

November 2017 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Search for the Historical Church

By Matthew & Elisabeth Akers

Matthew

"Catholics are not saved and probably are not Christians" — an ignorant statement, but it is an accurate summary of my "knowledge" about Catholicism as a child. My father, a Bob Jones University graduate and fundamentalist Baptist preacher, raised me with little knowledge of Catholicism, other than the assertion that it was bad and unbiblical. My relatives and my father's friends were all Protestant, and I knew few, if any, Catholics. Still, I am thankful to my father and the fundamentalist churches for instilling in me a strong respect for Scripture, a moral foundation, and the discipline of weekly church attendance.

Elisabeth

My father and mother were Episcopalians in the most traditional sense. My father is a 33rd degree Mason; he takes great pride in his English ancestry and the prevalence of Episcopalianism in the founding of America. He has little use for Catholicism within his own family. According to my parents, Episcopalianism left them during the 1970's. They remained devoted to the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* and the traditional positions of the Episcopal Church. Unfortunately for them, the only church within driving distance still using the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* was a tiny little Anglican Catholic Church in Akron, Ohio — 20 people strong on a busy Sunday. The priest who catechized me was mere steps away from true Catholicism, complete with Marian devotion and "smells and bells," as incense and high Masses have long been known in Anglicanism. My parents never officially joined the parish because it was far too "catholic" for them, but our family attended from the time I was three years old, and my parents still attend there.

Matthew

As a teenager, I rebelled against God and rejected Christianity. Even during my teenage rebellion, though, the solid foundation of faith that my father had laid pricked my conscience and eventually brought back His prodigal son. Towards the end of my senior year of high school, I began reading C.S. Lewis's theological works and was impressed. But I soon realized that the "mere Christianity" Lewis discussed was different — deeper and more historical — compared to the fundamentalist faith in which I had been raised. The historic and creedal underpinnings of Lewis's Anglicanism aroused my interest, especially when compared to the Baptist faith. I remember picking up a copy of St. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation of the Word* because Lewis had written the foreword. I no longer remember how I reacted to Lewis's introduction, but I was thrilled by Athanasius's theology. His statement that God became man so that we might become God struck me with fear and intrigue. The deification principle was unknown to me, as was most of Christianity's historic theology. Back then, I knew nothing about the Church Fathers. Neither the fundamentalist churches nor my father had mentioned them. With my limited insight, I began to search for a church that aligned more closely with Lewis's faith and the one outlined by Athanasius.

I first tried an Episcopal Church. The left-wing, politically correct slogans in the church hall and the liberal and political aspect of the Bible study caused me to leave prior to the holy communion service. Next, I visited an Eastern Orthodox Church and was fascinated by the Divine Liturgy, but it was too much for my Baptist background.

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

But one Saturday when I was browsing church ads in the newspaper, I came across the Reformed Episcopal Church, which described itself as “liturgical, reformed, historic, and creedal.” That caught my attention! I visited the small, store-front church and found an Anglican church that was somewhat like what Lewis described. Though Church of the Epiphany was low-church, it used a version of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, and I fell in love with the beauty and cadence of the traditional Elizabethan language of the Prayer Book. Also, the pastor offered Bible and Church history studies that were engaging and informative. I began to grow in my faith and understanding of historic, liturgical, creedal Christianity. Occasionally, the pastor and several members — including myself — would visit a neighboring Anglican church called St. Mary’s, which we all agreed was too “high church” and “catholic,” but we had a good relationship with the priest there, and we enjoyed discussing the liturgical and ecclesiological diversity within Anglicanism.

Elisabeth

I continued to seek out the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* service throughout college and my immediate post-college years. From 2001 to 2002, I taught Latin at an Evangelical Protestant high school near Akron, Ohio. I was very restless, though, and chose to leave teaching to pursue a one-year post-graduate course of study that would provide the theological grounding for the Great Books education I had received in college.

During the summer before I left, I met a young man named Matthew at the tiny Anglican Catholic Church in Akron, Ohio, (seemingly against all odds, since we cut the median age of that parish in half!), and we quickly realized that we loved the same things and were reading the same things. For instance, he was somewhat surprised and quite pleased to learn that I was reading Augustine’s *City of God* in preparation for my studies in Canada. We immediately found that we had common ground in many areas, particularly in the area of faith. He had just finished seminary studies at a traditional Episcopalian seminary and was heading to New Jersey that fall to pursue his PhD in English Literature.

We talked on the phone nightly throughout that school year and found that we were reading the same authors at the same times in each of our respective courses of study, which meant that we could discuss the theological and philosophical concepts we were encountering. He was able to explain some concepts I was struggling with, and we both came to the realization that my stubborn Anglican doubts about Catholicism and his extensive background in the Church Fathers were actually a beautiful combination.

That year laid a strong foundation for his teaching and my learning about the Catholic Faith (though we did not see it that way and continued to worship at Anglican churches). It definitely gave me a deep respect for Matthew’s knowledge. He never pushed an idea; he simply explained it carefully, often multiple times!

