



## January 2019 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Finding the Truth

By Nicole Dupuy

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works, lest any man should boast!" I said to my husband, quoting Ephesians 2:8 as I sat on the bed while trying not to cry. I had always thought Catholics believed they had to work their way to heaven and was reeling in horror as he explained why he thought we should consider becoming Catholic. I continued battering him with objections about the Pope, Mary, purgatory, priests, saints, statues, the crusades, and Confession until he finally sighed and left the room. I didn't want to touch, much less read, all the brochures and books he'd brought home, and I seriously wondered how we could stay married if he converted without me.

When Dane and I got married, we were nominally Christian. Although I had faith in a loving God, that faith was pretty much sidelined after I left home at eighteen. I did not pray, attend church, read the Bible, or live a Christian life. The choices I made in those years before I met Dane ended up causing me a lot of heartache.

Dane had a similar background. He believed in God and even had an important "come to Jesus" experience in his early twenties, but after a few months, with no real structure to build on, he fell back into his old ways. Then, after somehow surviving a fall from a three-story roof at the age of 26, he began to see that God must have a plan for his life.

As newlyweds, we decided we should find a church to join. Since we were living in my Texas hometown, I figured we should try my old non-denominational church. I was used to the fire and brimstone sermons, flashy entertainment, and impersonal atmosphere, but Dane was horrified by it.

We agreed to try the Episcopal church. I found it dry and boring. Nevertheless, we became officially Episcopalian. That lasted a couple of years until we lost interest and dropped church altogether.

Time went by, and our boys were born. And as often happens, we felt obligated to raise our sons in a church community. So once again, we set out to find the right one. Over the course of a decade, which included a move out-of-state, we tried several: Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, non-denominational, Bible churches, and Community churches. For a while, Dane was even made deacon of a church that met in a high school music room and whose members were obsessed with demons and the end times. We also attended megachurches so full of people you could hardly move.

Looking back, I think we were looking for a church that agreed with what we already believed rather than something we would need to conform to.

*Continued on page 2* ➤

*Journeys Home*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Although there were many good, well-meaning, and God-loving people in those churches, and we did learn important things in them, it never took long for religion to feel pretty thin in those congregations. Everything seemed to hinge on the ability of the preacher to deliver emotionally compelling sermons week after week. “Where’s the meat to this?” we would wonder. And how did we know that this guy’s version of things was correct, when another Christian pastor down the road was teaching totally different things? *Something was missing.*

We also wondered how any of it could matter to our boys if it felt so irrelevant to us. We could read the Bible at home. We could pray at home and even watch sermons on television. Why go through the trouble to get everyone dressed and out the door to church?

We were like a lot of people who thought that the reason there were so many different churches was that people like to have choices and different worship styles. We had never considered anything about church history, where the Bible came from, or even the fact that we were considered Protestants. We weren’t protesting anything that we knew of. But even back then, I intuitively felt there was something wrong with all the divisions and denominations that disagreed with one another on everything from how to baptize to whether it was okay to drink alcohol. They couldn’t all be right because each one had points of contradiction with the others. After all, Jesus had prayed for His people to be one (John 17).

Our disillusion with church and our confusion about our true beliefs were magnified when the country’s economy took a turn for the worse in 2008. We felt our foundation shaken, and I was terrified of what would happen if all the dire predictions we heard came true. One night, as I watched the news, obsessing over what might come, Dane came into the room and said something sarcastic and cynical. I asked him if he even believed in God any more.

He said he wasn’t sure. I was distraught from the realization that we were no longer on the same page spiritually.

Thankfully, things soon began to become brighter. God was working in our lives, and we found ourselves drawn into home-schooling. This was a leap of faith that really forced us to think through our beliefs in ways we’d never had to before. It brought us into contact with many families who took their faith seriously. And although we shared many of the same convictions, I could sense an undercurrent of discord in our Christian homeschool group. We actually had to sign an agreement stating that we would not discuss our faith or the particulars of any churches we attended because it could cause dissension. We weren’t attending any church at that time, so I shrugged it off.

A couple more years passed, and we decided that maybe it was time to give church one last try. A friend of mine was attending a Baptist church in our neighborhood and had wonderful things to say about it. I was still longing for that elusive ideal church family, and Dane was feeling more hopeful, so we gave it a try. Surprisingly, we liked it. The people were welcoming; the pastor was pretty smart, and it seemed like a fit. But after only a few weeks, we found out we would be moving back to Texas because of Dane’s work. Well, we figured, once we get to Texas, we’ll just find a Baptist church in our new city. They seemed to be the ones who had it right. I was excited that we would be arriving in our new hometown on Easter weekend of 2013. “Finally!” I thought. “We’ll be back home in Texas and in our new Baptist church home.”

