



October 2021 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



From High Church to the True Church

By Emily Woodham

C.S. Lewis, one of the greatest Christian apologists, turned to Jesus because of a late night conversation with his friends, J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. Scholars debate the exact timing, but the influence of that evening is undeniable. A conversation with friends changed his life.

Of course, Anglicans are quick to point out that Lewis chose the Anglican Communion and not the Catholic Church. If Anglicanism was good enough for Lewis, then why should anyone bother with the rules and regulations of Catholicism?

Despite Lewis's preferences, though, his writing drew me closer to the Catholic Church. I loved reading *The Great Divorce* in high school, and I found his views on purgatory to be fascinating. Lewis's vision of heaven and hell in the *Last Battle* (from the *Narnia* series) was more Catholic than Evangelical. It resonated with me, especially his themes of choice and free will, instead of predestination. In his essay, "The Weight of Glory," he said that, next to the Blessed Sacrament, the most holy thing presented to your senses is your neighbor. That was a truth that I believed, but didn't see even among High Church Anglicans. I saw it only in the Catholic Church.

"The Catholic Church is great if you need a lot of handholding," my husband, David, once said. "But if you have the grace of faith to walk with Jesus in a personal relationship, then the Catholic Church is a hindrance."

What David said didn't sit well with me, because deep down, I wanted a lot of handholding. Try as I might to find my sufficiency in Christ alone, I knew

I was lacking. I remembered my Catholic grandmother clutching her rosary as she wept over my grandfather's death. I thought of my French teacher in high school boldly talking about her conversion to the Catholic Church and her need for the Eucharist. I remembered our Catholic neighbors saying how much better they felt after going to Confession.

As I drew closer to the Church, I began to think that Tolkien was right when he lamented that Lewis's conversion had been incomplete.

Nevertheless, our family's journey to the Church was a long one. It involved a lot of reading and conversations with David and friends. We went through moves, and we changed churches several times. We homeschooled four of our children. There were a lot of struggles for us as a family.

Then, on May 30, 2014, the Feast of St. Joan of Arc, I had an appointment with a Catholic priest. We were supposed to talk about a homeschool dance, but that topic didn't last long. Instead, we had a conversation that changed my life.

The Balm of Faith and Middle Earth

I had more experience with Catholics than David did. Through Catholic family and friends, the Church was always part of my life. I was raised Episcopalian, like David was,

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

but my family's views were more High Church than those of his family, with a deep belief in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

My dad, who left the Catholic Church in college, busted some myths about Mary and the saints. He said Catholics didn't worship them, and because they were in heaven and fully alive, people could ask them for prayers. But he also said it was a waste of time to pray to them.

My parents allowed me to read his old childhood books on the Mass and the saints, until I started begging to become Catholic and to be a nun. My family left the Episcopal Church in 1986, when I was 12. I had hoped we would become Catholic, but they believed it would be better for us to go to charismatic churches.

During my wandering from the Episcopal Church through other branches of Protestantism, I married David and had children. We were the ideal conservative, homeschooling family. We prayed and read Scripture every day, we were engaged with our local church, and we believed that faith must be backed by action. But difficulties have a way of smashing idealism.

After we moved to Austin, Texas in 2005, our family began having health struggles, especially with severe allergies. Then, in January 2009, two months after my mother's sudden death, we nearly lost our youngest son to a severe case of bacterial pneumonia. While holding my toddler son in the hospital after his lung surgery, I thought of Mary watching her Son in agony on the cross. This vision of her pure faith and love in the midst of such horrendous suffering brought tremendous comfort and peace to me.

THOUGHTS FOR THE JOURNEY HOME

BY MARCUS GRODI

Non-Catholic clergymen and women who become Catholics find great joy in answering God's call. But the road home can be long, weary, and full of obstacles. Along the way they must wrestle with difficult questions, the opposition of family and friends, anxieties about finding a new livelihood, and much more. *Thoughts for the Journey Home* offers insight, encouragement, and hope to those who face such struggles. These essays are the fruit of author Marcus Grodi's personal experience as a clergy convert and his work with those who have taken similar paths. *Thoughts for the Journey Home* provides wisdom and strength for those who are exploring the claims of the Catholic Church, those who are on the path to the Church, and those who have already entered the Church yet need encouragement. Lifelong Catholics will find it useful as well in helping friends and family members they hope will someday come home.

Go to chresources.org to order this book and other resources about the Catholic Faith!



Thinking of her pure trust in God enabled me to entrust my son to God's care. The next morning, my son awoke hungry, and the nurses and doctors practically danced in joy at how well he was doing compared to the night before.

