



## November 2021 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Finding Faith

By Holly Puett

I was born in 1956 in Minneapolis, MN and raised Catholic. Mom took us to Mass every week, we said grace before meals, and Mom had a sacred picture, which I think was of the Last Supper, on her bedroom wall. Dad had no visible faith. I heard later that his dad had run away from home because of his parents' strict faith. I don't know what denomination it was; they lived in Manhattan, Kansas, which is a largely Mennonite area. Dad never talked about his background and passed away many years ago, so I will never know what happened.

Holy Name Catholic Church and school was kitty-corner from our house. I don't remember much from Catholic grade school other than that we had to go to Mass once a week in the adjacent church. If we girls forgot our chapel veils, we had to bobby pin a Kleenex to our hair. After Vatican II, I missed the old Latin Mass with its chanting. But one of our teachers, a nun who wore the new short habit, played the guitar and taught us the new folk hymns: "Joy is Like the Rain" and "Sons of God."

At age 13, not long after Confirmation, I decided that God did not exist. At least there was no way to prove He exists, so I guess that made me an agnostic. I was sick of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and also felt women were unfairly treated. I decided, however, to give God one last chance. So I walked across the street to the church and knelt down in one of the pews. "OK, God, if you're there, give me a sign!" There was no sign. (The assistant priest walked in and asked me if there was anything

he could do for me, but that wasn't the kind of sign I was looking for!)

I stopped going to church, which broke my mother's heart. I also wanted to transfer to the local public schools, but my parents wouldn't let me. They thought the public schools in our neighborhood were too dangerous. I didn't realize it at the time, but this decision on my parents' part was the beginning of God's stratagem that would eventually bring me home to Him.

In the meantime, two of our neighbors, Helen and Mary, who were Catholic told me they were praying for me. They knew my mother was suffering because of my defection. I forgot about them for years — until quite recently, in fact. But now I know that their faithful prayers fueled my return home to the Church.

I went to the Academy of the Holy Angels from 9th-12th grade. It turned out I loved the school. But I resisted the religion classes. First of all, the

Journeys Home

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

principal, a priest, promised me I wouldn't have to take religion classes. But when I arrived on the first day of school, there was "religion" on my schedule! I stormed into his office to complain, but he just said, "Everybody has to take religion classes." So much for my opinion of priests!

My big rebellion took the form of sloughing off the true-false tests they gave us. I would just go down the left-hand column and write T, F, T, F, etc., without reading the questions. The teachers took me aside and said that if I failed religion, my GPA would be affected and I wouldn't be able to get into college. So I started reading the questions on the tests — but I didn't study.

I did get into college, anyway. The one that offered the best financial aid was the College of St. Catherine, across the river in St. Paul. So Holly the agnostic continued to be surrounded by Catholics! I could choose to take either religion or philosophy, so I plumped for philosophy. That was fun! I never went to Mass on campus. I majored in music (piano) and sang in a wonderful group called the Chamber Singers. That group gave me some of the best memories of my life: sitting around the fireplace in someone's living room singing folk songs with guitar, travelling to Europe to sing in cathedrals, and even getting the chance to conduct the group from time to time. God was still working: in a late-night argument about God, two of my friends said, "Some day, Holly, you are going to believe in God more than the rest of us!"

After college graduation in 1978, I joined the Peace Corps. I was assigned to teach music at a girls' high school at Kaimosi,

Kenya. I'm pretty sure my Catholic school background was the reason they assigned me to a former mission compound. The mission was about three miles from the Equator, but also a mile above sea-level, so it was not intolerably hot.

Though the mission was Quaker, I guess any religion would have sufficed in the eyes of the Peace Corps. (God no doubt had a hand in this, too!) The compound comprised a primary school, high school, teacher training college, Bible school, and hospital. Though most of the institutions were now government-run, there were several Quakers still on staff. I learned that there are two kinds of Quaker: the "silent" ones and the evangelistic ones. I made friends with the "silent" ones, since one didn't seem to have to espouse any particular creed in order to participate. I attended silent meetings on Sundays. It was a good time just to ponder and meditate. This may seem strange to most Christians, but it was the best religion I knew at the time.

