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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Back Home in the Catholic Church

By Charlotte Wiley

I was in second grade when I decided I wanted to be a nun when I grew up. My parents were progressive Catholics and very active in our local parish. I attended a Catholic school from first through seventh grade, which aided in my desire to become a nun. However, during my pre-teen years I was disillusioned with church. I remember wondering *why I had to confess to a priest* when, really, I didn't have anything to confess! I would often make up sins to confess, and that made me feel dishonest. In high school, I began a journey of my own in search of something deeper.

When I was 16 years old, I attended a concert with a friend, not realizing it was a non-Catholic “Christian” one. During the final song, there was an open invitation for anyone to “accept Jesus Christ into your life as Lord and Savior.” I walked forward to do that, although had no idea what I was actually doing. It didn't matter, I thought, because I was convinced it was right. I began attending a local Protestant church and found myself falling deeply in love with Jesus.

Little by little, I realized I was rejecting my Catholic upbringing. I began to believe that Catholics didn't really know Jesus like those in the Protestant church I was attending. I was quite the fanatic; I looked for ways that I could help my Catholic parents “invite Jesus into their hearts” too, and I'm sure it hurt them a great deal to see me leave my Catholic Faith and heritage.

While attending Goshen College (a private Menonite institution), I went to Honduras for a semester of Intercultural Studies. It was there that I sensed God

calling me to serve Him overseas as a missionary. My heart's deepest desire was to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the entire world. I said “yes” and endeavored to follow God's leading to that end.

After transferring to Indiana Wesleyan University to study nursing and missions, I met my husband-to-be, Gary. During high school Gary had said “yes” to God's call on his life to go into missions. We were married in August 1978, after only 10 months of dating. I graduated two years later, and that summer we moved with our three month old daughter to Kentucky for Gary to attend Asbury Theological Seminary. He graduated in 1983 and accepted a call to pastor a Wesleyan church in a small town in Michigan. We pastored there, with our (now two) daughters, for four years. In the summer of 1987, we decided it was time to serve overseas. Soon afterwards, we headed for Lima, Peru under the patronage of the Wesleyan Church's missionary organization, Global Partners.

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

We were in Lima for 14 years and planted a church in a middle class neighborhood. Our main focus there was “Friendship Evangelism,” something I found extremely fulfilling. My heart’s desire was to help women know and love Jesus Christ, so I started a women’s weekly combination cooking class and Bible study group. Some of the women seemed to have a real reverence for God, even though they were Catholic. That confused me a bit, but I let it go. Others were thankful that I shared Christ’s love with them and, little by little, seemed to understand Him better. Some even “accepted Jesus into their hearts” during our time there.

I also developed a Children’s Church program, and at our first Vacation Bible School, 18 children “accepted Christ into their hearts.” I am so very grateful for those years in Lima. To God be the glory for what He accomplished during our time there.

Having completed our time in Peru in 2001, we sensed God calling us to plant a church in New York City. So in the summer of 2002 we followed His call as obedient children and moved there, not knowing a soul. Due to the high cost of living there, I had to get a job and therefore was unable to help Gary much with the church planting. It was a difficult time for us, and our church plant failed after two years. Nevertheless, God had His plan to keep us in New York City. What we didn’t know was that we would later find Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Church in that same city. Gary released the church plant and surrendered his will to what God’s next step was for us. We were certain He wanted us to stay in the city.

The Lord did a healing work in us and blessed us by providing us a place to worship as we continued to heal. Trinity Grace Church (non-denominational) was a new church plant, and we quickly adopted it as our new church home. After just a few months of

attending this very young church, Gary was asked to serve, first as an elder, then as pastor of Justice and Care, and later as the local pastor of the Washington Heights parish.

Gary was the pastor at that church for three years. Then my Mom passed away and everything changed!

In October of 2013, my Mom had a heart attack. Two days later, she passed into the presence of the Lord. After she died, I knew I couldn’t judge her, but I was hoping she had made it to heaven. She had never “asked Jesus into her heart” that I knew of, even though, once again, I had witnessed to her just prior to her death. However, the day after her passing, my Dad looked me straight in the eye and said: “Charlotte, your Mom loved Jesus as much as you do.” That statement both shocked and confused me, because I knew how much I loved Jesus, but I had believed for years that Catholics weren’t really Christians.

