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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## A Protestant Interrupted

By Lorelei Savaryn

I was baptized Catholic as an infant. My family, however, did not practice the Catholic Faith. Instead, I came to know Jesus through the Nazarene Church, which formed my early faith. I helped lead worship and sang for God from the time I was thirteen.

Yet those Nazarenes were conservative and fundamentalist. Secular music, certain aspects of science, and anything other than a literal interpretation of the Bible were considered dangerous. My parents also separated and divorced during my early teen years, prompting me to cling more tightly to faith in Jesus. But it also left me less connected to my church home.

A high school friend attended a youth group at an Assembly of God church, and I visited an event there with volleyball and other games one night in 2002. I was surprised at how many people, both youths and adults, were attending. Continuing with the youth group, I began to attend Sunday services there.

This congregation was much larger than the Nazarenes, with full bands for both youth group and Sunday service. People spoke in tongues. Fortunately, no one pushed me into speaking in tongues, and my faith continued as before. I even joined the youth group worship team.

### College and Questions

When I moved on to college, I entered a difficult period in my Christian walk.

Where before things were black and white, all of a sudden I was in a world where most people had different conceptions of truth, many doubting that it even existed. What was taught in class often didn't fit into my previous conservative Evangelical worldview.

The liberal stance of this ELCA Lutheran college was my first exposure to the diversity of Protestant Christianity. I encountered doctrinal differences I didn't know existed. Finding a Christian community I was comfortable with was difficult, so I tried to maintain my faith through personal study, seldom joining in community worship. It was a lonely time.

That particular college was a poor fit, so I returned to my hometown, took a break from school, worked multiple part-time jobs, and along the way met a young man, JP, who later became my husband. Meanwhile, I was losing my moorings in Christianity. I still had faith, but my practice of it gave way to "more important things" in life.

### JP and Catholicism Enter the Picture

I really liked JP, except for one thing: he was Catholic. Thankfully, my mom didn't seem to think JP's Catholicism was anything to worry about. Besides, he was much too handsome to pass up. His "incorrect denominational choice" could be fixed later. I was sure that once the errors of Catholicism were explained to him, it would all work out.

To be fair, my understanding of the errors of Catholicism was mostly based on misconceptions. As I was growing up, I had absorbed a number of anti-Catholic attitudes and arguments, all one-sided, of course. The Protestant—

*Continued on page 2* ➡

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Catholic debate remained our most frequent point of contention throughout our dating, engagement, and early marriage.

I attended part of an RCIA (instruction) class during our engagement but, following my predisposition, dropped out.

We did have a Catholic wedding — ceremony only, no Communion — on May 26, 2007 at Old St. Joe's Church at St. Norbert College. It was a good compromise, since by then I had no home church, and our relationship had developed around the St. Norbert campus.

We had no inkling how difficult it would be for us to remain divided in our faith. Our first two years together, we wrangled over church issues, often going to two Sunday services, first to Catholic Mass, then to a non-denominational church.

### How Can We Do It?

I prayed a lot for unity in that time. We knew that we wanted children, but how were those children going to understand that we both worshiped the same God if we went to separate churches each Sunday?

I began researching other denominations, trying to find some middle ground. When I came upon the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, I thought it might work. I shared the Lutheran theology with JP and drew him a tree of the early Church, suggesting that maybe truth had followed the Lutherans at the time of the Reformation. LCMS seemed to have a lot of the “good” stuff of Catholicism but none of the things I took issue with. We tried a nearby congregation and there encountered some lovely people. Maybe my prayers for unity had been answered.

We were finally able to attend one church together. We also sang and played together on the contemporary worship team at the Lutheran church.

Some of JP's family took the news of his becoming Protestant kind of hard. His uncles talked to him at a family gathering and overwhelmed us with their concern that he was now living in heresy. Honestly, JP had no idea what he was leaving.

In 2012, after relocating twice, we found ourselves, with one child, in a town in southeastern Wisconsin where there were no young, vibrant LCMS churches. We found it easiest to find a different Protestant church to attend together. We settled on the First Christian Church, where we encountered some amazing and servant-hearted people, with whom we are still friends. But at the same time, I entered into the darkest period of my faith life.

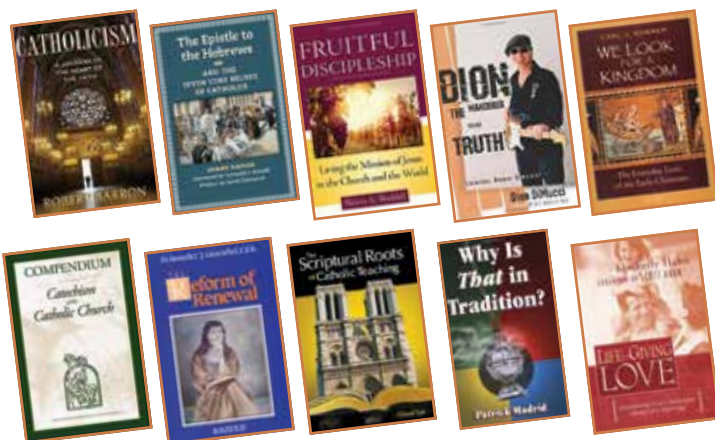
JP and I had been backsliding in our faith. We weren't reading the Bible; we weren't praying much. Church had become something we did on Sundays. I was still leading worship, but I wasn't sure I believed what I was singing. I wondered if this whole Christianity thing was a fairy tale. We were going to church but living as practical agnostics.

