



December 2019 CHNewsletter

"Finding My Way Home"	1
By Russell Yount.....	
"A Damning System of Works Righteousness"	3
By Kenneth Hensley.....	
"Deep in History Pilgrimage"	5
By Marcus C. Grodi	
"Announcing our 2020 'Deep in History' Pilgrimage through Germany".....	6
Joyful Journeys	7

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Finding My Way Home

By Russell Yount

I grew up in the rural community of Bethlehem, Kentucky — a great place to call home around Christmas. For as long as I can remember, my family attended a small country church. I don't remember ever *not* knowing and believing the stories of the Bible.

During my high school years, I began to have some questions about matters of faith. In the tradition in which I grew up, the answer to any spiritual question amounted to "What does the Bible say about that?" Thus, I started to read the Bible on my own.

Sometimes I had questions that were beyond what I felt comfortable discussing with my parents. Thankfully, someone came into my life to fulfill that need. He was a Methodist pastor in a neighboring town. He and his wife welcomed me into their home whenever I wanted to discuss something. Around the same time, my cousin Lisa introduced me to contemporary Christian music, which was of great benefit to me during those awkward teenage years. In particular, I discovered the Christian rock band Petra. I still often play their CDs in my car or when I'm weight lifting.

When high school graduation time came, I received a scholarship to attend Campbellsville College (now Campbellsville University), a Southern Baptist affiliate about 100 miles south of my hometown. For the first time, I was surrounded by people my own age who took their Christianity seriously and encouraged me to do the same. I found a church to attend while I was in Campbellsville,

and the youth director invited me to serve as his assistant.

Some people enter college with a definite career plan, but for others, a plan emerges during those years. I didn't fit into either group. Three and a half years went by. I had changed majors a few times; graduation day approached, and I still wasn't quite sure what I wanted to be when I grew up. I knew it was time to get out of the comfort zone of Kentucky, at least for a while. I had spent a few months working at a summer job in Massachusetts, so I knew the east coast fairly well, but this time I decided to try going west.

I heard about a Lutheran organization in Omaha that invited people — mostly recent college graduates — to work for a year in various non-profit organizations around the city in exchange for a place to live and a stipend for living expenses. It sounded intriguing, so one spring weekend, just before graduation, I flew out to Omaha to see it for myself.

When I arrived at the Omaha airport that night, one of the residents of this Lutheran community was there to welcome me, a tall, blond man named Carter. He took me out for a late-night snack, and he described the history of the organization. The house had once been owned by the Catholic parish next door, which had used

Continued on page 2 ➡

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

it as a convent. It was a big, two-story brick house with eight tiny bedrooms and a chapel. The nuns had moved out years earlier, and the parish had sold the house to the Lutherans. Then Carter said something memorable. He spoke of the many prayers that had been offered up in that house over the years and stated that he believed the house was sanctified by those prayers. By the time my return flight landed in Louisville Sunday evening, I knew that I would soon return to Omaha.

The following September, I moved into that repurposed convent in Omaha, along with four other people about my age and a semi-retired Lutheran pastor, who served as our spiritual director.

Each evening at the house, upon return from our work assignments, my housemates and I took turns preparing the evening meal. Once a month, we had a community-building activity off site. On one of those monthly outings, we went on an overnight visit to a Benedictine retreat center in Schuyler, Nebraska, about seventy miles from Omaha. Yes, that's right — a Lutheran community living in an old convent and visiting a Catholic retreat center. Something about the St. Benedict Center fascinated me, and after that first visit, I went back there a number of times on my own.

On one of those visits, I wandered into the center's little bookstore, and one book on a clearance table caught my eye: *Any Friend of God's is a Friend of Mine: A Biblical and Historical Explanation of the Catholic Doctrine of the Communion of Saints*, by Patrick Madrid. The title was a mouthful, but it sounded interesting, and I had just enough cash in my wallet, so I bought it. I didn't read it right then, though. That would happen much later.

Let me back up a little. A year before I moved to Omaha, while I was attending a friend's wedding, I met a beautiful young woman named Bonnie Peterson. We kept in touch and eventually began a long-distance romance, living as we were in separate states. After I moved to Omaha, I made many trips to St. Paul, Minnesota, where Bonnie was attending college.

When my year with the Lutheran community was about to end, I received an offer of a permanent position with the organization to which I had been assigned. Bonnie and I married the following summer, just after she graduated from college, and she joined me in my newly-adopted hometown of Bellevue, Nebraska, just south of Omaha. She also found a job with the Lutherans, in a church preschool.

Before long, though, we felt the urge to move closer to our families, which was a bit of a challenge, with one family in Wisconsin and the other in Kentucky. I accepted a position with a financial services corporation in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and we bought an old fixer-upper house in nearby Marion. Although we didn't know it at the time, the choice of that particular house triggered a series of events that would draw us closer to the Catholic Church.