That Easter morning, we rolled up to the First Baptist Church and found a seat. It was a large church, and the energy level was high, matching my hopes. I tried to focus on what was coming, figuring there had to be a reason there were so many people there. The lights went down; a giant screen dropped from the ceiling,

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## FEATURED RESOURCES

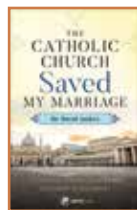


### Deep in Scripture CD

In this *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi welcomes former non-denominational pastor Steve Gleason to the program to discuss the words of Jesus in John 3, when He tells Nicodemus that he must be born again, of water and the spirit. Steve and Marcus reflect on what they thought it meant to be “born again” when they were Protestant Christians and how they understand this teaching of Our Lord now as Catholics.

\$35

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



### The Catholic Church Saved My Marriage

— By Dr. David Anders

Many people who encounter the Church’s teachings are shocked by their rigor. Yet the Church offers much more than rules about sexual restraint; she offers a way to make marriage into something supernatural, even mystical. In this book, Dr. Anders shares his personal discovery and offers a robust defense of the Church’s teaching on marriage, even the most controversial topics of divorce, remarriage, gay marriage, and contraception. With the Church’s teachings and the writings of the saints as his guide, he also offers practical, time-tested ways to live in peace despite an unhappy marriage, explains the value of suffering, and offers ways to overcome reluctance to forgive grave offenses. In a culture that breaks apart marriages and undermines human dignity, Dr. David Anders offers a hope-filled alternative for those who live moral and spiritual lives in union with Christ and His Church.

\$50

Receive *The Catholic Church Saved My Marriage* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *The Catholic Church Saved My Marriage* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

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

# Marital Struggles and Conversion

By Mary Clare Pieczynski | Publications & Pastoral Care Coordinator

“How can you do this to me?” “Don’t you know Catholics worship Mary?” “I didn’t marry a Catholic!”



One of the most significant and common struggles that people who are drawn to the Catholic Church encounter is knowing how to navigate their faith journey when their spouse doesn’t share their same interest in becoming Catholic.

The sense of loneliness, confusion, and dismay that you and your spouse can feel is a difficult, painful cross, especially when beforehand you had both been joyfully united in your faith journeys. While each marriage is different and, unfortunately, there is no perfect answer or solution, in our work with many couples over the years, we’ve found that there are some strategies and practical steps that can help make the path a bit more smooth for couples when it seems like God is calling one spouse towards the Catholic Church but not the other.

One of the most important overall aspects to keep in mind and work hard on is your general attitude towards your spouse. God might be doing amazing things in your faith journey, and you might be discovering beautiful things about the Catholic Faith, but remember that your spouse might find the entire experience to be bewildering and anxiety-provoking, and they might be very concerned for your soul if they have lots of misunderstandings about the Catholic Church. So your attitude towards whatever resistance or hesitancy they have needs to be one of love. First of all, genuinely listen to their concerns or at least let them know that you want to try and understand their perspective and are available to listen when they are ready. Always try to be respectful of their concerns, and don’t rush to hasty rebuttals or defenses. This isn’t an argument to be won; it’s a dialog with a person you are called to love deeply and with whom you have become one flesh. Reaffirm that this interest in the Catholic Church isn’t making you love them any less and that you are still committed to living a harmonious life together.

Try also to find out what exactly your spouse is concerned about. Is it the belief that Catholics aren’t really Christian? Are they concerned that you won’t be going to church together? Is it that you won’t be on the same page spiritually? Is it just general anxiety about what this change might involve? Is it concern over what friends and family will think? When you know what exactly is bothering your spouse, it can be easier to work together towards a resolution and a common understanding.

Be sure in all of this to set a good example to your husband or wife. Show concretely through your everyday witness that this desire to become Catholic is making you a better spouse, a better parent, a better Christian. Honestly admit when you have failed, and resolve to do better. If your spouse sees a change for the better in your life, it can be a powerful way to help break down barriers and calm fears. Read about the Catholic theology of marriage and how the sacrament of marriage is a beautiful means of grace. The Theology of the Body as articulated by Pope Saint John Paul II can be a tremendous way to better appreciate how we are called to make of ourselves a gift to our spouse.

