



## January 2017 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## From the Churches of Christ to the One Church

By Rachele Parker

My two younger sisters and I were raised in Springfield, MO by parents who valued faith, family, and friendships, and who served the community. We attended Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night services in a large, active Churches of Christ congregation. Our social as well as religious life revolved around this church.

The Churches of Christ are part of the Restoration Movement that began in the early 19th century, which sought to move away from denominationalism and to be like the early Church as seen in the Bible. In this Bible-only environment, I often heard the refrain, “We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent.” For instance, it was argued that musical instruments are not mentioned in the New Testament as being used in worship, so we should sing a cappella. Some members would go so far as to say that those who worship with instruments are in danger of losing their salvation. Even as a child I had difficulty with this idea. I couldn’t understand why God would command the Israelites to worship Him with instruments and then forbid it when Christ arrived. Had God changed?

Baptism in the Churches of Christ is by immersion, for the forgiveness of sins. There were, however, some doctrinal inconsistencies. Some members would say those not baptized would not be saved, while others were less certain. The Bible did not appear to be completely clear on the mat-

ter. And in fact, I was baptized twice — a fairly common practice among the Churches of Christ. I was initially baptized at ten years old. Later, when I had arrived at a deeper level of conversion, I was baptized again. Later still, this practice helped me to accept the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation. I certainly always needed to feel forgiven.

The Churches of Christ also observe the Lord’s Supper weekly, with only the baptized partaking. This is understood as a commandment from Christ, though the elements were considered only a symbol of His Body and Blood. I was not aware of any other interpretations of this practice until I began studying the Catholic Faith as an adult.

I attended a university affiliated with the Churches of Christ. After college, I began to attend another Churches of Christ congregation, where we occasionally used musical instruments and partnered with other denominations for worship. I also went to non-denominational worship services from time to time, while coming to the conclusion that generally Christians believe the same things. However, even *Continued on page 2* ➤

*Journeys Home*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

as I branched out, adopting the “invisible Church” of all believers concept, I remained most comfortable with the Churches of Christ.

### Marriage

I met my husband — or rather, met him again — at our ten year high school reunion in 2005. We began a long distance relationship shortly after the reunion, since I was living in Nashville, TN and he was in Cleveland, OH.

One of our first conversations was about faith. Will had been raised Catholic but had not been attending Mass regularly. I wasn't deterred by the difference in our traditions; that, I felt, could be overcome.

He told me that he was a Christian and that his faith was important to him. I trusted that God had placed us together and that He would lead us forward according to His will. However, our faith differences became a source of concern as our relationship grew more serious and talk of marriage ensued. My primary worry was that he would regret or even resent that he had not married a Catholic woman. He eased my mind and told me that he didn't know what the future would bring for us regarding church, but he knew that he loved God, and he loved me, and that everything would work out. After that, I let go of my fear and prayerfully trusted in God's plan. We were married on September 15, 2007 in my childhood Church of Christ congregation.

We had been living in Nashville, where the Churches of Christ was vibrant, and it was easy to find a congregation to belong to. When we later moved to Cleveland, OH, it was a different pic-

ture religiously, a predominantly Catholic part of the country. I was anxious about where we would go to church. We began visiting various denominations, struggling to find a fit for us both. We finally settled on a Churches of Christ congregation that was significantly smaller than any other church I had experienced and more conservative in teaching and style of worship. The people, though, were kind and welcoming.

### An Anti-Catholic Congregation

I became aware early on that the congregation's predominant view regarding Catholics was that they are not Christians and had been terribly led astray. Many of the members were former Catholics who had become convinced that the Church's teachings were false. I began to feel uncomfortable there, especially concerned about others making anti-Catholic comments to Will. One Sunday, we decided to attend an adult Bible class. Sure enough, that morning some comments were made regarding Catholics that were highly offensive to us. But we went again the following week. Once more, we heard anti-Catholic comments. It was all we could do to stay for services that day, we were so hurt and saddened. We talked and cried after church as we discussed what happened and our feelings about it. We knew that we could no longer worship there but had no idea where to go.

This set us on a most unexpected journey. Although my husband, Will, was raised Catholic, seeking to learn about the Catholic Church was not my first thought. Instead, I bought a book about Christian denominations and read through it, trying to discern the difference between all the various churches. What I

*Continued on page 5* ➤

## FEATURED RESOURCES

### SPECIAL OFFER!



Receive a copy of *A Scriptural Devotion to the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ for the Conversion of our Separated Brethren* for a donation in any amount. Join in our special CHNetwork effort for the week of Christian unity. Please see page C for more details.

