



July 2021 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Traveling Mercies

By Janice Burns-Watson

Three generations of my family were deacons in the Reformed church back in the 1500's, at the time of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. And my granddad had a hymn book that had been passed through the generations, actually signed by Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of my former denomination.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the oldest continuous denomination that has its origin in the United States. This church broke off from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the early 1800s, with the hope of unifying the Protestant churches by going back to the perceived practices of the New Testament: believer's baptism by immersion, taking communion every time a group gathered, and autonomous church government. This denomination grew out of the Enlightenment, so there was also a strong emphasis on practical thinking and reasoning. It also followed the westward movement of the pioneers, with their sense of independence, self-reliance, and simplicity. Sadly, the goals of the early founders were never lived out. To this day no denominations have completely merged due to the existence of the Christian Church (DOC). Instead, that denomination itself has split twice.

I had the ideal Disciples of Christ education, attending Bethany College in West Virginia, which was also founded by Alexander Campbell. I then attending Lexington Theological Seminary, which is only a few miles from Cane Ridge, KY, where Barton Stone, the other founder of the Christian Church (DOC), had his ministry. Part way through my RCIA process, I was still a member of the Christian

Church (DOC) in Ohio's Regional Board and other committees, and I harbor no ill feelings against my roots.

In spite of this background, my family was not really very religious. My mom took us to worship most Sundays, but that was about it. My dad seldom attended church. I credit my maternal grandparents for much of my early faith development.

As a child I had a pretty typical faith understanding. A favorite book was a very old one that was full of Bible stories. The only story I remember is the calling of the boy Samuel. Samuel is illustrated wearing a white gown, kneeling in prayer. I thought he looked remarkably like me! In a sense I adopted his story as my own: three times God called the boy, and finally Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening." I, too, was eager to listen to God from a very early age.

As a child, I attended the Independent Christian Church, one of the breakaway groups from the Disciples of Christ. There was no formal structure for educating its younger members. They practiced believer's baptism by immersion. When I was 12 years old, my siblings and I all decided one Sunday to come forward and ask to be baptized. There had been several other baptisms in the weeks leading up

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

to our decision, so it just seemed like the thing to do. That Sunday, during the altar call at the end of the worship service, we all came forward and repeated after the pastor: "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and I profess Him as my Lord and Savior." The pastor came by our house later in the week with a list of Scripture passages to look up. I was the only one of the four of us who actually did that. The next Sunday, we were all baptized in the church's baptistry. No fanfare and no classes afterward. We were given Bibles, though, and I still have mine.

After my baptism, I took my faith very seriously. I continued to pray every night, and I started reading through the Bible each year. By the time I was in high school, I was deeply involved in my church. I practically lived at the church. It got me out of my house and away from the dysfunction of my family, which was present, but I will not speak of that here. The high school youth group had become so large (over 100) that it would not fit inside the church, so every Sunday the church rented out a building at the local fair-ground. On Wednesday nights, there was also a large group Bible study. In addition, I attended the weekly prayer breakfast, was part of the youth choir and the puppet team. My best friend and I had a secret ministry, where every week we would pick someone to whom we would sneak a note. We signed the notes: "Your Koinonia Kristian Friends." We always picked a person who needed uplifting or who had something to celebrate. My faith meant everything to me even then, and I felt a deep desire to share it.

Within the Independent Christian Church, there were few career options open to me as a female. But my plan upon graduation

from high school was to go to Bible college and to become a Christian school teacher. My uncle, however, pushed me to attend Bethany College in West Virginia. I thrived at this small liberal arts college. I joined a sorority, was part of the student government, helped found a student mentoring group and a psychology honors society, etc. It was here that I became a member of the DOC.

While in college, I was exposed to the Catholic Church for the first time. There were only two congregations in town: the Christian Church (DOC) and the Catholic parish. Bethany was a Christian Church (DOC)-related college, but there were twice as many Catholic students, so many of my friends were Catholic, and I attended Mass with them at times. Father Pat, the priest, was a delightful man who frequently interacted with the students.

I treasure the memories of the two congregations doing several joint services together. They helped me realize that the Catholic Church was not nearly as scary as I had been led to believe from my Evangelical upbringing.