Be cognizant that a faith journey is just that, a journey and not a race. It can often be beneficial to a marriage for one spouse to wait and not move forward as quickly as he or she would like when

the other spouse is particularly resistant to the Catholic Church or is having a hard time. God can use all things for the good, and a period of waiting can yield abundant fruit in your marriage and also faith life. (The Chosen People spent 40 years in the desert after all.) Remember, God knows the unique challenges you face and loves your spouse even more than you do. Try to avoid being too hasty and hurting them more. A period of waiting for the other to be more accepting of your faith journey can also be an opportunity to grow in your own faith. Perhaps it is waiting a few weeks, a few months, or even a year or more. Discern what is best for your specific situation. If you feel that waiting to move forward with your desire to become Catholic is needed, be sure to unite this cross with Jesus’ in prayer for unity and harmony in your marriage.

Also, through this journey be sure to seek out good spiritual counsel. It can be difficult to be able to make good decisions when there are so many conflicting emotions and issues to sort through. Being able to dialog with a spiritual mentor such as a priest or spiritual director can bring clarity and peace to your situation.

Sometimes, too, meeting with a marriage counselor can help you identify and work through struggles you are having. Don’t be afraid to consider counseling for the good of your marriage. If your spouse won’t go to counseling, you can always go on your own to learn strategies to help your marriage heal and flourish.

Through it all, and above all, keep prayer at the center of your life. Pray for your spouse. When possible, pray with your spouse. Find ways to continue to keep God at the center of your marriage. Sacrifice for him or her. (Give up coffee, sweets, or a favorite indulgence for the needs of your spouse.) Go to Mass and Eucharistic Adoration and lay your marriage before the altar. Ask for the intercession of the Holy Family and the saints in helping you and your spouse to come to a greater unity. You can also ask God to bring someone else into your spouse’s life to help him or her understand your faith journey better. They may respond better to another source.

Overall, give yourself and your spouse time to discern how best to proceed and work through your struggles. Know that it might take a lot of patience and trial and error in knowing how you and your spouse can best work together when your faith journey is drawing towards the Catholic Church, and your spouse doesn’t share that same draw. Pray, discuss, and discern God’s leading in your faith journey and in your marriage. Trust in His love for you and your spouse. God’s timing is not always ours, but believe that He truly desires the best for you and your marriage. May your love for Him and your spouse deepen and flourish. If the Coming Home Network International can be of help to you in your faith journey, please reach out to us! ■

## Recommended books

*When Only One Converts* by Lynn Nordhagen

*The Secret Diary of Elisabeth Leseur: The Woman Whose Goodness Changed Her Husband from Atheist to Priest* by Elisabeth Leseur

*The Catholic Church Saved My Marriage* by David Anders



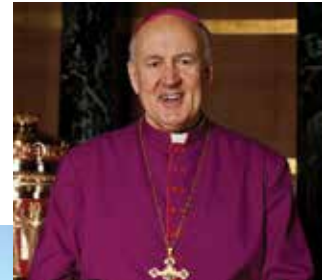
# COMING HOME NETWORK PILGRIMAGE!

The CHNetwork's first "**Deep in History**" pilgrimage will take place **Sept 23 - Oct 4, 2019**. Marcus Grodi, Ken Hensley, and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson will be leading a group to Italy to learn about "**The History of the Catholic Church in Rome.**"

While focused in and around Rome, the trip will also include a few days enjoying the beauty of Assisi, with excursions to other important sites. The final itinerary, prices, and other details will be announced soon.

If interested, please email Ken Hensley at [kenh@chnetwork.org](mailto:kenh@chnetwork.org) for further information.

**We hope to see you on the trip!**



"Read. Pray. Give it Away."

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## Read. Pray. Give it Away.

By JonMarc Grodi | Chief Operating Officer

As we step into this new year, amid a growing scandal in the Church and growing doubt and confusion about whether it is worthwhile to become (or remain) Catholic, let us take a moment to consider, once again, what we are doing here — together, you and I — as the Coming Home Network.



We are a network of non-Catholic Christians who have come home or are in the process of coming home to full communion with the Catholic Church. This network also includes lifelong Catholics who want to grow in and exercise their faith by supporting their brothers and sisters on this journey and by hearing and sharing their stories with the world.

As a network, it is our goal to help each other and all Christians hear and answer the universal call "to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 40). In doing so, we hope to assist the Catholic Church in fulfilling her mission of evangelization and Christ's call for Christian unity, as proclaimed by St. John Paul II in his encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* (That They May Be One).

This is our vision. This is why we — you and I — are part of this network.

We are connected by our conviction that the Catholic Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, that the sacraments *matter*, and that Christ desires all Christians (and, indeed, the world) to have Him in His fullness.