Receive a copy of *A Scriptural Devotion* for a donation in any amount.

\$35

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

### Deep in Scripture CD

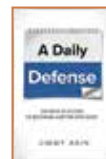


In this episode of *Deep in Scripture*, Jimmy Akin joins Marcus Grodi to discuss Jesus' commissioning of Peter as the Rock on which He would build His Church. Catholics have an easy explanation for this, but many other Christians have a very different interpretation of this passage from Scripture. Join Jimmy and Marcus as they break down one of the key Bible verses that divides Catholics and other Christians.

\$50

Receive *A Daily Defense* for a donation of \$50.

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Make a New Year's resolution to know your faith better! Do you want to learn how to defend and explain the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible, and scores of other truths? In *A Daily Defense*, Jimmy compiles 365 challenges that Catholics often hear from skeptics and non-Catholics — about God, Jesus, Scripture, morality, Mary, and a host of doctrines, and teaches you how to answer them.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *A Daily Defense* for a \$75 donation.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

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

# What Was the Reformation?

By Kenneth Hensley

Before becoming Catholic, I was an evangelical Protestant for about twenty years, an ordained Protestant minister for more than eleven.

My conversion was hard. I broke a lot of glass coming into the Church. Because of my background and situation, becoming Catholic wasn't something done quickly. It was the result of intensive thought and prayer over the course of some four years. It involved a rethinking of my entire worldview as a Christian — including the teaching of Scripture and the history of the Church.

Given this experience, I can't talk about Catholicism and Protestantism without instinctively making the case for the one and against the other. At the same time, I can't talk about Protestantism without deep affection for those I still consider my brothers and sisters in Christ.

## The Most Serious Division in Christian History

Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft has referred to the division that occurred between Catholics and Protestants at the time of the Reformation as “the most serious division” in the history of Christianity. It certainly was, and is. And the Catholic Church acknowledges that it is not without blame for the fracturing among Christianity that took place in the early 16th century.

In fact, whatever blame may be assigned for what happened back then, it certainly is not the fault of Protestants alive today, and Catholics accept them as fellow Christians. Quoting the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

In this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts .... But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church — for which, often enough, men on both sides were to blame .... one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers (CCC 816-818).

I have no doubt in my mind that I was a Christian for twenty years before I ever became a Catholic — that I knew Christ. I also have no doubt in my mind that the Spirit of God was present and active in the evangelical Protestant churches I attended and served during those years.

And our *Catechism* agrees with this as well. In fact, in the very next paragraph we read:

Christ uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church (CCC 819).

And so, with respect and affection, during this year in which the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation will be commemorated by a great number of our brothers and sisters

in Christ, in a series of monthly articles I'd like to ask the questions: What was the Reformation? And why did it happen?

## To begin, what was the Reformation?

Discussing this same question, Catholic historian Hilaire Belloc in his book *The Great Heresies* began by emphasizing what the Reformation was *not*. First, he said, it was not a matter of individual Christians introducing one or two or three particular false doctrines that needed to be dealt with. It was much more general than that.

Nor, Belloc continues, was it the creation, the introduction, of a new and separate religion, as was the case with Islam in the seventh century.

I sometimes hear Catholics speak of Protestants as though they were members of a different religion: “Oh, he belongs to a different religion; he's a Baptist.” I've even heard Catholics say, “Oh, she's not a Catholic. She's a Christian!” Allow me to attempt the impossible and put a permanent stop to this. Wrong! The division between Catholicism and Protestantism is a division within Christianity. Catholics and Protestants are both Christians. The Reformation was not the creation of a new religion.

Well, if it wasn't a matter of disagreements over a doctrine or two or even three, and it wasn't the introduction of a new religion, what *was* the Reformation?

What Belloc emphasizes is that Protestantism created “a certain separate moral atmosphere,” which he characterizes as that of “reaction against a united spiritual authority.” This moral atmosphere, he says, “so continued in vigor as both to break up our European civilization in the West and to launch at last a general doubt, spreading more and more widely.”

## Reaction Against the Authority of the Catholic Church

We can see this in lives of the Reformers.