After college, discerning to start seminary was not an easy process for me. I spent a lot of time in prayer, arguing with God much like Moses that I wasn't a speaker. But at the same time I felt called to serve the church in some way.

As it turned out, I truly was in my own environment in seminary. I loved the deep theological conversations and being around those who loved to pray. My two best friends and I quickly started a morning prayer group that grew into morning worship services. My friends and I made retreats at the Catholic Sisters of Loretto Convent in Nerinx, KY and visited the Trappist monks' Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani monastery, near Bardstown, KY.

My seminary had a special program for Catholic students at the time. My best friend, who was bridesmaid at my wedding, was considering becoming a nun. She is now indeed a nun with the Sisters of Charity in Nazareth, KY. The class I took on the Gospel of John was taught by a professor from St. Meinrad Benedictine Abbey in Indiana. I received my first spiritual direction from the Catholic theologian Michael Downey, who was a visiting professor. I wrote papers comparing the writings of Thomas Merton, a well-known Trappist monk, with those of the Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, and about St. Francis and Ecology and the Small Group movement that was transforming the Catholic Church in Latin America. In hindsight, these areas of contact were nudging me towards the Catholic Faith.

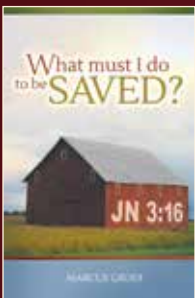
In 1993, while I was in seminary, I met and married my husband, Roger. In 1994, we left the United States on a short-term mission trip, spending two weeks in Honduras. I wrote this about a profound experience I had while there:

Bare, gnarled feet came into view: Filthy and deformed in a manner that told me the owner must have spent most of her long life without shoes. However, I barely noticed this woman in my rush to enter the building. I had never had the opportunity to visit a cathedral before and was eager to go inside. I was not disappointed; the gilt and gold literally made the church glow. My eyes

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WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

BY MARCUS GRODI



This month, the CHNetwork staff would like to recommend *What Must I Do to Be Saved?* by Marcus Grodi. A growing majority of Christians today believe that all that is necessary for salvation is an individual's faith in Jesus. Megachurches everywhere proclaim this "Jesus and Me" theology, built around a simple application of John 3:16, negating the need for membership in any

religious community, the practice of any rituals, the reception of any sacraments, the submission to any leaders, or the adherence to any set of doctrines. But is this biblically, theologically, and historically sound? This book argues, from the perspective of a biblical hermeneutic of continuity, that salvation has always involved more than this simplistic expression of modern individualism.

Go to www.chresources.com to purchase this book and other resources about the Catholic Church.



ON THE JOURNEY

Is *Sola Scriptura* Historical? Part I: How Old is *Sola Scriptura*?*

By Ken Hensley

Our aim in this series is to help our non-Catholic Christian friends understand the reasons a Protestant might have for becoming Catholic. I was an evangelical Baptist pastor in the Calvinist tradition. I became Catholic. Why?

We've been talking about the "foundation" upon which Protestantism *as a worldview* is built: *sola Scriptura*. What is *involved* in a commitment to *sola Scriptura*? It's often summarized simply as the belief that the inspired Scriptures are to function as the "sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the individual Christian and for the Christian Church." But actually, *sola Scriptura* includes within it another key commitment: the right of each Christian to study the Bible and *decide for himself* what it is teaching. Protestants commonly refer to this as the "right of private judgment," and it's understood as following inescapably from a belief in *sola Scriptura*. "In these matters of faith," Luther wrote, "to be sure, each Christian is for himself pope and church" (*Werke*, Weimar: 1898, 5:407, p. 35).

John Calvin expressed the same commitment when he wrote, "We hold that the Word of God alone lies beyond the sphere of our judgment. Fathers and Councils are of authority only insofar as they are in accord with the rule of the Word" (*Reply to Sadoletto*). But who will decide whether what the Fathers and Councils have taught is "in accord with the rule of the Word"? Well, Calvin will!

Bringing all of these aspects of *sola Scriptura* together, Protestant scholars Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie are happy to summarize it as the belief that "the Bible, nothing more, nothing less — and nothing else — is all that is necessary for faith and practice" (*Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, p. 184).

Now, in terms of my own conversion to the Catholic Faith, there's no doubt but that one of the *key issues* was coming to believe that the foundation upon which I stood as a Protestant — *sola Scrip-*

tura — was a cracked foundation: that it wasn't scriptural; that it wasn't historical; that it wasn't workable; that it wasn't even logical.