This event sent Gary on a journey to understand how it was that my Mom could have loved Jesus as much as we did. What, really, was the doctrine of the Catholic Church on this point? Had we been misinformed or confused all these years? Within just a few weeks, Gary found himself beginning a surprising journey straight into the Catholic Church.

The more Gary sought and found answers and peace, the more stubborn I became. I held to the opinion that “*I found Jesus in the Protestant church and I’m not interested in going back!*” During his first few months of new discoveries, he privately prayed for me and tried to share his insights with me, but I just half-listened and pretended to be interested.

After about six months, I finally told him, “Honey, you go ahead and become Catholic. I don’t mind. I’m sure we’ll be just fine.”

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FEATURED RESOURCES



Making Sense of Mary

— By Gary Michuta

Mary is often a difficult stumbling block for Protestants and Catholics alike. For Protestants, the Bible doesn’t seem to say much about Mary. For them, Marian doctrine is unbiblical, if not anti-biblical, and Mary seems to be in competition with Jesus.

For many Catholics, Marian doctrine is something believed and loved, but why the Church teaches what it does is not altogether clear. *Making Sense of Mary* shows how Marian doctrine is taught from Genesis to Revelation, but it also builds the necessary biblical and patristic framework for non-Catholics and Catholics to better understand how Marian doctrine fits together and is integral to God’s perfect plan of redemption.

\$35

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Receive *Making Sense of Mary* and *Priests for the Third Millennium* for a \$75 donation.



Priests for the Third Millennium

— By Timothy Cardinal Dolan

Cardinal Dolan clearly sets forth what it takes to be a Catholic priest in the third millennium. Whether he is stressing the necessity of regular Confession and the need to celebrate daily Mass and say the Liturgy of the Hours or discussing priestly celibacy in frank, realistic terms, he emphasizes true priestly identity by presenting a life worth living, a life worth sharing, a life worth offering up to the Father through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Pastoral, practical, and thoroughly Catholic, *Priests for the Third Millennium* will renew the joy of being Catholic in the heart of seminarians, priests, and the people they serve.

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Why Did the Reformation Happen?

PART 4: A CHURCH IN DESPERATE NEED OF SPIRITUAL REFORM

By Kenneth Hensley, Pastoral Care & Resources Consultant



In 1510, the young Augustinian monk Martin Luther was sent to Rome on an errand for his order. He had dreamed all his life of visiting the Eternal City where Saints Peter and Paul had preached and been martyred, where Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified upside down in Nero's circus. He was thrilled at the thought of praying and celebrating Mass in the great churches of Rome.

Instead, as Luther scholar Heiko Oberman writes:

Later he remembered clearly the shock and horror he had felt in Rome upon hearing for the first time in his life flagrant blasphemies uttered in public. He was deeply shocked by the casual mockery of saints and everything he held sacred. He could not laugh when he heard priests joking about the sacrament of the Eucharist. (*Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, p. 149)

Maybe you've heard the story of how this experience nearly shattered Luther's faith in the Church. And if you're Catholic, maybe you were tempted to dismiss the story as so much anti-Catholic propaganda. The only problem is that credible Catholics of the time *admit* that the Church's hierarchy was in moral shambles.

If in fact, a common saying of the time was: "If there is a Hell, then Rome is built on it!" (*Ibid*, p. 147)

Humanist priest Erasmus spoke of his own experiences in Rome:

With my own ears I heard the most loathsome blasphemies against Christ and his apostles. Many acquaintances of mine have heard priests of the curia uttering disgusting words so loudly, even during mass, that all around them could hear it. (*Ibid*, p. 149)

Unfortunately this was true. And it wasn't only the priests.

In the late Middle Ages, bishops were mainly drawn from the nobility, and (often enough) not because they possessed any spiritual qualifications, but because they could *purchase* their positions.

There are all sorts of examples of wealthy families gaining control of ecclesiastical affairs in a particular area and ruling there for years and years. Often these bishops didn't even reside in the dioceses they ruled. They viewed their "realm" primarily as a source of income — income they could use to pursue their political ambitions or spend on gambling and other entertainments.

Certainly, some were shining lights. But many were not.

For instance, by the time Albert of Brandenburg was 23 years of age, he already held the sees of Magdeburg and Halberstadt and wanted the archbishopric of Mainz as well. He needed money to pay the installation fees and knew he would also have to pay Pope Leo X for the irregularity of holding three sees simultaneously.