We moved yet again, this time to buy our first home in Racine, Wisconsin. Here we had our second child. Traveling distance to our former congregation became an issue, so we switched to a different church, closer to our new home. This one was Baptist. Since leading worship was part of who I was at the time, I inquired about being on the worship team. I auditioned, and everything looked good. We just needed to go through the membership class.

### Things Start To Change

The Statement of Faith at this church was only two pages long. It was relatively easy to assent to, and the membership class was very basic. However, there was one point brought up, in which the teacher drew the classic “two cliffs illustration,” where the chasm between them separated God and man. *Continued on page 5* ➤

## FEATURED RESOURCES



This month, we would like to invite you to make a **Christmas gift** of excellent Catholic books to your family and friends or even your local parish. We will send you a special selection of books to help you effectively build up the Faith. We want to get these powerful resources into your hands where they can do good for the Kingdom! As a premium, you will receive selections from among these and other titles:

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# Luther: The Rest of the Story

## PART III: THROUGH OPEN DOORS INTO PARADISE

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

In 1512 Martin Luther received his doctorate and took his seat as professor at the University of Wittenberg. Between 1513 and 1516 he lectured through the Psalms and St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

It was during this time that Luther discovered something in St. Paul, something that changed everything for him — and for the Church of the late Middle Ages as well. While Luther's "discovery" provided an answer to his own deep spiritual struggle, it also led to the fracturing of Christianity which has persisted to this day.

### Wrestling with Romans

Luther was struggling with the meaning of St. Paul's words in the first chapter of Romans, verses 16 and 17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every-one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the justice of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Luther was wrestling with the fact that this passage seemed to him to contain simultaneously both "good news" and "bad news." On the one hand, St. Paul was describing the "gospel," the "good news." On the other hand ... well, here's how Luther put it:

I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God but rather hated and murmured against him.<sup>1</sup>

How, Luther wondered, could it be "good news" to say that the justice [or righteousness] of God is being revealed? Is it good news that God is going to condemn me as unrighteous?

### A Flash of Light from Heaven

As Luther strained to understand what Paul was saying, he fixed his mind on the connection the Apostle makes between the "justice of God" and Paul's statement that "the just will live by faith."

Suddenly, it came to him that the justice (or righteousness) of God that Paul says is being revealed in the gospel is not the righteousness by which God will judge the guilty, but rather the righteousness God will simply *give* to those who only believe.

**For Luther, this realization came like a flash of light from heaven: the good news is that righteousness is offered as a free gift to be received by *faith alone*. The moment we believe, we put on Christ's righteousness like a man might put on a cloak, and from**

**that moment, we are, in God's eyes, as righteous as Christ Himself. We are pronounced "just." We are justified.**

A few years later Luther would use this very image in one of his most famous works, *The Freedom of the Christian*. Luther wrote, "Christ has suffered for our sins and has fulfilled the law for us. We have only to believe in Him, and by believing in Him, take hold, as it were, of his merits and put them on like a cloak."<sup>2</sup>

Luther referred to this as the "glorious exchange." We give Christ our sins; He gives us His perfect righteousness.

This was Luther's Damascus Road experience:

Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage became to me a gate to heaven.<sup>3</sup>

### The importance of *sola fide*

Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) was the central doctrinal issue for Luther. His eventual rejection of the entire sacerdotal and sacramental system of the Catholic Church was rooted in this one thought: the righteousness you and I must possess to enter heaven is not a righteousness God *works in us* as we cooperate with His grace and are remolded over time into the image of Christ (essentially, the Catholic view); rather it is what Luther

referred to as an "alien righteousness," a righteousness that comes from "without" and that is "accounted" to us the moment we believe. It is Christ's own righteousness.

Now, Luther's commitment to *sola fide* was *total*. It was the article of faith, he said, "upon which the church stands or falls."

He interpreted all of Scripture in the light of his new teaching. Indeed, he was willing to question the inspired authority of any New Testament book that didn't seem to him to agree with it — for instance, the Epistle of St. James.

Because James says in 2:24, "You see that a man is justified by deeds and not by faith alone!" Luther responded:

Away with James! Its authority is not great enough to cause me to abandon the doctrine of faith ... If they [referring to other teachers] will not agree to my interpretations, then I shall make rubble of it. I almost feel like throwing Jimmy into the stove. It is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works ... Therefore I do not want him in my Bible.<sup>4</sup>



Luther's Table

1 Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, p. 65.