But one step at a time. Over the past months we've been looking at the question of whether *sola Scriptura* is scriptural. Today we're going to begin looking at the question: is *sola Scriptura* historical? Was *sola Scriptura* the faith of the Church in the early centuries of its existence?

As I began to think about this question, before I had even begun reading what the early Church Fathers had to say about all this, I had made *three observations* that bent me in the direction of doubting that *sola Scriptura* could have been the mindset of the early Christians.

1 The first ties this question of early Church history back into what I had found in my examination of the New Testament.

I've already noted that while the Apostles were alive, authority within the Church — and by that I mean infallible authority, binding authority, not the sort of authority pastors and denominational statements of faith possess within the Protestant world — was found in (a) Scripture (the inspired writings), (b) Tradition (the oral teaching of the Apostles) and (c) the Magisterium (the decisions made when the leadership of the Church met in council to settle disputes and define Christian teaching). Remember Acts 15, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"?

Given this, it seemed *reasonable* to me that if the Apostles had it in their minds that once they had passed from the scene, this entire pattern of authority was going to *change* and that *sola Scriptura*

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would become the rule for individual Christians as well as churches — surely they would have *prepared* their disciples for such a fundamental change. Surely they would have said *something*!

And yet, they don't. As we've seen, the Apostles appear to have believed that the substance of their teaching would be preserved by the Holy Spirit, in the Church, through their successors.

I think again of the Apostle Paul preparing to leave this world and wanting to ensure that his teaching would continue after him. He writes to Timothy his successor in the ministry and rather than even mentioning his writings he says to Timothy (my paraphrase), "Timothy, that body of doctrine you've received from me, everything you've *heard* me teach in the presence of many witnesses, I want you to guard this deposit by the Holy Spirit that is within you and pass it on to faithful men who will be able to teach others" (see 2 Tim 2:2).

I could see that *this was the mindset of the Apostles*.

And so the first reason I had for thinking that *sola Scriptura* would not have been the mindset of Christians living in the decades after the Apostles was simply that there isn't a hint in the writings of the Apostles that it should be.

2 But here's something else that bothered me, something else that didn't fit. If the early Church was committed to *sola Scriptura*, why did it take so long to formally define the canon of Scripture?

I tried to put myself in the shoes of the earliest disciples and successors to the Apostles. If I had been a bishop when the Apostles were beginning to pass away, and if I believed in *sola Scriptura*, the number one priority of my life would have been to gather the writings of the Apostles and make sure every individual church had copies. And yet, this is not what the bishops did. Why? I wondered.

At the time I was reading a number of books on the formation of the Old and New Testaments. I remember reading Protestant scholar Bruce Metzger's book on the New Testament canon, in which he pointed out that in the early centuries approximately twenty-five percent of our present New Testament was to one degree or another in dispute. We're talking about the book of Revelation, the Epistle to the Hebrews, Second Peter, Jude, and a couple more.

This is something most Christians don't know. Another thing most don't know is that the canon of the New Testament was not "formally defined" until a series of synods that took place in the late fourth century, including Rome in AD 382, Hippo in 393, and Carthage in 397 and 419. Before that, while there were lists that had been drawn up by Athanasius, Jerome, and others, there was no formal list that was used in all the churches. This wasn't determined until the late fourth century.

And even then it was, to a significant degree, in response to heresies that had arisen in the Church that *required* a formal definition of inspired Scripture be made! There were the Marcionites, who attacked the *integrity* of Scripture, trimming away books and sections of books considered to be "too Jewish." There were the Gnostics, who attacked the *meaning* of the New Testament with their New Age interpretations. There were the Montanists, who attacked the *extent* of the New Testament, claiming to receive new revelation from God, revelation that in theory could be added

to the New Testament. The issue of the canon simply *had* to be settled.

Now, taking this long to formally define the contents of the canon of inspired Scripture, this was at least *understandable* on the Catholic premise that the Church wasn't thinking of Scripture as the "end-all and be-all" of its ability to know and preserve the apostolic teaching. But it made no sense to me *whatsoever* on the Protestant premise that the early Church was a church committed to *sola Scriptura*!

