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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## In the Potter's Hands

By Henry Flood

My journey to Rome was a lengthy one, consuming two-thirds of a normal lifetime. I traveled nearly every highway and byway of Methodism, Southern Methodism, United Methodism, and many forms of Evangelicalism. From Methodism my spiritual journey led me to the *via media* of Anglicanism, across the Newman Bridge and finally, with the help of a devoted cradle Catholic wife of 25 years, Nilde, my friend Gloria, and the ever-present Virgin Mary, my journey to Catholicism was complete at the age of 65.

### The Early Years

As the son of a conservative Methodist minister growing up in a staunchly evangelical environment in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's in South Carolina, Catholicism was unimaginable. Culturally, you just never thought about Catholics or what they believed.

In my younger years (1956 to 1963), my father's ministry was new, vibrant, and exciting. I enjoyed my childhood faith so much that I was confirmed at age nine, although the usual age among Methodists was 12.

Then came the social and civil rights revolution in the Deep South. These were difficult times socially and "the ordeal of change" caused great social and religious stress as I approached my early teen years. Not wishing to buy into the social gospel message sweeping through the Methodist and other mainline churches, my father left the relative security of the Methodist Church to become a Southern Methodist minister.

In my mid to late teens, I began to feel some discomfort with the more fundamentalist viewpoints

which tended not to be open to inquiry and reflection. We were Bible-believing Christians, with an Evangelical but not fundamentalist outlook.

Two examples come quickly to mind. The first was the "Bible wars." I grew up with the King James Bible (KJB) but had some familiarity with the Good News Bible (GNB) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV). Many Southern and Independent Methodist Churches rejected all versions of the Bible except the KJV. In their view, these other Bibles were not the Word of God; they were manufactured by liberals who used modern language to change the word of God. But in my reading of *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* by F.F. Bruce, I saw that such views were both illogical and untrue.

The second area of discomfort distinguishing fundamentalism from evangelicalism was the contempt for intellectual inquiry — especially questioning. If Christianity was merely a collection of set propositions, then what was to distinguish it from philosophy?

Bible and other religious reading was very important to me, and I read *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

widely from the tenth grade forward. Such inquiry caused many questions and sometimes brought me into conflict with the viewpoints held by my father.

### A Teen's Question about Mary

One of my earliest inquiries around the young age of 15 concerned Mary. As a Bible reader, I noticed that there were passages of Scripture that mentioned Mary outside of the Christmas narrative. My recollections were that, when Mary was mentioned, it only addressed her role in giving birth to Jesus. During my Southern Methodist years, Mary only came out of the closet at Christmas time and then quickly returned to her dusty place with the artificial Christmas tree. Rarely, if ever, was Mary discussed except in anti-Catholic terms.

When I did inquire about the other Marian verses in the Bible, my early attempts to do so provoked one of three responses: stone-faced silence, anger, or an invitation to visit some liberal or Catholic group of idol worshipers. I wondered about Mary's role beyond just giving birth to Jesus. My first serious theological question concerned the Incarnation. Jesus came and dwelt among us. I felt that Mary was more than just a vessel. Why did God choose Mary? She must have been a very special person. It seemed to me that you could not really talk about the Incarnation and ignore Mary's words in the Annunciation (see Luke 1:26-35). In those years, Mary was just there, latent in the background, but providentially there.

### The Search for a Credible Christianity

One of my father's last churches was in a suburb of Jacksonville, Florida. It was an "Independent Southern Methodist Church" — a church even more conservative than my experiences with the Southern Methodist church.

Although I ended up assisting my father during his last three months and even filling in for him in my early 20's, such fundamentalism was bewildering to me. It seemed to have little to offer, and the blatant racism present among some of the church membership was likewise unsettling.

When I was 22, our family moved back to Folly Beach, South Carolina, a slender barrier island twelve miles south of Charleston where I had spent much of my childhood and high school years.

I had interrupted my college education while living in Jacksonville, Florida but resumed it after returning to Charleston. My chief desire at this time was to have a credible, non-fundamentalist faith that could engage both mind and heart.

The "New Evangelical" authors fed my intellect and made Christianity believable to me. They gave me reasons to believe that were theologically and intellectually more convincing than what fundamentalism offered. C.S. Lewis demonstrated that deep learning and Christianity were compatible with each other. Donald Bloesch made reason and spirit come alive for me. Bernard Ramm introduced me to a serious reading of theology and to Karl Barth. F.F. Bruce made Bible history and theology interesting. His works, *The Canon of Scripture* and *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* opened many other vistas of Bible history and scriptural development. I encountered there the concept of oral tradition.

