



December 2020 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



From Darkness to the Light of Christ

By Sue Hanna

Darkness — Before Christ I grew up in a cultural, not religious, Reform Jewish home in northern New Jersey. We went to Temple two times a year, on Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement for your sins). I never liked going. When we went to Temple as a family, I didn't understand at least half of the service. The English and Hebrew alike always seemed like rote, meaningless prayers to an "old man in the sky" type of God whom I didn't know at all. There was no talk about God, just going to Temple, celebrating holidays, and making lots of Jewish food. Everything was superficial and about appearance. Part of my childhood included my parents cunningly injecting into me a fear of the cross and the Church. They didn't even like when I was friendly with Christian girls. I didn't know the New Testament existed, and God forbid I should say the name "Jesus." Looking back, sometimes I am not sure I even believed in God. The subject was not discussed, and since God wasn't part of my upbringing and I didn't know much about Him, it was easy to not miss Him or question what I was missing. I was unwittingly submerged into my parents' world of "Jewishness" — a tribal attitude and way of being. Not a God thing at all.

My parents sent me to "religious school" to learn about the Jewish holidays and culture, but not to Hebrew school. I never understood why they made that choice, but it contributed to the lost feeling I had growing up in a dysfunctional home where my father's illness ruled over everything, and my parents favored the one sister I had. I remember being in class with spoiled rich girls who were dressed to the hilt, and I showed up in basic jeans and a t-shirt. I was like cellophane:

they looked right through me as if I didn't exist. They were interested in one thing only — boys. I was interested in one thing only — how I could disappear. I hated every minute of it and felt incredibly out of place, both there and at home.

The only meaningful experience I treasure from my childhood is celebrating the Passover Seder with my grandparents, who were Orthodox Jews. I was close to them. They passed on when I was only 12 years old. I always loved Passover.

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

My parents made me believe that there was something inherently wrong with me, yet my sister could do no wrong. In my 30s, this in turn produced depression and anxiety. I never felt like I “fit in” anywhere. There was always an emptiness — like something was missing. Life felt meaningless to me back then, and I started wondering why in the world I was here. I began finding harmful substitutes to fill that ever-present emptiness, which turned into addiction, starting in college.

Little did I know that God would use this “thorn in my side” to shape and mold me into what I am today.

Through counseling, I learned there was really nothing wrong with me. I simply had suffered an emotionally abusive childhood. I felt like a weight had been lifted from me.

When I was in college, I had some devout Christian friends. I remember looking at them and thinking, “Wow, they are so focused and seem so much more joyful than me.” But of course I was too young and immature to respond to what I now know was the Holy Spirit sowing His first seeds in some pretty dense soil! They had something that was foreign to me — a new concept they called “faith.” What in the world was that?

How I Realized I Needed Christ

I met my husband, Rich, in the mid 1980s, and we were married in 1989 by an Episcopal priest and my childhood rabbi. My

knight in shining armor changed my life and showed me what it was like to be loved and cherished for who I am.

Before our wedding, we went for premarital counseling with the priest, with whom we were friendly. As part of this, we visited three couples in various interfaith marital situations. One couple had been interfaith, and the Jewish man converted to become an Episcopal Christian. They firmly believed that we should be of the same faith or things would become very difficult once we had children. Another couple was staying in their respective faiths, raising their children with both religions, and not giving them a religious identity. And the third couple was also staying in their respective faiths, but raising their children Christian. On our own, we met another family in which the parents were remaining interfaith and splitting the religious identities of the children, one Christian, one Jewish.

It gave us quite a bit to discuss! As mentioned, God had just started “sowing seeds.” Rich and I both felt that any children with whom God blessed us should be given one religious identity. The thought of me becoming Christian ... are you *meshugenah* (“nuts”)? My husband’s unbelievable faith, selflessness, and kindness enabled him to agree to make the ultimate sacrifice and raise our son Jewish (or so we thought at the time).

First, we met some folks who were interested in starting their own interfaith group, so we went to a few sessions. The leader of the group left, and the group disintegrated.

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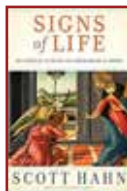
Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.



Discovering the Fullness

CD — By Rosalind Moss

In this talk from a past *Deep in History* conference, Rosalind Moss (now Mother Miriam) discusses how she came to know Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior after a Jewish upbringing and later became an Evangelical minister. Moss recounts her understanding of the way in which Passover was celebrated for her as a modern-day Jew and draws insights into the Catholic Eucharistic celebration. She also discusses the visible Church in light of the Kingdom of Israel.