For a Church committed to *sola Scriptura* to wait centuries to define its canon of Scripture ... well, it would be like someone building a skyscraper and then a hundred or two hundred years later saying, "You know, I wonder if we shouldn't give serious consideration to putting a foundation under this thing!"

3 The third observation I made, and that led me to think *sola Scriptura* was not the faith of the early Church, was the observation that the earliest Christian creeds say nothing at all about Scripture.

Now, this isn't a proof of anything. But I viewed it as evidence of a mindset that seemed to me more Catholic than Protestant.

After all, I was familiar with the various creeds and confessions that came out of the Reformation and I *knew* that most of them either *began* with a strong statement of commitment to *sola Scriptura* or got to it in fairly short order. For instance, the 1576 *Formula of Concord* for the Lutheran churches in Germany begins with this:

We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and the New Testament.

The same is essentially true of the 1561 *Belgic Confession*, the 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the 1689 *Baptist Confession*. And, of course, this makes perfect sense. After all, the Reformation was all about rejecting the authority of the Catholic Church to stand (at least ostensibly) on the principle of *sola Scriptura*.

But when I looked at the earliest creeds of the Church, I found it *curious* that nothing is said about Scripture. And it wasn't merely what these early creeds *didn't* say that struck me. It was what they *did* say! For instance, the Apostles Creed, while it contains no article on Scripture, does contain an article on the Church: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints ..." Here belief in the holy Catholic Church is listed as an article of faith.

Same with the Nicene Creed. This is the creed we Catholics recite at Mass every Sunday. It came out of the ecumenical councils of Nicaea in AD 325 and Constantinople in AD 381. And again, while this creed contains not a single word about Scripture, it contains an even more expanded article on the Church: "I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church."

Now, given my worldview as a Protestant, it would have been hard for me to even *imagine* authoring a confession of faith that would not begin with *some statement* about the inspiration and authority of Scripture. After all, was this not the foundation of everything? But here I am reading these ancient creeds and finding Christians described not as those who "believe in the Bible" but as

those who believe in “the Church.” It was hard to believe that the Church that composed those creeds was a Church committed to *sola Scriptura*.

On the other hand, it was easy to see how consistent this was with the Catholic conception of authority, where the emphasis is not on the Bible alone but on the teaching of the Apostles, the “deposit of faith,” being preserved by the Holy Spirit within the Church and passed down within that same Church.

The mindset evidenced in those early Creeds; the mindset evidenced by the Church’s willingness to wait as long as it did to provide a formal authoritative list of the apostolic writings — this did not seem to be a Protestant mindset. It was much more Catholic.

But the strongest evidence of all that *sola Scriptura* was not the faith and practice of the early Church came from reading the early Church Fathers themselves and listening to what they had to say.

And this is where we need to pick up next month. ■

*See the January-June 2021 issues for previous installments in this series, online at chnetwork.org.

SOLA SCRIPTURA



To read more about the topic of *sola Scriptura*, our exclusive CHResource *The Bible Alone?* presents a compelling look at the biblical roots, historical precedent, and logic behind using only the Bible as an infallible source of truth. This short book affirms the importance of Scripture as a divinely given foundation for our faith and also encourages the reader to consider the need for an authority established by Christ for its trustworthy interpretation. To obtain a copy of this book, please visit chresources.com or call 740-450-1175.

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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. We do ask for a \$35 yearly donation to help cover the production costs of the newsletter.

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.

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SAVE THE DATE!

Please consider joining us for our upcoming CHNetwork retreat. For converts and those on the journey, this retreat will be a wonderful opportunity to go deeper in your faith.

Oct 11-14, 2021 Holy Name Retreat Center, Houston, TX
To learn more or to register, please go to chnetwork.org/retreats/ or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org or 740-450-1175.