Historian Roland Bainton describes the situation:

The negotiations of Albert with the pope were conducted through the German banking house of Fugger, which had a monopoly on papal finances in Germany. When the Church needed funds in advance of her revenues, she borrowed at usurious rates from the sixteenth-century Rothschilds or Morgans. Indulgences were issued in order to repay the debts, and the Fuggers supervised the collection. Knowing the role they would ultimately play, Albert turned to them for the initial negotiations. He was informed that the pope demanded twelve thousand ducats for the twelve apostles. Albert offered seven thousand for the seven deadly sins. They compromised on ten thousand, presumably *not* for the Ten Commandments, (*Here I Stand*, p. 75)

It's true. Leo X was not exactly a saint.

The first occupant of what came to be known as the "Chair of St. Peter" was a man who, when he first perceived who Jesus was, fell to his knees and cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:8). Peter was man who finished his course as



a martyr, *that* kind of man.

But what kind of man was Leo X, the man who occupied the Chair of St. Peter at the time of the Protestant revolt? Historian J.N.D. Kelly describes him as "a devious and double-

tongued politician and inveterate nepotist" (*The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, p. 257).

And that was on a good day. Roland Bainton writes,

[Leo X was] as elegant and as indolent as a Persian cat. His chief preeminence lay in his ability to squander the resources of the Holy See on carnivals, war, gambling, and the chase [hunting]. (*Here I Stand*, p. 74)

In other words, he looked more like *this* kind of man:



There's no getting around it. It's clear that the Church's hierarchy at the time of the Reformation was sick from top to bottom — so sick that St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) advised good Cath-

olics against going to Rome, lest they be corrupted. Try to imagine popes John Paul II or Benedict XVI or Francis saying, "Whatever you do, unless you want your faith destroyed, don't go to Rome!"

Fine, tell me I'm exaggerating the situation.

But then explain the confession of Pope Adrian VI, who immediately followed Leo X as bishop of Rome and served during the early events of the Reformation:

We know that for years there have been many abominable offences in spiritual matters and violations of the Commandments committed at this Holy See, yes, that everything has in fact been perverted The first thing that must be done is to reform the curia, the origin of all the evil. (*Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, p. 139)

If you need to, read it again. Notice the pope doesn't speak of minor missteps in spiritual matters. Rather he speaks of "abominable offences in spiritual matters and violations of the Commandments." He doesn't say that a few things here and there were out of order. He says, "everything has in fact been perverted."

And then, notice he doesn't locate the source of the evil "somewhere over there." (*The woman you gave me, she made me do it!*) Instead he locates the "curia" — the Vatican leadership — as the "origin of all the evil."

Catholic historian Hilaire Belloc puts the final nail in the coffin:

No one can deny that the evils provoking reform in the Church were deep-rooted and widespread. They threatened the very life of Christendom itself. All who thought at all about what was going on around them realized how perilous things were and how great was the need of reform Every kind of man would violently attack such monstrous abuses It was from all this that the turmoil sprang, and as it increased in violence threatened to destroy the Christian Church itself (*The Great Heresies*, pp. 112-114).

Conclusion

There are more historical and culture forces that could be listed as causes of the Reformation, for instance, the rise of the European middle class, which fueled a growing sense of independence.

But you do the math on what we've discussed so far in the articles:

- The invention of the printing press, leading to a rapid increase in literacy throughout Christendom.
- The explosion of new theological ideas.
- The rise of an educational philosophy that mocked the official doctors of the Church and emphasized a return to the Bible and the Church Fathers to be read with fresh eyes.

- The growing emphasis on religion as something personal.
- The rise of individualism and nationalism, resentment of centralized authority in government as well as in the Church.
- The rise of anti-papal sentiment throughout Catholic Europe.
- And a Church hierarchy in desperate need of spiritual and moral reform.

Given all this — even though as a Catholic I view the Reformation as one of the saddest cases of throwing the baby out with the bathwater — it doesn't surprise me that it happened. Not in the least. It would have taken a miracle *not* to happen.

The atmosphere was right. Luther struck the match with his attacks — first on Church abuses, then on Catholic teaching, then on the authority of the Church — and the explosion occurred. The Reformers rejected the idea that Christ had established a unified spiritual authority on earth and decided that only Scripture should be taken as authoritative. In the process the Church was shattered and its visible unity has never been recovered.

But how applicable is all of this to our lives in the 21st century? More — much more — than you might imagine.