Signs of Life — By Dr. Scott Hahn

Signs of Life is beloved author Scott Hahn’s clear guide to the Biblical doctrines and historical traditions that underlie Catholic beliefs and practices. Devoting single chapters to each topic, the author takes the reader on a journey that illuminates the roots and significance of all things Catholic, including: the Sign of the Cross, the Mass, the sacraments, praying with the saints, guardian angels, sacred images and relics, the celebration of Christmas, and more. In the appealing conversational tone that has won him millions of devoted readers, Hahn presents the basic tenets of Church teachings, clears up common misconceptions about specific rituals and traditions, and responds thoughtfully to the objections raised about them. Each chapter concludes with loving, good-natured, inspiring advice on applying the Church’s wisdom to everyday life.

\$35

Receive *Discovering the Fullness* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *Signs of Life* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *Discovering the Fullness* CD and *Signs of Life* for a donation of \$75.

— 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.

Yet Another Christmas Greeting

By Marcus Grodi

First of all, I want to wish all of you a spiritually vibrant Advent and a Merry Christmas season! I also want to thank all of you for your prayers and generous support during this difficult past year. What an astounding, totally unanticipated year 2020 has been! Even as I write this short article, I have no idea how the end of this year will develop — what will be the state of the politics, violence, divisions, and pandemic? *Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy!*

Some of you, who were once Protestant ministers or are presently serving as ministers, deacons, or priests, know from experience how much of a struggle it can be to come up with something new to say every year at Christmas time. I think I've been writing Christmas reflections every year for over forty-five years! I think I even wrote them back in the early 70's when I was editor for my fraternity newsletter!

So what does one write who has pretty much said everything he's got in the drawer?

Let me step aside for a moment and draw your attention to the great legend of the Quest for the Holy Grail. I don't mean the Monty Python movie — though this, certainly, was a spoof on the legend, but the true historic search by thousands of seekers over the centuries, for the Holy Grail of Christ.

What is it that sets the legendary Holy Grail apart from all other cups, goblets, and chalices? The answer, of course, is that it once was held by our Lord Jesus during the Last Supper in the Upper Room when He declared that the wine in the chalice was His very Blood. As it states in Eucharistic Prayer I: "[When supper was ended, he took this precious chalice in his holy and venerable hands, and once more giving you thanks, he said the blessing and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT, FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.]"

So, if indeed this very chalice survived and was guarded, passed along, preserved, and eventually hidden away, it would certainly be a great treasure to find and venerate! But as any of you know who have read the legend, in time the chalice or "Holy Grail" took on a legend of its own. Pretty soon seekers were desperate to find the lost chalice because supposedly it was itself infinitely valuable, being made of precious metals and jewels. It even was rumored to have acquired unlimited powers that would make the person who possessed it all-powerful. This, of course, was the part of the legend that drove the archeologists and Nazi antagonists in the third Indiana Jones movie.

They may have mentioned the historic connection with Christ, but their primary emphasis was upon finding and hoarding the chalice for its own supposed worth. Even total nonbelievers — atheists — were willing to jeopardize their lives just to get their hands on the precious Holy Grail.

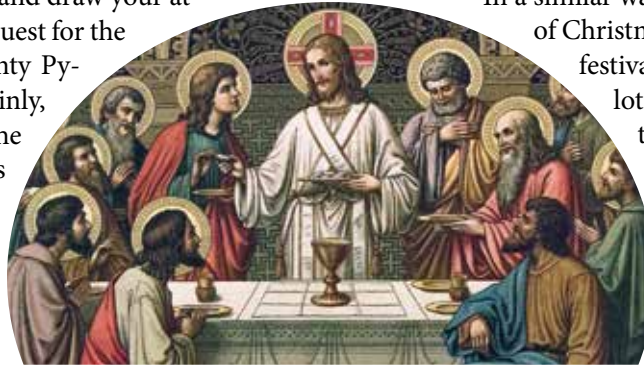
But what is the true value of the Holy Grail? Not what it was made of, or how it was made, or what powers it might have acquired; it is valuable solely because of what it once held and who once held it. All of its other qualities are secondary at best.

In a similar way, what is it that sets the celebration of Christmas apart from all other celebrations, festivals, and holidays? Certainly there are lots of great things that happen during the Christmas season — presents, greeting cards, decorated trees, wreaths, parties, carols, Santa Claus, festive dishes, and touching movies. All of this is fun and to certain levels inspirational — and more and more we encounter even non-believers anxiously

looking forward to celebrating Christmas with all its pomp and gaiety.

But, of course, all of this is at best secondary to the true value of Christmas. All of these festive accoutrements are intended to point to — to continually draw our attention back to — the true value of the Christmas event. Like the Legend of the Holy Grail, however, more and more people are forgetting the true significance of this holiday. For many, it's all about keeping the kids happy, or having an excuse to over-indulge, or competing with neighbors in the annual yard-decoration contest, or hoping that the "joy of the season" might give a glint of hope at the end of the tunnel of this crazy year!

