholic things they didn't cover in your catechism classes, this book can help. It offers practical advice and clears up misconceptions about what it means to be Catholic. Patrick Madrid is the perfect coach — able to offer encouragement when things seem odd or difficult, explain why Catholics say and do (and don't say or do) certain things, and help new converts fully live their Catholic faith. Here is a practical guide for all those who feel out of their element now that they are in the Catholic Church. Make this book a gift to someone you know who became Catholic at Easter or get a copy for yourself to better appreciate your Catholic faith!

\$50

Receive *Now What? A Guide for New Catholics (and Not-So-New) Catholics* for a \$50 donation.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *Now What? A Guide for New Catholics (and Not-So-New) Catholics* for a \$75 donation.

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See page C for how to enroll in our *Premiums Club* and automatically receive these resources each month!

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

in Steubenville, Ohio. Lynne told me one of the speakers was Msgr. John Esseff from Scranton, a priest whom I had known and admired for about twenty years. To her surprise, I agreed to go with her. We decided, however, that I was not obligated to attend any of the conference and if at any time I didn't want to be at the conference, I could go sightseeing in nearby Pittsburgh.

As it turned out, I did attend the conference, every session, even the ones about the Sacred Heart of Mary. I did get into some confrontations with certain militant Catholics over doctrinal issues, and I blew my cool when one young man told me that Martin Luther was the AntiChrist! I think that most of the people in the cafeteria that day could hear me yelling back my

defense of Luther and the Reformation during that lunchtime "conversation." In spite of this, I kept attending the sessions. I was enthralled by Msgr. Esseff's Saturday evening youth program, but the conference still had no life-changing effect on me until the next morning when I attended the Mass that closed the conference. What was about to happen to me was my "Paul" experience to follow my "Timothy" one. As a Protestant, I had already been converted to Christ; now I was about to be converted to the fullness of the Church.

During Communion, as the Catholics in the room were going forward to receive the Eucharist and I remained in my pew in prayer, I was suddenly overpowered by *Continued on page 5* ➤



## Encouraging Us To Seek Christ

INTERVIEW WITH ERNIE FREEMAN,  
FORMER ASSEMBLIES OF GOD MINISTER

Ernie Freeman has shared his written conversion story in the January, 2013 newsletter (Go to [www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org) to read it!) and recently was a guest on *The Journey Home* on February 22, 2016. In the following short Signpost interview he talks about his gratitude for being brought to Christ by the Assemblies of God but encourages others not to be afraid to sincerely study the Catholic Church, in which he and his wife found an enrichment and fulfillment of what they already had. — *JonMarc Grodi, Manager of Outreach & Development*



[http://www.chnetwork.org/signposts/  
encouraging-us-to-seek-christ-with-ernie-freeman/](http://www.chnetwork.org/signposts/encouraging-us-to-seek-christ-with-ernie-freeman/)

*I came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior through my background in the Assemblies of God. I am very grateful for the background, the teaching that I received, the foundation that was laid for me by that particular group of people and that organization. They introduced me to the Bible, they introduced me to a life of faith, and they introduced me obviously to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Great people. Very grateful. Very thankful.*

*The beauty of Catholicism is that it expanded that understanding for me of what it meant to know Jesus and to follow Him. It is by no means a rejection or repudiation of the foundation that I received in the Assemblies. It just might be a walking into a fuller, a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ and a deeper understanding of what it means to be His child — a deeper understanding of what it means to have a relationship with Him. There was just so much more there that I had never known or recognized before. The beauty of Catholic teaching and Catholic practice is just overwhelming. I am still overwhelmed by it, as is my wife.*

*I had a strange experience one Sunday morning just before I was to preach. I was standing on what we would call the*