And this is where we'll pick up next month. ■

WATCH & SHARE DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCE TALKS



The CHNetwork is excited to be making available talks from our past Deep in History conferences

on our website. Be sure to visit chnetwork.org/deep-in-history/ for the newest releases. We plan to have all the talks available by the end of 2017!

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, we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



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The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org

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.

CHNetwork Weekly Roundup

WEEKLY ROUNDUP EMAIL

Do you want to keep up to date and engaged with the latest happenings around the CHNetwork and the web?

Our Weekly Roundup e-mail contains new conversion stories, videos, articles, and podcasts from CHNetwork.org as well as curated links, quotes, and other Catholic content for converts and the curious. **Go to CHNetwork.org/email to sign up!**

NEWSLETTER DONATION

The CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication within the CHNetwork. We ask that members consider making a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Do you know of an employment opportunity in your local parish or diocese that would be well suited to a faithful Catholic convert who loves the Faith? When non-Catholic clergy convert they leave behind their careers and ministry. This can often be a difficult transition for them and after conversion they often are looking for ways to serve Christ and His Church. To help meet this need, we have a job board on our online forum, community.chnetwork.org, where we post job listings that might help a former Protestant minister find meaningful and gainful employment in the Catholic Church. If you know of an opening that you would like us to post, please e-mail the job description to jim@chnetwork.org.

SUPPORT CHNETWORK

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to chnetwork.org/donate/ or complete this form and mail to:

CHNetwork

Attention: Ann Moore
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Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For a non-denominational lay minister in Texas, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to search out the wisdom and truth of the Catholic Faith.
- For Cheryl in Massachusetts, that she may follow the tug she feels to return to the Catholic Church.
- For former missionaries in Pennsylvania, that the Lord Jesus would give them a deep hunger for Him in the Holy Eucharist.
- For Christopher, a retired minister in the United Kingdom, that God's call would lead him into full-communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- For an Assembly of God minister in Hawaii, that through prayer and study he may joyfully enter the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Jesus.
- For David, a former Evangelical seminarian, that he and his wife may find their home in the holy Catholic Church.
- For Keith, a United Methodist youth minister, that he may find a way to become Catholic and also be able to support his family.
- For Jonathan who lost his teaching position at a Baptist school when he told the principal that he was entering the Catholic Church.

Laitly

- For all those who were received into the Catholic Church at Easter last month, that they experience a grace-filled Easter season, rejoicing in God's tremendous love and grace.
- For Josh, who is attracted to Catholicism but his family is very much opposed to the Catholic Faith.
- For Tamara who is drawn back to the Catholic Church of her roots but hasn't been able to find good local support for her journey.
- For a woman in Washington state who feels like she is "almost there" with her journey but still has a few questions about the Catholic Church.
- For a man from a Pentecostal background who has been back and forth with his interest in Catholicism over the past few years, that he know with certainty what direction to pursue.
- For Lee who has experienced a lot of hostility towards his conversion, that he find good friends in his new life as a Catholic Christian.
- For a Lutheran who is drawn towards the Catholic Church but struggles to understand the Church's teaching about artificial birth control.
- For Gerry who is sorting things out about regarding his interest in Catholicism, that he receive clear guidance from the Holy Spirit as to how to proceed.

- For an Anglican who is regularly attending Mass but is waiting to move forward with his journey on account of his wife not sharing his same desire to be Catholic.
- For a non-denominational man in New York who feels like he needs to take some time to step away from his study of Catholicism and Protestantism and focus instead on prayer, that the Holy Spirit guide his mind and heart.
- For Susan who is feeling confused in her faith journey and doesn't know what church to attend.
- For John, a convert, that he find a good confessor who will guide him in making good confessions and not leave him more perplexed.
- For Elizabeth and her husband who are searching for a church home, that they both come to be at peace with where God wants them.
- For Alisha who watches *The Journey Home* and says it's been a huge help to her, that she find the answers to her questions and know how best to follow God's will in her life.

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: Wednesday 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 1 John Knutsen* <i>Revert</i>	May 8 Fr. Jeffrey "Skip" Thompson* <i>Revert, Former Pentecostal, Lutheran, Reformed, & Baptist</i>	May 15 Katherine Daniels* <i>Former Anglican</i>	May 22 Tim & Jackie Oglesby* <i>Tim: Former Baptist, Disciples of Christ, & Assemblies of God Jackie: Former Methodist</i>	May 29 Most Rev. Kevin W. Vann* <i>Re-air from 05/05/2014 Lifelong Catholic — Bishop of Orange, CA</i>
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To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home.