You know, of course, that it's really all about Jesus. Cutting through all the externals and all the materialistic hype, we might rediscover that it's really about the single most important event in all of history: that God so loved us that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be conceived in the womb of a humble Jewish girl named Mary, protected by her betrothed husband Joseph, born in the poorest and most vulnerable of circumstances, not to become a powerful earthly king, ruler, politician, or financier, but to be born to die, to offer Himself as



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the sacrifice for our sins on the most tortuous of instruments, a cross.

Christmas is about how utterly unworthy we each are because of our sinfulness — yet equally how precious we each are in the heart of God — and even more so because through Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, and the Eucharist, this babe born on Christmas, who lived, died, arose, and ascended, lives within our hearts. He abides in us and each of us in Him.

When we point our friends and family members toward the Church, maybe inviting them to join us for a Christmas Mass, it's sad that in this day and age we have to so carefully help them cut through the layers of distractions to once again see that what the Church herself is truly all about is Jesus. But then, we really can't blame anybody else for this but ourselves — to what extent have our own lives been a clear and faithful witness to the one most important Person who ever lived?

As we end this year of chaos, confusion, and fear, and as the Christmas season approaches, let's keep each other in prayer, that the risen Christ who dwells within our hearts will shine brightly through everything we do and say this Christmas. May we each be a beacon of His love.

“Jesus, our most loving Savior, be pleased to light our lanterns, so that they might burn for ever in your temple, receiving eternal light from you, the eternal light, to lighten our darkness and to ward off from us the darkness of the world. Give your light to my lantern, I beg you, my Jesus, so that by its light I may see that holy of holies which receives you as the eternal priest entering among the columns of your great temple. May I ever see you only, look on you, long for you; may I gaze with love on you alone, and have my lantern shining and burning always in your presence” (Saint Columban, abbot). ■

Jesus Was A Jew: Understanding Jesus and the New Testament

By Steve Ray

Jesus was a Jew. This fact may escape the casual reader of the New Testament, but it is crucial to understanding Jesus and the book written about Him — the Bible. Unhappily, in 21st century America we are far removed from the land of Israel and the ancient culture of Jesus and His Jewish ancestors.

Let me ask you a few questions. Were you born and raised in Israel? Did you study the Torah with the rabbis from an early age? Have you traversed the rocky hills and dusty paths to celebrate the mandatory feasts in Jerusalem? Do you speak Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic? I haven't found anyone in my Catholic parish who has these credentials.

Without this background, we are at a great disadvantage when studying the Bible and its central character.

When we open the pages of our English Bible, we find a Jewish book! The setting revolves around Israel and the worship of Yahweh. With one exception, the more than forty biblical writers were all Jews, and the exception was most likely a Jewish proselyte. (Do you know who the only non-Jewish author in the Bible is? I'll give you a few hints: he was a physician, one of St. Paul's co-workers, and he wrote the first history of the Church.)

The point is, how can we understand the Bible and the teaching surrounding our Lord Jesus and salvation without understanding His people, His culture, and His Jewish identity?

David H. Stern, a Messianic Jew writes, “The Messiah's vicarious atonement is rooted in the Jewish sacrificial system; the Lord's Supper is rooted in the Jewish Passover traditions; baptism is a Jewish practice; and indeed the entire New Testament is built on the Hebrew Bible, with its prophecies and its promise of a New Covenant, so that the New Testament without the Old is as impossible as the second floor of a house without the first. Moreover, much of what is written in the New Testament

is incomprehensible apart from Judaism.”¹ Even if a skeptic ignores the importance of the Jews in God's plan of salvation, which would be ridiculous, it would not change the fact that the Bible is Jewish and Christianity sprouts from thoroughly Jewish roots.

Studying the Bible comes alive when the fresh breeze of Jewish understanding wafts over the pages. When reading any good book, it is difficult to reap the benefits without immersing ourselves in the world and spirit of the “story.” When reading *Gone with the Wind*, the reader benefits from immersing themselves in the “feeling” of the story and soaking in the culture and surroundings of the characters.

One doesn't start the novel in the middle, for that would cut them off from the foundation and beginning of the story and make it impossible to gain a full appreciation of the setting, plot, mood, and characters. Too often the New Testament is read without a familiarity with the first “chapters” of God's Jewish story which begins several millennia earlier in the covenants and life of the Old Testament.

Let's take an example which is dear to the heart of any Catholic. St. Matthew records profound words between Jesus and Simon the fisherman. He actually changes the Apostle's name, from Simon to Rock, which in Jewish tradition signifies a

1 Stern David, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988), p 62.

change of status. Today, for us Westerners without understanding the Semitic importance of a name, this means very little.

But, to Jesus' disciples from the stock of Abraham, the name change was profound. Abraham himself had received a name change from God which corresponded to the ratification of the Old Covenant. Abram's name (meaning "father") was changed to Abraham (meaning "father of nations") which signified Abraham's new status or standing before God.