### Some Dormant Years

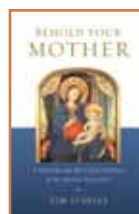
Around this time, I met Rev. Earnest Dugan, a Methodist minister who ran a mission similar to those you might see in the Salvation Army. He engaged my mind while stressing the need for service to others. His sermons were inspiring and his explanation of Scripture was intellectually and spiritually rewarding.

## FEATURED RESOURCES

### Deep in Scripture CD



Marcus Grodi is joined by Robert Stackpole in this classic Deep in Scripture program. They discuss the question of where the dogmas of Mary are found in the Bible. Be sure to obtain a copy of this Deep in Scripture program to gain a deeper understanding of the scriptural basis for Catholic beliefs about Mary.



### Behold Your Mother — By Tim Staples

Tim Staples takes you through the Church's teachings about the Blessed Virgin Mary, showing their firm scriptural and historical roots and dismantling the objections of those who mistakenly believe that Mary competes for the attention due Christ alone. Combining the best recent scholarship with a convert's in-depth knowledge of the arguments, Staples has assembled the most thorough and useful Marian apologetic you'll find anywhere. He also shows how all of the Marian doctrines are relevant — even essential — to a salvific faith in Jesus.

\$35

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

\$50

Receive *Behold Your Mother* for a \$50 donation.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture CD* and *Behold Your Mother* for a \$75 donation.

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

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Pastor Dugan presided over my marriage to a young lady who was Episcopalian, although I don't recall ever visiting her church. We were married at the Folly Beach United Methodist Church in 1976. My new wife and I soon moved to new employment in southern Delaware. She worked in an allied health occupation while I did grants and governmental relations. We both drifted away from religious practice. It just happened, and I cannot really explain why. Those were religiously dormant years for both of us. It was a difficult marriage, and six years later it ended. Being suddenly divorced and single was difficult.

### The Potter's House

I was newly living in Washington, D.C. and attending graduate school. As I worked my way through earning my Master's degree in Legal Studies, I found myself involved on the fringes of urban ministry, helping poor people. One of my hangouts was the Potter's House coffeehouse, a ministry of the Church of the Savior, located on Columbia Road in the heart of the Adams Morgan neighborhood.

The Potter's House was much more than a coffeehouse. It was a religious bookstore, a place of lively local entertainment, and seekers of every description — even agnostics and atheists — gathered there to share and talk. The Potter's House re-con-



## "Adding, Not Subtracting — Not Overthrowing"

INTERVIEW WITH ROD BENNETT (FORMER BAPTIST)



*Thankfully, I had a Christian upbringing — raised in the South, in the Southern Baptist Church. And the happiest part of that for me was encountering the Bible — the stories of David and Goliath, David and Bathsheba (or I guess I got the “edited down” version of David and Bathsheba) ... Those things make up my earliest mythology — the stories that I cut my teeth on. I think that kind of exposure to the Bible early on, especially the New Testament, the life of Christ, is going to color your whole outlook. The stories themselves change you.*

*It was during the “Jesus Freak” Movement of the early ‘70s that I got sent off to church camp. The next thing I knew, there were barefoot hippies playing guitars, talking to us about an encounter with Jesus — and it turned me into a little bit of a “Jesus Freak” myself (although, my hair wasn’t very long, yet).*

*Some people may think that the very opposite of the Jesus Freak Movement of the 1970s would be the Roman Catholic Church. (It’s not “opposite”; it’s just a witness to the fact that the Church is very big and has very different kinds of people in it.)*

*What got me started in the direction of the Catholic Faith — something you had been “trained” to keep away from — was my interest in history. [What] you very quickly find as an Evangelical Christian is that your timeline has big gaps in it. It was a strange idea to me and started a quest to learn more about what Christians were like during those ages when the people didn’t look very much like Southern Baptists. So, I went searching through the history of early Christianity. It was a big day when I found the writings of the people that we refer to as the early Church Fathers. [They] seemed to offer an answer to the question: What was the early Church like? And that we seemed to be able to know an answer to that.*

*I had already become aware, having been involved in non-denominational Christian works, of various types, that Christian unity wasn’t very unified, and that there were a lot of different opinions. But to be able to check [opinions] against early interpreters whom had been put in to place by the Apostles themselves — that I could use them as my trusted interpreter, instead of myself — that was a big moment.*