Matthew

In the spring of 2000, I was ready to graduate with a Bachelor’s in English, and I was thinking about my next move. I prayed about it and decided that God wanted me to attend seminary. I was unsure if I was called to ministry or not, but I knew I would value the formal theological education. I applied and was accepted at Cranmer Theological House, a seminary of the Reformed Episcopal Church.

At Cranmer, named after the architect of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, I received a strong grounding in biblical studies, liturgical studies, and ecclesiology. The seminary was caught between its affiliation with the Reformed Episcopal Church — an historically low church, evangelical break-off from the Episcopal Church — and the high church, more-catholic mentality of a number of its professors and students. My Baptist upbringing caused me to sympathize with the low church component at first, but my readings in the Fathers and the medieval church increasingly led me to see the correctness of the high church position. I listened to both sides of the argument — which was instructive — and emerged from seminary with a high church bent.

Perhaps those who have not studied Anglicanism do not realize how “catholic” high church Anglicans can be. The Rosary, auricular confession, Marian devotions, apostolic

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FEATURED RESOURCES



Sola Scriptura Roundtable

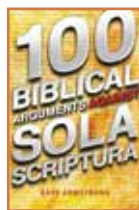
This DVD is a special discussion from the 2011 Deep in History conference on the topic of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) by converts to the Catholic Church. Marcus Grodi is joined by Dr. Scott Hahn, Dr. Kenneth Howell, Richard Lane, and others in an insightful discussion about the limitations of a “Scripture alone” approach.

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Luther: The Rest of the Story

PART II: THE ROAD TO WITTENBERG

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

Luther's Struggle

Although Martin Luther had become an Augustinian friar, then a Catholic priest, and later a doctor of Scripture and professor of biblical theology, he could not find peace in his relationship with God. Rather, Luther was a tormented soul, his mind filled with visions of a God he could never please, no matter how hard he tried.

And apparently, he tried!

In the monastery, Luther would fast for days without a crumb of food; in the dead of German winter, he would throw off the blankets from his bed and nearly freeze himself to death; he kept more and longer vigils than required — all in hopes that God would be pleased with him. “I was a good monk,” Luther later wrote,

I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.

No matter what he did, however, the questions kept coming: *Have you done enough? Have you fasted enough? Have you prayed enough? Is God now pleased with you? Does God now accept you?*

Luther was always trying to compensate for his sins, but he could never compensate enough. In Luther's mind God was always an angry, impossible-to-please father. He could never measure up.

As I argued in Part I of this series, I have to believe Luther's image of God as an impossible-to-please father was rooted, at least to some degree, in his relationship with his father.

Luther's First Mass (1507)

Luther was ordained a priest on April 3 of 1507 at the Cathedral Church of St. Mary in Erfurt.

He had postponed the date of his first Mass so that his father, whom he hadn't seen since entering the monastery, could be present. Hans, at least initially, did not disappoint. He arrived with 20 horsemen, bringing with him a generous gift for the monastery.

After the celebration of the Mass, Luther sat down to share a meal with his father and the other guests. “Dear father,” Luther looked across the table, “why were you so contrary to me becoming a monk? Perhaps you are still not satisfied. The life is so quiet and godly.”

He wasn't prepared for what was to come. In front of his fellow monks and all the guests, Hans rebuked his son.

You learned scholar, have you never read in the Bible that you should honor your father and your mother? And here you have left me and your dear mother to look after ourselves in our old age.

Luther attempted a response: “But father, I could do you more good by prayers than if I had stayed in the world.” He went on to remind his dad of the call from God that had come to him that day in the storm on the road to Erfurt. But his father cut in: “God grant that it was not an apparition of the devil!”

This must have been devastating for young Martin. We know from many things he wrote that he always felt terrible that he'd disappointed his parents. Martin loved his father, and when he learned of his death some 25 years later, he shut himself away with the book of Psalms and wept for hours. In a letter to Melancthon he said, “My dear Philip. I have just heard that my father has died. Through him God gave me life. Through his sweat he raised me. I am too beaten to write any more.”

Luther loved his father. But he also struggled all of his life with the feeling that as a son he had been a great disappointment.

“Love God? I Hated Him!”

Of course the traditional Protestant interpretation of Luther's struggle has tended to go something like this: It's the Roman Catholic Church that *made* Luther the tormented soul of whom you speak!

After all, a Protestant might claim, doesn't Catholicism *teach* people to view God as an angry father? Doesn't

the Church *encourage* people to think of their lives as lives of desperate “working” to *earn* salvation, to *make themselves* pure enough to be acceptable to God?

If Luther struggled (so the argument goes) surely it was only because he was a sensitive and honest enough soul to *see that he was not pure* and would never be pure enough to “earn” eternal life. If Luther lived in dread of the judgment of God, it is simply because he took the teaching of the Catholic Church seriously!

No doubt you're probably thinking: *But that's not what Catholics really relieve! Catholics believe that salvation is the gracious gift of God. Yes, we must respond to that grace in faith and the obedience that flows from faith, but this isn't the same thing as “working to earn salvation.”*

Indeed, if Catholicism actually taught what most Protestants think it teaches, or at least taught at the time, how are we to explain all those in the Medieval Church who loved God and walked with God and did not see God as Luther saw Him?