Simon's name change was significant. But what it was changed to was even more important. A Jew would instantly notice that the name Peter is an English rendering of the Greek word for "Rock." Jesus spoke Aramaic and the word He used to rename Simon was the Aramaic word for Rock: *Kepha*. This is why we find Simon referred to as Cephas throughout the New Testament (e.g., Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 15:5; Gal 1:18).

No one but God alone (and Abraham) had previously been referred to as Rock. Abraham was the rock from which the Jews had been hewn (Is 51:1). But, God was the only one with the name of Rock. Peter now shares that title. What would a Jew think about such a name for a mere man?

Another striking example of the necessity of understanding the Jewish ambience of the Bible comes from the same passage. This involves the phrase in Matthew 16:19 which mentions the "keys of the Kingdom." Due in part to an ignorance of Jewish culture, this passage is frequently truncated, reducing the "keys of the kingdom" merely to Peter's preaching on Pentecost (another word unknown outside the Jewish religion) "unlocking the doors of heaven."

Many Protestants make this mistake in trying to understand this passage without the benefit of a "Jewish background." What did "keys" represent to the Jews who actually heard Jesus? What would a Jew understand from the image of the keys given to Peter by King Jesus?

The Pharisees had large portions of the Old Testament memorized, if not the whole Tanakh. The average Jew was intimately

familiar with the Scriptures. When Jesus told Peter he would receive the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," the Jews would immediately be drawn back to Isaiah 22 and the monarchical office of the Royal Steward who ruled over the house of the King.

Read Isaiah 22 yourself and consider the royal office of Steward "over the house" in the Davidic kingdom. For those Jews who first believed in Yeshua the Messiah, who was soon to be seated on the Throne of his Father David and given an eternal kingdom (Dan 7:13-14; Lk 1:26-33) these were profound words. When the new king was enthroned, wouldn't the Jewish subjects expect the king to appoint his Royal Steward?

Alleluia! Simon is renamed Rock, the Israelite name for the strength of God and he is then delegated the keys of the Royal Steward to govern the domain of King Jesus.

Ah, the Jews understood! What about 21st century men and women? This should not discourage us from reading the Bible; rather, it should inspire us to excel in our knowledge of Scripture, its background, and the world of the Jewish people. The Church is growing from a Jewish root; the Church and the Scriptures are Jewish. May the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob enlighten us and give us a love for the Jewish People and for the word of God as contained in the Scriptures and the Sacred Tradition of the Church. ■

STEPHEN K. RAY was raised in a devout and loving Baptist family. After an in-depth study of the writings of the Church Fathers, both Steve and his wife, Janet, converted to the Catholic Church. Steve is the author of a number of bestselling books, including *Crossing the Tiber*, *Upon This Rock*, and *St. John's Gospel*. He is a pilgrimage leader and grandfather of 18. Steve has been a guest on *The Journey Home* program six times and will appear again on the program 1/25/20. His written conversion story is available at www.chnetwork.org. This article was first published on www.catholicconvert.com and is reprinted with the permission of the author.

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CHNetwork Attention: Ann Moore

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Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters. We do ask for a \$35 yearly donation to help cover the production costs of the newsletter.

SHARE THE NEWSLETTER!

The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends to encourage them to join our mailing list. They may also request to receive our mailings by using the response card included with this newsletter.

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ONLINE COMMUNITY



We have a great way for converts and journeyers to connect online! CHN's Online Community is the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.

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: Saturday 6 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 7

Deacon Joe Calvert*
(former atheist)

December 14

Dr. Brian McGee*
(former Wesleyan)

December 21

Dr. Kenneth Calvert*
(former Lutheran and
Congregationalist)

December 28

Sue Neugebauer*
(convert from Judaism)
(re-air from 3/5/18)

January 4

Oscar Herrera*
(former Jehovah's Witness)
(re-air from 4/9/18)

*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 Sam, a recent convert “I just had to write to you and tell you the great news. My wife and I were received into full communion with the Catholic Church last night! We had our sponsor, a couple of friends, and my son and grandkids present to watch us take our wedding vows as Catholics as well. We have been married 38 years but we just had to make it complete. That was our first Church wedding! There was a moment I just have to share with you. In prayer after I took Communion, I had the most peaceful yet energized visual. I entered through a door that opened up to a large room that had balconies on each side and full of the saints. They were welcoming me in, waving and cheering! I felt like I knew them. The night was rich in sacraments and a lot to absorb in one night. I just

had to share with you and let you know that though it's been a long journey, my wife and I have finally made it home to the Catholic Church. Thanks to EWTN, the Coming Home Network, you for keeping in touch with me, and all the others who had the light of Christ shining from them that made me want to follow.”

From Joseph, a convert “A quick word on my faith journey is this: it's been amazing and falling in love with every bit of it. I had my moments of trial, which I still do. But striving through the narrow road and thoroughly enjoying every aspect of faith journey as it unfolds — had persecutions of small scale but always ended discovering the supernatural grace, had moments where I thought I'm going to be lost as a prodigal

son, but our Heavenly Father proved prodigal in showing His mercy and grace. I always keep thanking God for all those hidden hands who raised their prayers.”