*That was my process: “History Nerd Goes Looking for Trouble.” [laughs]*

*My touchstone is still the Jesus Movement of the ‘70s, and I’ve added good things on top of that. Some of them unexpected, very strange and alien to a lot of people who first brought that message to me with their long hair and guitars. But a sense of having built upon a solid foundation, that nevertheless had some things that needed to be clarified.*

*That would be the process for me of adding, not subtracting — not overthrowing. ■*



READ & WATCH [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org) Be sure to share this short interview with friends and family. Also, if you haven't seen Rod's appearances on the Journey Home, go to the new [CHNetwork.org](http://CHNetwork.org) and click the magnifying glass icon to search our archive.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

nected me to religious reading, talking, and reflection. It fed my heart and mind.

The Potter's House was the gateway to my religious renewal, serious intellectual engagement with theology, and reaching out to others with a sense of service that goes with a lived faith. I read my first Catholic book there, *The Wounded Healer* by the noted Dutch Catholic Henri Nouwen. This was followed by his book *Reaching Out*. I strongly identified with Nouwen's pastoral theology and focus on serving others.

### The Episcopal Experience

In Washington D.C., I found a much more open religious environment. A work colleague introduced me to the Falls Church Episcopal — the historic church of George Washington in Falls Church, Virginia, a city just west of metropolitan Washington, D.C. I had earlier read Robert Webber's little book, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*. Through Robert Webber and the witness of a friend, I discovered that one could be Evangelical and liturgical at the same time. At this time, in the mid-1980's, Falls Church Episcopal was presided over by Rev. Dr. John Yates, a charismatic Evangelical with a decidedly Anglican focus. I fell in love with liturgical Christianity as found in the Book of Common Prayer.

I recall with fondness my visits to the Episcopal National Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in northwest Washington, D.C. The music and liturgy was astoundingly beautiful. It was not long, though, before I discovered that there were many ways of being Episcopalian and that there was a tension between traditionalists and modernists contending for the heart and soul of the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church leadership nationally and in many of its parishes in Washington were of a decidedly liberal bent. I found that, in many of these parishes, you could believe almost anything and still be Episcopalian. The church of John Yates held a minority position in that respect. Most troubling to me was the open talk of blessing gay relationships and ordaining gay women and men into the priesthood.

I found these theological events deeply troubling. How was it that a bishop such as John Shelly Spong could denounce key Christian beliefs reflected in the historical Episcopalian creeds and remain an Episcopalian in good standing? My thought began to be centered on what constitutes a real church. When does a church cease to be a church of the Creed? As I watched in horror this undermining of the Episcopal and other mainline churches, my question was, What should I do? Where can I go? Where is authentic belief and worship to be found?

### A Friendship and the Sacred Heart Years

My next steps on the journey were eight years of courtship and eventual marriage to a cradle Catholic named Nilde whom I met at The Potter's House in 1982. Our long friendship and courtship enabled us to safely talk and share. We read and talked together about life and especially about our respective faiths. I was the intellectual one; Nilde was more spiritual. We gravitated towards each other in the Potter's House friendship. Every week we met at the same little table to read, talk, and enjoy the quiet piano lounge music.

*Continued on page 5* ➤

## THE CHNETWORK STAFF & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## NEW STAFF MEMBER

Starting in May of this year, Matt Swaim joined the Coming Home Network as its new Communications Coordinator. Matt has been working in Catholic media for over a decade, perhaps most recognizably as producer and host of EWTN Radio's Son Rise Morning Show. Having grown up in a number of Christian denominational backgrounds, including Nazarene and Free Methodist, Matt is excited about the bridge-building opportunities between people of good will that will be part of his new role at the CHNetwork. His books include *Prayer in the Digital Age* and *Your College Faith: Own It!*, and he and his family will be representing the CHNetwork in the Washington, DC area. Matt will be responsible for increasing outreach and development efforts through social media, and continuing to establish the CHNetwork as the go-to resource for all those on the journey towards a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church.





# A Word of Thanks

By CHNetwork Staff

The staff at the Coming Home Network International would like to share with you a small selection of the encouraging messages we have received from those who have recently come into full communion with the Catholic Church. Please join us in prayer for all those who have embraced the Catholic Faith this past Easter as well as those still on the journey. Without your prayers and financial support we would not be able to assist men and women who are drawn towards the Catholic Church.