2 Luther, Martin, *The Freedom of the Christian*, quoted in Msgr. Patrick F. O'Hare *The Facts About Luther*, p. 101.

3 Bainton, p. 65.

4 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, pp. 81, 85.



Luther went so far as to assert that no one could be saved who did not agree with him on this crucial issue of justification.

I do not admit that my doctrine can be judged by anyone, even the angels. He who does not receive my doctrine [of *sola fide*] cannot be saved.<sup>5</sup>

## Are Catholics even Christians?

It might surprise you to know that this is *still* how the most serious Reformation-minded Protestants feel about this issue of justification by faith alone — that it's doubtful one could be saved who doesn't understand and believe it.

I have a book in my library titled *Justification by Faith Alone: Affirming the Doctrine by which the Church and the Individual Stands or Falls*. In this book a number of contemporary Protestant scholars contribute chapters on various aspects of the doctrine of *sola fide*.

In a chapter titled "Rome NOT Home," Dr. John Gerstner writes about the conversion to the Catholic Faith of his former seminary student Scott Hahn. He describes how he "mourned" for Scott when he learned of it. Why? Because he believed that no one could be saved who had *understood*, and then *rejected*, justification by faith alone. In fact, Dr. Gerstner interpreted Scott's becoming Catholic as evidence he had never been a Christian at all!

Instead of leaving the Protestant Church, [Scott] was leaving the lost world into which he was born — and from which he was *never actually separated* — for the false church of Rome. He has leapt from the frying pan into the fire, and only God can deliver him as a brand from the burning.<sup>6</sup>

Catholics read these words and think: *what?*

So, in Dr. Gerstner's mind it's justification by faith alone or nothing? Yes, that's correct. Being in the Church of Rome is the same as being lost? Yes. He doesn't believe Catholics are even Christians? No, he doesn't. And there are many who don't. And the ones who don't tend to be the ones most serious about the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*. And it's because *in their view* the very Gospel of Jesus Christ is at stake in this dispute between the Protestant and Catholic views of justification.

In their thinking only two options exist: either we are justified by faith alone in the imputed righteousness of Christ, or we are attempting in some manner to earn salvation through our obedience.

If Christ's perfect righteousness is credited to us, Protestants will argue then and only then is salvation entirely the work of God. Then and only then does God receive all the glory for the work of redemption. If, on the other hand, our obedience is *in any sense* a part of what is required, then salvation is partly God's work and partly ours; we have contributed to our own salvation, and we have something in which to boast.

This is how serious Protestants think about this issue.

And because Catholics do see obedience as required, serious Protestants see Catholics as teaching what well-known Calvinist pastor and author John MacArthur refers to as "a damning system of works-righteousness."<sup>7</sup>

Now, Catholics would likely scratch their heads at this. After all, Catholics *know* that salvation is the free gift of God and that even

our good works are the fruit of God's grace working within us. When Catholics walk forward at Mass to receive Communion, their hearts instinctively resonate with this prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas:

Almighty and ever-living God, I approach the sacrament of your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I come sick to the doctor of life, unclean to fountain of mercy, blind to the radiance of eternal light, and poor and needy to the Lord of heaven and earth.

Catholics know it is grace, from first to last!

But because Catholics believe that we must use our freedom to cooperate with God's grace, that justification is a process and that the obedience of faith is a part of what is required of those who would take up their cross and follow Jesus and inherit eternal life — to many Protestants, Catholics are teaching "salvation by works." MacArthur writes:

The difference between Rome and the Reformers is not theological hair-splitting. A right understanding of justification by faith is the very foundation of the gospel. You cannot go wrong at this point without corrupting every other doctrine as well. And that is why every "different gospel" is under the eternal curse of God.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

It's easy for me to describe this line of reasoning. I know it well. I was taught it as a new Christian. It was believed and taught at the Bible college and seminary I attended. For years my favorite theologians were men who believed and taught it, such as Luther, Calvin, the puritans John Owen, John Bunyan, and Jonathan Edwards. I also believed it and taught it. But, over time, I began to have questions. *To be continued...* ■

8 Ibid. p. 20.

## 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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5 Luther, *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops Falsely So-Called*, found in LW 39: 248-249.

6 John Gerstner, *Justification by Faith Alone*, Ed. Don Kistler, p. 185.

7 Ibid, p. 2.

### Thank God for the Church & Her Catechism

By Marcus Grodi

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This year the Catholic Church celebrates the 25th anniversary of the release of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is the first official world-wide *Catechism* since the one produced by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. I suspect we take for granted what a blessing it is that this *Catechism* was released in our lifetime.\*\*

Recently, as I was reading the Scriptures and reflecting on the importance of the *Catechism*, it once again struck me how wide-of-berth many Scripture passages can be interpreted. At first reading, most of Scripture may appear self-explanatory, or at least easily explained by the contexts. Others, however, such as a simple paragraph like Romans 5:13-15 has many conundrums:

[S]in indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many (Rom 5:13-15).