From Patricia, a convert “Thanks so much for reaching out. Things are going well as I've settled down in the Church and been growing wonderfully. I'm so thankful for CHN for helping me throughout this journey. I listen to the podcast often and still read the newsletters. The newsletters and stories of other people's journey help me to see that I'm not alone as I pass through all these transitions. It's encouraging to hear from others who can relate to what you're going through. With regard to my faith journey as a Catholic — I sort of feel like I've been seated at a huge banquet table.” ■

SHARE SHARE YOUR STORY!

The CHNetwork **always welcomes** those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their **written conversion stories** of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to chnetwork.org/converts to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

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Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Joshua, a pastor** who is facing very strong opposition to his interest in the Catholic Faith, that the Lord will give him grace and wisdom to deal with this while continuing to grow in his love for the Church.

■ **For Leslie, a non-denominational pastor** who has come to the Coming Home Network looking for assistance in finding the truth in the midst of so many Protestant denominations and sects.

■ **For Angel, a Pentecostal pastor** convinced that he must return to the Catholic Church where he was baptized as an infant, that the Lord will help him overcome his fear and lead him forward.

■ **For Derek, a Protestant pastor** who wants to become Catholic and is looking into the possibility of becoming a priest in the future, should he resign his ministry and enter the Church.

■ **For a Protestant pastor** who loves the ministry but knows now that the Lord is calling him into the Catholic Church, that the Lord would help him as he attempts to explain this to his wife and eventually his congregation, and think through how he will support his family once he leaves the ministry.

■ **For Jeff, a non-denominational pastor** who is convinced that Catholicism is true but is also convinced that the Lord called him to be a shepherd of God's people, that the Lord would show him the way forward.

■ **For Robert, a Baptist minister** who believes that the Lord called him to preach and is struggling with what becoming Catholic will mean for him in terms of the ministry he has loved.

■ **For Bill, a non-denominational pastor** who is struggling with how to become Catholic and support his wife and kids financially at the same time. At this point, it seems a miracle will be needed.

■ **For Ryan, a Protestant seminarian** who through his studies has come to believe that he

should become Catholic, that the Lord would soften his wife's heart to consider the Church.

■ **For a former Lutheran pastor** who entered the Catholic Church last year with great joy and works in a ministry position within the Church, but is struggling with the unorthodox environment she finds in the German Catholic Church.

■ **For a pastor and son of a Pentecostal televangelist** who is on the journey into the Church, that the Lord will continue to open the hearts of his parents and fiancée to understand the decision he has made.

■ **For Regin, a pastor** who wants to become Catholic but has a few remaining issues he needs to work through, that the Lord will help him to find the answers he needs.

■ **For Karen, a Methodist lay minister** in the south, that she may find the path that will bring her back home to the Holy Eucharist.

■ **For a United Pentecostal minister**, that he may be granted the grace to let go of his misunderstandings of the Catholic Church and accept the fullness of the truth.

■ **For Marc, an Anglican deacon**, that he may be able to experience the joys of entering into full communion with the successor of St. Peter.

Laitie

■ **For Sarah and her family** as they go through RCIA, that they will have a blessed and fruitful experience.

■ **For a Jehovah's Witness**, that as he learns the actual truth of the Catholic Church, he may have the courage to act on his newfound knowledge and enter the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

■ **For Sherry** to be able to move forward with her deep interest in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Stephanie** and her questions about Catholic practices and devotions, that she will be able to grow in her faith and love for Jesus.

■ **For Jonathan**, that his leadership will bring his family closer to the Catholic Church and conversion.

■ **For a Methodist in Kentucky**, that she will find good answers to her concerns about the Catholic understanding about suffering.

■ **For Linda** not to be discouraged in her journey and to find good, Catholic friends.

■ **For Margaret** who was received into the Catholic Church recently, that the Holy Spirit will give her joy and peace in her life as a Catholic.

■ **For Noah, a United Methodist**, that his RCIA experience may be a blessing so that he may soon be able to join his family in receiving the Holy Eucharist.

■ **For Kendra** as she goes through RCIA and is delighted to delve into learning more about the Catholic Church, that Jesus will guide her steps.

■ **For a Baptist in California** who is just beginning his journey, that his love for Jesus and the Holy Scriptures may direct his path to the altar of our Lord Jesus.

■ **For a convert** who is being drawn back to her Episcopal roots, that she will be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance in her faith journey.

■ **For a woman in Europe** who is wondering how to juggle her interest in the Catholic Church and the potential conflict it would bring to her employment.

■ **For Michael, a Presbyterian**, that he be given the grace to act on the pull he feels towards the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Alison** to be able to connect with a good and faithful priest to help guide her in her journey and for her to be able to move forward with her longtime interest in Catholicism.