As I read theological books in the months after my son's recovery, I wanted to know more about the Catholic Church and Mary. Protestants ignored so much of what the Church Fathers had said. I tried to push aside concerns that Protestants had little accountability outside of their own interpretation of Scripture.

Interpretation could be so arbitrary. It was the cause of splintering for many churches, as people debated on what was correct belief. How could Christianity be both for the poor and the rich, the illiterate and the intellectual, if so much depended on knowing Scripture, with its multiple possibilities of interpretation? Tradition and the Church Fathers seemed far more important than most Protestants gave them credit for being.

In dealing with the pain of the death of my mother and the stress of almost losing our son, David did not turn to theology. Instead, he turned to his favorite author — Tolkien. As an engineer who is constantly analyzing and using logic, he needed the escape of mythical stories.

In the evenings, after our four children, ages nine to two, got ready for bed, we would all curl up together and listen to David read *The Hobbit*. When *The Hobbit* was finished, the children begged for more stories, so David read *The Lord of the Rings*. It took nearly two years of faithfully reading each night to finish Tolkien's classics.

Our youngest usually fell asleep, but the three older children were captivated by the books. After saying prayers, we tucked them into bed, and they often asked questions, wanting to know more about the characters and Middle Earth. A Tolkien fan since middle school, David knew most of the answers. When he didn't, he would look them up before the next story time.

To delve deeply into Tolkien is to peer into the truths of the Catholic Church. Although Tolkien had said that he hated allegory, the tales of Middle Earth are a vibrant tapestry, woven with his faith. How his characters dealt with suffering was especially meaningful to my husband and me. After the kids fell asleep, we would talk about Tolkien, suffering, and faith. But we still felt that some of the Catholic teachings about Mary, such as the Immaculate Conception, were wrong, and that there was too much emphasis on the Sacrament of Penance.

Back to Tradition

Longing for tradition and liturgy, my husband and I returned to the Episcopal Church in 2010. Not fitting in well any more with the non-denominational crowd, our family joined the Catholic homeschooling group. Although I had been told that Catholics were legalistic, I found them, instead, to be gracious. There was less pressure to be perfect, and they talked about faith being a journey. In other words, they seemed to accept the frailties of humanity, more than did Protestants. Also, Catholics seemed to unify all cultures and backgrounds in a way that Protestants failed to do.

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ON THE JOURNEY

Is *Sola Scriptura* Workable?

Part II: The Unraveling of *Sola Scriptura**

By Ken Hensley

When we left Martin Luther last month, he was bewailing the explosion of interpretations and divisions that had resulted from his own teaching of *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment.

"There are as many beliefs as there are heads," he had complained. Apparently, even some of Luther's own students followed his example, took their stand on "Scripture alone" — and rejected aspects of his teaching in favor of their own interpretations of Scripture.

How many doctors have I made through preaching and writing! Now they say, "Be off with you! Go off with you! Go to the devil!" Thus it must be. When we preach they laugh When we get angry and threaten them, they mock us, snap their fingers at us and laugh in their sleeves (Msgr. Patrick F. O'Hare, *The Facts about Luther*, pp. 207-208).

It makes you wonder. After all, Luther had stood before the Catholic authorities at the Diet of Worms and said, "I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Scripture, which is my basis. Here I stand, I can do no other." Did he not expect that others might follow his example and want to make Scripture their "basis" and possibly come to conclusions different than his own? Did he not imagine that others might find themselves "convicted by the testimony of Scripture" and feel the need to say, "Here I stand" while disagreeing with his teaching?

At any rate, here's a question that came to me at this point: how did Luther and the other Reformers *respond* to the doctrinal chaos unleashed by their own preaching of private judgment? What did they do?

To promote the "truth" as they understood it (after all, truth is of the highest importance) while also maintaining "unity" in the Reformation movement (unity is important as well) here's what they did: they began to prohibit their followers from exercising the private judgment they continued to insist on for themselves. They brought down the boom.

Sola Scriptura: Theory or Practice

One of my chief mentors during the time I was learning the case for Catholicism was Catholic Answers' own Jimmy Akin.

Jimmy had written a little article under the title "*Sola Scriptura*: Theory or Practice?" which I read at the time and still have in my files. In this article, he elaborated on the contradiction that existed between the Reformer's "theory" (*sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment) and their "practice" (but only for us — not for you). To illustrate his point, he quoted at length from historians Will and Ariel Durant.

I can't think of a better way to make this clear than to simply present what these historians had to say about the "response" of Luther and the other Reformers to the theological chaos resulting

from their own example and teaching. It's a little long but incredibly eye-opening.