We are also connected by the profound impact that the Holy Spirit has made in our lives through the witness and spiritual gifts of fellow baptised Christians, indeed fellow "separated brethren," through whom many of us (or our children or family members) were first invited to give our lives to Jesus Christ. Despite the divisions within Christianity, the Holy Spirit raises up men and women of faith outside of Catholicism, to proclaim the Gospel to those who wouldn't otherwise hear it. But the Holy Spirit is also calling these witnesses and their hearers to come home to full communion with the Catholic Church and to bring their spiritual gifts as well: a love for and knowledge of Scripture, an evangelical zeal, and a gift for calling each person to a radical, personal conversion to Jesus Christ.

These are the convictions that connect us, and for over 25 years, what has been the primary vehicle of that connection? **You are holding it in your hands.**

The purpose of the **Coming Home Newsletter** is to connect this vast network — Catholics, converts, and journeyers — in the sharing of stories, learning about the faith, and uniting in prayer for each other and for the Church, the broken Body of Jesus Christ.

The newsletter is also there to give every member of the network a powerful, concrete way, each month, to participate in our mission: **Read. Pray. Give it Away.**

**Every month, together, we read a new conversion story**, a new witness to the active and dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit in someone's life — a new reminder of the truth of our faith and the mercy of our God.

**Every month, we pray prayers of intercession** for the needs of the many clergy and laity who are on the long, difficult journey home to the Catholic Church and **prayers of praise and gratitude** for the Joyful Journey Updates.

**And every month** — but especially this month, as we step into 2019 — **our challenge to you is this: after you read and pray, GIVE IT AWAY.** Share this newsletter — the conversion stories in particular — with your friends and family members and invite them to join you in this apostolate of reunion.

And as you **read, pray over, and give away** the stories of your fellow members in the CHNetwork, allow the Holy Spirit to ever increasingly show you your own *story* and empower you to share it. **You, too, have a story** of God's plan and activity in your life, and you are called to share it in word and in deed. Never forget the power of *story* — of *testimony*. As it says in Revelation 12:11: "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb **and by the word of their testimony**, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

Once again, as we step into the new year, while sin seems to have increased (or at least been forced into the light) in the Church, we trust that grace will abound all the more (Romans 5:20). As the Coming Home Network — you, and I, and the thousands of others with whom we are connected — let us press on in daily, ever-greater surrender to God's will; let us work together to share the fullness of truth with our separated brothers and sisters, and let us pray — as a network — for the renewal and re-unity of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Thank you for being part of the Coming Home Network and for receiving the newsletter each month.

**Read. Pray. Give it away. ■**

## 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.



### CHNetwork

P.O. Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH  
43702-8290



740-450-1175



info@chnetwork.org



The Coming Home  
Network International



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

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## READ. PRAY. GIVE IT AWAY.



PLEASE CONSIDER  
**SHARING THIS  
NEWSLETTER**  
WITH A FRIEND OR  
LOVED ONE WHO  
MIGHT BE INTERESTED  
IN THE CATHOLIC  
CHURCH!

## TAX LETTER

If you need a record of your 2018  
contributions for tax purposes,  
please contact **Janna Pitcock**:

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



## SUPPORT US

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**SUPPORT THE  
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through Amazon.com! Go to **smile.amazon.com** and select  
the Coming Home Network International as your charity when  
you shop through Amazon Smile.

## 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, Thursdays 2 PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Sunday 7 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

#### January 7

Dr. Matthew Bunson\* *(Child of  
converts)*

#### January 14

Dr. David Anders\* *(Former Presbyterian)*

#### January 21

Abby Johnson\* *(Former Baptist and  
Episcopalian)*

#### January 28

Fr. Edward Meeks\* *(Former Anglican  
priest)*

*\*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).



# Joyful Journey Updates

**We would like to share with you some encouraging updates and anecdotes from CHNetwork members. Thank you for helping us to assist converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church!**

**From Robin, a recent convert** "Thank you for your note . . . I have been a Catholic for six months! Obviously this is a very difficult time in the Church, and I'm sure you encounter people who are becoming discouraged, especially if they have just begun considering becoming Catholic. However, I have to say for me this is not the case. Of course, the news from Rome becomes more alarming by the day it seems, but the turmoil overall, I think, proves more and more the truth of the Catholic Faith . . . otherwise Satan would not be fighting so hard to destroy it . . . I know that the Coming Home Network is experiencing challenging times right now, and I would like to try to begin contributing to the work soon if I can. I will certainly keep you in my prayers as you have been very instrumental to me in my entry into the one, holy, catholic, and Apostolic Church!"