■ **For a Baptist** who is unable to proceed with her interest in the Catholic Church due to her and her husband's need for multiple annulments, that she will not give up on her journey.

■ **For a member of the United Church of Canada**, that the peace that he has discovered in Catholic teachings may draw him home.

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 from page 2

Then we tried a “Reconstructionist” Temple, which is based on “Judaism of today.” It was very accepting of interfaith families, but we found it too haphazard, with no rules or doctrine to speak of.

So we looked into joining an established Reform Temple. Based on nothing but the blissful ignorance of two madly in love, young and optimistic souls, we thought that perhaps the honor system prevailed, where we gave what we could. Boy, were we in for a shock!

We had to complete a membership application to join, which included dues of \$1,500 per couple, without children, in the mid 1980s. We could not afford this and disagreed with the very principle that we were being told what fixed amount we needed to pay. We asked the office for leniency, and were told we had to complete a separate financial disclosure, revealing our tax and income information. It included questions such as:

- “Do you own a second home?”
- “Do you belong to a country club?”

I am not joking. We told the office we would not complete this disclosure, and they replied that there was nothing else they could do for us. We were so disgusted that we ended up walking away and not going anywhere for a while.

Based on a “whim” (another seed), I decided to read the New Testament to see what it was all about. I was completely spellbound, and I think that, at that time, I believed that Jesus was the Messiah. I got so freaked out thinking about my parents and the whole family and approval situation that I ran the other way and dove back into the familiarity of Judaism.

At that point, I was soaked in trying to get my parents’ approval and letting them control my life — our life. How I wish I knew then what I know now! Fortunately, God was far from through with us.

In 1991, God gave us our biggest blessing: our precious son. Through my two men, I learned the true meaning of love, and I really started seeking God. Looking into those big blue eyes of our son, I knew God was there, and I was determined to get to know Him better.

My father-in-law died in 1999. He was really my *true Dad* and I loved him dearly. I remember going to his funeral. Though it was sad, there was not the overwhelming panic and hopelessness I felt at a Jewish funeral. *Looking into his casket, for the first time I knew the true “he” was not there. I knew in my heart that there was truly a heaven and that my Dad was there.*

God never gave up on me! Fast forward to the year 2001 and another gentle hint. God led me to the Bible a second time, this time through our son’s karate teacher, a devout Christian. He pointed out the verse, “You keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isa 26:3) — now one of my favorite verses and part of my daily prayers. The Holy Spirit was knocking on the door. This time I opened it.

How I Committed My Life to Christ

I started my journey to Christ by again poring over the New Testament, this time in more deliberate study. I let God’s Spirit take me to places I never dreamed I’d visit. I remember reading so many passages in the New Testament and being utterly blown away by how they fulfilled the Old Testament. For me, much of this came from my favorite Jewish holiday — Passover. The roasted lamb and the matzah are the main ones. The *real* Lamb of God is the *only lamb* that can take away the sins of the world. Animals that were sacrificed could never be used to forgive sins. They are just symbols — precursors — on a beautiful Seder plate. At a previous church, I was in charge of a Passover Seder for the Sunday school. I will never forget their reaction when I held up a piece of matzah and broke it. A number of children called out, “Wow, that’s just like the priest does when he gives Communion!” The connection was made — thanks be to God. Through Jesus, the Old Testament matzah eaten at His last Passover Seder (the Last Supper) from the Seder plate was instituted that evening to become the Holy Eucharist. “This is my Body which will be given up for you.”

I remember holding the door open for the Prophet Elijah at the end of my grandparents’ Seder and saying “next year in Jerusalem!” This represented the Jewish view of the coming of their (first) Messiah to complete spiritual redemption, represented by Jerusalem. I remember feeling weird doing this — it almost seemed vague to me, even as a kid. Like there was something not quite right, something we were missing. Amazingly, God was preparing the groundwork, even then, for me to accept Christ as the true Messiah.

The Seder was always beautiful to me and at a young age the symbolism was already becoming a microcosm of Judaism for me. It was like Judaism led me to the edge of a cliff, and the emptiness I felt needed to be filled by what was on the other side of the cliff — an endless valley of love in Christ. I believe Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. I don’t see it as “abandoning” Judaism, and I don’t believe Jesus saw it that way either.

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matt 5:17).

Through studying God’s Word and prayer, for the second time I had come to accept Jesus (*Yeshuah*) as the Messiah. I cannot say the same for my family of origin — relatives included — who “disowned” me. I pray that maybe someday they will come to know Christ. When I read the New Testament that second time, it was like synapses started connecting which were previously apart. But they weren’t yet *permanently* connected. That required receiving the Eucharist ... God had that one down pat. God’s timing is always perfect.