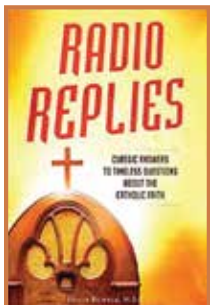
Across the fence from our new-old house was a larger house that had been divided into apartments. One Sunday afternoon, I saw a young man moving in there. I went over and introduced myself. Michael was a recent college graduate who, like me, had just accepted a job in Cedar Rapids. Over the next few weeks, he came to our house often, and in the course of one conversation, he mentioned that he was Catholic. Until that time, my exposure to Catholicism had been quite limited, and I wanted to know

Continued on page 9 ➤



SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resource to help enrich your faith.



Christmas gifts!

The CHNetwork would like to extend a special offer to you and your loved ones this Christmas. Fr. Leslie Rumble was the godfather of radio apologists. During the 1920s-30s his show helped millions of people understand and explain the teachings of Catholicism. *Radio Replies* distills Fr. Rumble's teaching and provides classic answers to timeless questions about the Catholic Faith. *Radio Replies* is a must-have for every Catholic's bookshelf! From the Bible to Baptism; from Christian morality to the marks of the Church; from the nature of man to the evidence for God in nature; *Radio Replies* is a one-stop shop for smart and sound information about the Catholic Faith. Give this wonderful resource as a gift this Christmas!

\$50

Receive 1 copy of *Radio Replies* for a donation of \$50.

\$80

Receive 2 copies of *Radio Replies* for a donation of \$80.

\$125

Receive 5 copies of *Radio Replies* for a donation of \$125.

\$200

Receive 10 copies of *Radio Replies* for a donation of \$200.

— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain resources by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/respond.

A Damning System of Works Righteousness

PART V: BUT PAUL SAYS, "NOT OF WORKS!"*

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator



Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart (Gal 6:7-9).

I was still a number of years away from giving even a thought to the Catholic Church when I had come to accept a view of salvation that was more Catholic than Reformed. What I had become convinced of — from Scripture alone — was that in the teaching of both Old and New Testaments, perseverance in faith *and* obedience is required of those who would receive God's blessing, including the blessing of eternal life.

A thousand stories and statements in Scripture pointed in this direction: the path to eternal life is the path of faith *and* obedience.

Not perfect obedience. I knew that my obedience to Christ would be no more perfect than my faith in Christ. I knew that in order to persevere to the end in faith and obedience, God's grace and forgiveness would be needed every step of the way. But still, I was convinced that the path to eternal life was foreshadowed by, and therefore is like, the path of the Israelites to the Promised Land. You recall that in order to reach their destination, Moses and the children of Israel had to trust God's word *and* follow the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Same with us.

So how was I to understand St. Paul's explicit insistence that "a man is justified by faith *apart from* works of the law" (Rom 3:28)?

The answer for me was rooted in coming to see that in the Bible not all "works" are the same. There is a kind of "works," a kind of obedience, that is absolutely required for salvation, and there is a kind of "works," a kind of obedience, that is absolutely rejected for salvation.

Now, lest one suspect that this is a clever distinction I've devised in order to get around Paul's clear teaching that salvation is by faith and "not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9), let me point out that this is a distinction that can be easily seen throughout the Bible.

The Obedience of Faith

From the beginning, there were always those — usually only a remnant — who responded to God's call with humble faith and who walked with God in the obedience that flows from humble faith. These are the Old Testament saints described in Hebrews chapter 11:

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts (Heb 11:4).

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household (Heb 11:7).

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance (Heb 11:8).

Notice that in each of these examples, both faith and the obedience that flowed from faith were "necessary" in order to receive God's commendation and blessing. Noah *had* to build the ark in order to be saved. Abraham *had* to leave his home in order to receive the inheritance. Abel received approval as righteous because by faith he *offered* to God a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother Cain.

Notice as well that the author of Hebrews does *not* set these Old Testament figures forward as examples of those who attempted to "earn" God's blessings by their "works" so that they might "boast" in their "achievement." There's not a hint that the author of Hebrews means to present these as illustrations of men and women living under a "damning system of works righteousness." Instead, they are described as those with whom God was "pleased" (Heb 11:5-6) and are presented as examples for New Testament believers to emulate!

This is the obedience of faith. This is the *kind* of obedience that is required of those who would inherit eternal life.

The Obedience of Works

But then there is another kind of obedience. While some responded to God's gracious call with an obedience of faith, too often the majority did not. These responded with a *different kind of obedience*. And while the obedience of those described in Hebrews 11 "pleased" God, the obedience of these others was a stench in God's nostrils.

Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them ... Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; Cease to do evil, learn to do good (Isa 1:13-17).

In essence, the mindset of those described by Isaiah — and there are many other similar passages — went something like this: "God is going to bless us because we are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because we bear the covenant sign of circumcision. Because we possess the law and the temple and the priesthood and the sacrifices. Because we observe the Sabbath and the required festivals and keep ourselves ceremonially pure."