**From Travis, a former Southern Baptist minister** "Six months into my Catholic faith journey, and I have no regrets. Zero. I'm happily living a sacramental life as much as my secular employment will allow. No real challenges at this point other than I long to serve the Lord full time, whether as a priest, deacon, director of religious education, or whatever. I have a good job for which I am thankful and service opportunities in my parish, teaching sixth-graders in CCD and attending RCIA as the pastor's understudy. I am also doing an online catechist formation program through Christendom College."

**From Margaret, a new convert** "Yes, I was received into the Church on Sept. 16. Oh my, it was wonderful!! From my first Confession on Friday (Exaltation of the Holy Cross day) through First Communion on Sunday, the experience was full of God's mercy and love. I don't think I stopped smiling for at least a week! . . . I have such peace and am so happy and at home in our local church and find myself eager to share this with friends. Thank you so much for your prayers and encouragement."

**From Peter, a former Anglican priest** "My time with you and others during the Coming Home Network Retreat in Columbus remains a pivotal earlier moment of grace. I am humbled and blessed to continue to receive CHN e-mails and CHN newsletters with wonderful testimonies and teachings. Your follow-up moments of grace continue to undergird our journey of faith from Anglicanism to Catholicism . . . May the Holy Spirit continue to fill, release, lead, and control your life and ministry and those whom you love and serve at Coming Home Network and beyond!"

**From Kristina, on the journey** "How kind and thoughtful of you to check up on me . . . These days RCIA is the only bright spot in my life, so I'm enjoying it very much, thank you! I want you to know that you came up in conversation during our first night last night. Sue [her CHNetwork helper] relayed how we met through you and through the Coming Home Network online. You have been such a blessing putting us together! Thank you so much for doing that! And it's wonderful to know that I could reach out to you. You are a very kind and loving woman; thank you for your help." ■

## SUPPORT 25 YEARS OF THE CHNETWORK!

**Could you give \$25 a month to help support the CHNetwork that, for 25 years, has helped men and women come home to the Catholic Church?**

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

**CHNetwork** Attention: Ann Moore  
PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702

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

### Your information

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☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$25.00 on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's 25 years of ministry.

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

■ For Bert, a Baptist minister, that the Holy Spirit will bless his RCIA journey.

■ For Calvin, a former non-denominational minister, that he may quickly find new employment after resigning as pastor of his congregation.

■ For Susan, a Baptist lay minister, that the Lord Jesus would remove all the road blocks barring her path to the Catholic Church.

■ For a Lutheran minister in Nebraska, that Our Lord will increase his longing for the fullness of the faith and the holy Eucharist.

■ For Andrew, an Anglican seminary professor, that his love of the early Church Fathers would bring him all the way home to the Catholic Church.

■ For a Baptist youth minister, that her husband will become accepting of her journey to the Catholic Faith.

■ For a Church of Christ minister in Arkansas, that God would continue to pull on his heart, drawing him to the fullness of the Faith.

■ For Christian, a former Jehovah's Witness deacon, that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide him in his journey.



■ For Susie, a Bible Church lay minister, that her friends and family might accept her Catholic faith.

■ For Michael, a former United Pentecostal minister, that his discovery of the truth of the holy Trinity may open the way for his entry to the Catholic Church.

■ For Joe, a United Church of Canada minister, that the way may open to return to the Catholic Church of his baptism.

■ For Brook, a Protestant minister who is having a very difficult time.

## Laity

■ For a woman in North Carolina who is navigating being strongly drawn to the Catholic Church while having an unsupportive spouse.

■ For Stacy, that her love for Catholicism help touch her husband's heart and draw him towards the Catholic Faith.

■ For Bryan who has concerns about the Catholic teaching on the End Times.

■ For Greg who struggles understanding the role of Baptism in our faith life, that he come to a deeper appreciation for the grace God gives us in this sacrament.

■ For Cindy to have clarity and direction as to how to move forward with her faith journey.

■ For Sarah who is struggling with some practical implications of how to live out her Catholic Faith within her family life.

■ For a woman whose husband has gone from opposition to the Catholic Church to being more open, that her patience and prayers yield good fruit in her marriage.

■ For Linda to have clarity and peace in knowing whether she should become fully Catholic.

■ For David a fallen-away convert who is considering returning to Mass and

the sacraments, that he may have the resolution to return fully to the Church.

■ For Loretta who isn't sure how to proceed with her journey and finds it very hard to embrace the Catholic Church in all its fullness.

■ For a Baptist in Kentucky who is drawn towards becoming Catholic but is troubled by some of the divisions within the Church.

■ For Justin as he and his wife are in RCIA and are preparing to be received into the Catholic Church.