It's instructive to observe how Luther moved from tolerance to dogma as his power and certainty grew In [his] Open Letter to the Christian Nobility (1520) Luther ordained "every man a priest," with the right to interpret the Bible according to his private judgment and individual light Luther should have never grown old. Already in 1522 he was out-papaling the popes. "I do not admit," he wrote, "that my doctrine can be judged by anyone, even the angels. He who does not receive my doctrine cannot be saved."

Luther now agreed with the Catholic Church that "Christians require certainty, definite dogmas, and a sure Word of God which they can trust to live and die by." As the Church in the early centuries of Christianity, divided and weakened by a growing multiplicity of ferocious sects, had felt compelled to define her creed and expel all dissidents, so now Luther, dismayed by the variety of quarrelsome sects that had sprouted from the seed of private judgment, passed step by step from toleration to dogmatism. "All men now presume to criticize the Gospel," he complained, "almost every old doting fool or prating sophist must, forsooth, be a doctor of divinity." Stung by Catholic taunts that he had let loose a dissonant anarchy of creeds and morals, he concluded, with the Church, that social order required some closure to debate, some recognized authority to serve as "an anchor of faith" ... Sebastian Franck thought there was more freedom of speech and belief among the Turks than in the Lutheran states (Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, volume 6, pp. 420-3).

Jimmy then comments with mock incredulity, "But everyone knows that Luther was a man of fierce temper. Surely this was responsible for his attitude and made him unique among the Reformers in his inconsistency with regard to private judgment. Right?"

He then continues to quote from Will and Ariel Durant:

Other reformers rivaled or surpassed Luther in hounding heresy. Bucer of Strasbourg urged the civil authorities in Protestant states to extirpate all who professed a 'false' religion; such men, he said, are worse than murderers; even their wives and children and cattle should be destroyed.

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The comparatively gentle Melancthon accepted the chairmanship of the secular inquisition that suppressed the Anabaptists in Germany with imprisonment and death He recommended that the rejection of infant baptism, or of original sin, or of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, should be punished as capital crimes. He insisted on the death penalty for a sectarian who thought that heathens might be saved, or for another who doubted that belief in Christ the Redeemer could change a naturally sinful man into a righteous man He demanded the suppression of all books that opposed or hindered Lutheran teachings; so the writings of Zwingli and his followers were formally placed on the index of forbidden books in Wittenberg (Ibid. p. 424).

At this point, Jimmy exclaims, "Yes, but we are still talking about the Lutheran thread of the Reformation. Surely the detached, intellectual Calvinists were better." One last section from the Durants:

No one [in Geneva, where Calvin was pastor] was to be excused from Protestant services on the plea of having a different or private religious creed; Calvin was as thorough as any pope in rejecting individualism of belief; this greatest legislator of Protestantism completely repudiated the principle of private judgment with which the new religion had begun. He had seen the fragmentation of the Reformation into a hundred sects, and foresaw more; in Geneva he would have none of them. There, a body of learned divines [Calvinist divines, of course] would formulate an authoritative creed [a Calvinist creed, no doubt]; those Genevans who could not accept it would have to seek other habitats (pp. 472-3).

Anyone who knows Jimmy Akin, knows that he has a particularly wry sense of humor. Well, pondering the inconsistency shown by the Reformers on this whole issue of the right of private judgment, he concludes this section of his article by commenting that apparently:

All that "Here I stand, the Word of God compels me, I can do no other" stuff had to be interpreted narrowly. "I can do no other", meant, "I can do no other." It did not mean you could do something other if you felt the Word of God compelling you. You had to do what I said because I was the one the Word of God had compelled.

The Protestant Pastor's Dilemma

I could see that Jimmy was right. The actions of the Reformers were in clear contradiction to their theory. At the same time, I was sympathetic to their situation because I could see that, as an Evangelical pastor, I was caught in exactly the same dilemma that Luther, Calvin, and the others were caught in.

As a child of the Reformation — a Baptist, one of those Zwingli would have had executed and Calvin would have banished from Geneva — of course I taught my congregation that the "Bible alone" ought to be treated as binding authority in their lives. I reminded them that I was "a mere fallible interpreter" of Scripture, that I could be wrong in anything I taught them and that it was their "right" — in fact their "duty" — to search the Scriptures and "decide for themselves."

This is what I said to them. Pastors of Evangelical churches say these sorts of things all the time. It expresses the humility of one who knows that in the end only Scripture is really authoritative.

But what would I have done if someone in my congregation had taken me up on this, accepted his "right" and "duty," had searched the Scriptures and decided that what I was teaching the church was not, as Calvin put it, "in accord with the Word"? What if that person was a respected teacher in the church and wanted the freedom to teach his point of view — even as I was free to teach my own point of view? What would I have done in such a situation? Would I have responded, "Good for you! Teach on"?