*platform and I was looking out over the congregation and for some reason it just suddenly occurred to me that 40% of my congregation who were gathered there that morning were ex-Catholics. I was surprised by that. I was a little saddened by that sudden realization because I had also already started my journey and my study of the Catholic Faith. Even then mentally, I was saying to them: "You don't know what you have given up." I was still a Protestant pastor, but was already on my journey and I felt sad for them. Understand my heart here: I felt sad for those that fear studying the teachings of the Catholic Church. There are some people who are actually so afraid that they will become Catholic if they allow the Catholic teachings to enter their consciousness.*

*You do not have to fear that. It will be your decision as to what you are going to do with what you confront, but you need to hear this: it does not mean in any way that you will lose something, you will gain so much more.*

*For my wife and me, our relationship with Jesus, our understanding of Jesus, and our understanding of the Christian Faith was not diminished by becoming Catholic. It increased exponentially. There is so much more there. You lose nothing and you gain so much. ■*

# Explore & Search the New CHNetwork.org!

By Seth Paine, Developer of Web & New Media

The new Coming Home Network website has been out for a few months and is full of helpful content, from episodes of the *The Journey Home*, to conversion stories, to *Deep in History* talks.

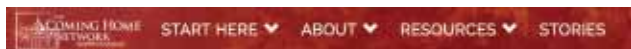


One of our primary aims is to spread the great stories of those who have been drawn to the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church. It is through these stories especially that many have been encouraged to look more deeply — or for the first time — into the claims of the Catholic Church. Furthermore when someone has begun to ask tough questions about the Catholic Faith, often more influential than apologetic arguments (though those are valuable) it is the personal testimony and witness of others who have confronted similar questions that help people come to discover the answers for themselves.

To this end, we want to make these stories as easy as possible to find and share on our website. I want to share with you some of the ways to explore CHNetwork.org in order to find the content you need.

## 1) Browse the top menu

The top menu is always visible on every page no matter how far down you scroll. We wanted it to always be accessible so no matter what you are doing you can get to any other point of the website with a few easy clicks.



**START HERE** The Start Here menu is broken into four sections, depending on why someone is coming to the site: those just exploring the Catholic Church, those in the process of becoming Catholic, Catholic converts/reverts, or life-long Catholics. The items in each section are some of the top content we feel is most helpful for each group.

**ABOUT** Anything you want to know about the work of the Coming Home Network as well as how to come alongside us and support us can be found under the About menu.

**RESOURCES** Under Resources, you can find the latest stories and articles as well as links to pages for *The Journey Home* program, Signposts interviews, and *Deep in Scripture* podcasts and other content such as *Deep in History* talks and written stories.

**STORIES** The Stories link will take you to a page of written stories, *Journey Home* programs, and Signposts interviews.

## 2) Narrowing your content

Once you visit a page for one of our programs or written stories, you can narrow down the number of items by using filters.



One way to filter the content is by denomination. For example, you can go to the Journey Home page and use the filters found on the sidebar to select “Episcopal/Anglican.” You now have a list of all *The Journey Home* programs that feature someone from

that denominational background. You can then take the URL of that web page and email it to an Episcopal friend. Or use the buttons found on the top of any show or story on the site to share:



## 3) Search

As you can see above, there are many ways to browse for the content you are looking for. To narrow down even more on what you want to find, you can use the search box. To search, click on the magnifying glass in the top right corner of the website.

The Search results page also uses the same filters as I described before. So you can do a search for “The Eucharist”, and then filter by “Episcopalian/Anglican,” “Couples,” and “Journey Home Episodes.” What you now have is a list of 11 Journey Home programs of Catholic couples who have come from an Episcopalian or Anglican background and whose descriptions or tags mention “The Eucharist.”

We are very excited to be able to give you the ability to find exactly what you want on our site. In the end, this is not just about making a website that is easy to use so we can feel good about it. We want a site where you can find what you want so that you can share it with your family and friends. There are so many people out there who have gone on this long and sometimes difficult journey into the Catholic Church, and we are proud to have many of their stories on our website. We are touched by each of their stories and we want to be able to share their stories with everyone. We pray that God will take the work that we have done and multiply it to His glory and the glory of His bride, the Church. ■





Member's Section

These were essentially the last words Jesus said from the cross, summarizing all for which He had lived and died, before He finally exclaimed, "It is finished!" The message and victory of His life, death, and resurrection was not just for the Jews but for "all the families of the nations!"