We also wanted to mention that we have sent out prayer cards and medals as a special welcome home gift to those who have recently come into the Church. Included below are also some of the kind words from those who have received these gifts. We are most grateful for your partnership in our work.

“Thanks for emailing me. My whole family and I came into the Church this Easter. It’s been a long but amazing journey. I’ve listened to Marcus on the Journey Home for several years. The stories that I heard on there were very similar to mine and what Marcus has done has helped me so much and I will always consider it ministry special to me and my family.”

“Both my wife and I were received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. It was fantastic to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. To receive this is so healing and fulfilling. I could really feel being filled with the Holy Spirit.”

“I am beyond overjoyed and grateful and relieved and happy to be able to tell you that my daughter, my husband, and I were baptized, confirmed, and received first Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil, with my beloved CHN helper, and several other of our other homeschooling friends from different parishes present. IT WAS AMAZING! I didn’t cry until after I received Holy Communion. And then I didn’t stop pretty much until on the way home. I was just overwhelmed with happiness...And all this time we’ve been longing to be truly Catholic and now we are. Oh my it feels so so so good to be home!”

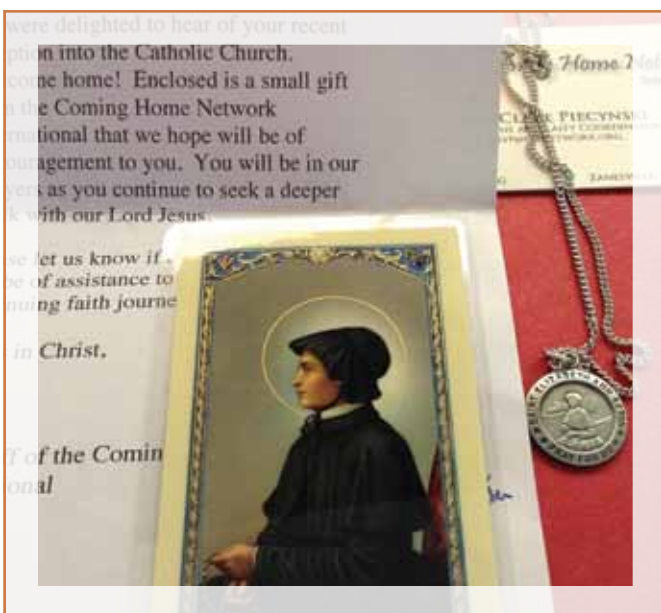
“I was lovingly received into the Catholic Church at our Easter Vigil and it was absolutely the most remarkable night of my life! With friends and family looking on, I became a member of the faith and a Church that has loved me through the process every step of the way. I’m so blessed!”

“I received the lovely gift today. How would you have known Elizabeth Ann Seton was one of the Patron Saints that I picked on my Confirmation and receiving into The Catholic Church? Amazing. Thank you so very much. I will wear it everyday.”

“Thank you so much for the gift! I love the picture, and the medal, and I was obviously very pleasantly surprised to get it.”

“I received a very nice gift from you and the Coming Home Network! Thank you so much for the medal and prayer card of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton! She was from NYC, which is very dear to my heart, since we live here! Thank you and thank the staff as well.”

“I just wanted to thank you for the beautiful letter, prayer card and necklace you sent me. I cried with tears of joy when I received it and placed the medal around my neck right away! It has been a long journey for me as a Jewish convert to the faith, but I know now that I am finally home. What a blessing your organization is, welcoming people like me into the church, our home.” ■





# Holy Friendship

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org



I read an article recently in which the co-pastor of a large non-Catholic megachurch quoted a survey that found 70% of the non-Catholic clergy respondents admitted to having no close friends. Not one, except perhaps their spouse, if they were married. I cannot speak to the accuracy of the survey. There is no way for me to fact check it.

Nevertheless, I began to think about the non-Catholic clergy with whom the Coming Home Network International (CHNetwork) works day in and day out. How many of the clergy who contact us have no close friends? No one with whom to share the news that the Holy Spirit has put on their heart to explore the truth claims of the Catholic Church. Imagine that a married minister feels led to explore Catholicism but his or her spouse feels no such movement of the Spirit. Worse, imagine that a spouse threatens divorce if their wife/husband decides to pursue reunion with the Catholic Church. Such threats might happen more often than you might think.

Enter holy friendship.