CONTACT THE CHNETWORK



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



740-450-1175



info@chnetwork.org



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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

July 5

Charles Hoffman*
(convert from Judaism)
(re-air from 10/29/18)

July 12

Kenny Burchard*
(former non-denominational
pastor)

July 19

Dr. Joshua Hochschild*
(former Episcopalian)
(re-air from 11/12/18)

July 26

Dr. MaryJo Burchard*
(former non-denominational
missionary)

August 2

Fr. Joshua Whitfield*
(former Episcopal priest)
(re-air from 11/19/18)

*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 Marina, on the journey "I received your book and rosary beads. Thank you so very, very much! They arrived at a moment I was very scared. I opened your mail and smiled at the book. I am still reading it and it is a wonderful book. I grabbed the beads and held onto them for hours until my son came home. They, along with prayers gave me so much calm and then I was told all my fears were nothing, that everything on that day was fine. I will be learning how to properly pray the Rosary. I am still watching *The Journey Home*. I listen to Relevant Radio on my PC now, I listen to Called to Communion almost every day. I do not know how to do RCIA with COVID restrictions, but in the coming months, I am hoping those restrictions ease so I can attend RCIA at my local parish. Thank you very much

for listening to me and your kind gifts. I very much appreciate and will always remember all you have done for me."

From Bobby, a former Baptist pastor "My first confession took an hour because I couldn't stop weeping through the entire time. I just wanted to say thank you again . . . I'm so very grateful to Our Lord for you all. I just wanted to say thank you . . . you've been such a wonderful friend and now my family. I have a family, and I'm so very grateful to the Coming Home Network. It's just beginning. Thank you brother, praise God!"

From Sally, on the journey "Thank you for reaching out to me. I continue on my faith journey trying to balance between being a Catholic and making my husband happy attending his Nazarene church. It is not easy but with

God's help I know I can continue. A prime example is receiving your e-mail. I was at a frustrating place where I had made up my mind that trying to do both was too hard and I was going to give up on my need for wanting to continue on my journey back to the Catholic church. I had put my Catholic study books away and my mind was made up. A few hours later, I opened my email and saw this email from you. I just sat there and smiled knowing that it was God's way of letting me know it was okay to continue to press on with what my heart desires and He will give me the strength to continue. I would like to ask you to add me to your prayer list for strength and discernment in my journey. And thank you again for following up with me. It is greatly appreciated more than you know." ■

Prayer List

Clergy

■ **For a Baptist pastor** firmly on the road toward the Church and wrestling with how to share with his wife all that he has learned.

■ **For Bryan, a pastor** looking to come back to the Church, that the Lord would show him the way.

■ **For Will, a Lutheran pastor** who has made the decision to resign his ministry later this year and enter the Church and is actively looking for some way to earn a living once he does this.

■ **For Eduardo, a former Presbyterian minister** who entered the Church last year and who has been asked to launch a Catholic TV show in his country, that the Lord will bless this work to reach many fallen-away Catholics.

■ **For James, a Lutheran pastor** who wants to convert but has serious obstacles including the need for an annulment from a previous marriage.

■ **For Jeff, a Presbyterian pastor** who is only beginning to work through what it would mean for him and his family to convert to the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide his steps.

■ **For Donald, a former Protestant pastor** who wants to return to the Church but has remaining questions and concerns about purgatory and Mary, that he will find the answers he seeks.

■ **For Mark, an Anglican priest** who is drawn to the Church but has some theological issues that need to be ironed out.

■ **For Gary, a Baptist pastor** who is intellectually convinced of the truth of Catholicism but who has developed an extensive ministry and has a lot to take care of before he can resign to enter the Church.

■ **For a Lutheran pastor** who is attracted to the Church but has not come to believe that he will need to actually become Catholic.

■ **For a pastor** who wants to become Catholic but whose wife at this point is strongly opposed, for wisdom as he attempts to reach her.

■ **For Stephen, a Mennonite pastor** who is firmly on the journey toward the Catholic Church and meeting with a spiritual director, that the Holy Spirit will continue to move him in the direction of home.

Laity

■ **For an Anglican** who is in the process of conversion but her parents are not supportive of her journey.

■ **For Jeremy, a Pentecostal**, that he may find a welcoming home in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Roger**, that he will come to have clarity and certainty about the teachings of the Catholic Church as he discerns the path forward with his faith journey.

■ **For Fredrik, a Scandinavian**, that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide his journey to the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Amelia** who is reading and studying and sharing bits of her journey with her loved ones, that they will be receptive to what she is learning.

■ **For Joshua, a Reformed Baptist in the south**, that his longing to go deeper with God would bring him to the Holy Eucharist of our Lord Jesus Christ.