Here's what I would have done, what I would have *had to do* in order to maintain unity in the church. I would have met with him privately and done my best to convince him of his errors. And if this failed, I would have explained to him (kindly) that he would either have to quit teaching his point of view in the church or take his "private interpretation" down the road to a church that agreed with him.

Basically, I would have explained to him that my little congregation was sort of like Calvin's Geneva and that he would sadly need to "seek other habitats." I would have, essentially, shown him the door. What else could I do? What else can a pastor do?

But now imagine this gentleman says to me, "Pastor Ken, I was baptized in this church. I was married in this church. My children were raised here. I've been here all my life. You've only been a pastor here for three years. How is it that you get to practice the right of private interpretation and teach the results of your own study of Scripture, but if I do the same and come to different conclusions, I am told to "seek other habitats"? I know these people. I love them and want them to know the truth. And given that you're as fallible as I am, *why don't you seek other habitats?*"

What would I have said to this?

Churning Up the Wind and Waves

Ephesians 4:11-16 became a critical passage for me during this time. In this passage, the Apostle Paul is talking about the need for unity in the Church. With this in mind, Paul says that God

Gave to His Church apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God ... in order that we would no longer be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the cunning and craftiness of men.

In other words, because God wants unity in the faith, because God doesn't want His children blown about by every wind and wave of doctrine, He has given His Church pastors and teachers. Simple, right?

As I was thinking about what Paul says here, suddenly a thought reached out and more or less grabbed me by the throat. It suddenly occurred to me that what St. Paul envisions here could only work if there was *some authoritative teaching* to which individual pastors and teachers were bound and to which their teaching was required to conform. In this case, even if scattered all over the world, when pastors and teachers taught, they would be teaching the same things and thus building the Church up in unity.

On the other hand, if each pastor and teacher really is free to study his Bible and follow the leading of the Spirit and draw his

own conclusions as to what is being taught in the Bible, will they not inevitably disagree with one another? And will not the result be that those specifically called to unite the people of God wind up becoming the very forces stirring up the wind and the waves of doctrine and tossing about the children of God?

I could see plainly that *this is what had indeed happened* from the time of the Reformation. On the premise of *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment, this is exactly what had happened, and what had continued to happen to the present. *Sola Scriptura* cannot work.

This is something Protestant scholars struggle with to one degree or another. For instance, here's Protestant historian and Lutheran scholar Heiko Oberman in his book *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*:

Application of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, the Scriptures alone, has not brought the certainty [Luther] anticipated. It has in fact been responsible for a multiplicity of explanations and interpretations that seem to render absurd any dependence on the clarity of the Scriptures (p. 220).

Does *Sola Scriptura* Even Make Sense?

At a certain point the question came to me: does it make sense to think that Jesus would have established His Church on such a foundation? Does it even make sense to think that He would have had the Apostles essentially hand all future believers a series of inspired writings and said, "Here you go. Do your best!"

I wondered how many denominations and sects and independent churches there would be if Christians had been practicing *sola Scriptura* not for five centuries but from the first century to the present. It staggered my imagination to think of what two thousand years of *sola Scriptura* and the right of private judgment would have produced.

It seemed to me that if Jesus wanted His Church to be one Church rather than many churches teaching conflicting doctrines, He would have had to have established that Church with some principle of authority outside of the Bible, some authoritative way of determining Christian doctrine and of settling the disputes that would inevitably arise.

Otherwise, unity would be impossible.

Which really leads us to a final question we want to look at next month. We've seen that *sola Scriptura* doesn't appear to be scriptural. We've seen that it doesn't appear to have been the faith and practice of the early Church. We've seen now that it doesn't work and in fact cannot work. But finally, does *sola Scriptura* even make sense? Is it even logical? ■

*See the January-September 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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EWTVN'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

October 4

Mark McNeil* (former Oneness Pentecostal) (re-air from 2/25/19)

October 11

Nikki Kingsley* (former Muslim)

October 18

Bo Bonner* (former Evangelical Protestant)

October 25

Christine Flynn* (former agnostic)

November 1

Joelle Maryn* (revert)

*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 Marian, a recent convert "Thank you for the email. Yes! I was received into the Church on Friday, my husband and I convalidated our marriage on Saturday, and I was confirmed and received First Communion on Sunday! It was a glorious weekend!! I appreciate your encouragement and your prayers!"

From Eduardo, a former Presbyterian pastor "Recently I went viral in Brazil. It was my profession of faith at the church and the archbishop asked me to share my testimony. I did it briefly, but it's reached over 400,000 views in my country. And now I am being asked to host a Catholic show on TV. Please pray for this endeavor!"