For instance, you read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and he doesn't seem to have gone into his study and come forth with one or two or three “improvements” on Catholic theology, a couple of doctrines he believes the Church to be mistaken about. Rather, he seems to have taken his Bible and gone into his study and come forth with *his own total vision of Christianity*.

Catholicism is something that is rejected outright. There's the sense that he is reinventing the wheel, starting over, returning to the original sources and taking a fresh look at Christian theology. And when he speaks about the Catholic Church, he doesn't speak about her “errors” so much as her “evils.”

What comes through is “a certain moral atmosphere” that I think could certainly be characterized as a reaction against a united spiritual authority; in particular, a reaction against the authority of the Catholic Church.

We can sense this same “moral atmosphere” in the attitudes of Catholics today who oppose a number of the Church's settled teachings — on women in the priesthood, artificial birth con-

trol, the authority of the bishop of Rome, abortion, divorce and remarriage, etc.

For the most part, it's not as though these people have rigorously studied the scriptural and theological arguments in favor of the Church's positions on each of these issues and then *answered* them. Their stand is a stand against the very *idea* of a unified spiritual authority. Their protest embodies and conveys a certain moral atmosphere. They don't *like* being told what is right and wrong. They want the freedom to decide for *themselves* what they think about women in the priesthood, birth control, and so forth.

This is at the heart of what the Reformation was.

It was a dispute over the issue of authority that tore at the Church in the early 16th century. The separation that occurred at that time between Catholic and Protestant was a separation between those who continued to embrace the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church on matters of faith and morals and those who rejected that authority to stand, with Luther, on the authority of Scripture alone.

### What Protestants Have in Common

Now, Protestantism began immediately to take numerous forms.

Martin Luther began by saying, "I do not accept the authority of popes and councils; in matters of faith each Christian is his own pope and council" (*D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Weimar: 1898). Yet, within a very short time (two years!) he was complaining, "There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads!" (*Letter to the Christians at Antwerp*, 1525).

Protestantism fragmented almost immediately because of disagreements among the various Reformers and denominations created by the Reformation. But the one thing Protestants had in common was this reaction against the idea that there existed on earth a united spiritual authority outside of the Bible itself, and that the Catholic Church represented that spiritual authority.

And this is still the essence of the disagreement.

There are a great number of Protestant sects and denominations in the world today. And they differ with one another on a great number of issues, both doctrinal and moral.

But there's one thing they are in perfect agreement on: "The Catholic Church has no spiritual authority over me. God has given us His Word in the Bible. God has put His Spirit in our hearts. He's given us pastors and teachers to assist us in understanding the holy Scriptures. What more do we need?"

### Sola Scriptura

Another way to express this is to say that the foundation of the Protestant worldview is *sola Scriptura* — the belief that the Bible serves as the "sole infallible rule of faith and practice" for the individual believer, and for the Church as well. This is how evangelical Protestants think.

This is how I thought for many, many years. And for the most part, it wasn't a position I came to as a result of some serious in-depth analysis of the Protestant and Catholic "claims" with respect to the issue of authority. For the most part, it was simply assumed. Every Christian I knew thought this way, as well as every church I attended and every teacher I listened to.

So how did Protestants come to think like this? What were the causes of the Reformation in the 16th century? And how is it that so many at that particular point in history came to react against the spiritual authority of the Church?

This is where we'll pick up next month. Stay tuned! ■

*Kenneth Hensley will be a guest on The Journey Home January 16, 2017.*

## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**February 18, 2017**

Catholic Men for Christ Conference

St. Louis, MO | catholicmenforchrist.org | 314-792-7185

**March 3, 2017**

Diocese of Oklahoma City

St. Gregory's University | Shawnee, OK

## WHAT IS THE CHNETWORK?

The **Coming Home Network International** was established to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, discover the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

Through the one-on-one outreach of our pastoral staff and volunteers, our monthly CHNewsletter, regional retreats, social media, and through the online community forums and groups at our website [CHNetwork.org](http://CHNetwork.org), we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



**CHNetwork**

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[info@chnetwork.org](mailto:info@chnetwork.org)



The Coming Home  
Network International



[www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org)

### Christian Unity: Challenges and Growth

By CHNetwork Staff

*“Christian Unity: Challenges and Growth”*  
By CHNetwork Staff ..... A

*“From the Hermitage: Helping Others Encounter Christ in His Church”* By Br. Rex Anthony Norris ..... B