I think all of us who work directly with those who contact the CHNetwork for help provide at least a beginning of friendship to those we seek to serve in the name of Jesus and His Church. Fielding phone calls, answering emails, shar-

ing the joys and often the struggles of those exploring the Catholic Church, are all part and parcel of holy friendships. It's what Jesus calls us to do, even as He called us His friends at the Last Supper (John 15:15).

It often happens that a person who contacts the CHNetwork will not in the end enter the Catholic Church. Ultimately, that is between that person and God. The Catholic Church, and the CHNetwork along with her, does not impose her truth, we only propose it. Yet we do so with all the earnestness at our command. Even if a person with whom we are working decides not to continue with his or her exploration of the Catholic Faith we continue to stand by the seeker as sisters and brothers in Christ. That's simply what disciples of Jesus do.

I'll end with a quote the origin of which I simply cannot now recall. It speaks to me of the importance of friendship as we at the CHNetwork try to live it out through our ministry: "*In the end, personal relationships save everything.*" Our relationship with Jesus Christ saves everything ultimately, but it is our personal relationships with other human beings through which Christ chooses to lead others unto salvation.

Thank you, dear friend, for helping the CHNetwork fulfill its mission to proclaim Jesus Christ as *the* Friend who is also Lord of heaven and earth and the Catholic Church which is His Mystical Body. ■

In the end,  
personal relationships  
save everything.



## PREMIUMS CLUB

If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation and join the Premiums Club in order to receive the featured newsletter resources plus a bonus item each month, please go to [www.CHNetwork.org/premiums](http://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 [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) or 740-450-1175 if you have any questions or concerns.

### Your information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address line 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Address line 2 \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes!** I wish to be a part of the **Premiums Club** and receive the newsletter premiums for a recurring donation of \$60 (minimum) each month or the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ monthly.

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For a former Pentecostal seminarian in Texas, that God's guidance and wisdom will bring him home to the Catholic Church.
- For Brian, a Baptist minister, that our Lord would use his desire for liturgy and sacraments to bring him and his family to the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For George, a United Methodist minister in the south, that the grace of the Holy Spirit would guide him to full communion with the holy Catholic Church.
- For Matt, a minister in Michigan, that as he reads and prays, Jesus would give him a strong hunger for the holy Eucharist.
- For Eric, a Lutheran minister, that our Lord Jesus would help him to resolve his concerns about his call to ministry and also to the Catholic Church.
- For a Southern Baptist minister in Texas, that, through his meeting with a local priest, God would guide him to full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For Matt, a Holiness minister, that the love and grace of Jesus would guide him to the Church founded by our Lord.

■ For a Southern Baptist minister in the south, that the Holy Spirit would break down all family obstacles that impede his entry to the Catholic Church.

■ For David, a former Episcopal seminarian, that our Lord Jesus Christ would guide him home to the Catholic Church.

■ For a Lutheran minister in Illinois, that God would enable him to overcome the doctrinal stumbling blocks that he perceives are hindering his entry to the Catholic Church.

## Layity

- For a young lady in Virginia who has theological issues with Catholicism that prevent her from seriously considering the Church.
- For a man who has been on the journey for a number of years and is currently leaning towards Eastern Orthodoxy.
- For Scott who is still interested in learning more about the Catholic Church, that he be given the grace to move forward with his journey.
- For Betsy who is struggling with what direction to pursue with her faith journey.
- For a returning Catholic who is having difficulties understanding the teaching on the Eucharist.

■ For a man who is a non-denominational Christian and has a number of questions about the Church and feels like his search is consuming his life, that he have clarity and peace.

■ For Jan who is on the journey and loves *The Journey Home* program, that she be able to connect well with a local parish.

■ For Deb who is continuing to move towards the Catholic Church, that her husband be open to her conversion.

■ For Brandon who has recently returned to the Church and asks for prayers for his wife to be drawn towards the Catholic Faith as well.

■ For Roger who is listening to Catholic radio and is reading and researching online, that he come to appreciate the fullness of the Faith.

■ For a lady who deeply longs to return to the Church but feels she needs to remain at her husband's side in the Nazarene church for the time being.

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

### July 4

Mike Carlton\*  
 Former Presbyterian  
 Re-air from 5/23/11

### July 11

Seth Paine\*  
 Former non-denominational

### July 18

Michelle Paine\*  
 Former Presbyterian and  
 Episcopalian

### July 25

Denise and Tim Mergen (mother  
 and son)\*  
 Former Church of Christ

\*Schedule is subject to change.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 4

My every Friday coffeehouse friend introduced me to the inside of a Catholic church, the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in northwest Washington. It was strange yet beautiful, a bit bewildering to my then Protestant sensibilities. Statues of Mary were everywhere. She was beautiful, but the Rosary made no sense to me. Devotion to the Rosary would come some twenty years later.