From Angie, a recent convert "Hi! I was recently baptized as a Catholic at the Easter Vigil! I'm so happy that this has happened; my longing to learn and have a deep relationship with Jesus has grown more. Thank you for your network and encouragement. I love watching

EWTN and your TV show. I also love your newsletters and hearing people's conversions. I feel at home in the Catholic Church and feel God's presence when I am in the church. Thank you!"

From Donna, a recent convert "I appreciate the book on the Mass that you sent me! I'm very thankful to have it. I almost finished reading it. Very informative. Your love and support mean so much to me, really more than I can adequately express. Thank you all for your continued prayers and support. I'm deeply thankful to know Jesus' great love, really for the first time . . . So many people have helped me along the way. The Coming Home Network has been very instrumental in helping me find, not just Jesus but also the Church . . . You just never really know all the ways you may help people, until much later." ■

Sacramental Longing

*How long by Your Table, O Lord, shall I stand,
Unable to taste of Your feast?*

*My heart I stretch forward instead of my hand —
Please bless me, Your last and Your least!*

*My eyes brim with tears as I gaze on Your Face;
Your Body and Blood I adore.*

*How long 'till You sanctify me by Your grace?
Your Heart's ardent flame I implore.*

*How painful the birthpangs of Christ in my soul!
To die while in labor I fear.*

*I grasp Mary's arm in her midwifing role;
She tenderly dries every tear.*

*My feverish forehead she cools with her kiss,
While soothing my angst with her song.*

*I hear through her longing, her pain, and her bliss:
Keep pushing, He shall not take long. ■*

LEAH H. is on the journey to the Catholic Church and has been regularly attending Mass for over three years. She yearns for the sacramental life of the Church and looks forward to being baptized, hopefully soon.

Prayer List

Clergy

- **For Chris, an Anglican priest** trying to navigate his way into the Church, that the Lord will lead him as he attempts to work through all the practical and personal issues.
- **For a minister in the Salvation Army** who has been reading deeply into Catholic teaching and history and would like to do doctoral work in Catholic theology.
- **For Ben, a Presbyterian pastor** on the journey toward the Church but still struggling with some doctrinal issues, that the Holy Spirit will lead him to the answers he seeks.
- **For Jonathan, a pastor** who has been studying the case for Catholicism and is strongly attracted to it, but still has questions about the status of the Orthodox Church.
- **For Kent, a former Protestant seminary student** who entered the Church Easter of 2020 and is in the process of discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church.
- **For Scott, a pastor** who has been on the journey a long time and gone in and out of RCIA, but has struggled with the scandals in the Church and has not yet been able to decide.
- **For Brian, a Methodist pastor** who is convinced he must become Catholic and is struggling with how he will support his family.
- **For Bret, a Baptist pastor** who has begun examining the teachings of the Catholic Church and attending Mass and is struggling to reconcile his Protestant background and understanding with what he's now learning.
- **For a Baptist pastor** who has become convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith, that the Holy Spirit might soften his wife's heart and give him the wisdom to know how to lead her toward the Church.
- **For William who works for a Protestant ministry** and is a doctoral student at a Protestant seminary and has become convinced that he must become Catholic, that the Lord will show him how to move forward.

- **For Jon**, who last year put his journey toward the Church on hold but now finds himself being drawn once again, that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead him home.
- **For a Methodist pastor** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for a number of years and who continues to struggle with what he would do to earn a living if he were to resign his position to become Catholic.
- **For Darshak, who resigned his Protestant ministry** in 2020 and found a new job and is excited about moving toward entering the Church, that the Lord will give him wisdom as he leads his family and bless him financially so that he can support them.

Laity

- **For John, a Southern Baptist**, that he will find a knowledgeable Catholic in his area that he can talk to.
- **For Abbie** who is struggling with knowing how to proceed after difficult issues have come up with her journey.
- **For Benjamin, a Methodist**, that he will find a supportive Catholic parish where the people will encourage him to grow in his faith.
- **For a member of the Vineyard Fellowship** in Florida who is trying to learn more about the Mass so she is more comfortable attending with her family.
- **For Kevin, a Bible Christian**, that through discovering the true teachings of the Catholic Faith, he may build up his relationship with Jesus Christ.
- **For a Baptist in Massachusetts**, that his continued study of Holy Scripture and the *Catechism* will bring him rejoicing to the altar of God.
- **For Amy**, that her life as a Catholic will bring her into a closer relationship with our Lord Jesus.
- **For Jeremy, an Anglican**, that he will continue to be drawn toward the Catholic Church and come to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For Timothy in Illinois**, for the courage to follow his heart through the leading of the Holy Spirit to the Catholic Church.
- **For an Anglican in New Jersey**, that he will find answers to his questions and disagreements with Catholic teaching.
- **For Donna in the south** as she seeks truth and asks for the Lord's guidance as she goes deeper in her faith journey.
- **For a former secularist in the United Kingdom**, that he might find helpful guidance in the annulment process.
- **For Thomas, a non-denominational Evangelical**, that his love for truth and the liturgy will bring him to full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For a Presbyterian in Kentucky** to find a good, welcoming parish and for her husband to be more supportive of her journey.
- **For a Baptist**, that, as he continues to read the works of faithful Catholic writers, the Holy Spirit will draw him home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Meghan** as she studies and reflects on where God is calling her in her faith journey, that she will have clear insight as to how best to move forward.
- **For a man in Tennessee** who has been casually interested in Catholicism for years, that he will find the impetus to truly move forward with his journey.
- **For an Evangelical in the northeast** who has decided not to pursue her interest in the Catholic Church, that she will continue seeking the Lord's will.