In a world saturated with division, conflict, and argument, Christian unity is as important as ever. 500 years removed from the Reformation, it would appear that in some ways, Christians are more unified than they’ve ever been, and on some questions, the gulf of disagreement seems to be widening. We recently asked our members and readers the question: **“In what areas do you see the strongest growth in unity among Christians? Conversely, what are the areas where we have the most work to do?”** Here’s what some of them had to say:

*I am very encouraged by the progress that pro-life organizations are making when Catholics and Evangelical Protestants join forces. There are groups out there working together to close abortion clinics, educate mothers, and even convert people out of the abortion industry. Any time Christians can work together across confessional boundaries to support the culture of life and protect the vulnerable, then we are actively working toward fulfilling Jesus’ prayer that we might all be one. **DR. JIM PAPANDREA, AUTHOR OF HANDED DOWN: THE CATHOLIC FAITH OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS***

*I see the most fruitful areas of growth toward Christian unity in the Southern Bible belt, especially through teachings on the Old Testament tabernacle. Evangelicals know the tabernacle pretty well; once you connect its worship and practice to “weird” Catholic worship and practices (institutional priesthood, actual sacrifice, liturgical year, purgatory, Magisterium, liturgical prayer, Mary), and both of those to heavenly worship, evangelicals often realize the truth of Catholicism as the faithful guardian of the Deposit of Faith. **SONJA CORBITT, BIBLESTUDYEVANGELISTA.COM***

*As more Protestants convert through ministries such as CHNetwork, it opens up many, many conversations with family and friends allowing people to dialogue, hopefully in a civilized manner, about theology and doctrine. The prayer of Our Lord that we may all be one was one of the greatest influences on my reversion back to the Church. **KATI, VIA FACEBOOK***

*I think the most fruitful areas of growth are around issues of marriage and family. I meet more and more non-Catholics who express their appreciation for the Church’s clear, uncompromising stand on the nature and dignity of marriage and the centrality of the family as the domestic church. **THOMAS SMITH, GEN215.ORG***

A common understanding of the sanctity of life and marriage, a common respect for the Scriptures, and a common experience of the radical mercy of God all flourish best in an environment where love is the basis of our ideas and action. Therefore, in order to achieve more perfect unity, Christians must strive to perfect our love. Pope Saint John Paul II made this clear in his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*:

We proceed along the road leading to the conversion of hearts guided by love which is directed to God and, at the same time, to all our brothers and sisters, including those not in full communion with us. Love gives rise to the desire for unity, even in those who have never been aware of the need for it. Love builds communion between individuals and between Communities. If we love one another, we strive to deepen our communion and make it perfect. (para 21)

Please pray with all of us at the Coming Home Network that God will deepen our love for Himself and for one another, and that the result of that love will be a deeper desire to become one unified Body of Christ, whose love for us knows no limit. ■

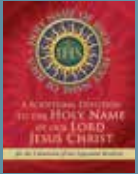
Member's Section

Member's Section



## WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

**January 18-25 2017** is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Starting on January 18, 2017, the CHNetwork invites you to join us in praying a network-wide 15-day Scriptural Devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus for Christian Unity!



Be sure to visit [www.CHNetwork.com/unity](http://www.CHNetwork.com/unity) to access the daily prayers, to sign up for reminders, and view other resources related to the cause for Christian unity. You can also obtain a copy of the booklet, *A Scriptural Devotion to the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ for the Conversion of our Separated Brethren*, that contains the prayers for the devotion by calling 740-450-1175, going to our website [www.chresources.org](http://www.chresources.org), or returning the envelope in this newsletter.

## 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](http://chnetwork.org/converts) to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

## TAX LETTER



If you need a record of your 2016 contributions for tax purposes, please contact **Wendy Hart:**

[wendy@chnetwork.org](mailto:wendy@chnetwork.org)  
740-450-1175 ext 100

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

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) if you have any questions or concerns.