These believed they "had it made" because they were the right people and because they wore those badges of identity that marked them out as separate from the Gentile nations surrounding them.

While there are a number of passages in the Old Testament that describe this kind of "obedience" *Continued on page 4* ➡

— an obedience that appears to be the very opposite of obedience — it is the prophet Jeremiah who boils this “obedience of works” down to its essence:

Behold, the days are coming when I will punish all those who are circumcised but yet uncircumcised ... for all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart” (Jer 9:26).

At its heart, the “obedience of faith” is an obedience that flows from humility. This is the obedience that pleases God and is necessary to receive God’s blessing. The “obedience of works” is an obedience that flows from pride and is the opposite of what God desires.

The Obedience of Works in the Gospels

This contrast we find throughout the Old Testament is *never* a contrast between faith and obedience. It’s a contrast between the humble and the proud, between those who trust God and, therefore, seek to walk in His ways (faith *and* obedience) and those who trust in their own righteousness.

And when we move into the New Testament, we find the same contrast being described, and the same message that was preached by Isaiah and Jeremiah is now preached by John the Baptist and Our Lord Himself!

What did John say to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to Him? “Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt 3:8-10). In other words, “You who are trusting in your status as a Jew, I don’t care whose descendant you are! I don’t care that you are able to boast that you are among the circumcised! What God desires, what God *requires*, is humble faith and the obedience that flows from humble faith!”

And what did Our Lord say to the religious leaders in the temple?

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean (Matt 23:23-26).

Whether we read Isaiah or Jeremiah or John the Baptist or Jesus, in each of these cases notice that we do not find obedience to God being set against faith in God. It isn’t ever faith *or* obedience. And it isn’t that the Jews being addressed in all these passages were focused on “obedience” when they ought to have been focused on “faith.” Ironically, their problem was precisely that they were not focused on faith *or* obedience! They did not walk in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham.

In their minds, it was enough that they could claim Abraham as their father — and make sure to keep the outside of the cup nice and clean.

The Obedience of Works in Paul

And, yes, what I’m suggesting is that when the Apostle Paul says that we are saved by faith and “not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9), he isn’t setting faith in opposition to obedience. When he writes, “For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom 3:28) he isn’t saying that we are justified by “faith alone” apart from the need to be obedient to Christ. He isn’t saying, “There is nothing a believer has to *do* in order to inherit eternal life, and if you think there is then you have bought yourself into a damning system of works righteousness!” Rather, Paul is standing directly in line with Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus and saying nothing more or less than what they said in their own way and in their own circumstances.

At the time Paul was writing, he was dealing with a situation in which certain Jewish believers, mainly from among the Pharisees, were insisting that for Gentiles to be saved they had to be circumcised and keep the customs of Moses — essentially that they had to become Jews (see Acts 11:1-3 and 15:1-2; Rom 3:28-30 and 4:9-12; Gal 2:1-5 and 11-16).

In response to this, when Paul says that a man is “justified by faith, apart from works of the law,” what he is saying is: “A man is justified by faith in Christ, not by being circumcised and living under the Mosaic code.”

And for Paul, faith in Christ *includes* love for Christ and obedience to His commandments.

Conclusion

Three times in his letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians the Apostle Paul states clearly and simply exactly what *doesn’t* matter to God, what *doesn’t* count with God. He also tells us what does. While evidence for the understanding of Paul I’ve outlined here can be found scattered throughout his writings, it was these three statements that confirmed to me that I was on the right path with Paul.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love (Gal 5:6).

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Gal 6:15).

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God (1 Cor 7:19).

Three times Paul tells us what doesn’t matter to God. Three times he uses exactly the same language to impress on his readers precisely what doesn’t count with God, and it’s whether or not one has received the sign of circumcision. What doesn’t matter is whether or not one has, basically, become a Jew. “Who cares whether one is a Jew or not!” Paul says. After all, as he had already stated earlier in his Letter to the Galatians, in Christ Je-

...us there is no longer Jew or Greek, but all have become sons of God and heirs of the promises made to Abraham through faith and baptism (Gal 3:26-29).

So what *does* matter to God? What *does* count with God? What matters, what counts, Paul says, is that we: (a) possess a faith that works through love (Gal 5:6); that we (b) have become a new creation in Christ (Gal 6:15); and that we (c) keep the commandments of God (1 Cor 7:19).

Faith *and* obedience. It would be some years before I would realize that this is in essence the Catholic view of salvation.

To be continued... ■



Deep in History Pilgrimage

Marcus C. Grodi



This past September, the Coming Home Network sponsored our first “Deep in History” pilgrimage, in partnership with Catholic Faith Journeys. Our primary destinations were Assisi and Rome, Italy, but we also visited Siena, Orvieto, and Ostia. We were incredibly blessed to visit so many grand sites of our historic Catholic Faith. In Assisi, we visited the churches dedicated to Saints Francis and Clare and saw the San Damiano Cross from which Our Lord spoke to St. Francis, calling him to renew the Church. In Siena, we visited the church where St. Catherine spent most of her life and from which she persuaded the pope to leave Avignon and return to Rome in the 14th century. In both Siena and Orvieto we toured beautiful Baroque basilicas.