Talk about blessings. First He enveloped me with His light and love one beautiful morning during breakfast in 2002. I felt

...Journeys Home Continued...

a light and warmth descend upon me, and I knew — without a doubt — with more certainty than anything I've ever known in my life — that I was to be baptized. That's when I first knew and experienced the meaning of faith. As I referred to above, when I mentioned my Christian friends from college, I had never heard the word "faith" in this context, as it is not used in Judaism. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1).

As soon as I met my husband, Rich, his strong and focused belief in God was evident to me and I began to see how they shaped so much of what I loved about him. Being brought up as an Episcopal Christian, he had what seemed to me this intimate relationship with God, in the Person of Jesus. It was based on his "faith." I explained to my husband, who had many Jewish friends growing up, that faith is not a word used by Jewish folks. In Judaism, God just IS — "I AM THAT I AM." You would never write "God" — you'd write "G-d." Since there is no New Testament, there is no Jesus. So there is no Resurrection! So there is no specific hope of eternal life when you die by believing in Christ — i.e., *no such thing as faith*.

Blessed Assurance

I shared everything I could remember with my husband about the warm and loving relationship I had with my maternal grandparents. As Orthodox Jews, they worshipped at "Shul" (vs. Temple in Reform, Synagogue in Conservative). Men and women sat separately and still do today. Just like with different denominations in Christianity, the different "movements" within Judaism (Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Hasidic) all have their different feelings and opinions on this separation of the sexes within worship. When my grandparents died in 1974, my parents went into panic and depression. Everything was traumatic and catastrophic. Because my grandparents *were gone*, all was lost! Perhaps my grandparents believed differently in the afterlife as Orthodox Jews (I don't know). Often, Orthodox Jews believe that the soul lives on — in some unknown form. However, for my parents, there was *nothing*. You turned to "worm chow," as a Reform rabbi once stated to us. The funeral was just awful — as generally Jewish funerals are — *without hope*. How blessed we are as Christians! We have hope! We have faith in Jesus Christ!

Oy vey — Sue, nice Jewish girl, you want to be baptized?

After I received this most blessed divine intervention, I told Rich about what I had experienced and that I wanted to be baptized. And he did everything he could to change my mind! Really, he wanted to make sure that what I shared with him came from God. After all, Satan is still creeping around the world, and my loving spouse — even with how excited he was with the possibility — wanted to make sure all was *kosher*.

Our next step was to tell our son. At that point, he was 11 years old, and we had started looking for a possible Bar Mitz-

vah venue. Nothing in this world is perfect, and we could never have seen what God had planned for us. *But God is perfect, and we trust Him*. Would it have been better if our son had been Christian from day one? Perhaps. But then he wouldn't have been exposed to the richness and beauty of Judaism.

Our son and I were baptized in 2003 during the Easter Vigil service in the Episcopal Church. It was a beautiful, joyful, and holy night. And I know it was not a coincidence that this all happened when I turned 40 years old. I know God planned it that way. After all, 40 is a *huge* number in the Bible. At that point in time, we were members of the Episcopal Church, which is the American counterpart of the Church of England.

The Difference Being Baptized Has Made in My Life

I have never had a single regret about my "conversion." In many ways, I feel like I have been Christian all my life, because, "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

But seriously, there I was, a Christian. Okay God, now what? *I didn't feel any different right away, but I knew I was different.*

Like with St. Matthew's conversion, when he went from spiritual death to spiritual life — that's what I felt like. It has been a true blessing, miracle, and testimony to the power of grace. Before my "conversion," there was this other part of me that I know was "there," that I so wanted to reach, but was unable to access. It was a stronger and brighter me. It frustrated me that no matter how hard I tried, I could not "reach" that part of me. I now know that through God's unfathomable grace, He is allowing me, by prayer, and trusting Him one day at a time, to become that person, because — and only because — my will is becoming aligned with His perfect will. The person God wants me to be. It is called *transformation*, and it is only possible through trusting Christ and His unfathomable love.

My life is far from perfect, but thank goodness my husband and I have each other and our son. It sometimes seems the closer we get to God, the darker this fallen world seems. But it's the job of each one of us to be the temple of the Holy Spirit and reflect Christ's light to this dark world as long as we are on this earth. Now I go through my days with a sense of purpose, and that past feeling of constant emptiness, that no one and nothing could fill, is gone. I try my hardest to follow Him and live my life in and through Christ.

Growing in Christ

From 2003 to 2015, my husband and I were generally theologically happy in the Episcopal Church. God allowed us to experience some challenging parish years to mature us in our faith. We encountered some difficult priests along the way. The church in which we were baptized was my husband's church from birth. We had built a Welcoming Ministry and God was sending many families to the parish. The priest decided he

...Journeys Home Continued...

wanted to change the parish from Episcopal to non-denominational. The only problem was that nobody else agreed with him, including the bishop. After losing 90 percent of the parish, the priest was defrocked. We left that parish and jumped straight into the fire. The next parish was Anglo-Catholic, and headed by a priest who should have never been ordained and somehow sneaked through the process — he was a great actor. It was a hurtful experience; however, we did learn something about the Catholic aspects of the Anglican Church, which sowed seeds for the future. In 2014, we went to a transition parish close to home. It was during these two years that the Episcopal Church began implementing new policies that we questioned. Our prayer and discernment process started by asking one simple question: “Where do we find the truth?”