Are you and I "those who seek him"? Are we those "who cannot keep [ourselves] alive"?

The prophecy of these words is far from fulfilled, for "all the families of the nations" have not yet turned to him; they

do not yet "worship before him"; the proud have yet to "bow down ... to the dust."

So our post-Easter task is before us: we must give away what we have received freely; we must "tell of the Lord to the coming generation, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn."

Who in your life does not know Him, and may only come to know and worship Him through you? ■

## We Walk by Faith, Not by Sight

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org

For five years I worked part-time as a therapist serving the mental health needs of women and men incarcerated at a county jail. It was a challenging ministry for a variety of reason — overcrowding, a lack of private meeting space, noise, uncooperative clients (and guards!), just to name a few.



One of the greatest spiritual challenges for me was to see Christ in the people I served. ("I was in prison and you visited me," Matt 25:36.) Honestly, try as I might, I simply could not "recognize Jesus in His distressing disguise," as soon-to-be-Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta used to say. I remember discussing this lack of spiritual vision with my spiritual director. I remember lamenting that I didn't see Jesus in the people I served in the jail, that I wanted to see Jesus in them, that I was praying to see Jesus in them, but I wasn't seeing Jesus in them.

"Not to worry," my director said. "Neither the goats nor the sheep in Matthew 25 saw the King (Jesus). 'When did we visit you in prison?' the one group queried. 'When did we not visit you in prison?' the other group asked. Remember that 'we walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor 5:7). Seeing God in others is an act of faith, not sight. You may pray for better spiritual vision for yourself, if you wish, but you must pray for them. Pray! Fast and pray for them."

I took my spiritual director's advice. I prayed and fasted and served my incarcerated sisters and brothers, trusting that Jesus was there in some mysterious way, even though I couldn't see Him.

I think it's easy to forget that we walk by faith, not by sight when it comes to our attempts to help a family member or friend come home to the Catholic Church. We pray, have conversations, exchange email, make phone calls, share books and CDs, extend invitations to Mass, and/or Bible studies all to no avail. Or so it seems. We cannot know for certain if, when, or how God is using us to bring another person to Christ or to His Church. We cannot be sure. God will determine that.

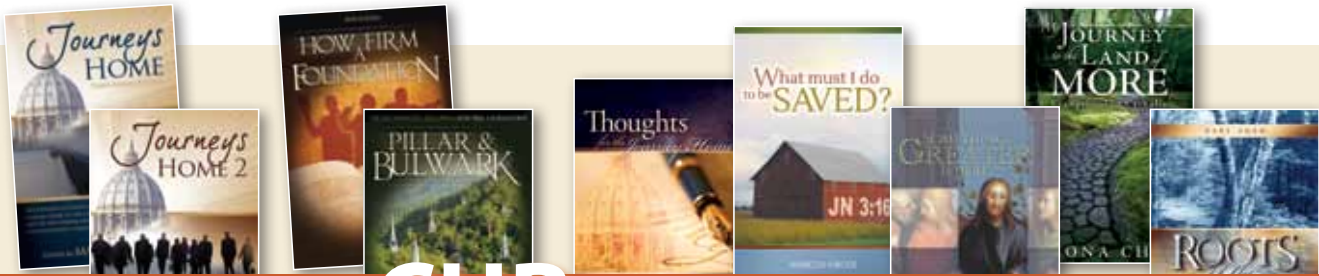
Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote in his poem, *The Passing of Arthur*:

More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands in prayer  
Both for them and those who call them friend?