Then in Rome and Ostia we visited the ruins and excavations of ancient Roman civilization, including the sites of early Catholic Christianity. These included the Circus Maximus where many early Christians were martyred for their faith and the Catacombs of Calixtus, where early Christians prayed at the tombs of the martyrs. We visited and celebrated Mass in the magnificent churches of Rome, including St. Paul Beyond the Walls, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, St. Frances of Rome, and the Church of St. Phillip Neri. And lest we forget, we toured and celebrated Mass in St. Peter’s and visited the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel. We also attended a public audience with Pope Francis.

This only scratches the surface, because there was, of course, the superb Italian cooking and scenic countryside, and the wonderful friendships we developed and shared with the other pilgrims. The entire trip was a great joy.

The most unexpected highlight of the trip for me was our visit with Fr. Walter Oxley of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). He is a priest of the Diocese of To-



ledo serving in the CDF. He was our main celebrant of Mass in the inner chapel of the CDF and then he gave us a presentation on the history of the CDF, followed by a Q&A session. This was a privilege to be in the center of the Church's doctrinal defense of faith and morals. We were deeply inspired by Fr. Oxley's defense of the Church and her teaching and humbled by his kind words and support of the work of the Coming Home Network.

We came away from our pilgrimage with a deeper love for our Lord Jesus and the Church He founded as well as a greater appreciation for the rich treasures the Church offers us in her saints, her history, and the beauty she has given the world. We are hoping to offer more CHNetwork pilgrimages in the future, and are happy to announce one to Germany in 2020! See below or visit our website chnetwork.org/pilgrimages/ for updates and to be put on our mailing list for further information. ■

Photos courtesy of Catholic Faith Journeys, catholicfaithjourneys.com.



Announcing our 2020 "Deep in History" Pilgrimage through Germany — Sep 8-18, 2020

In the fall of 2020, the CHNetwork will sponsor a pilgrimage through Germany, where we will study the history of the Catholic Church in Germany with special focus on the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

After learning about the early centuries of the Catholic Church in Germany, visiting Trier where Athanasius was exiled in the 4th century and Fulda, to learn about the life and ministry of St. Boniface the "Apostle to Germany" in the 8th century, we will travel north visiting the sites associated with the life of Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk and Catholic priest who launched the Protestant Reformation when he posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Our travels will take us to a number of picturesque German towns, including Eisleben, where Luther was born and died;

Wartburg Castle, where he made his German translation of the New Testament; Leipzig, where Luther debated the great John Eck; and Wittenberg, where it all began.

While this pilgrimage should prove to be an inspiring and educational experience for all Catholics, it may be of particular interest to converts from Protestantism, especially those from Lutheran and Evangelical backgrounds, as well as those still on the journey toward the Catholic Church.

Along the way, we will celebrate Mass in some of the most beautiful churches in some of the most wonderful towns in one of the most breathtaking countries on earth. Please consider joining us! It will be an incredible experience to share our stories and forge lifelong friendships as we experience the beauty and history of the Catholic Church up close. ■

EWTV'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 2 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-Friday 1 AM ET

December 2

Fr. Richard Rojas* (former Presbyterian & Anglican priest)**

December 9

Deacon Keith* Fournier (revert)

December 16

Fr. Jonathan Duncan* (former Episcopal priest)

December 23

No Journey Home* (special Advent programming from EWTN)

December 30

Mac & Katherine Barron* (former Evangelical Protestants)

January 6

Patrick Flynn* (former atheist & revert)

** (re-air from 6/5/2017)

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

Joyful Journey Updates

From Steve, a convert "Just checking in on my one-year anniversary. I wanted to thank you again for the help and advice you gave me as I walked the walk. I'm going deeper step by step. It took me a while but I have gotten use to crossing myself in public. I have even gotten into the Hail Mary and the Rosary even though it was a high hurdle to get over. Most important is that my coming into the Church has drawn my wife and me closer together. That third string in our marriage bond has gotten even stronger."

From Judy, a recent convert "Both my husband and I are just getting used to being Catholic. We love it, and our church family is so warm and so nice to us. During the service we were both so overwhelmed when so many members of the church welcomed us. I couldn't help but cry. Thank you so much for asking. I love the Coming Home Network, and I still love to watch *The Journey Home!*"

From Elizabeth, a recent convert "Yes, I was received on Easter Vigil. I went to Confession twice just to be certain I was prepared to receive the Eucharist. I wasn't expecting Confession to move me like it has, but it is such a blessing to experience the

love and mercy of Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I was finally able to tell Jesus that I loved Him — and mean it."