There are many issues of controversy in this short paragraph concerning sin, the law, death, the free gift of grace, and the relationship between God and "that one man Jesus Christ." Many of the earliest heresies of the Church were built around alternative interpretations of these and other passages by sincere believers who had great devotion to Christ and Scripture. In response to these alternative views, which were dividing the Body of Christ, the Church gathered in councils and throughout the ages has compiled her teachings into creeds and catechisms. Here are just a few quotes from the newest *Catechism* dealing with some of the topics in Romans 5:13-15:

Concerning "for many":

At the end of the parable of the lost sheep Jesus recalled that God's love excludes no one: "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." He affirms that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many"; this last term is not restrictive, but contrasts the whole of humanity with the unique person of the redeemer who hands himself over to save us. The

Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 605)

Concerning "God ... and ... that one man Jesus Christ":

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith." The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men "and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin." (Ibid, paragraph 234)

The Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense, one of the "mysteries that are hidden in God, which can never be known unless they are revealed by God." To be sure, God has left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his Revelation throughout the Old Testament. But his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone or even to Israel's faith before the Incarnation of God's Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit. (Ibid, paragraph 237)

*The Trinity is One.* We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the "consubstantial Trinity." The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: "The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God." In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), "Each of the persons is that supreme real-

Continued on page B ➡

\*\*For additional reading, please let me direct you to a superb article on this anniversary by Matthew Bunson in the *National Catholic Register*, [ncregister.com/blog/mbunson/the-catechism-turns-25](http://ncregister.com/blog/mbunson/the-catechism-turns-25).

ity, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature.” (Ibid, paragraph 237)

These, of course, are nothing more than a taste, but the point is that the Church, through her *Catechism*, sets trustworthy boundaries to help us interpret Scripture and to understand, live, and proclaim our faith with confidence. Without these boundaries, any one of us can be “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14), which is why St. Paul said that “[God’s] gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). This is the Catholic Church, the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

Don’t let your *Catechism* gather dust on a shelf or hold down a coffee table. Read it daily (possibly using our *Read the Bible and Catechism in a Year* guide). As Pope Saint John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*: “[The *Catechism* is] offered to all the faithful who wish to deepen their knowledge of the unfathomable riches of salvation (cf. Eph 3:8). It is meant to support ecumenical efforts that are moved by the holy desire for the unity of all Christians, showing carefully the content and wondrous harmony of the Catholic faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, lastly, is offered to every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes.” ■

*Read the Bible and Catechism in a Year guides are available for purchase through the Coming Home Network on our website at [store.chnetwork.org/shop/](http://store.chnetwork.org/shop/) or by calling 740-450-1175.*

## CHNetwork Staff Interview



### What is your name and title?

JonMarc Grodi, Chief Operating Officer

### How long have you worked for the CHNetwork?

I have been working full-time since 2010, but for a number of years before that I worked part-time on various website and layout/design projects, as well as correspondence with young adults on the journey to Catholicism. I actually spent my childhood tagging along with my father, Marcus, to conferences and speaking engagements, hearing his story and those of other converts to the Catholic Church, and observing the love for Our Lord that moved them to pursue the truth so far. This work of meeting people, answering questions, learning from them, accompanying them on their journeys deeper in the faith, and helping to share their stories — all for a common love of Jesus Christ — has been a permanent structure in the shape of my life and is very close to my heart.

### Before working at the Coming Home Network, what was the most unusual or interesting job you’ve ever had?

I originally picked up skills in simple coding, website design, and digital communications to fill various needs of the CHNetwork when working part-time before I went to college. Then during my college years, in addition to continuing to do some part-time work for CHN, I began to do freelance design and consulting work with a variety of companies and organizations — everything from the local car dealers to religious apostolates.

### How would you describe your job to a stranger on an airplane?

As some of my colleagues have noted, this question is a little easier when you’ve gotten a chance to find out where the other person is coming from and thus how to contextualize the description! But it usually comes down to something like this:

*We are a non-profit Catholic apostolate founded by and for Christians who, in seeking to follow Christ faithfully, find themselves drawn home to the Catholic Church. We disciple others who are on a similar journey and share their stories!*

### What does a typical day in the office look like to you?

### What is the most rewarding part of your job?

I spend a lot of my time these days answering correspondence, meeting with various members of the team, planning, and working on various active projects in the different “departments” of the organization such as Pastoral Care (our discipling of people on the journey), Outreach (studio and media projects, online resources, communications, etc.), and Development (raising funds and communicating with our valued partners in the work).

There really is not an area of our work that does not fascinate and excite me. Thus, I love being tasked with keeping a pulse on all aspects of the organization, discussing all the pieces and processes with my fellow team members, and looking for ways to empower them and improve our collaboration. It comes down to this: we have an amazing team carrying out the mission of the CHNetwork, and I am daily honored and gratified to be a servant of these servants of God.