■ For an Anglican who has a very Catholic devotional life but is unable to fully embrace the Catholic Church at this time on account of his wife's hesitancy, that Jesus bring this man ever closer to Himself.

■ For Wendi who is having a challenging time in her journey, that Jesus be near to her during this difficult time.

■ For Beth who feels ready to move forward with her interest in the Catholic Church, that she find good support for her journey.

■ For a man who comes from an Assemblies of God background, that as he continues to learn and fall in love with the Church, his wife and children be more open to his exploration of the Catholic Faith.

■ For a Pentecostal who is having a lot of her questions about Catholicism answered, that she have the courage to meet with a priest to discuss her lingering concerns and discern how best to move forward with her journey.

■ For an Episcopalian in Ohio who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for years but doesn't see a way forward with his journey at this time on account of his wife's adamant opposition.

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. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

and they began to play a video of their pastor and some other people doing a rap skit. And it was pretty hokey and awful. *Did we really need to be entertained to worship God?*

That’s when something in me just kind of gave up. All our hopes, all our searching, and this is what it had come to. As we left that day, Dane and I didn’t even have to discuss it. We both knew it was over. Church was not for us.

Looking back, I can see that all those experiences were necessary parts of our journey. Without all the disappointment and frustration, I would never have been able to remotely consider the idea of becoming Catholic. I had grown up in a church that referred to the Catholic Church as the “Whore of Babylon.” To me, becoming Catholic literally had never appeared on my radar.

It was only a few weeks after our visit to the Baptist church that Dane decided to go home and help his mom, who was going to have surgery. While visiting his parents, his dad, who had recently returned to the Catholic Church, shared his insights and suggested that we should learn more about it.

After excitedly sharing his news with me and seeing that I was not reacting the way he’d hoped, Dane quietly dropped the subject. A few days went by. Finally, curiosity got the best of me. I picked up the book Dane had left on the kitchen counter, the one called *Rome Sweet Home* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn. I figured that truth is truth, and I should have no fear of this guy’s arguments for Catholicism. Imagine my surprise when, a few chapters in, not only did I not find anything I disagreed with, but things that had been bugging me for years began to make sense!

Each conversion story is unique, and usually there’s a particular aspect of the Church that draws the person in. For me, it was the Church’s teaching on life and human sexuality. As I read Kimberly Hahn’s story of how she discovered that contraception and abortion are fruits of the same tree, everything began to make sense. Many things that had happened in my own life, as well as everything that was happening in our very confused culture, boiled down to those truths.

As a non-Catholic, being on the Pill was a no-brainer. It seemed to be the responsible thing to do and was never even questioned. After all, it was my body and my decision when to allow God to bless us with a child. Somehow, I had never wondered how it could be healthy or moral to ingest a chemical that treated my fertility as if it were a disease. And not one doctor ever told me that the Pill is on the World Health Organization’s list of ‘Group A Carcinogens,’ along with tobacco and asbestos.

In that book, Kimberly goes on to explain how the sacramental marriage of a husband and wife is a mirror of the Trinity. The self-giving love they have for each other is so real that, in nine months, they have to give it a name. For the first time — but certainly not the last — I was struck by the truth and beauty of the Church’s teachings. The Church was not anti-sex as I had been told. The Church was pro-love and human dignity, and loving someone has nothing to do with using him. Using artificial methods to separate sex from the potential of procreation was unnatural and unhealthy, making it a lot easier for people to use each other without the “side effect” of making babies.

In his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI accurately predicted the dire consequences that would come with the widespread acceptance of contraception. He concluded that it would lead to conjugal infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards; it would lead to lessened respect for the woman, reducing her to a mere instrument for the satisfaction of male desires; it would put undue power in the hands of public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law, and it would create the illusion that procreating life should be left to the arbitrary decisions of men.

The contraceptive mentality, which was actually forbidden even by Protestant denominations until 1930, has led to most of the social ills we see today: broken families brought on by so-called no-fault divorce, pornography addiction, disease, sex trafficking, and almost sixty million lives lost to abortion in America alone.

Understanding the truth about the contraceptive mentality brought some painful personal memories back to me. When Dane had had his vasectomy years earlier, I was not on board. Although we were overwhelmed with three small children and not having a support network, I had wanted him to wait before doing something permanent. At the time, I did not have the theological arguments to back up my instincts and persuade him that it was wrong to surgically alter his body to prevent the creation of new life. It is one of my life’s greatest regrets. Thankfully, Dane was later so moved by the Catholic Church’s teachings that he underwent a vasectomy reversal. Being open to the possibility of new life has changed the dynamic of our marriage for the better, even if we end up not being blessed with more children.