■ **For a Baptist in Texas**, that her loved ones will be open to learning about her deep interest in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Noah, an Evangelical in Illinois**, that the love and grace of Jesus would aid him to overcome his emotional hesitancy and enable him to embrace the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Olivia**, who has connected with a local parish, that she will continue to follow God's call in her life.



■ **For Justin in British Columbia**, that God would fill him powerfully with the Holy Spirit when he receives the Sacrament of Confirmation.

■ **For Jim, an Eastern Orthodox Christian**, that the Spirit of God would guide him back to full communion with the Successor of St. Peter.

■ **For a Conservative Baptist in Pennsylvania**, that he would find good counsel to guide him through the annulment process.

■ **For a Southern Baptist in Illinois**, that, as he and his wife investigate the truths of the Catholic Church, they would remain of one mind in the unity of marriage.

■ **For Joshua, an agnostic**, that God would reveal Himself to him in the fullness of His love and many graces.

■ **For Derek, a Lutheran**, that the Lord Jesus would enable him to find his true home in the Catholic Church.

■ **For a Baptist in Georgia** who is second guessing her journey and call to become Catholic, that Jesus will give her certainty and peace.

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

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

could not help but be drawn to the magnificent crucifix of Jesus above the altar. I paused at the back, full of awe and reverence. Sitting in a pew, I bowed my head in prayer, a natural response to what was before me.

After a brief period of meditation, I stood up and walked out of the cathedral. There were those feet again. Only this time, I noticed the whole woman. She was nearly doubled over in agony and could not stand up straight. Her hands were cupped together, asking for alms. Many others were begging, as well, but none touched me as did this woman. She was the epitome of being weighed down by the struggles of life. She was unable to look up at the sky or even to look others in the eye to plead with them for a few coins. Christ had pity on such a woman in the Gospel, healing her with the words: “Woman you are set free” (Luke 13:11-12). Today, how are we called to minister to those bent over and weighed down by life? How can we offer hope that enables them to stand up straight and praise the Lord? (*Gifts in Open Hands: More Worship Resources for the Global Community*. Editors Maren Tribassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2011, pp. 229-230, adapted.)

In part because of this experience, I chose Luke 13 to be the Scripture for my ordination on February 26, 1995. The phrases, “woman you are set free” and “she stood up straight and began praising God,” spoke to me personally. At the same time, this powerful experience certainly was a start for me recognizing the deep reverence for Christ within the Catholic Church.

During our trip to Honduras, my husband and I discerned a call to become long-term missionaries. We were in the first group of missionaries to go out under the joint umbrella of both the Christian Church (DOC) and the United Church of Christ in the summer of 1995. A month of our training was at Notre Dame University.

The three years spent living in Kenya, from 1995 to 1998, continues to have a profound impact on my life. Opening my heart to those who live in the Third World, deepening my understanding of Scripture and making me more open-minded to those different from myself.

The birth of my oldest daughter, Rachel Naima, brought me a significant insight. From the moment I knew she was coming, I was full of awe, wonder, and excitement. There was not the slight-

est doubt in my mind that she was a baby, not “mere tissue.” I was devastated when I almost lost her twice during the pregnancy, due to malaria and placenta previa. Prior to my pregnancy with her, I had been decidedly in favor of “the right to choose” to terminate a pregnancy. The Christian Church (DOC) and UCC churches are both liberal denominations, and it was simply accepted that I would follow such an attitude. It took me a number of years to admit, even to myself, that I was no longer comfortable with the idea that my pregnancy was merely a blob of cells there instead of a baby.

The next several years of my life quietly focused on balancing my calling as a minister with the needs of my expanding family. I had two more children, Nathanael and Abigail, all while serving in a variety of different ministries. I even served as a missionary again, only this time as a pastor in Appalachia. I loved what I was doing and treasure the fact that I have been blessed to be able to focus my whole life around my faith in a manner that few have the opportunity to do. Sadly, my husband and I separated in 2011 and eventually divorced.

It is a long-held belief of mine that if I quit learning and trying to grow in my faith, then I will be dead, at least spiritually. So, I have constantly sought out ways to deepen my faith. I have continued reading the Bible, devotional books, theologians, and other writings on faith matters. Over the years, I discovered that much of the training I was receiving was an adaptation of Catholic programs.