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

That broke his heart, and he decided to quietly, prayerfully and patiently wait for me to join him. He would remind me every so often during the next few months that there was “no pressure,” and that he loved me very much. It was a beautiful portrayal of a man who was deeply in love with his Lord. His patience warmed my heart, and I began to suspect deep within me that someday I would probably join him.

I saw changes in Gary’s life, positive and peaceful ones that intrigued me. He would quickly give God the credit for those changes and for what he was learning and understanding about the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Despite the beauty I saw in his spiritual walk, I remained unwilling to follow him. My position was unchanged: “I found Jesus in the Protestant church and He and I were doing just fine.”

In January 2015, about a year into Gary’s journey, I realized that I had gradually become rebellious toward God’s gentle push to join my husband on this journey. I was becoming more negative and irritable about it, until it finally occurred to me that I was in sinful rebellion. It was deliberate disobedience to the Lord’s call on my heart to join Gary, and it was starting to affect every area of my life.

Because I felt so guilty, I became more open to listening to Gary’s explanations of what God was doing deep within him. He thoroughly enjoyed watching (usually alone, due to my reluctance) *The Journey Home* program, hosted by Marcus Grodi, on EWTN television. I began watching from time to time. In February, I saw an episode with a former pastor of a similar denomination to ours who spoke of a miraculous fragrance that God used through the Virgin Mary’s intercession, to bring him into the Catholic Church. I found that weird but very intriguing.

Flippantly, but with intention, I mentioned to Gary that “*I need a miracle, or something like that, in my life too!*” I hoped it might change my hardened heart to “return home” to the Catholic Church. I was beginning to feel desperate to join Gary on his journey but was still not actually wanting to do so. I needed help, even divine help! God, in His mercy, answered that disrespectful mini-prayer in a most unexpected way.

It was about a week after my remark that I was awakened in the night by an unbelievably sweet and glorious fragrance of flowers in our bedroom. It shocked, scared, and overwhelmed me! But I had an instant understanding that it must have come from God, because that was exactly what had happened to that former pastor we’d seen on television. I accepted this experience as a message from Jesus Christ Himself, through the Virgin Mary — and that bothered me a bit, because I wasn’t at all interested in *her*. But that was the miracle I had asked for!

It was a surprising and blessed experience for me, lasting only a few seconds. God chose that means to speak to my heart, and I understood that He was wooing me toward surrender. Within days I began to understand and respond to God’s Spirit. I surrendered my rebellion about this journey and committed myself to finally join Gary.

Now that I was committed, I couldn’t stop talking about it. We couldn’t move forward fast enough! There was a deep, unexplained yearning within me for the Holy Spirit’s guidance while I surrendered each of my objections to the Catholic Church. I was filled with a sweet peace, like I had been “saved” all over again!

Meanwhile, Gary continued to process, understand, and absorb everything he could glean about the Church. This caused great conflict in his heart, because he was still pastoring the local Trinity Grace parish while heading down a different path. He desired integrity, and he knew that he would have to step down as pastor, out of obedience to God. So that spring of 2015, he began the process of sharing with the lead pastor and others about his need to resign. They were receptive to him and respected his de-

CHNETWORK SUMMER RETREAT COLUMBUS, OH JUNE 12-15, 2017

Our summer retreat will be held in Columbus, Ohio (just an hour away from our main office and studio!) at the St. Therese Retreat Center of the Diocese of Columbus.

Open to all Catholic converts and journeyers who are members of the CHNetwork, the retreats are a great opportunity to meet (or catch up with) CHNetwork staff and other members, to enter into prayer, attend Mass, reflect on the “journey home” and the call to lifelong conversion to Jesus, and of course to enjoy some good food and fellowship. The costs are \$275/person with a single room, \$425/married couple (room with double bed), or \$200/person if no room is needed.

Visit CHNetwork.org/retreats for more information or to RSVP. Please feel free to email retreats@chnetwork.org or call 740-450-1175 with any questions about this or other CHNetwork events.

CHNETWORK SUMMER RETREAT

...Journeys Home Continued...

cision, although it made no sense to them. During our last week in the pastorate, we shared our story one on one with our parishioners, and they graciously trusted our decision as well. It was beautiful to hear them affirm their love and respect for us. We had their blessing! It was a divine confirmation that we had chosen correctly. We didn't understand why, but God had called us, and we were moving forward.