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For a non-denominational missionary in Brazil, that the Holy Spirit would guide his reading and open his heart to the truth of the Catholic Faith.
- For a Wesleyan minister in Ohio, that his thirst for the truth would lead him to the Eucharistic altar.
- For Jeremy, a Reformed seminarian, that as he and his wife journey to the Catholic Faith they would find encouragement and fellowship.
- For Michelle, a non-denominational lay minister, that the Lord Jesus would guide the RCIA studies of her and her family.
- For John, an Anglican priest, that God would encourage his heart to return to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- For David, a minister in Ohio, that the pull he feels in his heart would guide him to full-communion with Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For a Baptist minister in Australia, that he will be successfully able to sift through his Reformation baggage.
- For Chris, a Nazarene minister, that the Holy Spirit would grant him wisdom and guidance as he seeks God's will.
- For a minister's wife on the West Coast, that she may become Catholic without endangering her husband's pastoral ministry.

- For Jim, a Wesleyan lay minister, that the love of Jesus would lead him to the fullness of the truth in the Catholic Church.
- For Joe, an Episcopal priest, that he would find fellowship and guidance from convert clergy who have made a similar journey to the Church as he is now experiencing.
- For Keith, a minister in Illinois, that he may successfully find a way to integrate himself into Catholic parish life.

## Lay

- For Susanna, that she will develop a willingness to study the proofs for the existence of God.
- For Kathleen who is suffering from lung cancer.
- For a man who comes from an Assemblies of God background and is struggling with his faith journey and doesn't know if he should pursue his interest in Catholicism.
- For Bill, that the Holy Spirit guide his heart and mind as he continues learning about the Catholic Faith.
- For a Baptist in Wisconsin who is struggling to understand papal infallibility and other Catholic doctrines.
- For an Evangelical who is in RCIA but has questions about salvation and the Church's view of non-Catholic Christians.

- For Paul, a former Mormon, who is going through RCIA and is looking forward to participating in Catholic life.
- For Scott who is reading and studying about Catholicism, that he come to appreciate and embrace the truth that the Church upholds.
- For Steve who has turned away from his openness towards the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit grace him with a better understanding of the Church.
- For Mark who is in RCIA but still is seeking answers to his many questions.
- For Nancy who doesn't know if she can proceed with her desire to be Catholic on account of the need for multiple annulments.
- For a Swedish woman who comes from a non-denominational faith background and was touched by Pope Francis' recent trip to her country, that she be encouraged to come fully home to the Church.
- For a new convert who feels like he is drifting away from his faith, that he be strengthened and invigorated in his love for Christ and the Church.

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

#### January 2

Drake and Crystal McCalister\*  
 Former Pentecostals  
 Re-air from 1/3/2011

#### January 9

Adam Janke\*  
 Former Baptist and Lutheran

#### January 16

Kenneth Hensley\*  
 Former Baptist minister

#### January 23

Don Johnson\*  
 Former Evangelical Free

#### January 30

Barbara Golder\*  
 Convert from Judaism,  
 Methodism, and Anglicanism

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home).

\*Schedule is subject to change.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

read was troubling and discouraging. My belief that Christians basically believed the same things began to crumble. I began to question how all these churches with such different perspectives on fundamental questions could all be right. We visited several churches, making the rounds to find one with all the things Will and I were looking for, but we could not find it.

Finally, we had a talk that changed the direction of our journey entirely. Will began to share with me what the Catholic Church meant to him: what he loved about it, what he had taken for granted prior to going on this church search with me, and even things he still didn't quite understand. As I listened, something — I believe it was the Holy Spirit — stirred deep within me. I just knew that I needed to study the Catholic Faith: where Will was coming from and what that religion really taught.

### The Journey Begins

I began by reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I kept my Bible open and would check out all the Scripture references given in the Catechism. When I came upon a teaching that I didn't understand, I found other references from Catholics to read and study further. I began reading conversion stories and watching *The Journey Home* on EWTN television. All my spare time was poured into prayer and study.

The first basic question I had was: What kind of Church did Jesus establish? Did He establish a Church with authority, as the Catholics say? The second question that followed naturally from the first was related to the teaching of Scripture alone. Is *sola Scriptura* correct or, if Jesus had really established an authoritative Church, what is the place of Scripture? Following those questions, I looked at other Catholic teachings that I was most concerned with: infant baptism, the Eucharist, the Communion of Saints, and the role of Mary.