All of us involved in evangelization would do well first and foremost to pray, fast, and pray for those we are called to invite into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church He founded. We may or may not see tangible results to our prayers. We must stay in the Effort Department and let God take care of the outcome. Pray. Fast and pray that He would work in and through their lives as *we walk by faith, not by sight*. ■

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### TAX NOTICES



If you need a record of your 2015 contributions for tax purposes, please contact Wendy Hart, wendy@chnetwork.org or 740-450-1175 ext 100

### 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.

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If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation and join the Premiums Club in order to receive the featured newsletter resources each month, please go to **www.CHNetwork.org/premiums**, call **740-450-1175**, or complete this form & mail to:

**CHNetwork**  
Attention: Ann Moore  
PO Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH 43702

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 a Presbyterian minister in Singapore, that the Lord would assist him in overcoming his final questions concerning the Catholic Faith.
- For Matt, a minister in Wisconsin, that our Lord Jesus Christ would bless and guide him as he studies the Catholic Faith.
- For an Episcopal priest in New Hampshire, that God would speak to his heart while he is on retreat during his sabbatical.
- For Henry, a minister in the Netherlands, that the Holy Spirit would guide him into the very heart of the Catholic Church.
- For Chad, a non-denominational lay minister, that Jesus would fill him with his many graces as he discovers the Catholic Church.
- For an Anglican priest in England, that as he studies and prays the Holy Scriptures our Lord would call him home to the Catholic Church.
- For Dan, a minister in the south, that, as he seeks full-communion with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, Jesus would guide his every step.
- For a Baptist seminarian in Texas, that he would quickly feel at home and find his calling in the Catholic Church.

- For a Pentecostal minister in England, that, as he studies more about the true teachings of the Catholic Church, God would give him a hunger for the holy Eucharist.
- For Mike, an Assemblies of God missionary, that his curiosity in the Catholic Church would bear much good fruit through the grace of our Lord Jesus.
- For a Baptist lay minister in England, that he would act on the grace granted to him to return to the Catholic Faith.

## Layity

- For all the members of the CHNetwork who were received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil, that receiving the sacraments will bring them ever closer to our Lord Jesus.
- For a Pentecostal from the West Coast who cannot come to accept the authority of the Church.
- For Amelia to overcome her struggles and be able to fully participate in the Mass and receive the sacraments again.
- For Nick who had some misconceptions about the Catholic position on non-Catholics, that he come to joyfully embrace the fullness of the Faith.

- For Cheryl to find good Catholic friends and support as she explores the Catholic Faith.
- For Paul who wishes to attend RCIA and be confirmed but does not at this point have transportation.
- For Cathy, a convert, who has had numerous personal struggles this past year, that her love for the Catholic Faith give her strength in her difficulties.
- For a teenager who wishes to become Catholic but her parents are not supportive.
- For Dan and his family who are looking to join the Church but are having a difficult time finding the opportunity to attending RCIA.
- For a Baptist in Utah who loves the Catholic Faith, that she be able to come into full communion with the Church.
- For Dan who feels called to become Catholic but is having a difficult time leaving behind his Protestant faith community.

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](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org).

We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & 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

**April 4**

Greg Pratt\*  
 Former Agnostic

**April 11**

Dr. Jack Mulder\*  
 Former Reformed Church in America

**April 18**

Michael Kress\*  
 Former Church of God/Agnostic/  
 Episcopal

**April 25**

Millie & Dail Lace\*  
 Former Assemblies of God

\*Schedule is subject to change.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 3

the awesome presence of holy love. In an indescribable way I was bathed with the Spirit of the Lord and began to weep openly. I regained my composure, however, by the time my wife and son returned to the pew. I believe that, at that moment, I received what St. Thomas Aquinas called “spiritual communion,” that is receiving the graces of the Eucharist without actually receiving the Eucharist.