During this time, John Paul II was in the prime of his papacy. The “Catholic moment,” so to speak, had arrived, as Richard John Neuhaus and numerous others became Catholic converts, drawing many into the Catholic orbit — including me.

Week after week, I found myself in Nilde’s company at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church. It was, and still is, run by a group of Capuchin Franciscans. They received me openly, never asking me much about my faith. They just fed me with friendship and fellowship.

Those I remember most were Brother Eric, who later became Father Eric, and Father Don, who is now Bishop of Mendi in Papua, New Guinea. We spent countless hours talking about faith and Catholicism. Catholic belief and practice seemed overwhelming to me at first. I often wondered if I could be good enough to be Catholic; intellect and heart were not in line with each other at this time. But I kept going there, and no one pushed me away.

Nilde and I did urban ministry and youth ministry together at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart. Soon we found ourselves in charge of thirty to fifty young people of largely Central American heritage. Many of these young boys and girls were sent here for safety during the Central American wars of the 1980’s. Some had relatives, but for many the Church became their caretakers, their mothers and their fathers. Nilde and I became their “*Padrinos*,” although we ourselves did not have children. Thirty of these youth formed half of our wedding party when Nilde and I married in October of 1990. I loved the Central American culture. I too was away from my South Carolina family, so these young people became my family.

Our devotion to Central Americans extended beyond the Washington, D.C. experiences. Nilde sponsored a young Honduran girl of eight in the early 1980’s. Over time, I became involved in the care packages we sent to Maria, and Nilde, with her mother, visited Maria in 1987. After our marriage, I became much more involved with Maria and her little community. The Honduran people are uniformly poor but deeply spiritual.

Having no children of our own, Maria, and eventually her two children, became our foster family from afar. Over thirty years, we made eight trips to Honduras. We adopted Maria’s little community of fifty houses, known as Rancho Alegre. Through fundraising, we brought electricity to their little village in the year 2000. We also reached out to the churches of her community and its 250 residents with medicines and other works of charity.

In the Fall of 2015, we had the good fortune of helping to re-build the church of our foster daughter at Rancho Alegre through receipt of a \$6,000 foundation grant. That church was re-dedicated this year on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

### The Ratzinger Encounter

The next important step along the road to Catholicism was my accidental discovery of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) in a second-hand Washington bookstore. Washington was a hotbed of religious controversy in the 1980’s. Hans Kung had been declared to no longer be a Catholic theologian and Father Curran was dismissed from his teaching position at Catholic University. I remembered that Joseph Ratzinger had something to do with this. *The Ratzinger Report* caught my attention, and it was only fifty cents.

Unknown to the cardinal, we became intellectual friends after reading this and another tome entitled *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, also purchased in that same Second Story Books for a mere two dollars. The issue then and now revolved around what makes a church authentic and true, as distinguished from a social club or debating society. His book *Called to Communion*, a series of short essays on ecclesiology, was important for me. These essays addressed the critical question of what it means to be a Church.

Ratzinger was Christ-centered in his theology and demonstrated an extraordinary command of scriptural interpretation — something that any serious Anglican evangelical could appreciate.

One of the most unforgettable moments of my life occurred when Nilde and I were in Rome on a religious tour in 2007. The highlight of our visit to the Vatican was a chance to greet Pope Benedict during a Wednesday audience in 2007.

### Mary Once Again

Remembering my earlier focus on the Incarnation, I began to inquire anew about Mary. The first explicitly Marian book I read was *Mary for All Christians* by the Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie. He confirmed my earlier suppositions. Mary made sense, at least from an Anglican and ecumenical perspective. My suspicions were confirmed that Mary belonged to the

## DEFENDING THE FAITH CONF.

CHNetwork at the 2016 Defending the Faith Conference  
The Franciscan University of Steubenville  
July 29-31, 2016

**Conference Theme:** Speaking the Truth in Love — Morals, Marriage, and Mercy

The Coming Home Network will be sponsoring its annual social for **Defending the Faith** conference attendees on Friday, July 29<sup>th</sup> at 10pm (JC Williams Center: Gentile Gallery). In addition this year, we will be holding a coffee and networking meeting for any non-Catholics and converts in attendance on Saturday, July 30<sup>th</sup> at 12pm - 1:45pm (JC Williams Center: Fireside Lounge). Contact [info@chnetwork.org](mailto:info@chnetwork.org) for more information. **We hope to see you there!**

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

economy of salvation. Theological appreciation, though, was far from constituting Catholic devotion.