### What is one fact about you that might surprise people to know?

One of my wife’s and my favorite book series is C.S. Lewis’ *Space Trilogy*. We’ve read it individually and together numerous times. We just had our fourth child, Philomena, and our homeschool is named “The Manor at St. Anne’s,” after an important location where the protagonists live in *That Hideous Strength*, the third book of the trilogy.

### Who do you nominate to be our next staff interview?

Ann Moore ■



## TAX LETTER

If you need a record of your 2017 contributions for tax purposes, please contact **Janna Pitcock**:

janna@chnetwork.org | 740-450-1175 ext 102

## 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

### December 4

Megan Silas\*

Former non-denominational Evangelical

### December 11

Steve Jeck\*

Convert from Judaism and former non-denominational Christian

### December 18

Lorelei Savaryn\*

Former Baptist, Assembly of God, Nazarene, and Lutheran

### December 25

No Journey Home, Christmas programming

\*Schedule is subject to change.

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

## SAVE THE DATES!

### 2018 CHNetwork Retreats

Would you like fellowship and connection with other converts or those on the journey to the Catholic Church? Visit **CHNetwork.org/retreats** for more information.

**April 16-19, 2018**

Columbus, Ohio

**June 4-7, 2018**

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**October 15-18, 2018**

Biddeford, Maine

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

■ For an Evangelical lay minister in Georgia, that the Holy Spirit would bless and guide his search for the fullness of God's truth.

■ For Paul, a Baptist minister, that our Lord would grant him the time in his ministry schedule to discern his call to the Catholic Faith.

■ For Scott, an Anglican priest, that God would guide him to gainful employment so that he may support his family in the Catholic Church.

■ For a minister in Tajikistan, that the Holy Spirit would guide his heart to the fullness of the Faith in the holy Catholic Church.

■ For Jim, a minister in Texas, that the Father, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, would assist him to overcome his discomfort with Marian devotion.

■ For David, a former United Methodist minister, that our Lord Jesus would open the doors to allow him to move forward with his interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For Aaron, a former Eastern Orthodox priest, that God may grant him the grace to accept the Lord's way of truth and life.

■ For a former Church of Christ minister in Alabama, that the Holy Spirit would guide him as

he witnesses the Catholic Faith to his former Church of Christ colleagues.

■ For a Lutheran minister in Finland, that the Lord Jesus would guide him as he seeks full communion with the Catholic Church and that God would open the hearts of his friends and relatives.

■ For a former seminarian in Arkansas, that as she and her husband both study the holy Scriptures God would call them to Jesus in the Eucharist.

■ For Richard, a military chaplain, that Jesus would guide him as he seeks to follow God's call to the Catholic Church.

## Laity

■ For a man who has been reading and studying about the Catholic Church and was recently invited to RCIA, that he be open to pursuing his interest in Catholicism.

■ For a woman on the journey who is torn between her desire to become Catholic and her husband who is hostile to anything Catholic.

■ For Frances as she goes through RCIA, that she receives the support she needs for her journey and help for her questions about the Faith.

■ For Nicole who is still drawn to the Church and is going through RCIA, that she know how best to move forward with her journey.

■ For a new convert who is struggling how to dialog with her loved ones about her conversion and wants to know how to pray as a Catholic.

■ For Gayle who is at a standstill with her journey on account of some personal struggles that are making her feel overwhelmed, that she not be discouraged or give up on her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For Christina who is a recent convert and having a lot of struggles in her life, that our Lord in the Eucharist give her comfort and peace.

■ For a Baptist in Canada who is going through RCIA and doesn't have any family who understands her faith journey, that she find good Catholic friends.

■ For Allison who is still researching and praying about the Catholic Church, that she have clarity and peace as to how to proceed with her faith journey.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org). We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

## Joyful Journey Updates

**Updates from CHNetwork members who have been in touch with us regarding their interest in the Catholic Church. Thank you for your support in allowing us to help them and others!**

**FROM RENEE, A NEW CONVERT:** "I feel a bit like a Hobbit embarking on the Great Adventure and also finding my way Home, one and the same. Thank you for all your patience and support! During all the twists and turns, the what-ifs and if-onlys, knowing that you and CHN were there, quietly supporting me, was such a blessing. And now I am here."

**FROM BRETT, A PRESBYTERIAN ON THE JOURNEY:** "I picture my current situation as being on a Protestant island, and I'm trying to get to the Catholic continent with the Coming Home Network serving as my bridge. Underneath the bridge the waves are rough, but the Coming Home Network is helping to provide a safe path home ... Thank you for everything you and everyone at the Coming Home Network is doing, and thanks for keeping in touch!"



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

Ultimately, the cross of Jesus fills that gap. (Interestingly, I later found out that this illustration had Catholic origins!) My husband then asked what happens for those who enter a relationship with God but later choose to reject Him. The teacher replied that, once you cross over, you can’t go back. If you have authentically believed, it is irreversible.

