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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Give Grace a Chance

By Jackie Barry

Erma Bombeck once said of those born on Christmas day, "There are 364 other days to choose from, but you were chosen to enter the world on a day when peace and joy reign." I was one of two babies born the morning of December 25, 1946 at a hospital in Flagstaff, Arizona, having to wait my turn while the other baby was brought into the world. My father jokes about how he nearly ran over a Catholic priest upon leaving the hospital, his tires sliding on the ice down a steep Flagstaff street.

I was still very young when my family moved from Arizona to the desert town of Victorville, California. In 1951, my parents converted to Catholicism and I was baptized. Later, we moved to Riverside, California, where I attended St. Francis de Sales Catholic School, receiving my First Communion in 1954. I then transferred to St. Thomas Catholic School and was confirmed in 1958. Many of the friends I made at these schools later left the Church, as I myself did; only a handful of them have remained Catholic. But we all shared many wonderful memories of growing up Catholic, and of all my childhood experiences, these times were some of the best.

My parents raised us with a strict sense of commitment to the Church; we were converts, after all. We prayed daily Rosaries, attended Mass each Sunday, went to confession at least once a month and learned reverence and devotion to the Blessed Mother. Rosaries were prayed together on our knees in the living room. Our prankish brother would make faces or noises and set us girls off in

silent laughter, resulting in our father giving us a stern look. I must admit that our Rosaries were not very reverent.

After I left grammar school, our parents could no longer afford to send us to Catholic schools, so I attended public junior high and high school. I was used to small classroom sizes, uniforms, and strict rules. Now I was exposed to a world so totally foreign that it took months for me to feel like I fit in, and even more time to make new friends, since most of mine had gone on to Catholic high school. However, our family continued with our Catholic upbringing, and most of the friends I ran around with were from my grammar school days, so faith still played an important role in my life.

I stayed home once I graduated from high school, attending a two-year college, where I earned my Associate Degree. Then I was accepted at the University of Northern Arizona to pursue a four-year degree in teaching; however, the lure of becoming a flight attendant derailed those plans. I went to an interview for

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

Eastern Airlines and was accepted for training in Miami. I was ecstatic! I flew to Florida, having never been on a plane before! Somehow I divined that, when I left California, I would not be back for a very long time. But not knowing the future, I had no idea I would be leaving behind my Catholic faith as well.

On My Own and Flying High

It was difficult to be a faithful Catholic while working as a flight attendant. I was stationed in Alexandria, Virginia and was on call for both Dulles and Reagan airports. I rarely had Sundays off, so it became ever easier not to attend Mass. Besides, there really was no local Catholic parish where I lived and I had no car. We flight attendants relied on taxis and public transportation to get us to and from the airport. One roommate did have a car, but she was out on flights many times when I was not. One time when she was home, she suggested we go to the local Lutheran church (she was Lutheran), and I thought, "Why not?" I had grown up with the notion that it was sinful to attend a Protestant church, and for a time felt guilty about going. But after enjoying the warmth and hospitality of this congregation, I had no problem attending periodically with my friend. This began my exposure to other faith traditions and an overall feeling that God was present there as well as in my Catholic church back in California. So I gave it no further thought.

Through a mutual friend, I met, fell in love with, and married my husband. He is Methodist and was in the Air Force at the time, stationed in Korea during the Vietnam War. We were

married in April of 1970 at the Methodist church in Riverside, California. My parents, still very much Catholic, never said a word about it, and I appreciated that from them. My husband's remaining military time was spent in Biloxi, Mississippi right after Hurricane Camille had destroyed much of the area. It seemed like an idyllic life. We rented a small place off base and remained there for almost another year before his time in the military was completed.

Married and Methodist

We attended services on base as well as at a small Methodist church in Biloxi. Methodism was quickly becoming a part of my life, and I felt very comfortable in its surroundings. My husband's family had been Methodists for generations; some had been circuit riders back in the 1800's. I learned a lot about the history of John and Charles Wesley, and I still love to sing the beautiful Charles Wesley hymns. Even though there were times during my early married life that a longing filled my heart, I wasn't aware what it was, and I wasn't considering returning to Catholicism.