From David, a pastor on the journey "Catholic atonement is a beautiful thing. I've read Aquinas' thoughts on it before, but now this whole doctrine has a more intense glory about it. Purgatory makes more sense to me now. It makes sense if we consider that sanctification is a lifelong process. A final purging and refining is logical to me. It works! We've got so many more things to read. The beauty is we can continue this! I am so excited to continue to dig in! Thus, I can say that after a couple years of reading, studying, praying, and conversing amongst ourselves, my wife and I have decided to join the Catholic Church. I told her she didn't have to follow me to the Church, but she surprised me by saying that she's in. She's on a reading frenzy — myself, too — and it's been a wonderful experience. We are in! Thank you for the information. It's been beyond helpful."

From Daniel, on the journey "Blessed be the Lord, the very tenacious hound of heaven. This short email is to let you know that the last reservations I have had about

the Virgin Mary and a few other Catholic doctrinal issues have fallen, and I accept all the doctrinal Catholic points as they are expressed in the *Catechism* of the Church. Interestingly (or providentially!) the final brick was laid this Friday/Saturday last, in part through a listening of some videos on St. John Cardinal Newman, in part his position on the development of doctrine, as well as a YouTube video by Brant Pitre on his new book *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*. Yes, I remain irritated, but somewhat better understanding, by Marian devotion excess, but I absolutely adhere to the Catholic Marian dogmas. Praise be to God the Father in Christ our Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit — by the intercession of Mary. Thank you and the Coming Home Network team for your patience and prayers." ■

TAX LETTER

If you need a record of your 2019 contributions for tax purposes, please contact **Janna Pitcock**:

janna@chnetwork.org | 740.450.1175 x102

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Could you give \$25 a month or more to help support the CHNetwork as we help 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/ 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 if you have any questions or concerns.

Your information

Name _____

Signature _____

Address line 1 _____

Address line 2 _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

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

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

☐ **Checking account** or ☐ **Savings account**

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

☐ **Credit card**

Card number _____

Expiration date / CVV Code _____

☐ Visa

☐ MasterCard

☐ Discover

☐ AmericanExpress

Prayer List

Clergy

■ For an Orthodox Presbyterian minister, that he, his wife, and children may find faithful guidance on their journey to the Catholic Church.

■ For Jared, an Anglican seminarian, that he may find answers to his questions about the Catholic Faith.

■ For Ryan, a former Episcopal priest, that, after he and his family enter the Catholic Church, they may receive encouragement and guidance.

■ For a Reformed seminarian, that the Holy Spirit would guide her RCIA experience.

■ For a Baptist minister who is teaching Catholic doctrines to his congregation, that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide him.

■ For an Assemblies of God missionary, that she may meet faithful Catholic friends who are willing to mentor her on her journey to the Church.

■ For John, an Anglican priest, that his path to the Catholic Church may be cleared of all obstacles.

■ For a Church of Christ teacher, that his wife would become open to joining the Catholic Church.

■ For Charles, a minister in Michigan, that the Holy Spirit would untie all annulment knots.

■ For Bobby, a youth minister in the south, that he may find a balance between family, school, and work.

Laity

■ For Barbara, that she be able to find good, local support for her faith journey.

■ For a woman in England who is struggling with understanding how Catholic teaching is biblical.

■ For Ann who desires to come into full communion with the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide her heart and mind.

■ For Karen and her husband who, after a number of years, are both joined in practicing their Catholic Faith, that they will continue going deeper in their faith journeys.

■ For Olivia as she goes through RCIA, that her journey will bear much fruit.

■ For James who is once again looking to move forward with his interest in the Catholic Church and is looking for good resources to help him learn more.

■ For a recent convert who is struggling with loneliness as a Catholic, that God will give her good, faith-filled friendships.

■ For a non-denominational Christian in the midwest who is struggling to understand the role the saints should play in her faith life, that she will be able to see them as our heavenly friends.

■ For Christina, that her heart and mind will be opened to the beauty of Jesus in the Eucharist.

■ For a family in Virginia as they begin RCIA and settle into their new parish.

■ For an Anglican on the journey who is worried about how her decision to become Catholic is hurting her parents, that they will in time come to support her desire to be Catholic.



■ For Marjorie who is struggling with finding support for her faith journey in her local area, that she will be able to form good friendships.

■ For Nancy as she continues to read and study about the Catholic Church, that she will have clarity as to what direction to pursue.

■ For Katie who is having a hard time understanding some Catholic doctrines, that the Holy Spirit will give her wisdom in her search for truth.

■ For a woman in Maine as she begins to attend Mass and become more familiar with the liturgy, that she will fall in love with the Eucharist.

■ For an Evangelical in the south as she prays and hopes that her husband will be enthusiastic and willing to join her on her journey to the Catholic Church.

■ For a Baptist in the south who loves the Catholic Church but feels he can't move forward with his journey until his wife is more open to his desire to become Catholic.