This didn’t sit well with us. “Once saved, always saved” just didn’t make sense with our life experience. Both JP and I had genuinely known Jesus from an early age, yet here we were, in our young adulthood, not living our faith. I knew the Bible well and I was familiar with the verse about faith without works (James 2:17). This teacher at our membership class was suggesting that, if we walked away, our original belief in Christ was illusory. JP and I were dissatisfied with the shallowness. How could we base our lives on such a faith?

We later discovered that this Baptist congregation had strong Calvinist leanings. Thoroughgoing Calvinists have a particular belief about predestination, election, and security of salvation, and they tend to be heavily anti-Catholic. These points would come back later to impact the events surrounding my conversion and JP’s return to the Catholic Church.

Faced with these facts, we decided to get serious about our faith. Did we actually believe Christianity was the truth? If it wasn’t, we wanted to stop pretending. But if it was, we needed to take our faith life much more seriously.

We could not sustain this practical agnosticism, this “Christian in Name Only, Church as a social club” lifestyle any longer. We had two children who would be depending on us to anchor them in some worldview that they could count on.

JP and I dug into theology, each in our own way. Timothy Keller’s *The Reason for God* was very helpful to me, as was C.S. Lewis to both of us. And at the end of our searching, we came to believe in Christ more fully as adults, passionate about doing whatever it took to follow Him.

### The Storm

The events that followed helped to create the scenario that led me, as a surprise even to myself, to look into the claims and beliefs of the Catholic Church and, ultimately, to become Catholic.

Now that we knew we were Christians, we sought to live in service to others. Reducing our selfishness would allow us to help our fellow man, Christian or not. We weren’t being super holy in this or thinking we needed to earn our salvation through our own power. We just wanted to be genuinely obedient to the commands of Jesus to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

The small group that we had joined at our church responded with discouragement when we shared the changes in our lives. We thought we were discerning what Jesus would have us do, but they insisted that we couldn’t do everything, that the purpose of the local church was to take care of each other and that feeding the hungry pagans wasn’t a bad thing to do, but it was not required.

It seemed so clear to JP and me that Jesus was calling His followers to care for the most vulnerable in the world, regardless of their faith. Yes, we as Christian brothers and sisters should take care of each other in times of need, but that does not mean that we are

given permission to neglect others. The dissonance was growing between the reality we understood deep in our core and what we were being taught at this church.

Also, as I spent more time on the worship team, I was becoming discouraged with what I felt to be a heavy emphasis on the production value of the worship set each week. We had a stage with fancy equipment, and sometimes worship services were recorded and put on YouTube. People would talk about how you “rocked” a song if you did well. I’m not against making worship beautiful and removing worldly distractions. But the culture of the team and the emphasis placed on secular values made me wonder: Shouldn’t there be a certain reverence to what we were doing, singing, and playing music each week?

These thoughts began to redefine the whole concept of the church services we attended. It felt more and more like we were in a “church” where reverence was neglected and “niceness” was paramount.

Looking back, I know many in the congregation itself at the time would have described its whole culture as unhealthy. There had been difficult transitions, factions, and splits over the years that had left deep scars. I now view it as an example of what happens when you have no central authority that you assent to. If you don’t like something, you leave, or start a new church or, if you’re in a position of authority, you change things to your liking. Now that I am Catholic, I can see how, under such a system, each person becomes his own pope.

In all of this frustration, and in trying to find somewhere to land that would allow me to embrace the depths of my faith, I again started researching different denominations. I asked our small group what the early Church would have looked like because maybe the problem was the Americanized version of Christianity. No one had an answer, and no one thought it was a worthwhile question!

### Turning Homeward

One night, I sat on the couch and acknowledged that, amazingly, I was at a place where I felt I needed to take another look at the Catholic Church. I had been to enough Masses and talked enough with JP’s Catholic relatives to know that they had a stronger connection with the early Church than I did. I simply wanted truth, no matter where it came from.

So I determined to re-examine all that I had previously disagreed with and give Catholicism a fair chance for the first time in my life.

JP and I were on a date, one snowy December evening in 2015, when I asked him if he would be interested in attending Mass that Sunday.

He was thrilled! Unknown to me, JP had been reading some Catholic theologians during his commute to work on the train each day. He told me he had been feeling drawn back to the Catholic Church and had been praying for unity in our marriage.

### Taking on the Issues

Thus began the final, intense part of my conversion story. Every single bulwark that I previously had built up against Catholicism came crashing down. I tackled things systematically, one issue at a time, leaving my biggest concern for last.

My background was strictly Bible alone, but as I studied and learned, I came to the conclusion that we Protestants were setting

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

ourselves up as the authority for interpretation of Scripture. If the Holy Spirit were really guiding everyone in correct individual interpretation, we would not have thousands of denominations and even more factions within those denominations!