The Augustinian Monastery in Wittenberg

I think about St. Bernard of Clairvaux's treatise, *On the Love of God*, or the hymn attributed to him that begins: "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts, thou Fount of life, thou light of men, from the best bliss that earth imparts, we turn unfilled to thee again."

It doesn't seem as though St. Bernard could write about anything *but* the love of God!

What about St. Philip Neri, a contemporary of Luther, who was known for being filled continually with the happiness and joy of the Holy Spirit? What about Sts. Francis and Clare and Thomas Aquinas? What about St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila?

Apparently not *everyone* viewed God as Luther did.

In fact, how do we explain Luther's own confessor, Johann von Staupitz, vicar general of the Augustinian order at the time and Luther's good friend and mentor? Staupitz seems to have been baffled by Luther's inability to see God as a loving father and appears to have done everything he could to convince Martin of God's love for him. On one occasion, he is known to have said to Luther, "Man, God is not angry with you. It is you who are angry with God! Don't you know that God commands you to hope?"

And Luther was angry with God. Later in life, he wrote:

I was more than once driven to the very abyss of despair
so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I
hated him!

Clearly, Luther had issues of his own.

Luther in Rome

In 1510, five years after entering the monastery, another lightning bolt struck in Luther's life.

Luther had the privilege of being sent to Rome with another Augustinian friar on business for the order. And he was thrilled — not merely because he'd never been out of Germany, but because of the spiritual benefits he believed would be his as he walked the streets the great Apostles Peter and Paul had once walked, as he prayed and celebrated Mass in the churches of Rome, and as he viewed the holy relics of so many saints and martyrs.

With all this in mind, Luther set off for a month in the Eternal City. This was to be a turning point in his life. Reading from Heiko Oberman's *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*:

Luther was certain that he would be able to find salvation in abundance in the center of Christendom, and was thus determined to make the unique opportunities being afforded everywhere ... But noticing how much blasphemous behavior went on in the holy city disturbed him deeply. Later he remembered clearly the shock and horror he had felt in Rome upon hearing for the first time in his life flagrant blasphemies being 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. In Erfurt his first Mass had set him shivering in awe. Now he had to stand by while servants of God thought it funny to blaspheme the most sacred words of institution. "Bread thou art and bread thou shalt remain! Wine thou art and wine thou shalt remain" "I was a serious and pious young monk," Luther said, "who was pained by such words."

Now, this is one of those points in the story of Martin Luther where Protestants become very excited and Catholics become very

defensive and suspect that the level of decadence and evil in the Church's leadership at the time is being exaggerated.

It may well be. I think it best, however, that we accept the fact that at this time Rome was not exactly a model of Christian spirituality. And Catholic writers at the time, and since, confirm this.

For instance, the 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.

(We think we hear some strange things in Mass!)

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) the founder of the Jesuits, advised good Catholics against going to Rome, lest they be corrupted. Try to imagine Popes St. John Paul II or Benedict XVI or Francis saying, *Whatever you do, unless you want your faith destroyed, don't go to Rome!*

There's no good reason to doubt that Luther's report of the situation in Rome was substantially true. What it led to in Luther's life was a crisis of confidence in the Church's divine authority.

This culminated in a particular event while climbing the Holy Stairs stairs in Rome.¹ Luther was on his knees ascending the steps Jesus is thought to have ascended during His trial with Pilate. He was praying an Our Father on each step, kissing the stones, and attempting to believe that what he was doing was assisting those in purgatory. As he reached the top his doubts overcame him and he thought to himself, "Who knows if it is really true?"

Under the Pear Tree

Luther returned to the monastery, still struggling, and now, for really the first time in his life, doubting that the Church had the answer.

Soon after, in the garden of the monastery, under a pear tree, Staupitz informed Luther that he wanted him to begin to study for his doctoral degree in Sacred Scripture and prepare to assume the chair of biblical theology at the University of Wittenberg.

As Roland Bainton, professor of ecclesiastical history at Yale University, tells the story, Luther gasped "and stammered out fifteen reasons why he could do nothing of the sort. The long and short of it was that so much work would kill him."

To this, Staupitz famously replied, "Quite alright. God has plenty of work for clever men to do in heaven."

Apparently, Staupitz hoped that for Luther, who was obviously extraordinarily bright, pouring himself into the study of Scripture might be just the thing to help him out of his depression.

And so, in 1513, having received his doctorate, Luther began lecturing at the University of Wittenberg. Between 1513 and 1517 he taught through the Psalms as well as St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians.

It was during these years that Luther came to a view of the doctrine of justification — of how we are made right in the sight of God — that had never been taught in the history of Christian thought. This "discovery" would change his life forever and lead to his eventual break with the Catholic Church.