We left Mississippi in 1971 and headed back to California, where my husband and I both worked while he finished college at the University of California at Riverside. We were active in the Methodist Church in Redlands, where his folks lived, and we settled in comfortably, not suspecting that a career opportunity would soon have us headed to Texas. It was in Texas that we raised our family and became entrenched in the Texan way

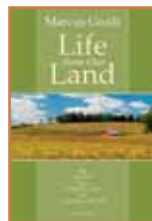
FEATURED RESOURCES

Deep in Scripture CD



In this insightful *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi and guest

Jim Anderson discuss "hard verses" in the Bible where Jesus speaks of things such as renouncing all our possessions and hating our mother and father. What does Jesus want from us who are called His disciples and are wishing to live a Christian life? This program discusses these verses through the eyes of Catholic tradition.



Life From Our Land: *The Search for a Simpler Life in a Complex World* — By Marcus Grodi

Voices from every direction beckon us, even push us, toward better and faster technology, with the promise of more wealth, more pleasure, and, consequently, more happiness. But have we become so bewitched by the siren song of material progress that we've lost the ability not just to achieve, but to discern what true happiness is? What criteria do we use to plan for the future, for retirement? At the end of our earthly lives, how will we measure our fruitfulness? In this book Marcus Grodi discusses what he and his family discovered, mostly by surprise, after moving from the city to twenty-five acres of Ohio farmland. This move involved a radical shift in priorities for all of them, but mostly it helped them to discover some critical truths about our relationship to nature and to nature's Creator that apply regardless of where a person lives. He offers wonderful reflections on his going-back-to-the-land experience as a metaphor for drawing closer to God.

\$35

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

\$50

Receive *Life From Our Land* for a \$50 donation.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *Life From Our Land* 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!

of life, loving the land, the people, and their values of faith and family. Here we met some of our best long-term friends; here our children grew up, married, and raised our grandchildren. Here, too, I began to be aware that something was missing in my life. But it would be another 43 years before I would realize just what had been burning so long, deep down in my soul. It was that flame of the Holy Spirit which had ignited in me when

I was confirmed. It had never left; it was, for all those years, just reduced to a faintly glowing ember.

We started our Texas life in the town of Edna. Having been raised in California, this was my first experience in a very small town. It was somewhat of a culture shock. My husband was a probation officer for a tri-county area, and Edna was close to most places he had to travel. The town was full [Continued on page 5](#) ➤



Encountering Christ as a “Cradle Atheist”

INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER FULWILER

This month we are sharing an interview with recent returning *Journey Home* guest Jennifer Fulwiler, a life-long atheist who longed for truth and found it in Jesus Christ. Enjoy this short interview and then head over to CHNetwork.org to watch/share the video interview and to access her full testimony in our *Journey Home* archive. — JonMarc Grodi, Manager of Outreach and Development



www.chnetwork.org/signposts/encountering-christ-as-a-cradle-atheist-with-jennifer-fulwiler/

your money to these organizations and be a great Christian. That is no problem.” And I had a Christian over here saying something different. So, I

I was always on a quest for truth. Especially truth when it came to ideas about love, morality, and doing the right thing.

Something in my heart said, “I know that love is the meaning of life. I know that serving others and kindness — which I see so many of my atheist friends doing — I know this is objectively the right way to live.” But I couldn’t get there with this strict atheistic view.

I eventually found this truth, frankly, in Jesus Christ. He is the source of that love, of that which I was searching for all along.

When I first encountered Christ — and that might even be too strong of a word, because I was not open to encountering Christ; I was very closed to that idea — you could say, I was reading about Christ, and that was as far as I would go. And I would not have admitted this at the time. If you had asked, I would have denied, denied, denied ... But I had this feeling that there was something in me that said that there is something real here. That there is something to this idea of Jesus Christ.

So, I began asking the question, “Who is Jesus?” What does He stand for? What does this mysterious Jesus Christ figure say about our lives? And what I saw within mainstream Christianity was as many answers as there were people. Very quickly, I came to see a need for authority. Who’s right?