Mary's influence grew gradually. Ratzinger's *Daughter Zion*, a small book of essays on Mary, convinced me that Mary must be important in any Christian church, Catholic or otherwise. I also read *Our Lady and the Church* by Hugo Rahner and *Mary for Today* by Hans Urs von Balthasar. These works impelled me to undertake a deeper, extended study of Mary and Marian doctrine in Catholic and ecumenical perspectives, eventually leading to my writing *The Virgin Mary — A Resource Guide for Laypersons*.

### Good Enough to be Catholic?

So why wasn't I Catholic yet? The short answer to this question might be found in a quotation from the philosopher Renan, who said, "No one has a religion until they have lost it."

That quote embodies my forty-year journey to a faith that is credible to both heart and mind.

A Christianity that engages the heart but denigrates the mind is deficient. I felt uneasy. In order for Christianity to be credible, it has to offer something more than fire insurance. I had lost my fundamentalism and visited varieties of Evangelicalism, then the American Episcopal Church — only to discover that what I thought was an authentic church was in fact something else.

At the same time, I was wary of exchanging Protestant fundamentalism for Catholic fundamentalism. Father Francis Sul-

livan, S.J. helped me to understand that, despite a "Deposit of Faith," our knowledge is partial. There are open questions whose resolution may only emerge gradually. That was reassuring.

I have a special affinity to Cardinal Dulles, who wrote of his conversion in 1946: "The only sufficient cause for any conversion, is, of course, divine grace, for which man can give no explanation." But we both agreed that one can describe how God influences or acts through others to impact our will.

For nearly thirty years, I was a fellow traveler within the Catholic orbit. Through deep reading and participation as an interloping "guest," I simply ceased to be Protestant. Like Cardinal Newman, I read myself into a Catholic mindset.

But I could not fully own my Catholicism. There were barriers. My former wife could not be located, so I could not proceed with the annulment process and pursue being received into the Catholic Church. And I constantly wondered if I was "good enough" to be Catholic. It is surprising how such a doubt can be a barrier for someone considering becoming Catholic.

### Seeking a New Spiritual Home

We loved Washington, D.C., but changes in life are inevitable. Nilde and I moved to Miami in 1993 so she could be with her parents during their final years, because Nilde was an only child. At first, we attended Saint Dominic's Catholic Church in Miami, since that was where Nilde's parents lived. It was also Nilde's parish church growing up. We went there every weekend because I began singing in a local restaurant near their home every Saturday. Singing from the American song book was a carry-over from my Washington days, having spent countless hours in Washington's piano lounges. After visiting several Catholic parishes closer to our home in Aventura, Florida, we eventually found a permanent home at St. Matthew Catholic Church.

### Mary for a Third Time

Following Nilde's recovery from spinal cancer and regaining her ability to walk in 2007, we began volunteering for Memorial Regional Hospital and became members of the Legion of Mary.

## CHNETWORK RETREAT

The CHNetwork is offering a retreat October 17-20, 2016 in Biddeford Maine for clergy and laity who are converts/reverts to the Catholic Church or are on the journey and inquiring about the Catholic Faith.

We are also planning to offer additional events for CHNetwork members in the future. We welcome your feedback regarding what kind of events would be most helpful to you and have created a survey on our website.

Please go to [chnetwork.org/events](http://chnetwork.org/events) to sign up or for more information on the Biddeford, ME retreat and other events hosted by the CHNetwork.



## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

### August 4–6, 2016

2016 Chesterton Conference  
Slippery Rock State University  
Slippery Rock, PA

[www.chesterton.org/35th-annual-chesterton-conference/](http://www.chesterton.org/35th-annual-chesterton-conference/)



### September 17–18, 2016

EWTN Family Celebration  
Birmingham, AL

[www.ewtn.com/familycelebration/](http://www.ewtn.com/familycelebration/)



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Our devotion to Mary grew steadily, and I enjoyed the supportive fellowship of my Legion of Mary friends. As my devotion to Mary increased, I wondered where she was leading me.

At the Legion of Mary, I found a special apostolic partner in Gloria Ippolito. Providence joined us together in a ministry of faith and reaching out to others — especially at funeral wakes.