To be continued. ■

1 According to tradition, St. Monica brought the Holy Stairs from the Holy Land to Rome.

Some Thoughts About the 500th Anniversary of Protestantism in Germany

By Jim Anderson, Ministry Membership & Pastoral Care Coordinator

"Some Thoughts About the 500th Anniversary of Protestantism in Germany"
By Jim Anderson A
CHNetwork Staff Interview..... B

Last month the Christian world remembered the 500th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's 95 *Theses*, which sparked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. There has been much discussion as to how to look at this historic milestone. During the past few years I've had the opportunity to visit Germany on several occasions and to make some good German friends, both Protestant and Catholic. I've learned that in Luther's home country, Christians look at 500 years of Protestantism from differing perspectives. On the one hand, Catholics see this as 500 years of division and disintegration and a cause for remorse and repentance. Many Protestants, though not all, are celebrating 500 years of freedom from Roman tyranny. There have been ecumenical Lutheran-Catholic ceremonies and commemorations. At the same time, the city of Wittenberg, where it all began, has been having a year-long celebration, including carnival rides. Though, much of the festivities in Wittenberg are likely motivated more by the desire for tourist euros than by heartfelt celebration of 500 years of Protestantism.

In the area of the former East Germany where Wittenberg is situated, about 72% of the population does not identify with any faith, and 52% of the people are confirmed atheist. This is in stark contrast to the western part of the country which reports only 10% to be atheist. In Wittenberg, on an average Sunday, the Lutheran church is full, but sadly, perhaps only ten of the people are from the local community. The bulk of the worshipers are foreign Protestants visiting the city on pilgrimage. A German friend told me that the atheists of eastern Germany are not like the angry dogmatic atheists of Britain and America. They are almost like blank slates, having been brought up without any concept of the supernatural. A priest told me that he was speaking to a young man and explained to him that he was a Christian. In response, the young man said he was just a normal person. To him, the secular worldview is just how normal people live. Protestantism and Catholicism are equally foreign to him.

Strange to say, one result of secularization in Germany is a kind of realized ecumenism, or ecumenism of the trenches. For centuries Protestants and Catholics not only didn't talk but were antagonistic with one another. I was told that as late as the 1960's, when Catholics in villages would celebrate a

Marian feast, their Lutheran neighbors would choose that day to spread manure on the fields (though, to be fair, the Catholics were not above such antics when the Lutherans would have special observances). Today, Lutherans and Catholics see that they have much more in common with one another than with the secular culture surrounding them, fostering dialogue, greater understanding and, in some, an openness to the Catholic Faith. An example of this openness was celebrated this June at the Fulda Cathedral, wherein is found the grave of St. Boniface, the Apostle to the Germans.

I was given the opportunity to return to Germany to attend the ordination of a good friend of mine, whom I had assisted while he was on the journey to the Catholic Faith. While living in Fulda, Germany during 2012, I met and became friends with Ingo Heinrich, the Baptist pastor of Fulda. Ingo had been brought up Lutheran. After a conversion experience, he ministered as a Pentecostal pastor for twenty years, later becoming a Baptist minister. We were introduced by Fr. Winfried Abel, the pastor of the 1,000 year old St. Andreaskirche (St. Andrew's Church) in Fulda. Ingo and I had many long discussions about the Faith and whether or not he was being called by God to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. After months of prayer, study,



St. Marienkirche
Wittenberg Church

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along with the guidance of Fr. Abel and Fr. Martin Wolf, Ingo and his wife were received into full communion with the Catholic Church in December of 2012. Soon after, with the encouragement of the bishop of Fulda, Ingo began four years of formation for the Catholic priesthood. I was privileged to attend his ordination on June 3rd of this year. Fr. Ingo is now happily serving as a Catholic priest in two parishes in the suburbs of Fulda.

During my visit to Germany this spring, my host was Fr. Martin Wolf, who had confirmed my friend Ingo. Fr. Wolf is the prior of the wonderful community of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in that town. As we sat down to a delicious German supper, he was very excited to share with me an experience he had this past March. At that time he was invited to lead a week-long retreat for the small Catholic community in Wittenberg, the city of Martin Luther. Their parish church is small, so, because many people would be attending from out of town, they received permission from the Lutherans to use the St. Marienkirche (St. Mary's Church) for their retreat. This is the main Lutheran parish in Wittenberg where Dr. Luther preached over a thousand sermons and is considered to be the mother church of Protestantism. Fr. Wolf told me that he believes that he was honored to be the first Catholic priest to celebrate the holy Mass on the altar of that church since the beginning of the Reformation. They also had Eucharistic adoration and benediction. During the close of the retreat, Fr.

Wolf informed the people that, for those who attended the entire retreat, a plenary indulgence was being offered. He then turned to the Lutheran pastor who was sitting in the front pew and said, "Don't worry Pastor. We haven't sold them for centuries." The pastor smiled. In addition to the Catholics attending the retreat were some Lutherans, who later contacted Fr. Wolf inquiring about becoming Catholic. Fr. Wolf told me that the source of the cooperation between the Lutherans and Catholics in Wittenberg stems from the fact that Protestants and Catholics have much more in common with one another than they do with the general secularized population, thus creating an ecumenism of the trenches. Eastern Germany, the former core of the Lutheran faith, is now missionary territory needing to be reclaimed to faith in Jesus Christ.

If it were not for the recent thawing of tensions between Lutherans and Catholics, after 500 years of animosity, neither the conversion and ordination of Fr. Ingo Heinrich nor the retreat at the Marienkirche, in Wittenberg, would ever have been possible. True ecumenism requires charity and communication without compromising the truth of the faith. Please pray for the people of Germany, that the Holy Spirit may bring healing and unity to His people at one altar in communion with the successor of St. Peter and that God would turn the hearts of nonbelievers, through His grace, to the light, love, and salvation found only in His Kingdom. ■



Fr. Ingo's first Mass



CHNetwork Staff Interview

What is your name and title? My name is Seth Paine and I am the Developer of Web & New Media.