At the time, I was very big on being pro-choice; I donated to pro-abortion causes. And I had this Christian over here saying, “Oh, that’s no problem at all! You can keep giving

saw the need for authority. I discovered this idea that maybe Christ founded a Church, and He instilled it with His own authority, so it’s not human authority. It is His own authority.

In my conversion, that was the central question: Who is Jesus Christ? This impression I have of Him, is it accurate? Is it making Him into something that I want Him to be? Do I have the correct impression of who this Person is — who this “Divine Being” is? And we discovered that in the Church that He founded.

Of course, the biggest thing is that we receive Him physically [in the Eucharist]. This is something that is so meaningful to me. I have six young children, and when I go to church, there are times when we read the Scriptures, and I’m like, “What was that? Was that from John or Mark? I didn’t hear!” There are just times when I’m tired, and I’m distracted, and then I have that moment where, even if I missed what was said, or I have a baby hitting me upside the head, while the other kid is trying to run out of the pew, to know that I can encounter Christ physically, even when I’m tired, even when I’m distracted, even when I’m not clear what the end of that Gospel reading was. It makes such a profound difference. I just feel so taken care of. I feel like God has just anticipated all of my needs, and they are right there in the Church.

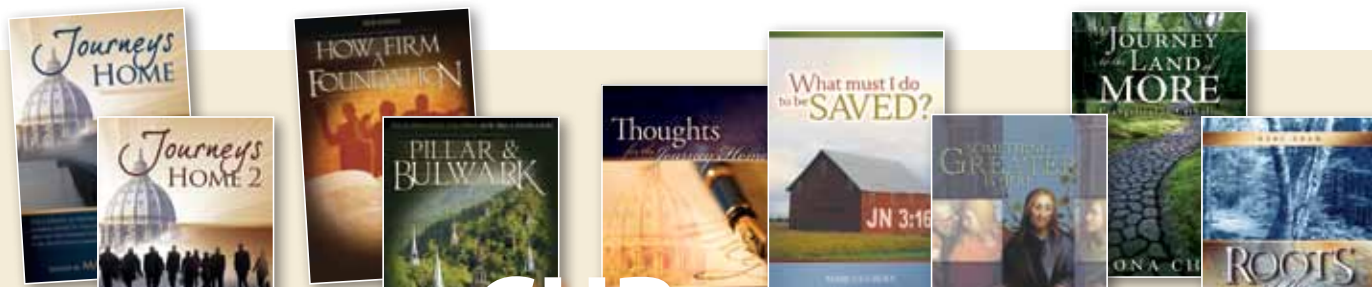
If you really want to know who Jesus Christ is, and you want to have this experience of feeling like He knows your needs better than you do, then get to the nearest Catholic church! ■

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE PODCAST!

Be sure to discover the Deep in Scripture podcast available through our website <http://www.chnetwork.org/deep-in-scripture/>. In this new format, Marcus invites special guests to join him in discussing "hard verses" that were difficult to understand within their previous faith tradition but that they have now come to



appreciate in a new way through the teachings of the Catholic Church. Patrick Madrid, Steve Ray, David Currie, Paul Thigpen, David Anders, and Gary Michuta are some of the exceptional guests who have recently joined Marcus on Deep in Scripture. Enrich your faith and knowledge of the Scriptures by listening to this podcast! **Do you have a question you would like to be considered for inclusion in a future Deep in Scripture program? E-mail your question to dis@chnetwork.org.**



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

MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

August 4–6, 2016

2016 Chesterton Conference
Slippery Rock State University
Slippery Rock, PA
<http://www.chesterton.org/35th-annual-chesterton-conference/>



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Encouraging One Another

By Marcus Grodi

"I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence; for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men. (1 Cor 16:17-18)

St. Paul ended most of his letters with a strong confirmation that he needed — and therefore we need — the fellowship and companionship of fellow believers.



Following Jesus Christ was never meant to be a solitary walk — "Me and Jesus." When He called His first disciples He called them to follow Him into community; and when He sent them out to minister in His Name, He sent them out in pairs, never alone. When He called the Twelve into leadership, they were to be a group of leaders, and when He placed Simon Peter as their leader, it was still as a community of the New Israel.