But my journey was not quite over. There was my former marriage still to be dealt with.

After years of searching, I did locate my former wife. The process moved quickly throughout 2014, and the marriage was declared null on May 5, 2015. I went through RCIA a second time.

Now I finally felt that I could own my Catholicism. The reality is that Mary brought me home, offering me the fullest expression of Christian truth — the Catholic Church. And my wife, Nilde, was enduringly important too. She was my Monica who prayed constantly for her famous intellectual son, Augustine.

The riddle of my forty years of wandering and deep reading was answered. All that study suddenly came into focus one September day in 2014. I was asked by our Legion of Mary president to give a talk, a study reflection, at the regional Legion of Mary meeting. The topic was John the Baptist. As I pored through the mass of materials I had gathered, I asked Mary for help. What was the message for me? What was the message for my audience of fifty to seventy other Legion members?

One of the amazing things I discovered was that John the Baptist was the patron saint of my birthplace, Charleston, South Carolina. The mission of John the Baptist was simply to declare the word, to make straight the ways of the Lord and announce that salvation was coming. John the Baptist is now my Patron Saint too.

Mary gave me one more affirmation through a special Providence of God. June 5, 2015 marked the ten-year anniversary of my mother's passing. While planning for a Pilgrim Virgin Visit ceremony in my home to mark this occasion, I ran across something I thought had been lost forever. It was a beautiful icon prayer card of Our Lady of Joyful Hope and Our Lady of South Carolina. The prayer card and the story behind its creation recalled the motto of my home state: "While I breathe, I hope." I had often quoted this state motto as I awaited what I hoped would be a blessing of my marriage to Nilde and full reception into the Catholic Church. How incredible were the graces of Mary throughout this long journey!

My formal reception into the Catholic Church and convalidation of my marriage to Nilde Martinez took place on June 29, 2015 on the Feasts of Saints Peter and Paul. My confirmation took place at the Cathedral of Saint Mary in Miami, Florida.

### A Second Call

I am determined not to refuse a second calling to declare the word. That day in September of 2014 was a seminal moment. Mary and John the Baptist have called me to truly declare the word. I had been doing this increasingly through the delivery of short devotions and presiding at funeral wakes. Each time I

did these things, I felt affirmed by the Holy Spirit to keep doing what I was doing.

This affirmation led me to think about what I should really be doing. During some of my trips to Honduras, I discovered people in remote areas of Honduras who did not have regular access to a parish church and the sacraments. The Honduran Catholic Church filled in these gaps with Delegates of the Word, something similar to deacons when priests were not available. *Delegates of the Word*. That concept resonated with me.

I needed a platform to host my writing, speaking, and special works of charity, so I created the Delegates of the Word organization to be the means for doing my apostolic work. Through this organization, I am reaching out to others by writing, speaking, and teaching in whatever venue that might be open. I do not know where this will lead, but at a minimum, Delegates of the Word can serve as a means for me to unpack forty years of constant Catholic and ecumenical study for laypersons and anyone else who might care to listen.

### Was the Journey Worth it?

Non-Catholics might wonder, What really made you Catholic? What about your Evangelical and Anglican heritage? I think it would be accurate to say that I read and studied myself into the Catholic Church.

The second factor has to do with ecclesiology. What is a true Church as distinguished from a club or a debating society? What I discovered was that the Catholic Church has the fullest expression of cumulative truth contained within its history, tradition, worship, and theology. As Thomas Howard said, the Catholic Church is "Evangelical plus." Authority and ecclesiology are linked together.

Intellectually, Benedict XVI and many of the theological giants of the Ressourcement movement that ushered in Vatican II informed my mind and spirit. This is especially true of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henry de Lubac, and the Jesuit theologian Francis Sullivan.

Long before becoming officially Catholic, Mary was there as a tiny mustard seed in my consciousness. She was the cause of my first serious theological question. Over time, she gradually grew larger, and through my eight years of Legion of Mary affiliation, she, Nilde, and my apostolic friend, Gloria, led me through the final journey. ■



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### BLOG

Please visit [www.chnetwork.org/story](http://www.chnetwork.org/story) to comment on and discuss this story!



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# PREMIUMS CLUB

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Those in the Premiums Club automatically receive the featured newsletter resources each month along with a bonus item, and a letter from the Director.

The Premiums Club is a great (and easy) way to get outstanding material to learn and share the Catholic Faith each month while also supporting the work of the CHNetwork in a profound way.