How long have you worked for the CHNetwork? I have worked for the Coming Home Network for just over two years.

Before working at the Coming Home Network, what was the most unusual or interesting job you've ever had? The most interesting job I have had was when I spent a year in Cusco, Peru working for an Evangelical Micro-Finance organization. This was a few years before I became Catholic. One great thing about the organization is they tithed 10% of the interest they earned on their loans to support evangelization programs and lunch programs around Cusco. I helped with some of their IT issues around the office and trained the staff on different software platforms. The most interesting project I worked on while there was a collaboration project with Messiah College. I worked with a group of 20 students taking a Spanish Business course and connected students with an entrepreneur. Each week I gave the entrepreneurs an hour of com-

puter training, and then they spent an hour chatting online with their student. The students' final project was to create a portfolio for the entrepreneurs' businesses. One rewarding outcome of this project was when I went back a year later, one entrepreneur who had a business driving a taxi had sold his taxi, leased 10 computers, and was running an internet café in his remote part of the city where there hadn't been many other cafés.

While in Peru I attended Mass every morning while going to the evangelical church in the evening. This played a very important part of my journey into the Catholic Church because it introduced me to the universality of the Church.

How would you describe your job to a stranger on an airplane? Through our website chnetwork.org and videos on YouTube, I share a variety of stories of how and why many people have entered into the Catholic Church.

What does a typical day in the office look like to you? I don't really have a typical day, and I am glad for that. Some days I am working on improving our website, whether it be the public

website, the online store, or the online community. Some days I am editing a video to share on YouTube. Some days I am collaborating with JonMarc Grodi and Matt Swaim on how to improve our communications. The most rewarding part of my job is when I can think big and look to the future at all the new and amazing ways we can communicate the beauty of the Catholic Church to the world through the stories of discovery of many of our members. You can argue with apologetics, but you cannot argue with someone's story, and that story can get past so many of people's defenses.

What is one fact about you that might surprise people to know? Generations of my family have lived in Massachusetts back to the Mayflower, which I recently discovered 3 of my ancestors were on. After the Mayflower, the Paine Family lived on Cape Cod in the same town for 6 generations.

Who do you nominate to be our next staff interview?
JonMarc Grodi ■

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For an Anglican minister in Pennsylvania as he and his family begin the process of entering the Church through the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.
- For Jeff, a minister in Arkansas, that the Holy Spirit may richly anoint his RCIA experience.
- For a Baptist minister who is seeking a way for him and his family to transition from the Protestant ministry to the Catholic Faith.
- For a pastor in Montana, that Jesus may grant him the grace to overcome his hesitancy to accept the authority of the Catholic Church.
- For Patricia, a former non-denominational pastor, that she may be able to come into full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For a former United Methodist minister in Louisiana, that the Lord Jesus would fulfill his hunger and thirst for Catholic truth.
- For an Anglican minister in Ireland as he explores the possibility of entering the Church and seeking priestly ordination through the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham.
- For Frank, an Anglican priest in England, that he may discover and embrace the true purpose of ecumenism.

■ For Andrew, a former Church of Christ minister, that God would grant him a hunger for all of Catholic truth and the conviction to follow it.

■ For a Christian & Missionary Alliance lay minister and his wife, that the Holy Spirit would give them a hunger for Jesus in the holy Eucharist.

■ For a former United Methodist minister in Pennsylvania, that the Holy Spirit would bless his prison ministry and that the inmates to whom he ministers may turn their hearts to the Lord Jesus.

Lay

■ For Rachel who is asking a lot of questions about Catholicism, that the Holy Spirit guide her search.

■ For a man in England who comes from an Evangelical-Charismatic background as he goes through RCIA in hopes of entering the Church next Easter.

■ For Victoria who is struggling to understand the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist as well as the Marian dogmas.

■ For a woman who is very drawn to the Catholic Faith but is having a difficult time understanding the Catholic teaching on homosexuality and also apostolic succession.

■ For Suzann, that Jesus clear a path for her to move forward with her deep desire to receive the sacraments.

■ For Michele, a Protestant who loves Jesus with all her heart and is drawn towards the Catholic Church but doesn't know where to begin.

■ For Mona who is falling in love with the Church but is hurt by the anti-Catholic hatred and disrespect she is encountering.

■ For Sharon who is going through RCIA, that her family will become open to Catholicism.

■ For Joann who hasn't been able to find a RCIA program in her area or anyone who would be willing to do individual instruction, that the Holy Spirit open the right doors for her to be able to pursue her desire to become Catholic.

■ For a convert, who goes to Mass and confession but still struggles with several doctrinal issues, that the Holy Spirit guides him in discovering the fullness of the Faith.

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

November 6

Sr. Miriam James Heidland, SOLT*
 Revert

November 13

Fr. Thomas Cavanaugh*
 Revert

November 20

Nadia Mitchell*
 Former Christian and Missionary Alliance

November 27

Dan Spencer*
 Revert

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home.