What about the Church? Did Jesus give His Apostles authority, and was that authority meant to continue after their deaths? In Matthew 16:18–19 we see Jesus stating that He will build His Church on Peter and that the gates of Hades “shall not prevail against it.” He tells Peter that He will give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven and that “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” As I studied this passage further in context, I discovered the meaning behind “the keys.” It appeared that Jesus did give Peter, specifically, an office in the Church. Additionally, He conferred authority on all the Apostles in Matthew 28:18–20: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded of you.” He also gave them all authority to forgive sins in John 20:21–23, saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” In the early Church, as written in Acts, we see matters of dispute being brought to the Apostles and that their teaching is accepted as from the Holy Spirit. The early believers understood that the

Apostles held an office that must be filled continuously. In Acts 1, the deceased Judas is replaced by another eyewitness of Jesus' ministry and teachings. Another Scripture that really impacted me regarding the Church was 1 Timothy 3:15, in which Paul refers to the Church as “the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”

I discovered that the Church Fathers had some important things to say on the topic as well.

Be not deceived, my brethren: If anyone follows a maker of schism, he does not inherit the kingdom of God; if anyone walks in strange doctrine [in other words, is a heretic], he has no part in the passion [of Christ]. Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of his blood; one altar, as there is one bishop, with the presbytery and my fellow servants, the deacons (Ignatius of Antioch – AD 110, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 3:3–4:1).

Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop or by one whom he ordains [a presbyter]. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (Ignatius of Antioch – AD 110, *Letter to the Smyrneans* 8:2).

In the Church, God has placed apostles, prophets, teachers, and every other working of the Spirit, of whom none of those are sharers who do not conform to the Church, but who defraud themselves of life by an evil mind and even worse way of acting. Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace (Irenaeus – AD 189, *Against Heresies* 3:24:1).

So it became clear to me that Jesus did indeed intend to establish an authoritative Church built upon Himself and His Apostles, whom He taught and charged with the task of spreading these teachings to the entire world. It also became clear that the only Church who could trace herself back to the Apostles and Jesus Himself was the Catholic Church.

**SACRED SCRIPTURE AND SACRED TRADITION:** If Jesus established a Church with authority; does it make sense to say that

### CHNETWORK RETREATS

Would you like fellowship and connection with other converts or those on the journey to the Catholic Church? The CHNetwork is offering a number of retreats in 2017. See the back page for more details or go to [CHNetwork.org/retreats](http://CHNetwork.org/retreats).

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

the Bible alone is our authority? As I studied, I began to see the problems with this teaching.

First, the Bible never says it is the only authority. In fact, in many of the letters to churches we see the people being told to follow the teachings they have learned whether written or by word of mouth. “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). What, then, is “tradition”? It is all the teachings that Jesus passed to His Apostles and they passed on to us in the Church. Without Sacred Tradition, some texts in the Bible are difficult to understand. The Catholic Church holds Scripture in the highest regard and honor. It is the inspired word of God. But it was never intended to be used as a detailed owner’s manual for discovering Christianity.

The doctrine of Scripture alone is why there is so much division among Protestants. There always will be division outside of the authoritative Church led by the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is only by the authority given the Church that we have the canon of Scripture in its current form. While this was a difficult truth for me on the journey, it really made the most sense historically and biblically.

**INFANT BAPTISM:** This topic actually was not as difficult as I thought it would be. In the Churches of Christ we did not practice infant baptism, and my impression was that it was not generally seen as a valid form of Baptism. The argument was that the validity of Baptism depends on a person’s ability to understand and acknowledge his sins, and profess belief that Jesus is the Son of God. What had been confusing to me was how to know when a person was truly ready. The criterion seemed to be a subjective one.

When I looked at Scripture in light of the fact that most early Christians were Jewish, I was able to understand why infants would have been baptized. Baptism was an initiation into the body of believers. The Jewish people had circumcision as their initiation, the means to identify them as God’s people. When the Jewish believers heard Peter say, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him” (Acts 2:38-39) they would have interpreted that as including all their children, regardless of age. Also, in the Book of Acts, we see the conversion and baptism of the jailer and his entire household. There is no indication that all others in the house professed belief themselves or were even old enough to do so.

This was enough to convince me that the early Christians practiced infant baptism. Had it not been allowed, it would have caused open controversy. This also makes more sense when coupled with the teaching of original sin. I had always believed in original sin, even though I don’t recall it being formally taught by the Churches of Christ. I gathered from Scripture that we are born in a fallen state because of the sin committed by

Adam and Eve. So it would seem that if Baptism is indeed for the forgiveness of original sin, we would want to offer it as soon as possible. Appropriately, it is based on the parents’ belief and their promise to raise their children in the Catholic Faith — a beautiful sacrament of authentic community, love, and responsibility for each other in the Church!