Gary began working in the secular world in August, just one week after receiving his last paycheck from Trinity Grace. Isn't it wonderful how God graciously blesses our obedience to Him? In September 2015, with a deep sense of peace, joy, and expectation, we began attending RCIA classes (the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). We had already been attending the Catholic church of the Good Shepherd for a few months, and both of us absolutely loved and respected Pastor Robert. As I got to know him, it surprised me that a Catholic could be so in love with Jesus. I was obviously *still* needing to let go of my previous prejudices about Catholicism!

RCIA was eye-opening for me. We studied the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I was able to see how clearly Scripture lined up with the Church's doctrine. This was a pleasant surprise and caused me to crave an even greater understanding of the Church. Being in class every week often brought me to silent tears regarding what I must have put my parents through when I turned my back on the Catholic Faith. I had no idea how much they loved God. We could have had a much closer relationship had I realized they loved Jesus like I did.

As RCIA progressed, I soaked up ever more beautiful teachings of the Catholic Church. I found it fascinating that nothing is said or done in the Mass without some deep spiritual meaning behind it. I was most impacted by the Sacrament of the Eucharist. When I used to receive Holy Communion as a child, I would try very hard not to chew the Host because "I didn't want to hurt my Jesus." I didn't recall that childhood attitude of mine until I re-learned the meaning of Christ's Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist. This created an even deeper desire in me to receive Christ in the Sacrament.

During those six months of preparation, every time Communion was distributed, we were allowed to walk forward and receive a blessing from the priest. I was so grateful for those blessings each week, but I would return to my seat tearfully longing to receive the true Body and Blood of my Lord Jesus Christ. It was a spiritual yearning that I simply cannot put into words. It was then that I *knew* that the sacred Host is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ.

St. Gaudentius of Brescia wrote: "We no longer look on the bread and wine as earthly substances. They have become heavenly because Christ has passed into them and changed them into His Body and Blood. What you receive is the Body of Him Who is the Heavenly Bread, and the Blood is the sacred vine; for when He offered His disciples the consecrated bread and wine, He said: This is My Body, this is My Blood. We have put our trust in Him. I urge you to have faith in Him." (<http://brotherdismas.blogspot.com/2010/05/from-treatise-by-saint-gaudentius-of.html?m=1>)

St. Catherine of Siena offers this comforting thought conveyed to her by Jesus: "Oh, dearest daughter, open well the eye of thy intellect and gaze into the abyss of My love, for there is no rational creature whose heart would not melt for love in contemplating and considering, among the other benefits she receives from Me, the special gift that she receives in the [Blessed] Sacrament" (<http://www.ecatholic2000.com/catherine/siena76.shtml>).

I resigned from my job as a dermatology nurse just two months prior to the Easter Vigil. Having more free time, I wanted to spend most of it in church, so I began attending Mass on a daily basis. About a year earlier, when we first started attending the church, I had noticed that, upon entering, there was always an indescribable sense of Christ's Presence there. I now understand why: It's the Real Presence of Jesus Christ residing there. What a treasure! The tabernacle, that golden box near the altar, is the home where Christ dwells. The priest consecrates the Host during Mass, and whatever is not consumed during Holy Communion, is placed in the tabernacle. At that point in my journey, I still could not receive the Holy Eucharist, but I began spending about 20 minutes at the altar in adoration of my Lord before Mass began. This continues to be the most precious part of my Catholic Faith.

In my rebellion I did not care to understand what any of this meant. Now, however, I recognize Communion as the most holy and sacred Sacrament of the Catholic Faith. Knowing that Christ is truly there in the Host is a matter of faith and trust in God's word. He is actually present; see John 6:51, 54-56. So now, each time I enter the church and kneel at the altar, I greet my Lord with a smile, because I sense His Presence. He resides in the Tabernacle, and after receiving the Holy Eucharist, He actually resides within me. This is a daily spiritual feeling that I will cherish for as long as I live. What beauty!

One week prior to returning to full communion with the Catholic Church, I was to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Yikes! Years ago, I'm sure you could have heard me say, regarding Confession, "I don't need to confess my sins to anyone, much less a priest!" But today, having studied, understood, and experienced the meaning of this sacrament, I have an entirely different opinion! How can I explain what a gift Confession truly is? Its very title speaks of healing and peace: reconciliation. That's what I experienced upon sharing, face to face, for the first time in over 40 years, my life's sins — to Fr. Robert! It was a healing, sanctifying moment for me, and one that continues to refresh my heart and soul on a continual basis. A bonus to this sacrament is that it has created a spiritual desire and determination in me to avoid sin. It's motivating to stay as clear from sin as possible because this sacrament is so sacred. The priest has the anointing of the Holy Spirit to absolve sins, because he represents Jesus Christ Himself, as Christ Himself, through him, absolves us. I find Confession to be a most healing and peaceful experience.