When I returned home to Minnesota in 1980, I entered a promiscuous stage in my life. I became pregnant out of wedlock. The father was not good marriage material. I moved to Arizona to live with some friends of a friend, in order to sort out my life. Abortion never entered my mind. My quandary was either to keep the baby or to put her up for adoption. When I was about five months pregnant and felt the baby move, I knew I had to keep her and love her.

Near the beginning of my pregnancy, I attended a meeting for unwed mothers run by Catholic nuns. Practically the first thing out of their mouths was that we had sinned. Well, in my eyes, sex outside of marriage was not sinning. I never went back.

Eventually, as with many young parents, I saw the need to bring up my daughter in some type of faith. There was a Unitarian church near me, which was acceptable to me because one didn't really need to believe anything in particular. (This has been a repeated theme for me!) I joined the choir and taught my daughter's Sunday school class. It was interesting to listen to the pastor's sermons, since over time he became more and more interested in God. That, of course, was not required of a Unitarian preacher.

It was in this church that two seminal moments happened. First, I was up in the choir loft one Sunday during Christmas season while the children were putting on a pageant. (There was a procession with Mary and Joseph, but no baby — and, officially, no God.) At any rate, as I was looking down on the procession, a question came into my mind: "what if it's all true?" I never forgot that question in subsequent years.

The second moment involved music. I was in church singing a folk song by Carolyn McDade. As I sang this very moving song, the thought came to me: "This is what I should be doing with my life." Again, I never forgot that moment.

Because my voice was not developed enough for me to enter a graduate program in voice, I enrolled in the Master of Music program in choral conducting at the University of Minnesota. Here, we were exposed to much of the great church choral

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### SOMETHING GREATER IS HERE

BY DR. KENNETH HOWELL



Dr. Kenneth Howell was teaching in a Protestant seminary after nine years of Presbyterian ministry. But two nagging questions wouldn't leave him. Is what he believes really true? Does he really understand what it means to be a Christian? And the second: is this all there is to being a Christian? Could there be a deeper spirituality out there that he had not yet encountered? He tried to avoid, ignore, and suppress them, but they wouldn't go away. He was faced with a tough choice. Either pursue the truth and the God of all truth with integrity and zeal, or sit back in a comfortable life of familiar places and familiar faces. He decided that he really had no choice. It was all or nothing. His pursuit of truth, goodness, and love gradually led him into a world he had only vaguely glimpsed from afar. It was a world filled with things for which he had always longed. It was the fullness of truth.

Go to [chresources.org](http://chresources.org) to order this book and other resources about the Catholic Faith.

## ON THE JOURNEY

# Is *Sola Scriptura* Even Logical?\*

By Ken Hensley

For some ten months in this series on *sola Scriptura*, I've been explaining the process of reasoning that led me to walk away from the foundation upon which I stood as a Protestant — a foundation I now view as cracked and unsustainable — to seek a firmer foundation in the Catholic Church.

For me it was all about coming to see that “Bible only” Christianity (a) isn't really the teaching of the Bible; that (b) it was *never* the teaching of the Church in the first fifteen centuries of her existence; that (c) it has served since the time of the Reformation as a perfect blueprint for theological anarchy and division; and finally (d) that it doesn't even make sense, that it isn't even logical.

In fact, I came to believe that *sola Scriptura* refutes itself because it winds up implicitly relying on the authority of the Catholic Church to assemble the Bible it then uses to deny the authority of the Catholic Church. It just doesn't make sense.

### The Issue of the Canon

Now, the assertion that *sola Scriptura* isn't logical focuses on the canon of Scripture and specifically on the question: how can the Protestant know which books are inspired and ought to be included in his Bible *when the Bible doesn't tell us*?

I remember how this issue was first presented to me: “Ken, you know that the Bible didn't fall down from heaven, 66 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New, all bound in leather with gold leaf on the edges and the words of Jesus in red. Actually, the decision as to which books ought to be received as inspired and canonical involved a process that stretched over several centuries culminating in councils of the Catholic Church held in the late 4th century AD. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit led the Church in those councils to a decision which is true and binding, yes or no?”

Now, I could see right away that this was a loaded question. It reminded me of when the Pharisees asked Jesus, “John's baptism — where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?” If I answered, “Yes, the Holy Spirit led the Church to a decision that is true and binding,” my friend could respond, “Welcome to the Church. You're thinking like a Catholic!” If, on the other hand, I answered, “No. I'm with Luther. All councils are fallible and I cannot trust that the Holy Spirit necessarily led the Church ...” then my friend could respond, “So, I suppose you cannot know for sure that the books you now have in your Bible are the right books?”