As the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, “There are not more than 100 people in the world who truly hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they perceive the Catholic Church to be.” I had been one of those millions who believed all the misconceptions and even flat-out lies I’d heard about the Catholic Church, and now I was learning how wrong I was. That summer, Dane and I devoured every book we could get our hands on about Catholicism. And in the fall, we enrolled in RCIA classes at our local parish to learn more and begin the formal process for entering the Church.

When I look back on that time, I can still feel the swirl of emotions. Either we were really onto something, or we were flirting with heresy. Was it worth gambling our souls on something so risky? We were not the first to go from shock, to horror, to joy at the realization of the truth. Even though my heart and the Holy Spirit were guiding me, I was on guard. But the more I learned, the more the barriers I had erected came down. *There was an answer, and a good one, for every objection I had.*

One of the most pivotal things for me was when I learned where the Bible came from. Many Protestants beat Catholics over the head with it, claiming that the Bible condemns Catholic Tradition and teaching. The fact is, it is not possible for the Bible to contradict Church teachings, because the Bible is a Catholic book.

Jesus founded a Church, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that Church produced The Book. The Church Fathers discerned what the table of contents would be, and the final form was

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

not settled until almost 400 years after Jesus' Ascension. Thus, if someone doesn't trust the Catholic Church, then they cannot trust their Bible.

So how did the Apostles spread the Gospel for all those years before there was a book to hand out? With the help of *Tradition*. Paul had told the Thessalonians, "Shun any brother who conducts himself in a disorderly way and not according to the tradition they received from us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6). And, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

The idea of *sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone, is self-refuting when you simply ask, "Where in the Bible text does it list the books that belong in the Bible?" It doesn't. So automatically, you're counting on the authority of the Church, which decided on the table of contents, to provide that information. While we're at it, "Where in the Bible does it say that everything you need to know is written in the Bible?" It doesn't. In 1 Timothy 3:15, it is the "Church of the living God" that is described as the "pillar and foundation of truth."

With this new, factually-based understanding of the origins of holy Scripture, I began to see the Bible in a whole new way. I found out about typology — how people and events in the Old Testament foreshadow people and events in the New Testament. For example, the sacrament of Baptism was foreseen in the Great Flood when God purged the wicked from the earth with water, and again in the Exodus when God's Chosen People fled to freedom by passing through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Likewise, the Holy Eucharist was foreshadowed in the manna, food provided by God as His people wandered in the desert for forty years. He still nourishes us with mysterious, supernatural food as we journey to the Promised Land, praying, "Give us this day our daily bread." The Bible is like a mirror, the Old and New Testaments reflecting each other.

As we continued our journey, not only did the Lord send the Holy Spirit to guide us, He also sent an unexpected friend. One night, when Dane and I were walking to the downtown square for a date night, we happened upon an elderly neighbor unloading groceries from her van. Dane asked if we could help, and she gladly accepted. As we carried the bags in through her house, it became apparent from her décor that she was Catholic. When we told her we were in the process of converting, she was thrilled for us. "There's nothing like being Catholic," she told us, and she meant it with all her heart.

Over the next few months that woman, Anne, became my mentor. She introduced me to Our Lady of Guadalupe and told me

about Mary's appearance in Mexico in 1531 that brought millions of indigenous Mexicans away from their demonic practice of human sacrifice and converted them to Christianity. In addition to that miracle, I learned not only was she the Ark of the New Covenant and the new Eve, she was our spiritual mother, given to us by Christ as He hung dying on the cross:

When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (John 19:26–27).

Mary was closer to Jesus than any other human being. He performed His first miracle at her request. She always points us to her Son as evidenced by her last-recorded words in the Gospels:

"Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

Her "yes" to God was the perfect example of how we should all respond to our Creator. As they say, don't worry about Catholics loving Mary too much. We could never love her more than Jesus does.

My perspective on everything began to change. Like so many people raised in America, I was taught that "rugged individualism" was to be admired and that all I needed was Jesus, my Bible, and my own interpretation of what that Bible said. It was basically all about me, me, and me. Looking at the world with my new Catholic eyes, I was beginning to see things very differently. Not only did I have a family in heaven made up of Mary and the saints, but the concept of my human family on earth started to seem more real, as did my obligation toward them.

Once you come unmoored from the Church authority established by Christ, it is a very slippery slope. With each splinter that breaks off, truths are lost and things become more subjective and relative to non-Catholics. Many denominations have decided it's easier to fall off a cliff than stand for the truth. But for two millennia, the Catholic Church has not given in to the pressures of prevailing societal winds. When Jesus said to the first Pope, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18), He meant it.