The first reception of 3000 newly baptized converts after Peter's Pentecost sermon "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship [koinonia or communion], to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

This continuing fellowship of believers was so important to Saint John that he began his first letter by saying that the reason he was proclaiming what he had "seen and heard" was "so that you may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1:3).

Concerned that many Christians were becoming lax in their convictions and fervor, the author of Hebrews wrote: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:23-25; emphasis mine).

And this community, of course, was the Church our Lord established, that met in the homes of converts wherever there were Christians — individual churches yet unit-

ed as "one body" in "one Spirit" by "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph 4:4-6).

Following Jesus Christ — from faith and Baptism, through Confirmation, Confession, and the Eucharist, through the sacrament of Marriage or Ordination, through the trials of sickness and suffering — this "abiding in Christ", must never be done alone, for "[y]our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (1 Pt 5:8).

This is why St. Paul's greetings were never mere friendly, perfunctory add-ons, but genuine expressions of his gratitude for the strength and comfort he had received from their companionship.

What is particularly significant about the greetings, especially for our work in the CHNetwork, is that St. Paul and all of his first-generation companions were converts to the faith. He even mentioned that the "household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia" (1 Cor 16:15). St. Paul knew from experience that these converts to this strange new "sect" were continually being ostracized by those whom they had left behind, from Jewish and pagan non-

believers who did not understand why they had become believers in this Jesus.

From the beginning of our work, we have not only focused on helping non-Catholics, lay and clergy, discover the fullness of truth and "come home" to the Catholic Church, but on providing as many ways as possible to help them be at home in the Church after their reception. Converts and reverts, clergy as well as laity, can face many trials after conversion: they may

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have lost their vocations and means of supporting themselves and their families; they may have been rejected by most of their former friends and family; they may experience marital struggles, and even depression as they seek to break from their past and enter into the fullness of the Church; and they may not find themselves as welcomed by Catholics as they had anticipated. They need the fellowship of the Church, but especially the fellowship of others who have made the same journey into the Church.

For this reason, we have always provided opportunities for converts to fellowship with other converts — so that together they can weather whatever storms may arise and receive encouragement in their continued journeys. Particularly for clergy inquirers and converts, we often have arranged annual retreats — but we are now in the process of expanding these to allow both clergy and lay members on the journey as well as converts to gather on retreat. We have also recently launched a new online community, expanded discussion forums, and denominational groups. Please check these out at www.chnetwork.org/community and join if so led.

All of this, as well as all aspects of our work, are driven by the same convictions that drove all the New Testament writers to encourage their Christian readers to meet together and to encourage each other in fellowship: “See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God” (Heb 12:15a). We believe that every non-Catholic inquirer who comes to us seeking information about the Church is being drawn by grace, and we want to do all that is possible to nurture this grace. For this, inquirers as well as converts need the strength of community, and we thank you, through your support and prayers, for making this possible.

But we also recognize that life-long Catholics are strengthened in their Catholic faith through this same fellowship with converts and reverts — with those who have given up much to obtain what so many take for granted. For this reason, we strongly invite all members of the CHNetwork to explore the options for fellowship that we offer online, so that together we can “stir up one another to love and good works ... encouraging one another” as brothers and sisters in Christ (Heb 10:24-25). ■

SHARE YOUR STORY!

The CHNetwork **always welcomes** those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their **written conversion stories** of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church.

If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to chnetwork.org/converts to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

SAVE THE DATE!

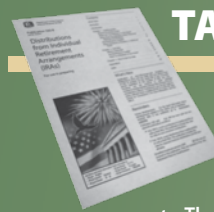
The CHNetwork is offering a retreat October 17-20 2016 for clergy and laity who are converts/reverts to the Catholic Church or are on the journey. More information will be forthcoming in the newsletter and on our website www.chnetwork.org.



NEWSLETTER DONATION

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

TAX NOTICE



Did you know? If you are age 70½ or older, you can make a rollover contribution of up to \$100,000 per year to The Coming Home Network directly from your IRA! Consult your tax advisor for details.