After Mass I did not say a word about what I had experienced even though I felt a love, a joy, and a sense of holiness in my spirit I could not describe. But as we were pulling out of the parking lot to leave the conference I nearly caused Lynne who was driving to swerve off the road when I said, “I think the Lord wants me to become a Catholic!” Then I shared with my wife and son what I had experienced during Mass. But I also found my defenses going up as I began to list all the reasons I did not want to be a Catholic and should not be one. These ranged from doctrinal beliefs which I considered unscriptural to vocational issues such as my call to ministry. I knew at this point in my faith journey that I most certainly did not want to become Catholic, but somehow in my innermost being I was compelled to do so.

Upon returning home, I decided to enter the inquiry stage of RCIA (The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). It was providential that there was a newly ordained permanent deacon at the parish in South Williamsport where my wife and son were members. He had also been a Protestant minister for many years. In fact, at one point he had served as dean of a Protestant theological seminary. I started to meet with him regularly to discuss the Catholic Faith. I tried to be brutally honest about my objections to what I thought Catholics believed about Mary, the Pope, purgatory, and other doctrinal issues. In response, the deacon would give me sections of the *Catechism* and the documents of the Second Vatican Council to read and respond to. What I read in those documents and heard from the deacon’s instruction went far beyond what I expected. Much of it was not what I thought Catholics believed. Not only to my great surprise was Catholic teaching in total harmony with Scripture, I discovered that I already believed much more of it than I had thought I did. I did voluminous reading. I digested the *Catechism* and some of the writings of the Church Fathers. I searched the Scriptures to find support for Catholic teaching, and, as a result, became more convinced that in the Catholic Church is the fullness of truth. I was still wrestling with various issues, though, and did not enter the Catholic Church at that point.

### The Eucharist Drew Me

Pivotal to my conviction of the Catholic Church having the fullness of truth was my increasing awareness of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This is not surprising, since the Eucharist is so absolutely central to our faith and identity as Catholic Christians.

Holy communion has always been very important to me. As a Methodist, I believed that communion was a sacrament and,

as such, conveyed divine grace. I further believed that our Lord was indeed spiritually present in this sacrament; but also that the bread and grape juice, while special and sacred, remained bread and grape juice after their consecration. For many years I had never thought there was a need for me to rethink or re-experience the meaning of Christ’s presence in the sacrament. But in the decade before my Steubenville experience, I was gradually discovering there was something more.

Interestingly, a liturgical renewal within my Protestant denomination played a role in this process. In the mid-1980’s, the United Methodist Church issued a new Order for the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper which bore a much closer resemblance to the Vatican II Liturgy of the Mass than did the previous ritual, which had emphasized holy communion as a memorial meal symbolized in bread and cup. The new one offered a shift in emphasis and startled me with the words that had been added to the calling down of the Holy Spirit section (“*epiclesis*”) in the so-called Prayer of Thanksgiving. These words ask the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine the Body and Blood of Christ for the worshipers.

One day after having offered this prayer, it truly hit me what I was asking the Lord. I was not asking God to turn these communion elements into representations of Christ’s Body and Blood, but into His actual Body and Blood! That thought, especially after my Steubenville experience, blew me away! I began to ask myself, “Do I really expect the Prayer of Thanksgiving to be answered? Can Jesus Christ actually transform ordinary bread and wine into His actual Body and Blood, and will He do it?” At that point I had not yet adequately grappled with the issues of apostolic succession and the validity of a Protestant celebration of the Eucharist, but that change in the Methodist liturgy started me down the path of acceptance and appreciation of both transubstantiation and the Catholic Mass itself when I actually encountered it.

During my final years of Protestant ministry, I was serving as a part-time chaplain at a large state-operated residential facility for adults with intellectual disabilities. My offering of holy communion to the individuals who lived there also caused the Holy Spirit to enlighten me about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As I ministered to these individuals who had moderate, severe, and profound cognitive disabilities, I realized that when I held aloft the communion wafer and said to them, “The Body of Christ,” many of those who heard these words were incapable of comprehending them as symbol but understood them literally. It dawned on me in the course of this ministry that these folks truly believed that wafer was what I said it was — the Body of Christ. Beginning to look at the Eucharist through their intuitive spirituality, I began to believe it, too.