I knew truth is not ambiguous. God has a specific meaning for all He has inspired to be written in Scripture. He has to be loving enough not to leave us with just a book, with no trustworthy means to know what He meant. It didn't make sense that individual interpretation was the intended system.

Another big issue for me was purgatory. I thought it was a strange belief and imagined that Catholics believed souls just waited around for a while before God deemed them "good enough" for heaven. Besides, how could purgatory be supported by Scripture?

Protestants can easily understand that God sanctifies, or makes holy, those who follow Him in Christ. I also understood that we are sinless when we come into heaven, by virtue of Christ's redeeming sacrifice and resurrection. But the intricacy of how that process works was vague to me as a Protestant. At the Baptist church we were attending, the belief was that Jesus' death and resurrection cover over our sins like a sheet. God looks at us and sees a clean sheet. But underneath, we are still totally depraved. The Catholic view, in contrast, is that Jesus' death and resurrection make it possible for us to actually become clean and holy in God's eyes, no sheet required. This led me to think about the fact that, at the moment of our death, we are not all equally sanctified. Some people need more purification than others.

1 Corinthians 3:15 speaks of people who will be saved, but as though "through fire." It's difficult to let go of sin. Whenever we turn away from sin and choose God's way, we experience a certain amount of pain. Ultimately, I came to understand purgatory as the process by which God allows our sanctification to be completed, so that we can enter heaven.

Praying to saints was another difficulty for me. I was taught that we should pray only to God. This is one of those instances when Catholics and Protestants use the same words but attach different meanings to them. When Catholics speak of praying to saints, it means we are asking for their intercession, or for them to pray for us on our behalf. Revelation 8:4 talks about the prayers of the saints in heaven. Since they are in heaven, they have no need to pray for themselves. Catholics conclude that they are spending their efforts in prayer for those of us on earth. Through the Communion of Saints that crosses the spiritual and physical worlds, we can ask for their prayers just as I could ask my husband to pray for me.

### Priests and Papacy

I also learned more about the words Jesus spoke in establishing a priesthood at the Last Supper and establishing the role of Pope to guide His Church once He ascended. The Pope was always something that had confused me. I didn't understand how "on this rock I will build my church" made Peter a Pope (Matthew 16:18). But finding ourselves on a road trip at the beginning of my conversion journey, JP and I listened to an audio recording of Scott Hahn discussing the legitimacy of the papacy. The way he described Christ's words in the original language made a very strong argument that the "rock" Jesus is referring to is Peter.

Another thing I didn't understand was how the papacy was an inheritable office. Just one verse later, in Matthew 16:19, Jesus tells Peter that He will give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. For all my years of reading that passage, I had no idea of its meaning. Now, I discovered that the "keys" symbol refers to a passage in the Old Testament, where the person who held the keys was second in command to the King (Isaiah 22). The keyholder had royal authority; he acted on the King's behalf while the King was away. The Old Testament also makes it clear that the "Office of the Keys" is an inheritable office. I then learned about the unbroken lineage of the Popes from Peter, which made sense, given that Jesus intended the Pope to be an inheritable position and that the Pope was meant to act on Christ's behalf until He comes again.

In all of this, I was learning about the early Church. The early Church writings overwhelmingly support the office of the Pope.

At this point, I had no choice but to conclude that the early Church was entirely Catholic!

And just like that, issue after issue, I kept assenting to the Catholic position. But now I had to approach my biggest concern: the Catholic views on Mary. As a Protestant, we just didn't think about Mary that often. Statues of Mary were okay to take out during the Christmas season within the context of a Nativity scene, but that was pretty much it.

### A Different View of Mary

One thing that helped change my understanding of Mary came through a better understanding of Judaism. Jesus was Jewish, and what He did and said would have had significance for the Jewish people of His time. But 2,000 years later, our evolved culture has lost much of that understanding.

I had never been exposed to the concept of the Queen Mother and its significance in Judaism — until I started exploring the Catholic Church. In Judaism, the mother of the King was highly honored. King Solomon's mother in 1 Kings is seated at Solomon's right hand, and he even bows to her! Jesus is known as the King of the Jews. Understanding the idea of Mary as the Queen Mother made a lot more sense to me when I looked at it through a Jewish lens. She would therefore be honored greatly (compare Luke 1:48b). Revelation 12:12 also speaks of Mary. There, she is described as being in heaven and wearing a crown — further supporting the idea that she is highly honored. Again, the Queen Mother had the ear of the King, and the King would take her requests and input seriously. That's why Catholics are so keen to ask for Mary's intercession. When the Queen Mother speaks, the King listens respectfully.

To be completely honest, by this time, I had found the Catholic Church's position on *every single issue* to be more thorough and logically consistent within Scripture and within the whole system of belief, and I ended up feeling that I had no need to look into the issue of Mary with much scrutiny. I basically acknowledged that if I hadn't stumped the Catholic Church on anything thus far, Mary probably wasn't going to be any different. If the Church said Mary was ever-virgin, I was ready to believe it.