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

When we moved to Boise, Idaho in 2012, we knew we needed to either choose to go to RCIA classes or to stick to our Protestant beliefs by staying away from the Catholic homeschoolers. Despite all that we found right in the Catholic Church, we still didn't feel it was right for us. So we joined a parish that was a part of the Anglican Church in North America.

Somehow, though, we ended up being added to the Boise Catholic homeschool group. Then my brother, Glenn, who is a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, joined RCIA with his wife in the fall of 2013.

Our family was on a slippery slope. When we missed our Anglican church service, we went to Mass with friends, although we couldn't receive Communion. My husband and I were already using NFP (Natural Family Planning, a sticking point for a lot of Protestants) because a Catholic OB/Gyn in Austin had said that I was so prolife in my beliefs that I needed to use NFP for the good of my soul — even if I wasn't Catholic. I became friends with the community coordinator for the Catholic radio station in Boise and volunteered for her during pledge drives.

The kids often asked, “why can't we become Catholic?” Our answer went like this: Confession was an unnecessary burden, purgatory denied the grace of God, the Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church) was too strict, with Holy Days of Obligation and other requirements, and the Immaculate Conception of Mary was a denial of Mary's humanity and need for her Son.

But the draw to the Church only became stronger. The kids and I prayed with 40 Days for Life, whose members were mostly from St. Mark's Catholic parish in Boise. They taught us how to pray the Rosary. I had a dream about Mary in 2012, and my brother Glenn would remind me of it. “Mary wants to help you, Emily,” he'd say.

I began to feel that I was living a lie by staying in the Anglican Church.

St. Vitus, St. Joan, and a Conversation

In the spring of 2014, I decided to organize a dance for the Catholic homeschool group. The other mothers agreed, but with one stipulation: they wanted a Catholic priest to be involved. Someone suggested Father Ben Uhlenkott at St. Mark's parish, and my Catholic neighbors also said he was good with youth.

I committed our dance to the prayers of St. Vitus, the patron saint of dancing, and I prayed to him each day for help with the dance. It was kind of an experiment to see if God would punish me for praying to a saint regularly. Moreover, I mistakenly thought my appointment with Father Uhlenkott was on the Feast of the Visitation. So I prayed to Mary, not knowing that the day was actually St. Joan of Arc's feast day.

With my baby bundled up in my arms, I met Father Uhlenkott. He was an outgoing and happy priest, and I could see right away why he was recommended to help with our dance. We talked about the dance for 10 minutes. I thanked him and quickly went to the door, when he asked me what parish I belonged to.

“Holy Trinity,” I replied, as if Holy Trinity was just any other church in the diocese. I started to say good-bye, but his puzzled face made me stop. I hesitated, then explained, “we're Anglican, but the Catholic homeschool group lets us hang out with them.”

“Really?” He smiled and sat down as he asked, “well, why aren't you Catholic?” From that flowed the conversation that changed my life.

We talked about Henry VIII and St. Thomas More and the many branches of Protestantism. We talked about C.S. Lewis, purgatory, faith, and forgiveness. We discussed the pitfalls of materialism and pride, the beauty of humility

and service. We touched on Mariology, openness to God's will and Mary's essential role in the Incarnation. Time seemed to stand still, as we sat side-by-side in armchairs, bent over, speaking softly as old friends might do. The conversation was so peaceful that my baby fell asleep.

Then Father quietly said, “You pray the Rosary, don't you?” Without thinking, I answered simply, “Yes.” Then I immediately realized my mistake.

He jumped up from his chair and grabbed a book. I tried to explain I didn't pray the Rosary regularly, et cetera, but he waved away all my protests with his hand.

He handed me a large book with the simple title, *A Guide to the Sacraments*. It was written by an Anglican Oxford scholar, John Macquarrie. Father Uhlenkott said Macquarrie almost became Catholic at the end of his life but decided it was too much work.