These experiences intensified the insights I was gaining from reading the Church Fathers, who I discovered were unanimous in their teaching that the Eucharist is the Real Presence of the Lord.

Additionally, I saw the sixth chapter of John in a new light. I came to realize that when Jesus said, “My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink” (John 6:55), He was not speaking in metaphorical terms but in literal ones. If His language had been symbolic, He certainly would have clarified the matter promptly for those disciples who “turned back and no longer went about with Him” (John 6:66), but He did not. I came to see that in an earlier passage when Nicodemus misunderstood what Jesus was saying about being “born anew” (or “born from above,” John 3:3-4), the Lord did offer an explanation. “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). But in John 6, Christ’s words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood stood with no modification. Their meaning was seen to be self-evident and obvious. As astonishing as it seems, the Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ!

### Trouble With Mary

Another serious doctrinal issue I had to overcome in my pilgrimage centered on the Catholic teachings about Mary. I thought that Catholics made too much of Mary and, since we could go directly to Jesus as our Mediator and Advocate, praying to Mary was unnecessary at best and blasphemous at worst.

I recall one afternoon when our son came home from parochial school with a rosary given to him by his teacher. When he asked me to pray the Rosary with him, I wanted nothing to do with it. I remember getting up, saying, “Get that thing away from me!” and walking away with Christian running after me with his rosary in hand before Lynne thankfully intervened. For me at that point in my faith journey, the Rosary was an obsolete remnant of the Middle Ages that was connected with superstition for illiterate people, not the beautiful and powerful aide to intimacy with God that I now know it to be. In the years that have passed since my son chased me around the parsonage with his rosary, the Holy Spirit has helped me to see that our Catholic devotion to Mary does not take anything away from Jesus, but instead it exalts Him!

When we pray to Mary, we are not looking at her as an object of worship, but merely asking her to direct us to her all-gracious Son in praise and intercession. When we affirm her Immaculate Conception we are not declaring that Mary needed no Savior, for as the *Catechism* states, “She is redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son” (CCC, paragraph 492). Rather her preservation from original sin is fitting in light

of the reality of the Incarnation since Mary bore in her womb the Second Person of the Godhead who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

In summary, I have discovered that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the other Catholic dogmas concerning Mary are not superficial appendages to our Christian beliefs but are necessary to a complete development and appreciation of the miracle of the Incarnation. Although one cannot definitively quote chapter and verse from Scripture to “proof text” some Marian doctrines, they logically follow from a full understanding of who Jesus truly is, God Incarnate, a belief that all Christians can gladly affirm!

### Vocational Concerns

The vocational and practical issues of my coming into the Church were more problematic than the doctrinal ones. After all, I was married and assumed I could not be a priest. Ever since I was in elementary school all I ever wanted was to be an ordained minister and I was finding that dream shattered. Besides that, being a pastor was the only occupation I had ever known. I had never actually had a job in the secular world.

In 1994 I resigned from the church I was pastoring, took an early retirement from the United Methodist Church, and started looking into secular jobs while still pursuing the part-time chaplaincy position I continued to hold, ministering to adults with developmental disabilities. The next five or six years were extremely difficult financially and put tremendous strain on me and my family. During that time, my wife waged a terrible battle with bipolar disorder and was hospitalized numerous times in various mental health units. I was also terrified about how I should approach my mother about my decision to become Catholic. She was now in her upper 80’s and in very poor health. I was sure that the news that her son the minister wasn’t going to be a minister anymore would break her heart and spirit. All of these obstacles delayed my entrance into the Catholic Church.