## Discovering the Eucharist

We began attending RCIA classes shortly after attending that Mass of family unity together. The classes helped me to work through my issues and answer my remaining questions.

During this period, I began to feel drawn toward the Eucharist. The Catholic understanding of the Eucharist wasn't that difficult for me to accept. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod believes that Christ is truly present in holy communion, even though they do not believe His presence remains in the elements. Their belief comes much closer to the Catholic belief in the Real Presence than many other Protestant denominations. Having spent some time as a Lutheran, I had already reached the conclusion that, if God wanted to put His Presence in the elements, He was more than able to do so. This, then, helped me embrace a full Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.

Our RCIA class was held on the same night of the week that our parish holds Eucharistic Adoration. I would walk past the sanctuary and look through into the Adoration Chapel. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, I realized that something important was going on in there, and I knew that I wanted to participate. It was definitely a supernatural desire, something I cannot account for on my own. After caring nothing about transubstantiation, here I was longing for Jesus in the Eucharist. This yearning has continued and grown since my conversion.

## Sharing the News

The time came for us to let those in our Protestant church know what we were doing. We hadn't spoken much about it because initially we weren't sure where we were going to end up. But we also were concerned with how people might respond. We didn't want other people's arguments and pressure to impact our honest study. I knew the arguments; I *was* the arguments. Nothing any Protestant could say was going to surprise me. I wanted to be able to focus, without interference, on seeking the truth.

Sadly, the transition from our Protestant church to the Catholic Church was painful. We lost some friends, and other friendships became strained. We were not allowed to say goodbye to those in our Christian life group; we were told "it would be best" for us not to return. We went from being connected and well-liked to being a dangerous concern. As beautiful as entering the Catholic Church was, it came at a cost. I remember talking to a Baptist pastor in our home, who had come to express his concern that if we were losing this much, and if it was *this hard* to become Catholic, and I was doing it anyway, this spoke strongly of my conviction. He confided in us that they had never before had anyone leave their church to become Catholic, that they would have much less problem with someone leaving for another Protestant church. Finally, in the view of those who held tightly to Calvinistic views, if we were becoming Catholic, then we were never genuinely Christian in the first place.

## Confirmation

And still we pressed on. I was set to be confirmed at the Cathedral of St. Paul, in Minnesota, on Easter Vigil, 2016. I received permission to be confirmed there so all of JP's relatives who had shared their Catholic faith with me over the years, who had prayed for my conversion, could celebrate with me as I became fully united to

the Church Jesus Himself established 2,000 years ago. You can't get more connected to the early Church than that!

Standing in that beautiful cathedral, during the amazing Easter Vigil service, having just been anointed with oil by the archbishop and facing the congregation, tears in my eyes, I just knew that I was finally home.

## One Year Later

March 26, 2017 marked my one-year anniversary in the Catholic Church. Our lives have truly changed for the better over the past year. JP and I learned about the Theology of the Body, which is an extensive work by St. John Paul II, addressing the meaning and purpose of our human bodies. It is a holistic and completely Christian view of sexuality, an icon of our purpose as image-bearers of God. The Theology of the Body taught my husband and me about living our lives as a gift to each other and to those we encounter, and our marriage has become much stronger. Thanks to the teachings of the Church and the Theology of the Body, we reopened ourselves to new life, and I gave birth to our daughter, Mary Charlotte, the day after Christmas 2016.

We now have all these beautiful tools to help us live out our faith: Confession, the Eucharist, Adoration, the Rosary, weekly and daily Mass, and more. We have such a solid set of truths to teach our children and live out in our own lives. We are encouraged to think and dig deep, but discovering ultimate truth is not something that rests only on our shoulders. We have the confidence of correct biblical interpretation and teaching in the Catechism, Tradition, and the Magisterium.

In the short time we have been Catholic, the Church has given us so much that we feel blessed to give back and also to share with others. We have started sharing our own faith story and journey on our blog, *This Catholic Family*, and we hope to be able to assist in teaching RCIA. I have had the honor of cantoring at several Masses. We want to augment the young adult ministry by starting a small group in our home. Ministering in various ways, knowing that we are part of a Church that values social justice, and serving the most vulnerable and marginalized in society — this is our passion. My mom and stepdad are on their own conversion journey. They plan to be confirmed at Easter Vigil, 2018.

And finally, thanks be to God for the Catholic Church and for His Spirit gently yet persistently, leading me home! ■



LORELEI SAVARYN is a passionate Catholic convert, wife, mother, and teacher, who enjoys writing in her spare time. She holds a B.A. in Creative Writing and an M.A. in Education. Lorelei live-journalled her conversion process at [www.protestantinterrupted.wordpress.com](http://www.protestantinterrupted.wordpress.com) and now blogs regularly at [www.thiscatholicfamily.wordpress.com](http://www.thiscatholicfamily.wordpress.com). She is also a Columnist for Catholic Stand. Lorelei will be a guest on The Journey Home on December 18.



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