Our months of learning and discovering were thrilling. At Mass, as I breathed in the incense and watched the candles glow, I was taken in by the beauty and mystery playing out before me. The liturgy touched all my senses, the spiritual and physical intertwined. The Word was alive and dwelling among us in the readings, the tabernacle, the priest, and the people. From crossing myself with holy water as I entered to being blessed by the priest at the end of Mass, participating in ancient rituals going back thousands of years made me realize I had never experienced true reverence for

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my Lord and Savior in a church before. I remember thinking, “Of course, Jesus. Of course your Church is full of beauty. Thank you, Lord.”

And then, there was the ultimate mystery: the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I finally understood what Jesus meant in John 6, and it changed everything. Those strange sayings had always been ignored, danced around, or completely contorted by every other church I had attended. Really, you couldn’t blame them, because without the Catholic Church, it was not possible to understand.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. (John 6:53–56).

Nowhere else in the Gospels does Jesus use repetition like this to get His point across. And when many of His disciples were shocked and decided to leave Him, saying, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Jesus did not go after them and soften His teaching.

In Matthew’s Gospel (26:26–28), we see Jesus celebrating the first Mass at the Last Supper:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a chalice, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

*That was The Thing that had been missing from all those other churches: The Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ.* In the Mass, heaven reaches down to earth, and our voices join together with the angels and saints (see Hebrews 12:22–24). Then, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the words and actions of the priest, Jesus mysteriously makes Himself present under the appearance of bread and wine, just as humbly as when He became incarnate in the womb of a virgin and when He gave Himself up on the cross. The priest re-presents the one, perfect, unblemished Sacrifice on our behalf, and we are invited to join in the Supper of the Lamb. Through the Holy Eucharist, the Good Shepherd feeds His sheep, giving us our spiritual daily bread, every single day of the year.

By receiving the Eucharist, Catholics show that they believe what the Church teaches. They must be in a state of grace, cleansed of mortal sin, or they can bring judgment upon themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27–32). Catholics believe, as the earliest Christians believed, that it is no mere symbol.

To be cleansed of mortal sin and inwardly prepared to receive the Eucharist, Catholics receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation by confessing their sins to a priest, who acts *in Persona Christi*, in the Person of Christ. This practice was established by Jesus when He gave special authority to His Apostles:

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and

said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:21–23).

As I prepared to be received into the Church, my first Reconciliation was one of the final pieces. I had to take a long, hard look at my life and make a thorough examination of conscience. This was yet another amazing gift of the Church. My previous understanding of the Ten Commandments had been pretty simplistic, but the more I learned, the more they were really fleshed out. Before, I would think, “Have I ever killed anyone? No, I’m not that bad.” But had I ever hated someone in my heart and wished evil upon him? Um, yes. Had I ever worshipped false gods? Not literally. But years had gone by without my speaking to or trusting in the God I believed in.

Forty-one years’ worth of sins can add up to a very long and interesting list. I was very nervous for my first Reconciliation. As I began to say out loud what I’d done, I began to feel overcome with emotion and regret. Hearing my sins out loud somehow caused me to really see them for the first time. The tears flowed, and I was surprised at the depth of my remorse. When I was finished, the priest absolved me and reassured me that God loved me and forgave me.

After my first Reconciliation, I could hardly wait to be in full communion with Jesus’ Church. The Church that had seven sacraments and 73 books in the Bible. The Church with the fullness of truth. Just one year after I sat so dejectedly at First Baptist, Anne was by my side as my sponsor as I was confirmed and received my first Holy Communion. Looking back at the beginning of my conversion, which will continue until the day I die, it is clear that it was by the grace of God that the scales fell from my eyes. Only His hand could have led my stubborn, prideful spirit home. Forty-one years earlier, He had begun a good work in me at my baptism on Easter Sunday, 1973. And at the Easter Vigil of 2014, He continued His work by bringing me into His one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, like Him, ever ancient and ever new. ■



*NICOLE and her family entered the Catholic Church in 2014 after many years of searching for the truth. She and her husband, Dane, live in the Texas Hill Country where they home-school their three teenaged sons. They serve as catechists, altar servers, and Respect Life leaders at their parish, and Nicole works part-time at a local Pregnancy Care Center. Dane is a member of the Knight of Columbus. Dane and his best friend, Jimmy, who entered the Church in 2017, coach a homeschool football team called The Brigade of St. Michael the Archangel. Nicole’s parents and mother-in-law were received into the Catholic Church at the 2018 Easter Vigil.*

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