### An Authority I Could Trust

When all is said and done, the key issue in my entering the Catholic Church was the matter of authority. I was frustrated and despairing over the Protestant denominations’ inability to speak and act with a unified, consistent authority on several significant matters of faith and morals. I was drawn to the Catholic Church because I began to see that when Jesus gave His authority to the Apostles (cf. Matthew 10:1; 28:16-20), He was bestowing it upon His Church. I became increasingly convinced that



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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

the unity and consistency of that authority to speak and act in His name was most fully present in the Catholic Church.

In 1997, as I was moving towards my final weeks of RCIA, this conviction was put to the test when I read the Easter Vigil liturgy and encountered the statement I would have to affirm in order to be confirmed as a Catholic: “I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.” That word “all” threw me at first. As a Methodist, I did not feel required to accept everything my denomination taught as revealed by God. So I thought to myself, “How can I affirm that statement? I still don’t know all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches, and some of what I think I know I’m still not sure about including some of that stuff about Mary.” Yet I was sure about this matter of the authority of the Church in its faithfulness to apostolic teaching. So I affirmed what I knew, trusted twenty centuries of apostolic teaching for what I didn’t know or wasn’t sure of, and gladly and gratefully read the entire statement at Easter Vigil without hesitation.

I was confirmed and received my first Eucharist in the Church that Jesus founded through the Apostles. I will remember and cherish dearly that wonderful Easter Vigil in 1997 all the remaining days of my life. It was an occasion of profound joy even though I still did not have a permanent full-time job at the time, and we were still facing severe financial, emotional, and marital difficulties as a result of the many pressures we had to endure. It was a journey to joy in the midst of the dark night of my soul as I continued to wrestle with what sort of vocation God had in store for me.

Our financial woes continued to mount until I secured a full-time position with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania late in 2000, but it was too late to save us from bankruptcy and too late to save our marriage. Lynne and I separated in 2000, and I very reluctantly granted her a divorce in 2003. For several years I lived a life of celibate singleness, keeping in touch with Lynne as a friend and praying for the restoration of our marriage.

In 2007 my prayers were answered when Lynne approached me about getting back together as husband and wife. We agreed, however, that before setting a date for our reuniting, we would test our relationship by participating in a Retrouvaille weekend at our diocesan retreat center. (Retrouvaille is an outstanding Catholic program for couples with troubled marriages, an outgrowth of Marriage Encounter. I highly recommend it.) On December 18, 2010, Lynne and I reaffirmed our marriage vows before the altar of St. Therese’s Church in Shavertown, PA.

I was relieved to discover that many of my fears and apprehensions about becoming Catholic were largely unfounded. When I told my mother I was Catholic several months after I was received into the Catholic Church, she took the news better than I expected, and so did most of my other relatives and friends. Additionally, although I have not become a priest or deacon, I have no shortage of opportunities to use my pastoral gifts and training in my local parish. At St. Therese’s I have served as a lector, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion,

catechist for RCIA and SPRED (special religious education), Lenten Scripture study leader for four years, member of the Parish-Pastoral council for three years and chairperson for one; and a member of the Liturgy Committee and the newly formed men’s faith sharing group. I have been at no loss of occasions to serve our Lord. The pastor and members of St. Therese’s are giving us tremendous encouragement and support.

In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, ‘Rejoice!’ Have no anxiety about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 4, 6-7).

Do you know what was going on with Paul when he wrote those words? He wasn’t sitting in an ivory tower or enjoying a time of pleasure and ease. No, he was shackled in a dark dingy prison cell, not knowing from one moment to the next whether or not he would live or die. Yet he was moved to write, “Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, ‘Rejoice!’” What could possibly give the apostle boundless joy in the midst of such desperate circumstances? It was the knowledge that “the Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). He is coming someday on the clouds of glory. He is coming today and every day to bring us peace in the midst of pain, hope that disperses despair, and joy that no sadness or heartache can overcome. Jesus will lead us all on a journey to joy if we but trust Him. Thank God for the Catholic Church! ■



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