You see, as a Protestant, I was committed to *sola Scriptura*. And the heart of *sola Scriptura* is the belief that when it comes to divine revelation, we should accept as true only what can be shown to be clearly taught in the pages of Scripture. But nowhere in the pages of Scripture are we told which books to include in Scripture.

Nowhere are we told, for instance, that the writings of Luke, Paul's traveling companion, are inspired. Nowhere does Scrip-

ture tell us that Matthew is an inspired book. And what about the Epistle to the Hebrews? We don't even know for sure who wrote it. How do I know it ought to be in my New Testament? As a Protestant committed to *sola Scriptura*, what grounds did I have for saying that the books I had in my Bible were the right books, each of them inspired and infallible? How did I know?

This is how the challenge was put to me. And while I don't remember who first hit me with this question, what I do remember is that from the moment I began to try to answer the question as a Protestant committed to *sola Scriptura*, I sensed that I was in trouble.

### “You Catholics are Exaggerating the Problem!”

One possible response to this challenge might have been to say, “Listen, the Bible doesn't need to tell me which books belong in the Bible. Christians inherited the Old Testament from the Jews and when it comes to the New Testament, essentially *everyone knew* which books were apostolic and inspired. It wasn't that hard for the Church to formally define the canon of Scripture. You Catholics are exaggerating the difficulty.”

The problem here is that this simply isn't true. It isn't true to portray the process involved in deciding exactly which books would be included in the canon of Scripture as though it were a slam dunk. All one has to do is read a few scholarly studies about the formation of the New Testament canon to see this.

As it turns out, while there seems to have been fairly early acceptance of the Gospels and a number of Paul's epistles, in the first three centuries of Christian history no less than six of the 27 books we have in our New Testaments were disputed to one degree or another: Hebrews, James, the Apocalypse, 2 Peter, Jude, and 2 and 3 John.

The Muratorian Fragment contains the earliest New Testament canon list we have. It dates from around the end of the 2nd century and lists only 21 of the 27 books we have in our New Testaments. It also includes the book of Wisdom; a book Catholics have in their Old Testaments but Protestants don't accept at all.

Even as late as AD 330, we find the Church historian Eusebius describing the New Testament as containing only one epistle of John and one of Peter. He refers to James, 2 Peter, and Jude as “disputed writings” and the Apocalypse of John as a book accepted by some but “rejected” by others. Although Eusebius doesn't mention the letter to the Hebrews as being disputed, we know that it was not only disputed but widely “rejected” in the Western parts of the Church.

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And then there were those who accepted books we do not now have in our New Testaments. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) included in his New Testament list 1 Clement, the Preaching of Peter, the Revelation of Peter, the Didache, and the Shepherd of Hermas. Origin (c. AD 185-254), also living in Alexandria, included these as well as the Epistle of Barnabas, at least until he moved to Antioch of Syria, where none of these were accepted.

The truth is that the first list we have from the early Church that exactly matches our current New Testament is that of Athanasius, dating from the mid-4th century. This is the list of 27 books that was approved in AD 382 by Pope Damasus and confirmed at the councils of Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397 and 419.

It is simply not true to suggest that “everyone knew” which books were apostolic and inspired and so deciding on the canon that would be accepted throughout the Church was no big deal. Not true.

So again, what grounds did I have for believing that my Bible contained all the right books?

### **“The Holy Spirit Led God’s people!”**

The most common answer that Protestants give to this challenge, and the response I probably gave at the time, goes like this: “the Bible may not tell us which books belong in the Bible. There may not be an inspired ‘Table of Contents’ in the New Testament, but Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice and they come to me’ and because the same Spirit that inspired the Apostles resides in God’s people, God’s people were able to recognize the voice of Jesus in Scripture. The Holy Spirit led God’s people to recognize the canon.”

Over time, I came to see that this doesn’t work, either. First, remember that what *sola Scriptura* says is that Christians should accept as true and binding only what can be shown to be taught clearly in Scripture. It doesn’t say, “Oh, and whatever the Holy Spirit leads God’s people to believe!” Again, the problem for *sola Scriptura* is that the Scripture *doesn’t tell us which books to include*.