2016 to Present — Journeying Home

I had heard the term “Two Stepper,” referring to my first conversion from Judaism, then my second conversion from the Episcopal Church. My second “step” to coming home to Catholicism began by reading a book written by a son of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Anglican Church) who converted to Catholicism while his father was still alive. It is called *Confessions of a Convert*, by Robert Hugh Benson. I read it and couldn’t put it down. Then I read it again. Other than the great classic, *Rome Sweet Home* by Scott Hahn, this was one of the only books I had to read, though I did keep reading. I read about many different people who found the truth in the Catholic Church who came from a Jewish background, including Edith Stein (my favorite, now known as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), and Rosalind Moss (now Mother Miriam of the Lamb of God). I also watched many episodes of *The Journey Home* on EWTN and listened to a wonderful CD, “Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist,” by Dr. Brant Pitre.

The Eucharist: I used to struggle with how the Catholic Church could literally “eat the flesh and drink the blood” of Jesus. It was a stumbling block for me. Now I look at it and think — how could I ever have thought of it as *just* a symbol? Why would Jesus have died for *that*? Jesus is actually present under the elements of bread and wine. It makes perfect sense.

The Episcopal Church generally painted a negative picture of the Pope, and the history of papal authority wasn’t celebrated or studied — it just wasn’t discussed. Mary was given a very secondary role in the church, and was generally only brought up at Christmas time. When I attended a Catholic based Bible study, I started realizing how much we were missing.

We stopped attending the Episcopal Church. I spent a lot of time in prayer and began speaking to the priest who would end up confirming us in the Catholic Church. I looked around me at how much the world was changing in not so good ways. At how none of our son’s friends have faith and don’t want to hear anything about it. At how Episcopal churches are virtually

empty. At the opioid epidemic. At kids brought up unable to interact in person with others. And I couldn’t help but think — why would a church (like the one we were leaving) want to change their doctrine to keep up with a culture like this? At what point does it stop? Where do you draw the line? What’s next to change? And by whose authority are these things being changed? There’s no central authority. I couldn’t help but wonder if soon the Episcopal church would be unrecognizable.

I asked clergy if the Episcopal church believes that we receive the true Body and Blood of Christ. I was told that “we don’t really know. It’s what you make of it.” The rules were often bent, as it was more or less comfortable — “Fast as you can. We did away with this or that.” By whose authority?

We knew we no longer believed much of what the Episcopal Church espoused, but most importantly, *we did believe that the Catholic Church is the one true Church that Jesus Christ started and does not change with secular society.*

On March 1, 2018, my husband and I had our First Reconciliation and were confirmed in the Catholic Church. I am now volunteering in the office of a wonderful local Catholic parish. I committed to a weekly Adoration slot and look forward to this time with the Lord. This is something completely new to me. How *extraordinary* it is that we are afforded the honor of spending time with Our Lord in person. When I am there, the calm and peace I feel is certainly not of this world.

We are *home*, and we are eternally grateful. It feels so right! As we sit in Mass, the pieces of the puzzle that form the journey we have taken over the past 30 years come together perfectly. We are utterly amazed at how God has taken us from Reconstructionist Judaism to the Catholic Church.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst’” (Jn 6:35). Every time I receive the true Body and Blood of Christ at Mass, I feel my Jewish roots being fulfilled in Christ, the true Lamb of God. I can’t wait to see the rest of the journey. Whatever God has in store, one thing’s for sure — I will never go back. From darkness to the utterly brilliant, life-giving love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God!■



SUE and her husband, Rich, have been married for 30 years. They reside in the South Jersey/Philadelphia area and have an adult son. They came home to the Catholic Church in March, 2018. They love both matzo ball soup and gelato. They are thankful for the solemnity, peace, and heavenly joy of every Mass.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

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

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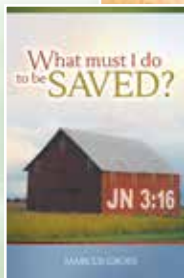
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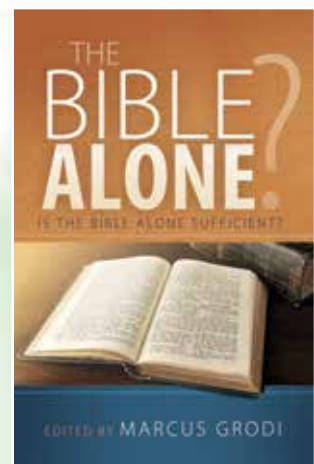
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