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Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org

First of all, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all those who were fully initiated as Catholic Christians during the Easter Vigil. To the worldwide RCIA Class of 2016, **WELCOME HOME!**



One of the most touching moments for me during the Easter Vigil is watching my newly baptized and/or confirmed sisters and brothers going forward to receive Eucharist for the very

first time. Often, I'm brought to tears when I see the reverence and, yes, something that looks like awe on the faces of these new Catholic Christians as they approach the table of the Lord from which He will feed them His glorified self — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

Watching these women and men approach the altar to receive the Eucharistic Christ brings to mind something I experienced at Mass several years ago.

I had the most wonderful experience helping a middle-aged gentleman with Down Syndrome — I'll call him Christopher ("Christ bearer") — find his way through the missal we use at my parish. He and his companion (a paid personal care attendant, unless I miss my guess) happened to sit beside me in the pew.

I won't tell you all that happened during that Mass, it would take too long. But one thing I want to share is that at the end

of Mass, as people prepared to leave the church, Christopher left his pew, walked straight toward the altar, stopped several feet in front of it, and proceeded to prostrate himself before it for a minute or so of prayer. He then got up and along with his companion walked out like nothing was amiss, as if we were the ones who didn't really understand what had just taken place on the altar during Mass, as if we were the ones who did not recognize the Lord Jesus enthroned in the tabernacle directly behind the altar and center stage of the sanctuary.



This "God moment" with Christopher was not unlike what I experience as I watch new Catholic Christians receive the Eucharist. The reverence, the awe, the realization that God is present in the sacrament of the Eucharist in a way unlike any other way this side of The Other Side.

My hope for new Catholics, and for those of us who have been in the Church for a while, is that we will pray for the grace of the Easter season to deepen and renew our reverence for Christ in the Eucharist. While few of us lay prostrate before the altar as we are much too concerned with what others may think, still, we ought to do everything possible to assure that we do not approach the Eucharist as if it were just *one more thing* we do as Catholic Christians.

The Lord has risen, indeed! Alleluia! ■

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PO Box 8290
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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Joe, a former Baptist seminarian, that the Spirit of God opens his heart to the ministry of St. Peter in the Church.
- For a United Church of Christ minister, that God would use his Catholic friends as a witness to the truth of the Catholic Faith.
- For Stephanie, a Church of Christ lay minister, that the love and grace of Jesus in the holy Eucharist would draw her back home to the Catholic Church.
- For an Evangelical seminarian in Northern Ireland, that through his prayer and studies the Lord would lead him to the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For a Brethren in Christ seminarian, that God would guide him, his wife, and children to the altar of Jesus in the Catholic Church.
- For a former Independent Baptist minister, that God would lead him and direct his paths.
- For Mark, a former Lutheran seminarian, that our Lord Jesus would guide his heart and mind as he explores the truths of the Catholic Faith.
- For Brian, a lay minister in Indiana, that as he attends Mass the Real Presence of Jesus would give him a hunger for entering into full-communion with the Catholic Church.

- For Jim, a Lutheran missionary, that his case of "Roman fever" would guide him home to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.
- For a Lutheran pastor in Sweden, that through the intercession of St. Birgitta of Sweden he would be brought into full-communion with the Catholic Church.
- For an Episcopal priest in Mississippi, that through understanding authentic teaching about the role of the papal office he may come into full-communion with the Bishop of Rome.
- For Steve, an Episcopalian minister who loves Our Lady, that he be brought home to the fullness.

Laity

- For a Lori's family, that they become supportive and understanding of her desire to be Catholic.
- For Evelyn who wants to become fully Catholic after being involved in a parish for many years, that she find the best way to proceed with her journey and embrace the sacraments.
- For Heather to find a good local friend to help guide her in her journey towards the Church.
- For a Bible Christian in the south for whom considering a change to the Catholic Church is difficult.

- For Patricia who would love to be Catholic, that she be able to understand the need to explore the annulment process.
- For Lorrie, that she be able to connect well with her new parish as she pursues her deep desire to be Catholic.
- For a young man who has fallen away from the Church after he converted and is attending an Episcopal church, that Our Lady lead him back home again.
- For a Baptist in the south who has been on the journey for a number of years, that she be able to take the leap towards the Church.
- For Jeff who has theological issues with Catholicism that prevent him from seriously considering the Church.
- For John and his family as they attend Mass and are blessed with participating in various spiritual aspects of the Church, that they receive an annulment for his wife's previous marriage and be able to be received into the Church soon.