Second, as soon as I began to ask the question “And how exactly did the Holy Spirit lead God’s people to recognize the canon? What was the process and who made the decisions?” it became clear to me that the answer supports Catholicism and not Protestantism.

Let me explain. Protestants look to Scripture alone as authoritative and binding, and yet the decision of which books to include in the canon of Scripture was made to a significant degree on the basis of Tradition. Since the New Testament didn’t tell the Church which books were inspired, the Church asked questions like: which books are known to have come from the apostolic age? Which books claim to have been written by an Apostle or close associate? Which books have been accepted by the most ancient churches and are read in the liturgy? These are all questions related to Tradition.

And then, who made the final decisions? Was it each believer, examining the evidence, practicing the right of private judgment and deciding for himself in good Protestant fashion? No, the decisions were made by the Magisterium of the Church.

In other words, the Holy Spirit *did indeed* lead God’s people to the truth, but He led God’s people through the Magisterium of the Church reflecting on Scripture and Tradition. I asked my-

self: does this sound like Protestantism or does this sound like Catholicism?

Another problem — a serious problem — for a Protestant wanting to say that the Holy Spirit led the people of God to hear the voice of Christ speaking in Scripture is that the same councils that recognized the voice of Christ and chose the right 27 books for its New Testament also defined the Old Testament canon as including the seven extra books Catholics have in their Bibles and I as a Protestant did not have in my Bible.

And what was I to make of the fact that the Church that defined the New Testament canon also believed in baptismal regeneration, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the ministerial priesthood, the rule of bishops, and the primacy of the bishop of Rome? Would I say that the Holy Spirit led the Church when defining the New Testament but when defining the Old and not on all this other stuff that I considered “unbiblical”?

### **“But You are Placing the Church Above the Word of God!”**

There’s a third response I find often in Protestant apologetic literature and used in debates. It goes like this: “in effect, Catholicism places the Church above the Word of God by saying the Church determined the canon of Scripture. It is God who *determined* the canon, not the Church! The moment an inspired book was written it became part of the canon, and the moment the last inspired book was written the canon was completed and closed. The Catholic Church *merely recognized* what God had already done!”

The answer to this challenge is simply to say, “Of course God is the Creator of the canon! Of course, *objectively speaking* the canon of Scripture was completed the moment the last inspired book was written! And of course, the Church *merely recognized* what God had already done! *But this is all the Church claims to have done!*”

I’ve come to think of this challenge as in most cases a deliberate attempt to confuse the issue. Best case, it’s a distraction based on a misunderstanding of what the Church believes. Because the Church doesn’t believe that she “determined” the canon.” What the Church believes is that she was led by the Holy Spirit to *recognize* the voice of Christ and come to a decision on the canon that is binding and true.

### **A Self-Refuting Proposition**

I came to realize that I had been preaching every Sunday from a New Testament that had been assembled in those early centuries and through those early councils by the Catholic Church. And the question I had to answer was: do I trust that the Holy Spirit led that Church to a decision that is true and binding, yes, or no?

Reformed Protestant scholar R.C. Sproul, consistent with his commitment to *sola Scriptura*, answered this question in the negative. Because of this, he admitted that technically speaking the best a Protestant can say is that he possesses a “fallible collection of infallible books.” I remember hearing him say this and thinking: is this notion even coherent? After all, if the collection is fallible, isn’t that the same as saying that some of the books in the collection might not be infallible and therefore that he doesn’t know for sure?

In the end, we all know how our New Testaments came to be. Inspired authors wrote books and letters and handed them on to the churches. The churches preserved them and handed them on. As the Church grew and was spread throughout the world, disagreements arose that needed to be resolved. As heresies arose that attacked the canon of Scripture, it became all the more necessary that some authoritative determination be made. This was finally done in the late 4th century of Christian history.

That's how our New Testaments came to be.

I was still a Protestant but it was becoming clear to me that as a Protestant I faced a dilemma. If I was going to take the Bible as my "sole infallible rule" for Christian doctrine, I had to *know* which books belonged in my Bible. I couldn't very well go around saying, "I *think* these are the right books, and everything they teach is infallibly true!" I couldn't very well climb into my pulpit each Sunday and say, "Thus sayeth the Lord ... I hope!" I had to *know* that I had the right books.