For example, I am trained as a Worship and Wonder Storyteller trainer, which is pretty much the same as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. I also have been a pilgrim and an assistant spiritual director for the Walk to Emmaus, which is the Protestant version of Cursillo. Most of the spiritual direction that I have received has been under the guidance of various Catholic religious sisters. Slowly I became disquieted by the fact that I was always borrowing from the Catholic Faith and drawn towards the original source of what I was reading, teaching, and preaching.

The Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph in Wheeling, WV and Tipton, IN, with whom I practiced spiritual direction, considered me as one of their associates. In 2005, I was invited to join the Sisters in Wheeling on their retreat to discern whether they should join with other communities to become the Congregation of St. Joseph.

One of the coincidences in my life has been the repeated intersections with another Christian Church (DOC) clergywoman. Bonnie. When I was a college student she lived at Bethany. She was



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...Journeys Home Continued...

a professor at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. She taught a summer class on the Captivity Epistles of Paul that I took in seminary. When I returned to make a retreat in Wheeling, WV with the Congregation of St. Joseph in 2013, Bonnie was living on their grounds as a hermit. This was my first encounter of a person converting, and it was someone I viewed as a mentor.

The first two years after I moved to northwest Ohio in 2015, I started making annual retreats the Maria Stein Shrine and Retreat Center. I still go out there at times, when I feel I need an extra dose of prayer. While looking for a St. Andrew prayer card in their gift shop, I ran across a card for Mary, Untier of Knots. That image and its prayer resonated with me. After I arrived home, I ordered her statue. It sat on my prayer altar for two years before I considered becoming Catholic, but this concept of Mary started playing a significant role in my prayers and faith.

The next year, I returned to Maria Stein for another retreat. I ended up being there for the 100th anniversary Mass for Our Lady of Fatima. It was a Solemn Mass celebrated by the Archbishop of Cincinnati, with the Knights of Columbus, and a statue that came from the Vatican accompanied by three nuns who kept vigil, praying with her for a whole week before the Mass. The reverence and awe shown before and during this service left a very deep impression on me. During the service, I was told by two different people I did not know that I was going to become Catholic. Prophetic words!

Due to my interest in spiritual direction, I have read *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross, *Interior Castle* by St. Teresa of Avila, the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, etc. I also have read Thomas Merton, St. Teresa of Lisieux, Mother Teresa, etc. Gradually, I came to realize that I was reading more Catholic authors than Protestant ones, and the Catholic authors resonated with me more authentically in their presentation of the faith. As a spiritual director, I was especially drawn to the mystics. I sensed a depth to their prayer lives that was not in anything I found in Protestant circles.

I also started feeling that communion in my congregation was not being given the reverence it deserved. When I stood at the Table as a pastor and repeated the words, "this is my body broken for you," I started feeling like it really should be treated as if it were really that. The Eucharist is central to my beliefs, and once I started viewing it as literally the Body and Blood of Christ, it became difficult to see others treat it so lightly.

I also saw that I agreed with Catholic social teaching more than I did with the haphazard view that I saw embraced within both the Christian Church (DOC) and the UCC. The Catholic Church has a much more consistent stance that all of life is sacred from conception to natural death. I was excited when Pope Francis was elected, choosing as his namesake St. Francis of Assisi, and then immediately washing the feet of the down and out, including a Muslim immigrant. As a former missionary, God's preferential option for the poor speaks to me quite strongly. And I agree wholeheartedly with the just war theory of the Catholic Church.

All of these things led to me to contact Sr. Wanda, from Tipton, IN, to begin exploring becoming Catholic. I deliberately chose St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Lima,

OH to be my parish home. I still lived in Wapakoneta, OH, where I had served my last church as a pastor. But going to St. Joseph Catholic Church in Wapakoneta was out of the question. I wanted to be anonymous for a while. I checked out St. Charles Borromeo Parish and fell in love with it. The first

Sunday, after worship, I stayed for donuts and was made to feel right at home, being introduced to a number of people.

When I met with the RCIA director, I realized that God had led me to the right congregation. Her story was much more similar to mine than I would have ever expected, with her turbulent childhood, divorce, religious education, and conversion. After our first meeting, she had me read Scott Hahn's book, *The Lamb's Supper*. I was blown away, because a few years before, I had led a Bible Study on Revelation and had come to many of his same conclusions on my own. That was one of the times I had been told I was too Catholic because, among other things, I admitted that the "woman clothed with the sun," in chapter 12, probably referred to Mary.