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 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

May 2

Kris Sarver*
 Former Atheist/Agnostic

May 9

Rod Bennett*
 Former Baptist

May 16

Dr. Joseph Johnson*
 Former Evangelical
 Presbyterian Church

May 23

Reneé Hendrix*
 Former Baptist

May 30

Fr. Jurgen Liias*
 Former Episcopal/Anglican priest
 (re-air from 5/19/14)

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 3

of ranchers and farmers and had a long history of families who had settled the area before Texas became a state. They were welcoming and friendly to us and before long we settled into the community. Nearly everyone in Edna was Baptist, Methodist, or Lutheran. After trying a Lutheran church in another small town nearby at the invitation of some new friends, we decided on a Methodist congregation. I do not recall where the Catholic church was or if there was even one in town. I had left my Catholic roots in California and did not give them another thought.

Most activities in a small town generally involve the church you belong to. I joined the women's circle and various other organizations as a break from taking care of our new son.

A couple of years later, we moved on to Beaumont, Texas, east of Houston. My husband had been offered employment there in the mental health field. His college major had been psychology, and he felt this would be a good opportunity. Here we were introduced to a whole different way of life, with a bit of Cajun influence, moss covered trees, and a swamp near the Nueces River. We immediately joined a local Methodist church. We are still close to the friends we made there, including the pastor and his wife. Our daughter was born in Beaumont in 1978 and baptized in that Methodist church. We took an active part in church life, and Sunday school became the foundation of many friendships and activities. Our children formed their foundational Christian beliefs in the Methodist Sunday school, vacation Bible school, summer camp, and the Methodist youth program. It was a small but vibrant church and drew me closer into the Methodist way of life — a life of piety, fellowship, and love. I can still smell the rich furniture oil that the altar society used on the pews, altar rail, and wood seats for the choir. The old style church, with its stained glass windows, choir loft behind the pulpit, red carpet down the center aisle, and red cushioned pews, was a warm, comforting sanctuary, a place of peace.

Fanning the Coals

A few years later, we moved to Fort Worth. My husband began working for the Salvation Army at a halfway house for street people and ex-offenders. Again we became involved in the Methodist Church and its many activities for young families. And here the guidance of the Holy Spirit began to manifest itself in my life, gradually leading me back “home” to the Catholic Church. Looking back, I sometimes wonder if my zealous work in the Methodist Church was a way of ignoring the will of God. Any time there was a request for a volunteer, my hand went up. I was also working full time for a pharmaceutical company, which required some travel. Add to that raising a family and then discovering that my husband was suffering from chronic depression, and I'm not quite sure how we got through those times. I'm convinced that it was the grace of God that sustained us.

It was also at this time that my brother was diagnosed with brain cancer. He put up a good fight, but ultimately, about five years later, he passed away, leaving a wife and two small chil-

dren. It was a devastating time for our family, especially for our parents. I am sure our parents' deep Catholic devotion enabled them to get through it.

A Call to — What?

During these hectic years, my husband began to feel a call to ministry. He entered Brite Divinity School on the Texas Christian University campus. Adding this to his full time work schedule made for a difficult life at home. Thankfully, our children were old enough to cope with it, though at times, looking back, I realize that God must have been in this for us to have survived this crazy period and remain married!

About this time, I noticed an ad in our local newspaper for an event at one of the local Catholic parishes that was for those interested in returning to the Catholic Faith. For some reason this piqued my interest, and I decided to attend. I mentioned it to my husband, trying to downplay it since he was preparing for the Methodist ministry, and this was undoubtedly not something he wanted to hear. I went to the seminar, which consisted of a discussion of some of the changes since the Second Vatican Council, a tour of the church, and a Q&A with a couple of priests. There were very few in attendance, but the event was interesting and I felt something stir within my heart. But after several days of talking myself out of doing anything about it, I dismissed the idea from my mind and returned to my work and volunteer activities at church.