*Schedule is subject to change.

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succession, and a sacrificial notion of the Mass are a few of the beliefs and practices of some high church Anglicans. While I had not adopted all of those views yet, I was much more sympathetic to them after attending Cranmer House.

After graduating, in the summer of 2002 I met my future wife. I had returned from Texas to spend the summer in Ohio and, due to a scheduling conflict with my summer job (and the providence of God!), I could not attend the local Reformed Episcopal Church. My pastor advised me to attend St. Mary’s Anglican Catholic Church, the one we had visited a number of times. A budding Anglo-Catholic, I found statues of Our Lady, icons of the saints, and a liturgy that was an Elizabethan translation of the Tridentine Rite with some additional elements from the historic *Book of Common Prayer* mixed in. I was happy theologically, and I was also happy because I had met a young woman at St. Mary’s whom I had previously doubted could actually exist: a beautiful, intelligent, spiritually minded, liberal arts loving, young Anglo-Catholic traditionalist.

Elisabeth and I hit it off immediately. We both loved discussing theology, literature, philosophy — the permanent things. In addition, we were both politically conservative. The only problem was that she was heading to Canada for a year of theological study, and I was headed to New Jersey to begin my doctoral studies in literature. But that year turned out to be incredibly wonderful for our relationship and our spiritual development.

We were often studying and reading similar things: St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. John of Damascus, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, and other Eastern and Western theological writers (my doctoral study at Drew University combined both literary and theological topics). Our conversations on spiritual and theological themes would often last two to three hours. After a year of study, we both returned to Ohio for the summer and were engaged in July, a year after we met.

Over the course of the next year, Elisabeth entered law school in the Washington, D.C. area, and I returned to my doctoral studies at Drew. Our long-distance conversations continued, and we built an early foundation of communication about things that mattered.

Elisabeth

We married in the summer of 2004. Matthew took a job teaching Latin at the Evangelical high school where I had taught. And our spiritual journey continued. We attended the Anglican Catholic Church of my youth, all the while becoming higher and higher in our churchmanship. I began wearing a veil at that church merely as an acknowledgment of submission to Christ and to the spiritual authority of my husband (Ephesians 5:22–33). Little did I know how my view of that would evolve over time!

Eventually, Marian devotion became a serious question for me. I realized a stark lack in my faith. If God the Father and God the Son were the archetype of a family structure, and Mary provided the maternal figure, where was the maternal figure in my own faith life? Could it be true that the Blessed Mother — as I am now blessed and privileged to know her — was my mother as well? My husband bought me the book *The Rosary Handbook* by Mitch Finley. In re-

spect, I believe that this is where my openness to Catholicism began, but the journey would continue for some time.

During the spring of 2009, we were blessed to learn that we were pregnant with our first child. We attended a seminar that summer at the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois and spent many hours in conversation with faithful Catholics and Catholic priests. While they had a great deal of respect for the Anglican liturgy, they rather knowingly implied that our current Anglicanism was part of our journey toward Catholicism. I personally could not imagine that they were correct, and I resisted mightily.

I had been raised to believe that Catholicism was steeped in error: papal and Marian doctrines, saint worship, and — worst of all — the concept of the Real Presence. My father was always dismissive of these “heresies,” as he called them. Thomas Cranmer was a hero to him. It had never occurred to me that the Reformation wasn’t simply a good thing, or that the Catholic Church was anything but riddled with error. But on our way home from that conference, my husband began discussing these questions with me. We both agreed that we were in the right place in the Anglican Catholic Church. Neither of us felt pulled toward Catholicism.

Matthew

In 2009, I visited St. Sebastian Catholic Church in Akron, Ohio because the Church was hosting a Hilaire Belloc impersonator. I had been reading deeply in Chesterton and Belloc and was particularly impressed with their promotion of distributism, a system which I saw as vastly superior to both capitalism and socialism. I had already realized the wisdom of traditional Catholic social teaching. Fr. Valencheck, the priest at St. Sebastian, welcomed me warmly. We talked briefly at the Belloc presentation, but in God’s providence, Fr. Valencheck and I crossed paths several more times soon after that. I saw him, for instance, at a Shakespeare play and at a restaurant. God kept him and our conversation in the forefront of my mind. We would have many wonderful conversations prior to my conversion.

In the summer, the evangelical school where I had taught previously asked if I would return to teach both English and Latin. I agreed; the only university teaching position I had been able to land was an adjunct position, which was part-time with no benefits. Returning to an evangelical environment underscored my deep differences with that theological system. Several faculty members who respected my knowledge of the Church Fathers asked me to lead a faculty Bible study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. My text was the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* — I had studied with several contributors to the series during my time at Drew University. The series collects commentary from Fathers of the first eight centuries of the Church on passages of Scripture. One member of the study — a committed evangelical — remarked during the course of my study that the Catholic position on a number of topics, which I presented fairly and accurately, really made sense and was in agreement with Scripture and the early Church. Well, that was my conclusion, too!

By the fall of 2011, I was in serious conversations with Fr. Valencheck about converting to Catholicism. A practical obstacle was employment: My wife and I had one child — Eleanor — and an-

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other one due in February 2012. I knew that I would need to find a new job if I became Catholic.