The Church’s teaching on Baptism also solved the problem of depending on an individual’s understanding of what he is doing and professing. It is incredibly beautiful that an infant — completely helpless and unable to profess anything — can be saved by receiving the grace of Baptism. He cannot earn it; he cannot understand it. It is all gift. And isn’t that really the way it works for all of us?

There are other sacraments to help us grow in our faith, as we grow in understanding. We receive the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and Confirmation at more mature stages on the journey.

**EUCCHARIST:** Before Will and I were married, I bought a book on Catholicism. I felt that I should have more understanding of where Will was coming from. Of all things, I read *Catholicism for Dummies!* I was moving right along until I got to the Church’s belief in the Real Presence in the Eucharist. I closed the book and put it down. This teaching was too strange, and I wanted no part of it.

It’s amazing to look back on this, and it is such a testament to the role of the Holy Spirit in leading me to belief. I clearly remember the moment I began to believe. I was listening to a talk on the Eucharist by Dr. Brant Pitre, specifically about how Jews would have understood what Jesus was saying. As I meditated on John 6, I felt suddenly overwhelmed by Jesus’ love for me, and I knew then ... it’s true!

After that revelation, I knew there could be no other church for me. Where else could I be so truly close to our Lord? There were still things to study, but I knew in my heart that I had to receive the Eucharist for the rest of my life! When we think about the lavish love of Jesus, who gave His very life for us ... *of course* He would give Himself to us in such an intimate and beautifully simple way.

Several Scriptures stood out to me concerning the Eucharist. One was John 6 that describes the Bread of Life discourse in which Jesus commands us to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood to have eternal life. Later, we see Him institute the Lord’s Supper as the way in which we receive Him (Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20).

But without knowing how early Christians taught and practiced it, this teaching still was a mystery to me. Some of the early Church writings that helped me understand the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist include:

They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

(Ignatius of Antioch – circa AD 110, *Epistle to Smyrnaeans*, 7, 1).

For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh (Justin Martyr – circa AD 110–165, *First Apology*, 66).

[T]he bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup is His blood (Irenaeus – circa. AD 200, *Against Heresies*, IV: 18, 4).

There were other Scriptures that I grew up reading but completely missed their significance until I came to see how the early Church understood the Lord's Supper through quotes such as the above ones. Then, I could better make sense of Scriptures such as "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). There it was!

**COMMUNION OF SAINTS AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY:** Prior to looking at the Church's teaching regarding those souls who have died in the Body of Christ, I didn't realize that I had never been taught anything on this subject. I believed that the saved went to heaven but had never considered deeply what they were doing there and had no idea of what Scripture has to say concerning them.

Two biblical passages in particular were influential for me coming to understand the Communion of Saints. One was Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." This verse describes that those who have died in Christ somehow remain with us. They are aware of us and what we are doing, cheering us on as we walk this journey of faith. I then read in Revelation 8:4 where it depicts the saints lifting up prayers as incense to the throne of God. For what or whom could they be praying? Surely they are not lacking anything in heaven? These two verses combined showed me the truth of the Catholic Church's teaching on the Communion of Saints.

### Integrating It All

Once I accepted the Church's teaching regarding the Communion of Saints in heaven interceding for us, I could begin to look at the Church's teachings on Mary and her role in our salvation. I decided at some point after becoming Catholic to stop trying to understand it and to just begin speaking with Mary. It was awkward at first. I would talk to her honestly about how

strange it felt to talk to her and ask her for help to connect with her more. I started praying the Rosary and grew to love this daily devotion.

The first time we went to Mass, I was still deep in my studying. I cried through the entire Mass! I was completely overwhelmed as I saw the early Church I had been reading about unfold in front of me. The Eucharist especially moved me. I couldn't even speak to Will without crying, so we had to wait until we got back to the car to talk. I burst out, "I loved it!"

Not long after that, we met with the parish pastor to introduce ourselves and let him know about our journey. He was wonderfully kind and supportive. I began attending RCIA in the fall, making friends along the way.

Will and I had the amazing experience of marrying each other for a second time in January 2010 so that our marriage would be considered valid by the Church. On Easter Vigil 2010, I entered into full communion with the Catholic Church. Interestingly, we were pregnant with our first child one month later, even though we had been actively trying to conceive for over a year. We now have two daughters, and I am full of joy as Will and I raise them in the Church.