But how did I know? The reality was that I had implicitly accepted the authority of the Catholic Church to make those decisions for me. In order to have my "infallible rule" of faith and practice, I had to believe that the Holy Spirit had led the Church "infallibly" when it examined the evidence from Scripture and Tradition and came to its decision on the canon. But then, in order to escape becoming Catholic, I had to believe that the Holy Spirit had led the Church infallibly *only in its decision on the canon*. And only in its decision on the New Testament! On most everything else, the Church that heard the voice of Jesus and made this one good decision was dead wrong!

What was beginning to dawn on me was that in order to have the foundation I needed to be a Protestant (an infallible collection of infallible books) I would have to first be a Catholic. Even to attack the authority of the Catholic Church from the pages of an infallible New Testament, I would have to first assume the authority of the Church to assemble my infallible New Testament.

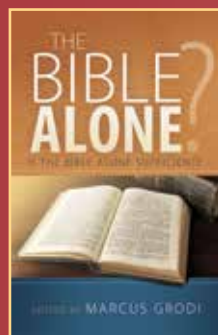
I apologize for the brain-twister but what was becoming clear was that I would have to sit on the Church's lap in order to slap her in the face!

I had come to believe that *sola Scriptura* wasn't the teaching of the New Testament, that it had never been the faith and practice of the Church, that it wasn't workable. Now I saw that it wasn't even logical, that it was, in fact, an idea that seemed to refute itself.

I was on my way into the Church. ■

\*See the January-October 2021 issues for previous installments in this series, online at [chnetwork.org](http://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](http://chresources.com) or call 740-450-1175.

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**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?**

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

We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are copyright © 2021 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

## 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

**November 1**

Joelle Maryn\*  
(revert)

**November 8**

Doug and Dawn  
Doughan\* (former  
Evangelical youth ministers)

**November 15**

Jim Wahlberg\*  
(revert)

**November 22**

Deacon Lou Aaron\*  
(revert)

**November 28**

Dr. Matthew Bunson\*  
(child of converts) (re-air  
from 1/7/2019)