Then I decided to finish college. I attended Dallas Baptist University, receiving a Bachelor's degree in General Studies. The required curriculum provided exposure to classes in religion. These classes were geared towards the Baptist way of thinking about the Gospels, salvation, and our relationship with God, and the experience would ultimately push me to question just what I did believe.

Not long after I graduated, I began to think that I too might have a call to the ministry. I enrolled at Brite Divinity School following my husband, who by then had nearly completed his studies. One of my classes was on John Wesley. I enjoyed the class, but it just did not feel right. Something was missing. Where was I supposed to be?

Because of my husband's depression and other medical issues, he was never able to fully enjoy being a minister. He received his M.Div. degree, but other than a few associate positions, he was unable to fulfill what he perceived to be a divine call. This caused him great distress in subsequent years.

The Ember Re-ignites

Our Sunday school class was made up of like-minded individuals, with whom we formed close relationships and had many lively discussions. During some of these classes, we would discuss various Scripture passages, and I began to take a careful look at just what I believed. I found myself examining our class conversations with a critical eye, which I would later realize was a Catholic perspective. Gradually, it became apparent that I was in trouble. I would go home and look up these topics on Catho-

...Journeys Home Continued...

lic websites. I became aware that something deep inside me was stirring, and I was afraid of what it might be. I quit my research, took long walks and told myself, “This can’t be happening!” Like Jonah, I tried to run as far away from God as I could. I understood that the Holy Spirit was the cause of these feelings, and I pleaded with Him to let me alone. During that dark time, I had ordered Bishop Sheen’s book, *Life is Worth Living*. It was a page-turner for me, and once I finished it, I knew I needed to return to my Catholic roots.

I began to dig deep into the history of the Church, looking for answers to those things I had begun to question as a Protestant. Why did the Reformers leave the Catholic Church? What really happened between Martin Luther and the Church, and what about those who came after him? Did they leave because they were led by God to start another church or because of a

mistaken interpretation of the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers? I had read 2 Peter 1:20–21: “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” This seemed to reject a purely individualistic interpretation of Scripture. Moreover, St. Augustine had written, “If you believe what you like in the gospels and reject what you don’t like, it is not the gospel you believe in, but yourself.” And I had remembered one of my Methodist friends say that he liked being Methodist because he could interpret the Gospels for himself.

The most important thing drawing me back to the Catholic Church for me was the Eucharist. I had read and re-read chapter six of the Gospel of John, especially verses 53–58, about the bread from heaven. It haunted me: What, *really*, was the Eucharist? I remember at one point asking my husband why Methodists only had communion once per month. He had mentioned that early on, when he was young, the Methodist Church had communion every Sunday. The decision was later made to have it only once per month because then it would mean more to the congregation. I then came to realize how much I missed

being able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ any day of the week!

The Full Flame

Now what to do? All these questions about family, friends, relationships, and so forth began going through my head. What would people think and especially my husband? I had encountered a website that advertised they would help with any questions or concerns about the Catholic faith, so I began a correspondence. I never met this person other than online, but he was my mentor and guide through a most tumultuous time. I visited a couple of nearby Catholic churches and noted that not a whole lot had changed other than that the altar was now facing the congregation and the liturgy was in English. The basics were still there. I finally decided on a home parish, but it would be six months after my encounter with the Holy Spirit before

I could find the courage to walk through the door of the parish office to speak with someone about my interest in returning to the Church. And what do you think? I knew the lady who greeted me through our volunteer work at the federal prison!

After walking through that door, I received the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time in 50 years, and I understood that nothing would be the same again. Though my knees shook and my stomach had butterflies, I also realized this was finally what the Holy Spirit had in mind for me: a return to the Church of my childhood. I received the Eucharist on Passion Sunday of 2011 and recalled that little girl back in 1954 wearing a scratchy, white starched dress, veil, stockings, and white shoes walking down the aisle of

that church in Riverside, California to receive Communion for the very first time. My marriage was also convalidated during this time through a process called a Decree in Sanatio in Radice (healing at the root) by the chancery office of the Diocese of Ft. Worth, Texas. This meant my marriage was now valid without a new marriage ceremony. Nothing was required of my husband.