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.

CHNETWORK STAFF, ADVISORS, & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President/Founder
Marcus Grodi
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Chief Operating Officer
JonMarc Grodi

Ministry Membership & Pastoral Care Coordinator
Jim Anderson
(former Lutheran)

Office Manager
Ann Moore

IT/Facilities Coordinator
Bill Bateson
(former Secularist)

Resource Specialist
Janna Pitcock
(Revert)

Publications & Pastoral Care Coordinator
Mary Clare Miller

Outreach Manager
Matt Swaim
(former Methodist)

Developer of Web & New Media
Seth Paine
(former non-denominational)

Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator
Ken Hensley
(former Baptist minister)

Ecclesial Advisor & Chaplain
Msgr. Jeffrey N. Steenson
(former Episcopal bishop)

Financial Advisor
Kevin Lowry
(former Presbyterian)

Spiritual Advisor
Brother Rex Anthony Norris
(former Anglican)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marcus Grodi (President)
Msgr. Jeffrey N. Steenson (Vice President)
Kevin Lowry (Treasurer)
Donald Brey (Director)

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

more about my neighbor’s religion. I remembered the book that I had picked up earlier in Schuyler and started to read it.

When I finished Patrick Madrid’s book, I realized, with just the slightest hint of uneasiness, that everything in it made sense. He had included his email address in the back of the book, so I sent him a message, and he graciously responded with suggestions of other reading material. The back of the book also included an advertisement for *Envoy* magazine, a journal of Catholic apologetics, so I ordered a copy, all the while telling myself — and Bonnie — that this was purely a quest for learning.

One day, at our home, I mentioned to our neighbor Michael that I had begun studying the Catholic Church — in a strictly academic way, of course! He said, “I’ll be right back” and went to his apartment. He returned a few minutes later with a stack of books to loan to me: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *The Baltimore Catechism*, *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*; and a few others.

Not long after that, Bonnie slipped the next piece of the puzzle into place. The husband of another teacher at her school had also become interested in Catholicism. I was eager to compare notes with someone close to home, so I called Mike — yes, another Michael — and we realized that we had made some of the same discoveries. One Sunday afternoon, we met at the café at Barnes & Noble, and before we realized it, four hours had passed. It was good to have a companion on the journey ... but where was this journey headed? Why would I want to be Catholic when I was content where I was? Was there something in the Catholic Church that I needed, something that I longed for without realizing it? What had started as a purely academic pursuit was making me increasingly uncomfortable.

Early in my studies, a couple of Latin terms came up: *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*, Scripture alone and faith alone. Until then, I hadn’t realized just how much my understanding of Christianity had relied on those concepts — especially *sola Scriptura*, the belief that the Bible is the only authoritative source of doctrine for Christians. How had the early Church functioned before the New Testament, as we know it today, was compiled? And why had I never thought about that? Without knowing it, I had always approached the Bible the way many people do: as if it had dropped out of the sky on the day of Pentecost. I soon found out that there was debate as late as the fourth century, long after the Apostles had passed away, over what books should constitute the New Testament. I also became more aware that many intelligent, faithful people disagreed on their interpretations of the Scriptures, often on important topics.

Our neighbor Michael and I continued our conversations by email after he moved away. The topic that came up most often was the Eucharist. I had always understood communion, or the Lord’s Supper, as purely symbolic. There was one email dialogue with Michael where I quoted a passage from 1 Corinthians: “Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup” (1 Cor 11:27-28 NABRE). Only later did I

realize that those verses make no sense at all if communion is purely symbolic. I had caught the seat of my pants on my own pitchfork!

The other topic that I kept running into was apostolic succession. It caused me to think back to something I had heard from a friend during my college years. The analogy went something like this: imagine an ice cream truck driver making his rounds through a neighborhood, and he sees a police car. He thinks to himself, “That’s my true calling!” He puts a rotating light and a siren on his ice cream truck and starts handing out speeding tickets. Of course, those tickets are not valid because no one has conferred on him the authority to issue them, no matter how strongly he feels “called” to be a policeman. At the time, I thought it was a silly analogy, but years later, it came back to me.

Taking a step back from apostolic succession, I saw that the underlying question was, “What exactly is the Church?” I had always understood the Church, in the broadest sense of the word, to be simply the collection of everyone around the world who believed in the Holy Trinity, no matter what label they put on their local assemblies. My studies were seriously challenging this “invisible church” idea. In particular, St. Ignatius of Antioch was often quoted: “Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church” (*Epistle to the Smyrneans*, ch. 8). This passage is often cited as the first known use of the word *catholic* to describe the Church, and clearly, St. Ignatius understood the Church as visible and hierarchical. At the same time, I ran across a verse of Scripture that I hadn’t noticed before, in the First Letter to St. Timothy: “But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.” If anyone had asked me what was the “pillar and foundation of truth,” (1 Tim 3:15 NABRE) I would have said, “The Bible, of course.” Yet here the Bible itself was saying that about the Church!