Two 19th century works that I read at the time greatly influenced me. William Cobbett's *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland*, a scathing critique of Anglicanism, caused me to realize its weakness and inherent liberalism. Cobbett, though he never converted to Catholicism, sympathized with Catholicism and pointed out numerous problems within Anglicanism, including its promotion of the state over the Church, its attack on the divine origins of the Church, and its contribution to the breakup of Christendom. As a staunch traditionalist and one who strongly identified with my forefathers, I placed myself mentally in the time of the Reformation: would I have supported Christ's Church or the Protestant rebellion and revolution? As you might guess, then and now I stand with the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

The other work that I read was the letter that the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote on October 16, 1866 to his Anglican father announcing that he was leaving Anglicanism for Catholicism. It is a beautiful letter in spirit, but it is also filled with well-reasoned arguments as to why Catholicism, rather than Anglicanism, is correct. He lists his reasons for converting, and they are so strikingly similar to mine that I want to quote Hopkins:

My conversion is due to the following reasons mainly (I have put them down without order): (i) simple and strictly drawn arguments partly my own and partly others', (ii) common sense, (iii) reading the Bible, especially the Holy Gospels, where texts like "Thou art Peter" (the evasions proposed for this alone are enough to make one a Catholic) and the manifest position of St. Peter among the Apostles so pursued me that at one time I thought it best to stop thinking of them, (iv) an increasing knowledge of the Catholic system (at first under the form of Tractarianism, later in its genuine place), which only wants to be known in order to be loved — its consolations, its marvelous ideal of holiness, the faith and devotion of its children, its multiplicity, its array of saints and martyrs, its consistency and unity, its glowing prayers, the daring majesty of its claims, etc. etc.

I felt a kindred spirit in Hopkins, and his letter encouraged me during the times I faced the disapproval of those close to me, including my father.

Elisabeth

In the spring of 2010 we suffered a very difficult loss. Our beloved priest in the Anglican Catholic Church — a man who had been a father figure to us both and had counseled and married us — passed away. Three days later, we welcomed our first child. As a couple and as new parents, we were deeply saddened that the man who had loved us so much and had prepared us for marriage would never meet our baby. We also struggled as our little church family reeled and the search for a new priest went very badly — falling largely on my poor husband's shoulders because he was ordained a deacon in June, after Father's passing. Father's death forced us to confront the future of the Anglican Catholic Church, and it was bleak. While people stayed in the parish during this time of turmoil, there was

no question that the structure for dealing with a situation like this simply did not exist. There are no "extra priests" in the Anglican Catholic Church. There was no seminary in our diocese, or even in a neighboring diocese.

That summer, we returned to the Catholic seminar that we had attended the previous year. Again we were greeted with knowing looks and gentle encouragement about our faith. This time, as we drove home discussing what we had learned, my husband began addressing questions about our faith that he had been pondering. I realized with a sense of panic that he was seriously considering converting to Catholicism! It was this conversation as we drove through Chicago that caused me to realize that the Anglican Catholic Church was lacking in one fundamental regard: It had no Magisterium to deal systematically with every aspect of the faith.

Both my husband and I were aware of that lack on one particular burning question. That was the question of life. He and I had always been pro-life, but we had not carefully considered the implications of that position on issues such as artificial birth control. As we did so, we found that the Catholic Church provided the faithful with the thorough framework they needed to form their own faith and to answer the questions of those outside that faith.

In the fall, I was close to losing my mind dealing with a child who never slept. I was becoming completely hemmed in and isolated. In the wee hours of the morning during a particularly bad night, I located and reached out to a local Catholic moms group to ask if I could become a member. Unsurprisingly, they had never heard of an Anglican Catholic. But when I explained my beliefs they let me join.

In the moms group, I was exposed to the Catholic Faith in ways I had never expected. These were wonderful ladies who were looking for ways to include their faith in every aspect of child rearing. I joined a women's study with them shortly after we found out we were pregnant with our second child. The study was Johnette Benkovic's *Full of Grace*. Nothing could have been more timely. I was overjoyed to find a study that did not dumb down Scripture or leave an entire study up to personal interpretation, unlike the many Protestant studies I had done. This was a study that married Scripture with the strength of Church teaching and the writings of the Church Fathers and the saints. The Catholic Faith began to make sense!

At the same time, I discovered Catholic radio (our Canton, Ohio station, 1060 AM, Living Bread Radio), completely by accident. What I read in the study was reinforced by what I heard on the radio. The questions I continued to have I could bring to my husband, who could explain them based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (which he had read cover to cover during his attempts to answer his own questions), his study of the Church Fathers throughout graduate school, and his knowledge of liturgy and tradition. In retrospect, everything "just fit."