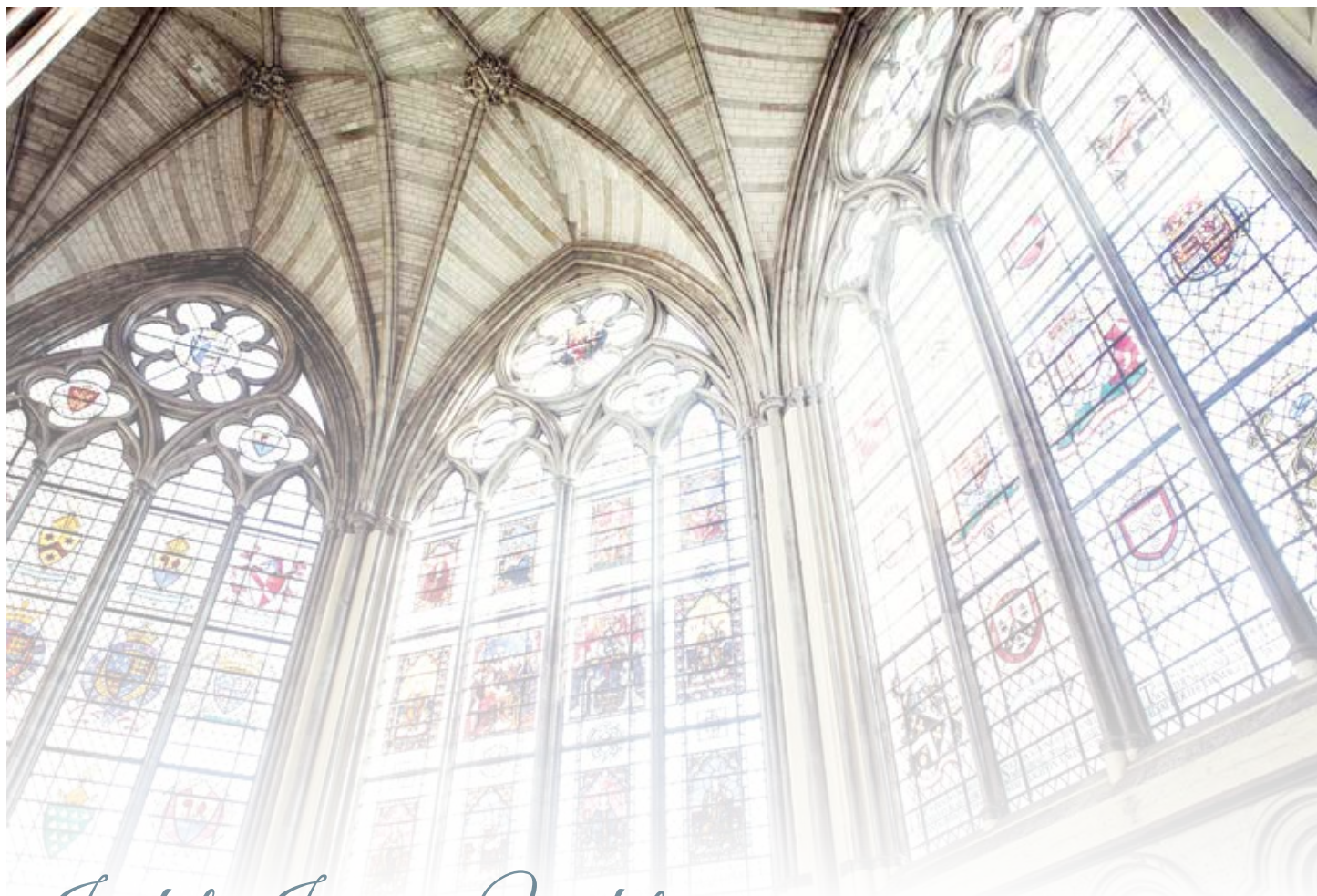
**December 6**

Craig Alexander\*  
(former Methodist)

\*Schedule is subject to change.

To access the full archive of past *Journey Home* programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home).





## Joyful Journey Updates

**From Philippa, a recent**

**convert** “Thank you so much for your care . . . Yes the annulment was granted and I had a wonderful reception into the Church . . . What a great moment, praise God . . . God bless you, your family, and all you do through the Coming Home Network which has been a large part of my journey.”

**From Judith, a convert** “The Coming Home Network was instrumental in my conversion. I can't thank you all enough for answering questions that we couldn't find the answers to anywhere else.”

**From Chris, a recent convert** “After what felt like the longest wait of my life, I entered full communion with the

Church at the Easter Vigil, receiving Confirmation and Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time. It is hard to put into words what the journey has been like over the last year and a half, but thankfulness and excitement are two that stand out. I am so grateful for the Lord's grace in leading me to the Catholic Church. I have experienced much joy since my Confirmation, from the sacraments to the community I've found, and as I continue to study and discover the depths of truth and beauty in the Church. Today my parish put out holy water for the first time since the pandemic, and I felt like a kid opening presents on Christmas day as I dipped my hand in and made the Sign of the Cross!

I cannot wait to continue to grow in the life of the Church and discern where the Lord is leading me in the future. Thank you to the Coming Home Network for all your prayers and work to point others to Jesus Christ and His Church!”

**From David, a recent convert** “My background before coming into the Catholic church was as a Oneness Pentecostal minister for twenty years. The Catholic experience has been overwhelmingly positive and I couldn't give them higher marks. The change has been wonderful. As for CHN, I have found it a rich source of knowledge and inspiration.” ■

# Prayer List

## Clergy

■ **For Randy, a former pastor**, that God will work powerfully in his marriage to bring him and his wife into a deeper relationship with each other and our Lord Jesus.

■ **For Justin, an Evangelical pastor** who has been watching shows on CHN every week and is on the road toward the Church, that the Lord will give him answers to the questions he still has.

■ **For Julie, a pastor in training** who appears to be on a slow path to the Catholic Church, for the Spirit's leading in her life.

■ **For Gary, an ordained Protestant pastor**, who has been drawn toward the Catholic Church for some time, that the Lord will lead him home.

■ **For Donald, a pastor** looking to return to the Church but dealing with a number of hurdles, both theological and practical.

■ **For Michael, an Episcopal priest** seeking full communion with the Catholic Church and looking into possible ordination as a Catholic priest.

■ **For Ben, a Nazarene pastor** firmly on the path toward the Church, that the Holy Spirit will give him courage to make the hard decisions he sees on the horizon.

■ **For Jay, a non-denominational pastor** who was baptized and raised Catholic and now finds himself drawn back toward the Church, that the Lord will lead him and give him courage.