Gradually, our friends and family found out about my new interest. Some were supportive; others were clearly uneasy about it. I hadn’t realized until then that many people had a bitter distaste

CONTACT THE CHNETWORK



CHNetwork

P.O. Box 8290

Zanesville, OH

43702-8290



740-450-1175



info@chnetwork.org



The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org

...Journeys Home Continued...

for the Catholic Church. I remember one heated discussion at a friend's home in Minneapolis, which prompted him to send me an eight-page letter explaining the "errors" that he saw in Catholicism. (I responded with a 20-page letter, single spaced, with 73 footnotes.) People sent me anti-Catholic materials in the mail, sometimes with no return address.

Michael, the neighbor who had got me into this mess, moved away. The other Mike and his wife, Kimberly, were received into the Catholic Church in 2003. Around the same time, I heard about a conference called Defending the Faith, to be held that summer at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Mike and I agreed to take a road trip to Ohio. My quest for truth was becoming a "journey" in a literal sense! From the afternoon we arrived in Steubenville, and for the next two days, everything I had been studying over the past two years came to life. The speakers, the Masses, the Holy Hour on Saturday night — it was almost too much to take in all at once. Yet I don't want to make it sound like some sort of religious emotional high. I had initially been drawn to the Catholic Church by truth, but at the conference, I began discovering the goodness and beauty of the Catholic Faith in a way that reading about it could not duplicate. For some people, that process happens in reverse: they're initially drawn to the beauty and goodness of the Catholic Faith. Philosophers often call these three qualities — truth, beauty, and goodness — the transcendentals. For me, truth had to come first, and the others followed.

Patrick Madrid's book had been the starting point of my studies. While we were on a break between sessions of the conference, I was standing outside the bookstore, and guess who was standing next to me! Of course, I struck up a conversation with Pat-

rick Madrid and reminded him of the emails we had exchanged. Mike and I also had the chance to speak to Marcus Grodi from the Coming Home Network and Scott Hahn of Franciscan University, whose conversion stories are now legendary.

As Mike and I drove home on Sunday, somewhere along the way, I said, "I wonder whom I should choose as my patron saint." We looked at each other and burst out laughing. Then, while I was taking my turn driving and Mike was reading his Bible, he came across Revelation chapter 12, read it aloud to me, and said, "This says Mary is our mother!"

I knew my journey had reached a point of no return. All evidence aligned in favor of the Catholic Church. There were still many things I didn't quite grasp, but when you've accepted apostolic succession and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, you're practically there!

Mike and Kimberly had joined a large suburban parish in the Cedar Rapids area. I called and set up an appointment with a pastoral associate there.

The time had come to update friends and family on what was going on. Most accepted it, although typically with some questions and concerns. Some of these questions were totally reasonable, such as, "What was lacking in your life that you have found in Catholicism?" and "Have you sincerely valued the Bible more than any other resource?" Bonnie and I were still attending another church in Cedar Rapids. The pastor didn't fully agree, of course, with the direction I was headed, but he was as supportive as he could possibly be, and I will always be grateful for that.

I started going to a men's Scripture study group at another Cedar Rapids parish on Wednesday nights. One man from that group had an impressive knowledge of the Bible and Catholic doctrine. He and his wife became mentors on my journey. I also started attending an early morning Catholic men's fellowship. Those gentlemen encouraged me greatly on my journey.

I was received into the Church at Easter Vigil Mass on April 10, 2004. Bonnie was there to support me, even though she wasn't ready to take that step herself. Having read Scott and Kimberly Hahn's book *Rome Sweet Home*, I knew of the pain that Kimberly had experienced when Scott left his Presbyterian ministry and joined the Catholic Church. I didn't want that for Bonnie. I assured her that even if she never decided to become Catholic, everything would be fine. But when the time was right, Bonnie made her own journey into the Church.

That night, when I was confirmed and received the Eucharist, my family wasn't there, nor were many friends. I don't remember feeling any sadness about that. Instead, I saw it as my chance to say, "I choose you, Lord. I choose you and your Church, even though my family and friends don't understand. There's still much that I don't understand, either, but I'm trusting in You."

When I decide to do something, I tend to jump in with both feet. I went back to Steubenville that summer, this time with Bonnie, and I got involved with the planning of our diocesan men's conference. It still wasn't enough, though. I wanted more. As a married man, the priesthood and religious life were not op-

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE



Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters.

YEAR-END GIVING

Please remember the CHNetwork in your year-end giving. Your donation may be tax-deductible and is a tremendous help to our ministry as we seek to assist non-Catholic Christians on the journey to the Catholic Church. You may donate by calling 740-450-1175, returning the envelope included with this newsletter, or going to chnetwork.org/donate/.