As I journeyed through RCIA, I was intrigued by the ability to choose a Christian name and patron saint. The person I was drawn to isn't yet a saint. When I asked my priest about it, he said he had been in a similar position when he was confirmed as a boy. And he said that I could use her name, since there were already other saint Dorothys, but that I could consider Dorothy Day as my patron nonetheless. Through the help of my sponsor, I was able to join the process of transcribing Dorothy Day's diaries and letters to forward to the Vatican to help her cause for sainthood. I have been awed and humbled to help with this. After all, how often does someone get to help their patron saint become a saint?

The reason Dorothy spoke so much to me was because she was a convert to Catholicism as well. She started the Catholic Work-



...Journeys Home Continued...

ers Movement, which resonates with my desire to serve the Least of These (see Matt 25:40), as did her activism for issues like the antiwar movement. Her wild Bohemian background, before her conversion, made her a real person whom I could relate to. Another saint who really resonates with me is also new: Oscar Romero from El Salvador. And I would love to travel to Rwanda to see the site of Mary's apparition at Kibeho.

Going through RCIA was still not an entirely easy process for me. Giving up being an ordained minister was one of the hardest things I have ever done. Letting go of the title, the prestige, the trappings of the vestments, the special sense of calling — ego things in the end, but still dear to me. I have spent my whole life trying to follow God's lead, and I have no doubt that I am where I am supposed to be, but it wasn't easy to give all this up.

A few weeks before Easter Vigil of 2019, when I officially became a Catholic, was the most difficult moment. It was an unlikely event that prompted it. I was listening to Christian music, and the song "Here I Am, Lord" came up, a favorite hymn of mine — favorite enough that I had the congregation learn it, just so it could be sung at my ordination. I called my RCIA sponsor and took all my vestments over to her house, just so I could, in a sense, release them. It fully hit me, at that moment, that as much as I loved presiding over the Lord's Supper, that would never happen again. I also miss preaching and having the title of Reverend. Even writing these things brings tears to my eyes.

I have been blessed to serve as a part-time chaplain at Mercy Health – St. Rita's Medical Center, so I am still able to do ministry. I was hired as a Protestant chaplain, and the director of the department knew I was in transition. He said it would be exciting to journey with me through the process.

I have treasured being exposed to a number of very devout Catholics on a daily basis. I have been able to participate in Masses at the hospital. As a Catholic chaplain, I became an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in record time after I officially became Catholic. Through my time at the hospital, I have also gained a clearer understanding of the Catholic approach to health care. I am becoming ever more involved in the life of my parish as well, preparing to help teach two different Bible studies. I have joined a

prayer group that meets on Zoom. I am also a lector at Mass and volunteer in a number of other ways as well.

When I told loved ones that I was becoming Catholic, I was surprised that many of the people responded that they had seen it coming. My mother was the one I most dreaded to tell about my decision, but the only person to react negatively was my oldest

daughter. As a young woman who is seeking to empower herself, she must have felt I was letting womankind down by giving up my calling as a minister. She came to the Easter Vigil Mass when I was received into the Church, though, and has not said anything negative after that initial conversation. My son's immediate response to my telling him I was becoming Catholic was to look puzzled, then ask me if, as a clergywoman, that would make me a nun. I just laughed and emphatically told him no. My younger daughter just shrugged and said, "whatever." I don't think my kids understand why I became Catholic.

I continue to try to follow the path God wills for my life. Right now, I still feel that I am in a period of transition. I eagerly desire to use my God-given gifts again. I know it

will never look like my previous ministries, but my desire to serve the Lord will continue to direct my journey. Enough other people have asked me, since my son's innocent question, if I plan on becoming a nun. At this point, I am not opposed to the idea, but although I am aware that my age would prohibit me from joining many of the orders, I am in no rush. God is the one in charge, and I will go wherever I am called. ■



Janice Burns-Watson is currently employed as a chaplain at St. Rita's Medical Center in Lima, Ohio. She is a member of St. Charles Borromeo parish and is the mother of three adult children: Rachel Naima, Nathanael, and Abigail.

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