I see Jesus "behind" the priest, and I feel enveloped by His love as I share the "stuff" in my heart and life. "*In persona Christi*" (a Latin phrase meaning 'in the person of Christ'), is a phrase that [is] ... used to explain how an ordained priest, even though he is 'a mere human being' can do 'divine' things such as change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ and forgive sins A priest can do these things because — at that moment — he is acting "in the person of Christ." (Fr. Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M., *Theology of Ministry*, Chapter 31, available online at tomrichstatter.org/pministry/p31theol.htm)

Saturday evening, March 26, 2016 the Easter Vigil finally arrived. Oh, the joy I experienced upon receiving Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist that evening! To have yearned for this moment for so many months proved to be a most sacred and holy experience. To commit myself to the teachings of the Catholic Church and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit with a special oil on my forehead was a solemn and sacred experience as well.

I deeply regret that I had dragged my feet for so long. I had heard God's voice at least six months before I gave in to Him, but I chose to close my ears and heart in disobedience. My journey was one of rebellion and disobedience because I was completely aware of what God wanted me to do. I chose not to because "Jesus and I were just fine where we were!" But God is faithful.

I am forever grateful for Gary's patience as I fought my battle with God. His specific prayers and deep surrender to watch God work it all out were instrumental in my own full surrender to our Lord's call to return to the Catholic Church.

As I look back on my personal walk with Jesus, I am thankful for that concert on May 29th, 1971, when I recognized that Jesus Christ could actually live within me and sanctify me unto Himself. I give glory and honor to Him for all He has taught me and how He has loved me so dearly these past 45 years as a committed Christian.

I just can't get enough of JESUS! To God be glory and honor and praise. I was quite active as an Evangelical pastor's wife and missionary. Those years as a Protestant were very fulfilling for me; God did amazing things in my life. However, in my life now as a Catholic, there is a fresh daily need to be in Mass and receive

the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Upon receiving Him every single day, I know beyond a doubt that He has me and I have Him, that "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). But this isn't a new strength; it's simply deeper and richer than before.

Every part of the Mass celebration has a special meaning, which daily draws me closer and closer to my Lord. The various devotional and Scriptural readings that the Church provides online are invaluable as well. Every single day, all over the world, the same Holy Scripture is proclaimed, the same Mass is celebrated, and the Real Presence of Christ is given to us, proving Christ's divinity and the unity of believers in this Church with a 2,000 year history.

It has only been a little over a year since Gary and I were reconciled with the Catholic Church, and we are still learning as we go. We are both open to God's call to know, love, and serve Him in whatever capacity He wills. Obedience has always been our calling, and we desire to follow Him wherever He leads. We currently serve Him in the Mass as Lectors, reading from the Holy Scriptures at Mass, just prior to the priest proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I have a renewed love for God's Word and what takes place in the Mass, and I am humbled, honored, and blessed to be given the privilege to proclaim that Word. I cherish His Word like never before in my life.

None of this can be easily explained. For me it was a heart issue: the beliefs of the Catholic Church were so foreign to me and so difficult for me to accept or even desire to understand ... that is, until I had that change of heart. Prior to that I wanted nothing to do with the Catholic Church — at least what I thought was the Catholic Church. It took a miracle for me to finally surrender to God's wooing voice. Although I may still not understand everything about the Church's teaching, I find that the more I love Jesus, the more I desire everything the Church has to offer. I am honored and humbled to be called a Catholic, and am more in love with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ than ever before! ■



CHARLOTTE WILEY was raised in a Catholic home, one of nine children. She left the Church in her early teens and "accepted Christ into her heart" at the age of 16. During college, she accepted a call of God to serve Him in missions and as a registered nurse. In Lima, Peru, along with her husband, Gary, they served as missionaries and later pastored a church in New York City. Charlotte returned to full communion with the Catholic Church at the 2016 Easter Vigil, when Gary was also received into full communion. Married 38 years, they have three children and eight grandchildren. Charlotte's blog is catholicchar.wordpress.com.

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