...Journeys Home Continued...

tions for me, but maybe I could be a pastoral associate or serve the Church in some other vocational capacity. A year after I came into the Church, I resigned my corporate job to work full-time on a Master's degree in religious studies, confident that God would provide for our financial needs. It was a reckless thing to do, yet it seemed right at the time. The reality would prove much different from what I expected.

Some Catholic colleges and universities have remained faithful to Church teaching, yet there are many that have embraced "academic freedom" at the expense of their Catholic identity. Time and time again, I heard people with advanced theology degrees questioning and even openly denying fundamental truths of the faith. On occasion, I mustered the courage to speak up, which accomplished little more than labeling myself as a troublemaker. By the end of the year, I withdrew from the Master's program and walked away defeated, wounded, broken, and unemployed.

For the first time, I began to wonder if I had made a huge mistake. The joy that I had experienced as a new convert faded away. I began to understand why people leave the Church, especially in college. As frustrated and discouraged as I was, though, I never seriously considered leaving the Church. Somehow, I knew that what I had experienced back in Steubenville, and through the witness of the faithful Catholics in Cedar Rapids, was real. The words of St. Peter, possibly the most profound theological statement ever spoken, came to me: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Where else could I go but to the Church that our Lord Himself built? Besides, I was not going to admit that the people who had tried to keep me out of the Church had been right! There was one other matter to consider, too: Bonnie had just enrolled in RCIA. I had my God-given role as the spiritual leader of our home to fulfill.

Being a full-time student had left a six-month gap in my employment history. I applied for a number of jobs and received a series of those dreaded "Thank you for your interest" letters. For the interim, I started working as a security officer and eventually ended up patrolling a college campus on night shifts.

That was one of the lowest points of my life. Most of the time, God seemed distant. My prayers, if you can call them that, sounded like, "I trusted you, Lord! Why aren't you here? I gave up everything for you, and this is what I get? Surely You made me for more than this!" I felt like such a failure. My efforts to serve the Church in a vocational capacity had crashed and burned, and my business career appeared to be ruined as well.

Looking back, I see that I had forged ahead on my own, doing what seemed right in my own eyes. It was as though God was saying, "Yes, I made you for more. This isn't the life for which I created you. Let go and wait on me." I believe that what kept me from completely losing my bearings during that time was continuing to attend Mass, receiving the Eucharist, and going to Reconciliation, even when I didn't feel like it. The sacraments gave me the strength to continue learning the Catholic Faith — not just learning *about* it. My formation slacked off, but it didn't stop entirely. As the dust settled from my bad experience with

graduate school, I began to recognize that in any institution like the Catholic Church, made of human beings, all of them as imperfect as myself, some disorder is to be expected.

As trite as it might sound, the darkest time of night is just before the dawn. On a cold January day, I received a phone call from a staffing agency where I had applied. A non-profit organization in Cedar Rapids needed someone with my qualifications on a short-term basis to audit some files. This position was expected to last a few months; I remained there for seven years, working my way up to assistant controller. The long, dark night gave way to a new day.

With my professional life back on track, the time had come to reassess where my journey was headed. I had joined the Knights of Columbus a few years earlier, and I began to attend meetings more often. Before long, I was invited to be a local council officer, and then I was appointed as district deputy. In 2016, I was chosen as one of eight delegates to represent Iowa at the Knights of Columbus Supreme Convention in Toronto. That was truly the experience of a lifetime. Seeing so many cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, and lay people from as far away as Poland, all gathered together, reminded me of how "catholic" — in the most fundamental sense of the word — the Church truly is.

A short time later, I was called to interview for a new position with the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin. The offer came in mid-summer, and in early August, I began working for the Diocese, which has been a tremendous blessing.

I haven't departed from the Christianity of my early life. The firm grounding in Scripture and the warmth of Christian fellowship that I experienced in my rural Kentucky upbringing, the bold witness of my friends in college, the respect for liturgy and social ministry that I learned while working for the Lutherans, the evangelistic zeal I experienced at my suburban mega-church in Omaha — all of these experiences prepared me for a deeper expression of Christianity in what I once considered a most unlikely place, the Catholic Church. ■



RUSSELL YOUNT serves as an accountant for the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin. A native of Kentucky and a transplant to the Midwest, Russell entered the Catholic Church in 2004 after three years of discernment. He has a passion for Catholic men's ministry, especially in the area of promoting virtue. Russell previously served the Knights of Columbus as a district deputy and was chosen as a delegate to the 2016 Supreme Convention in Toronto. His wife, Bonnie, an elementary school teacher, completed her own journey to the Church in 2006. She is actively involved with various ministries in their parish and community.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

Please visit CHNetwork.org/converts to comment on and share this or one of hundreds of other powerful testimonies!

The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DID YOU KNOW

you can **help support** the
CHNetwork's ministry
simply by setting up your
Amazon.com account to
donate a portion of
your purchases through
Amazon Smile?

Go to **smile.amazon.com** and
select **Coming Home Network
International** as your charity!