How did my return to the Catholic Church play out at home? Not as well as I had hoped, but I was braced for the inevitable questions and confrontations. My husband had said I needed to



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...Journeys Home Continued...

do what I felt was best, but once I actually made the commitment to return to the Catholic Church, the reality set in and we had some contentious times. Among other things, he reminded me of that promise I had made to remain Methodist all of our married life. What could I say? God called, I answered.

The most difficult struggle I have had in returning to the Catholic Church is not being able to participate with my husband at his communion table. He has had the same feeling of not being welcome at mine. He is still reluctant to attend Mass with me because he cannot receive the Eucharist, and I understand, because the Eucharist is the “source and summit of our faith.” But I continue to go with him to our Sunday school class and church service, and I kneel with him at his altar with my arm around him as he receives communion.

As to the rest of the family, our son just looked at me and pleaded, “Why?” Our daughter, who is currently unchurched, said, “It’s your soul, Mom.” I sent out an email to all our Sunday school members explaining the reasons for my return to the Catholic Faith. I received no questions or comments initially, but little by little as time passed some would ask questions about the Church on certain hot button topics, and if I did not know the answer, I would look it up and respond later. Some of my closest Methodist friends have been very gracious about my return; others tend to show indifference, perhaps because they are not sure what to say. One dear older, semi-retired minister walks up to me every now and then and asks me, “Are you still happy in the Catholic Church?” To my “Yes,” he responds, “Then I am very happy you are at home there.”

I probably would have returned to the Catholic Church even if I had not been Methodist, but I will say that my faith is more enriched because of the time I spent as a Methodist. Having studied Methodism and read about John Wesley, I learned to appreciate the Wesleyan spirit and the deep, abiding faith of those “not so far from the tree.” I had a Franciscan friar once tell me that John Wesley is the “St. Francis of the Methodists.” I believe that to be true. There are times when I wish I had not left the Catholic Church. But then I look back and realize how much more I appreciate the Catholic Faith because of that time I spent as a Methodist. The theme for Methodists is “open minds, open hearts.” Do we not believe this as Catholics?

My mother passed away in April of 2014. Among one of the most precious things I received from her were her prayer books for the Liturgy of the Hours. In each of these books are her notations, prayers, favorite hymns, and psalms. This has probably been the greatest gift I have received since returning to the Church.

I recently participated in a Mass and conferring of the sacraments by the bishop at the federal prison and realized how far I had come. As we all raised our voices in song and praise and walked in procession to receive the Eucharist together as sisters in Christ, I realized this is where God had wanted me all along. How fulfilling this ministry is, how fulfilled I feel as a Catholic returning home!

There is a prayer I ran across not too long ago, written by the Servant of God Elisabeth Leseur (France, 1866–1914). I pray it on those days when I feel sadness in my lonely journey of faith. Elisabeth’s husband was an atheist and did not convert until after her death from cancer. This prayer brightens my life. My hope is it will help others as well. ■

Loving During the Storm

“My Savior, I am all alone spiritually, as you know. You know, too, how I suffer from the hostility or indifference of certain persons. I think that is why you have done so much for me and given me so much in your goodness. And now with your gentle gaze you are dispersing the clouds that in these last months have so often overshadowed me. You are kindling my heart again after leaving it in painful dryness; you are chasing away the darkness and the confusion. Thank you, my beloved Savior, my God! I know that sorrow will return, for effort and struggle are your will for us. Your love has conquered, and I know that you will not abandon me and that deep peace will remain with me. To love during the storm is very consoling, and my love grows stronger after each sorrow, each setback. Complete abandonment to you, offering my heart and my life in your service.”

— *Servant of God Elisabeth Leseur*



JACQUELINE BARRY returned to the Catholic Church Passion Sunday of 2011 having been away from the Church for 41 years. She and her husband live in Fort Worth, Texas where they have resided for over 30 years. They have two children and four grandchildren. Jackie is currently a member at St. Andrew’s Catholic Parish in Fort Worth where she is involved in a prison ministry at the federal women’s prison, a women’s Bible study, and is in process of beginning the first steps towards becoming a secular Franciscan.

BLOG

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