As I studied more about the communion of saints, the mystery of the Incarnation, its celebration in the Eucharist each Sunday, and the graces afforded to the faithful in the fullness of the faith, I became overwhelmed by what I had been missing. And the one person who stood out to me more than any other was Our Blessed Mother. Here was the mother figure so lacking in Protestantism. While I had prayed the Rosary before, I had not fully appreciated

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the role of Mary in salvation history. Suddenly I realized that she truly does show us her Son, and she does so lovingly and with every prayer for our salvation. Instead of seeing her as a distraction or as an idol, as I was encouraged to do in my Protestant upbringing, I began to understand that she is my mother. And I then understood veiling before the Blessed Sacrament in a whole new way. I saw the triumph of our Blessed Mother in her humility, which causes prideful Satan both to seethe and suffer defeat. By embracing her humility in veiling before her Son, I could hope to emulate her in some small way and to honor her in honoring Him.

I do not mean to imply that I had no moments of doubt. I harbored the mistaken belief that we could return to our Anglican Catholic parish to “visit” so that things would be easier for my parents. In this way, I thought I could stay connected to the Anglican Missal, which I loved. I struggled with the Latin Mass, which was the Mass my husband and I had been attending, because I initially missed the Anglican liturgy. And some of the Catholic doctrines continued to trip me up, especially the doctrine of purgatory. But continued attention to Catholic radio and to my husband and our priest helped me to sort out those questions, and ultimately to embrace the liturgy and our new home without reservation.

Matthew

After much prayer and many conversations with priests and with each other, my wife and I decided to take a leap of faith. We left our Anglican Church in November of 2011. By then, I had been ordained a deacon, and it was difficult in some ways to leave. But my family and I had begun attending the Latin Mass at St. Sebastian, and we immediately knew we had made the right decision.

With the help of the Coming Home Network, I revised my résumé, and I began applying for other positions. On Christmas Eve 2011, a local state university, to which I had applied for a non-teaching position, called and offered me a job. I accepted, and on February 4, 2012, my family and I were received into the Catholic Church, just days before the birth of our son. I took the name of Athanasius because of his rock-solid defense of Jesus Christ against the Arians and because I had read his *On the Incarnation* at the beginning of my search for historic Christianity. My wife took the name Monica, after St. Augustine’s mother, a wonderful example of someone who persevered in her prayers for the conversion of her son — as others, we found out later, had been praying for us. I believe that both Athanasius and Monica were praying for us and welcomed us home.

I am so thankful that my wife and I were true partners in this journey and entered the Church together. We talked and talked about our decision — much like we discussed theology when we first met. Our parents and many friends were not happy with our move, and we have lost some closeness to both family and friends. But my wife never wavered in her support of me and in her search for truth. I know that I am blessed beyond measure that we both agreed on this fundamental decision.

Elisabeth

It still amazes me, in reflecting on my life, to see that my conversion story began long before I was aware of it. I am blessed by God’s patience with me and His gentle encouragement. I will forever be grateful to Our Lord and to His Blessed Mother and to those around

me who were His instruments — knowingly or unknowingly — in helping to guide my journey home.

Matthew

I am excited to continue growing in the Catholic Faith. It is so large and so multi-faceted that I never grow bored — there are always more areas to study, more ways to grow. I try to integrate my faith into all areas of my life, including my employment, where we have recently enjoyed a wonderful blessing. I desired a position at a Catholic institution, preferably a university, which would allow me to exercise my faith and to use my doctoral degree. But with the stipulations that we wanted to stay in the Northeast Ohio area and wanted Elisabeth to stay home with the children, I assumed that I would not be able to find a suitable position. But God is good! I am now Executive Director of the James B. Renacci Forum and Center for Civic Engagement and Visiting Professor of English at Walsh University, a Catholic University of Distinction and one recognized by the Newman Society for its strong Catholic identity.

Currently, my wife and I are deepening our Catholic faith within our home. We now have four beautiful children who attend the Latin Mass and are learning the Faith. We are proud that our two older children know the *Pater Noster*, the *Ave Maria*, and the *Credo* in Latin and in English. We read them stories from the Bible and other theological works and pray as a family every night. Both Ellie and Matthew can lead the Rosary; they will stop wherever they are to say an *Ave Maria* when they see or hear an ambulance, and they cross themselves as we pass the many Catholic churches in our area. Bethany and Mary, our two younger children, will soon be joining their sister and brother in their prayers and theological readings as we strive to celebrate and practice the fullness of the Faith in our domestic church. Our family is blessed and grateful to be at home in the Catholic Church.

Elisabeth

Looking back over the last 15 years of my life, it is not hard for me to see that God was preparing me for my conversion very slowly. After all, He knows me best, and He knows I don’t do well with sudden change! From my college education and search for a church home, to the timing of meeting my husband, to the journey we began and continued together as husband and wife, and the blessings God continues to heap on us, God has guided our steps and brought us home to the Catholic Church. ■



Matthew and Elisabeth Akers converted to Catholicism in 2012 after attending the Latin Mass for several months. Currently, Matthew serves as Executive Director of the James B. Renacci Center for Civic Engagement and Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Walsh University, a Catholic University of Distinction, in North Canton, Ohio. Elisabeth, who holds a JD, homeschools the couple’s four children: Eleanor, Matthew, Bethany, and Mary. The family is blessed to be part of St. Sebastian’s Latin Mass community.

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Resources for RCIA



Check out our newly updated and expanded RCIA page, for lots of free resources available for RCIA instructors and those on the journey!

Chnetwork.org/RCIA