After he blessed my baby and me, we left. I was joyful all the way home, but as I walked through our front door, the fear came back of what would happen if I became Catholic without my husband. So I put the book on a shelf and decided to wait before reading it.

Longing for a Change of Heart

It took me a couple of weeks before I got the courage to open the book from Father Uhlenkott. When I did, I was amazed. I would not have been able to understand it if I had tried to read it before my mother's death. The last six years of personal study had prepared me for it, and I was open to all the insights provided in the book. I was thrilled as I read the theological and scriptural basis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I marveled at the explanation of the Holy Eucharist. I felt convicted to live out my baptism more fully.

The more I read, the more I realized how right the Church was about the Sacraments. If it was right about them, then was it also

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...Journeys Home Continued...

right about the Immaculate Conception and other matters of doctrine? What other truths were found in the Catholic Church that I had been dismissing all my life?

But my husband was not ready to become Catholic. He had been reading a book by Peter Kreeft on Tolkien's philosophy, and he was warming to the idea. But he still wasn't comfortable with some of the Church's teachings. Not wanting to rock my marriage by crossing the Tiber alone, I returned the book to the parish office in silence. It was not easy to avoid Father Uhlenkott, though, because our homeschool co-op began meeting at St. Mark's.

Through my kids' studies, I finally understood that the Immaculate Conception was necessary because Christ's humanity without original sin was necessary. This also brought to light a sharp difference between Catholics and Protestants: Catholics don't gloss over tough issues with spirituality. The physical matters to Catholics. So instead of glossing over Christ's humanity through Mary, they examined it. Instead of dismissing her humanity as unimportant, they saw it as vital, and they understood that her freedom from original sin was crucial.

Other doctrines about Mary also came from this understanding that her role was key to our salvation. Being ever-virgin safeguarded the truth of the Incarnation. Especially in Evangelical churches, I had heard that Mary and Joseph had many children. This was despite the beliefs of the first Reformers, such as Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, who upheld the necessity of the perpetual virginity of Mary. The idea that she did not remain a virgin came from an unprecedented interpretation of Scripture, without any context of what the early Church believed or why.

Emboldened by all these realizations about the Church's teaching, I decided to read aloud the book of Wisdom for our morning Scripture and prayer with the kids. I noticed that some passages in Wisdom were similar to St. Paul's writings, although I had never heard of the connection in Protestant circles. I asked a friend, who is a New Testament scholar and teaches at a Baptist seminary, about it. Always brutally honest, he told me that the Apocrypha were actually more important to understanding the New Testament than most Protestants were willing to admit.

Immediately, I began to wonder: if Protestants were picking and choosing what they included in their scholarship to discern Scripture, deliberately leaving out Scriptures that Jesus and the Apostles referenced, then how could their interpretation be valid?

The weekend before St. Valentine's Day of 2015, my brother Glenn came to visit. He went to Confession, and we went with

him to Mass afterwards. His love for Confession and Mass made an impression on all of us, including David.

Before Glenn left for the airport, he sat with me in the car and said, "I know you don't want to become Catholic without David, but he's not God. You have to choose God over your husband. Emily, God wants you to be Catholic."

I knew he was right, but I still didn't want to enter the Church without David.

Praying for a Sign

That night, I talked with David about my desire for us to be Catholic. He said we would pray and discern during Lent, but he didn't want me to tell anyone.

A few days after that, our co-op decided to make Valentine's Day cards for Father Uhlenkott, to thank him for letting our co-op meet at his parish. Even though David wanted me to keep our time of discernment a secret, I felt we needed some serious prayer. I thanked Father Uhlenkott for the book he had loaned me and told him our plans to discern God's will for us during Lent. I asked him to pray.

My kids also wrote notes that day, and without my knowing it, they each told Father Uhlenkott how much they liked the Catholic Church.

The next night, near midnight, we wound up in the emergency room with our toddler, Evelyn. She had hit her head on a concrete floor at a friend's house and sustained a minor concussion. She was cleared to go home, but we had to make sure she didn't hit her head again.

We were exhausted all of Valentine's Day, although we were encouraged by the many messages from friends offering prayers and Masses for Evelyn and our family.

One thing after another seemed to keep us from finally going to bed. Sometime in the night, sleep overcame us — a peaceful, deep sleep.

In the morning, David awoke in a panic because we had slept in. We had literally missed a month of Sundays at our Anglican church, and this Sunday was an important parish meeting. The morning was a flurry of breakfast and getting ready to leave, while keeping Evelyn from hitting her head.

We piled into the car, and the kids started fussing again for the Catholic Church as they snapped on their seatbelts.