While intellectually I understood and believed the Church's teachings, sometimes I struggled to find how to live them. But when I began teaching my oldest daughter that saints in heaven pray for us, especially the Blessed Mother (Mary), and we began singing the Litany of Saints together before she went to preschool, I began to see the beauty of this truth and to feel on some level their presence with me. In addition, something surprising happened when I attended the Easter Vigil in 2015. It was the first time I had been able to attend the Vigil since entering the Church in 2010, due to small children and no childcare. The thing that moved me most was when we sang the Litany of Saints. Those saints were all participating in the liturgy with us!

I have begun teaching Sunday school for preschoolers. I hope to continue as a children's catechist and eventually help teach RCIA. I'm learning that God opens a way through life at just the right time, in just the right manner. Even if it doesn't line up with what I think should happen, I trust Him completely. He recently made it possible for our family to move back to our old hometown, near the rest of our family. I know God has amazing plans for us here and can't wait to see what He will do next! ■



*Rachelle and her husband currently live in Springfield, MO, where they are raising their two daughters (3 and 5). They attend St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish.*

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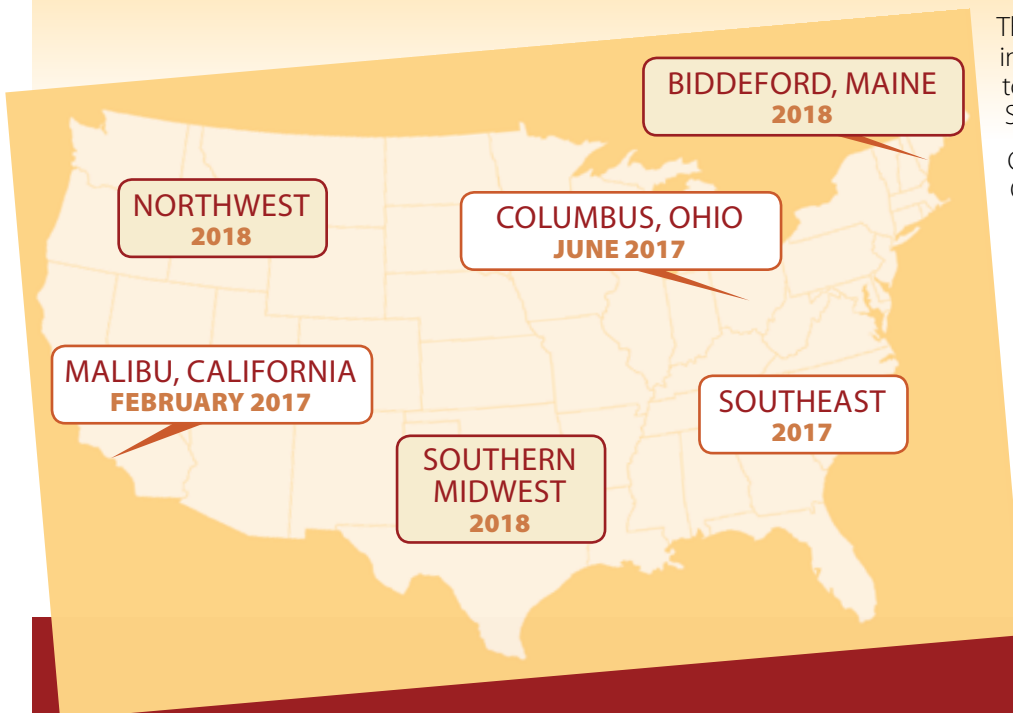
## The Coming Home Network International

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# 2017/2018 CHNETWORK **RETREATS!**



The CHNetwork is hosting three retreats in 2017 and three in 2018 covering a total of six regional areas of the United States.

Currently scheduled are Malibu, California at the end of February and one in Columbus, Ohio in June. Later in 2017 we'll hold a retreat in the southeast and in 2018 we'll have retreats in the northwest, southern midwest, and a New England retreat at the Marie Joseph Center in Biddeford, Maine.

All members of the CHNetwork who are converts or who are currently on the journey to the Catholic Church, are invited and encouraged to attend.

**Space is limited! RSVP early!**

Visit [CHNetwork.org/retreats](http://CHNetwork.org/retreats) for more information and to apply for a spot.