"Enough!" David shouted as he turned around to look at them in the back seats. "We are not Catholic! We are Anglican! We are not becoming Catholic! Just accept it!" With that, we left in silence.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

While David drove, I prayed. I was hurt, and so were the kids. Had he already given up on his promise to discern becoming Catholic during Lent?

When we arrived at our church, the older children crept out of the car and filed in beside my husband. Then a man from the parish moved toward us.

"There's no room!" he shouted as he waved his hands. We were stunned and confused.

"What?" David asked in disbelief.

The man came closer. "There's no room! It's standing room only!" he yelled again. David's face turned to stone. The kids looked at us, waiting for us to say something, but we were too bewildered to speak.

David just stared the man through until the man finally spoke again, "But you can come in if you want. It's just there aren't any chairs left."

Red crept up David's neck and then to his face, like a cartoon thermometer about to burst. He barely maintained control as he said through gritted teeth, "Everyone. Back. In. The. Car."

After we all scrambled into the car, we decided to go to St. Mark's for Mass. David tried to keep back the flood of thoughts that were bombarding him, but it was too much. "I guess God wants me to be CATHOLIC!"

David ranted the whole way to Mass, while I drove: "No room! I can't believe they don't have room! I'll be Catholic because at least they have room for large families! After all, it's not as if GOD didn't make it OBVIOUS! I wanted a sign, but I wasn't expecting THIS!"

I tried to be sympathetic, to be comforting, but it was so hard not to laugh. Like the kids, I couldn't wait to tell people.

When we arrived at St. Mark's, David calmed down and asked us to not talk about the decision to join the Church. He wanted to collect his thoughts more before we went to friends and told Father Uhlenkott.

The Church Holds the Full Truth

Although the providential events of that February 15, the Feast of St. Claude de la Colombière, were an uncanny and hilarious sign, David and I did have serious conversations following it. He didn't understand how, he said, but he knew that the Catholic Church was the true Church. He found some of the teachings mysterious, but he said he could no longer deny that the Church held the truth, the fullness of Christianity. The faith of Tolkien and the truth told through hobbits and kings, elves and even orcs was too clear and rich to be denied.

I met with the pastoral associate of St. Mark's, and she had each of us, including our four older children, write letters to her and Father Uhlenkott explaining why we wanted to be Catholic. We shared our letters with each other before handing them in, and our discussions as a family strengthened our belief that the Church was right about Mary, the sacraments, the Pope, and all the other teachings of the Magisterium.

After meeting with David and me several times to make sure we understood Catholic teaching, Father Uhlenkott brought our

entire family into the Church on August 9, 2015, the Feast of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (St. Edith Stein).

I went to daily Mass the next morning with my toddler, Evelyn, because I was so excited to finally belong to the Church. We arrived just before the procession. With a flourish, Father Uhlenkott bowed and said, "Emily! Welcome to the Table!" It seemed to seal the joy of the day before, and I knew that I was home.

Being Catholic

Two months after we became Catholic, David began having trouble with his health. After speaking with Father Uhlenkott about it in Reconciliation, it seemed best for me to leave the life of a stay-at-home mom and start working on a career. I decided to see if a friend could help me get started in writing. Within a few weeks, I had a job writing for CatholicMatch.com. Then, in the summer of 2016, I began writing for the Idaho Catholic Register (ICR).

For over four years, I have written the saint story for the back page of each issue of the ICR. Researching and writing about the saints has been my continuing catechesis as a Catholic. To look back over our testimony, I cannot help but recognize the feast days of the different saints who have helped us on our journey!

David is unable to volunteer because of his health, but he goes to Mass faithfully and also goes with me to a small faith community for Bible study and prayer. I have found my old love of music and singing and am a cantor for our parish. Our adult children practice their Catholic Faith without any prompting from us. Our younger children are also involved in parish life. St. Mark's is truly a second home to us. We had another baby, our first cradle Catholic, in October of 2017.

Each time I go to Mass, Confession, or adoration, I am flooded with thankfulness. Being Catholic is such a gift, and I am humbled by all that the Lord has done to bring my family and me into His Church.

Tolkien was right about Lewis: his conversion was not complete. But I believe that after a very short pass through purgatory, the friends may have found each other in paradise. And just as our sense of time holds no meaning in Narnia, there is also no time in heaven, where Tolkien and Lewis go on long journeys through unexplored worlds, drinking pints of perfect ale and holding the lively conversations that mark the best of friendships. ■



EMILY WOODHAM is a wife and mother of six. A year after entering the Catholic Church, she became a staff writer for the Idaho Catholic Register, the biweekly newspaper for the Diocese of Boise. Among her articles for the Register, she writes the saints' column for each issue. In addition, she has written book reviews for the local Catholic radio station. Her blog is rosesandwhimsy.blogspot.com.

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