■ **For Brook who has wanted to become Catholic** for a number of years and is exploring employment possibilities that would allow him to support his family and enter the Church.

■ **For an Anglican priest** drawn to the Catholic Church and struggling very much with a family who is strongly opposed.

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

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

■ **For Will, a 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.

## Laity

■ **For Gary, a Southern Baptist**, that as he journeys through RCIA, he may gain a hunger for Jesus in the Mass.

■ **For an Anglican in Europe** who keeps encountering roadblocks on her journey, that Jesus will grant her desire to come into full communion with the Church.

■ **For Bruce, a Baptist**, that he may find a solid Catholic parish where he can join their RCIA program.

■ **For Heidi and her family** as they begin RCIA and move forward with their interest in becoming Catholic.

■ **For Patrick, a member of the Church of Christ**, that he may find solid answers to his many questions about the Catholic Faith.

■ **For an Anglican on the journey**, that she will find good, solid answers to her concerns about Catholic teaching and have an open heart to respond to them.

■ **For Lisa**, that she and her husband will continue to grow in their faith together.

■ **For Ken, a former non-denominational Christian**, that he may be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist at the next Easter Vigil.

■ **For a Presbyterian in New England** who is still weighing what direction to move with her faith journey, that the Holy Spirit will guide her heart and mind.

■ **For Joey in Tennessee**, that his experience of RCIA would light a fire of love in his heart for Christ's holy, Catholic Church.

■ **For Debbie** as she goes through RCIA and seeks to go deeper in her faith life.



■ **For Diane**, that the obstacles preventing her from moving forward with her desire to become Catholic be removed so she can receive our Lord Jesus in the Eucharist.

■ **For a Methodist** who has completed RCIA and is waiting to have her marriage convalidated, that she will be able to approach the sacraments soon.

■ **For Ed, a Pentecostal**, that the Holy Spirit may anoint and guide his research into the Catholic Faith.

■ **For a convert** who is struggling in her marriage, for her and her husband to find healing and for her to experience the power and beauty of confession in healing her hurts.

■ **For an Evangelical in Poland**, that he and his wife may discover answers to their many questions that will enable them to return to the Catholic Faith.

■ **For a Baptist in Georgia** who feels like she is at a crossroads in her journey, that she will be able to more fully pursue her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Caroline**, that she will obtain gainful employment and also acceptance in a faithful Catholic parish.

■ **For Paul**, a non-denominational Evangelical, that he may accept the authority of the apostolic Church and be able to receive Jesus in the holy Eucharist.

■ **For Glenn, a former Catholic** who drifted away from the practice of the faith, that Our Lord would draw him home to the Church.

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

music. Again, God placed His hand on me in a way I was not aware of. The head of our department encouraged us to look for church jobs and be willing to move in order to take a job.

After graduation, my daughter and I moved to Wisconsin for me to take a part-time choir director job at a local junior college. While there, I met an excellent clarinet player, who was the wife of the local Presbyterian pastor. She invited me to her church, and soon my daughter was enrolled there in Sunday school. I liked the church because — once again — one didn't really need to believe anything in particular to attend. But my new friends encouraged me to join. The pastor said that in order to join, I would have to affirm that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. I didn't believe that, so I told him I couldn't say it. Then he went into a long rigamarole about how it could mean many things to many people, so I agreed. With that, I was accepted into membership!

God was at work again. Not long after joining, I was invited to accept the position of Director of Christian Education at that Presbyterian church. All this on the strength of my having taught kindergarten Sunday school at a Unitarian church. I shudder to think of the way I filled this position. I didn't know the Bible and I didn't see why it had to be the backbone of our curriculum. Once I told the junior high teacher, who was teaching the journeys of Paul at the time, that I thought Paul's journeys were boring! He was astonished, and I'm sure, dismayed.

But God led me over time to delve more and more into the Bible and to cultivate a relationship with Jesus. I became a full-time employee at the church: Director of Music and Christian Education. I count these among the happiest years of my life. My daughter and I attended a yearly church camp in northern Wisconsin called Moon Beach that has contributed to many happy memories for us.

Unfortunately, the good times ended in 1994 when there was a scandal in the church. I was the whistle-blower, which brought two years of misery. During this time of trial, I joined a “spiritu-

ality” group that exposed me to spiritual disciplines and brought me closer to Christ. It was probably the only thing that kept me going through the crisis.

As these two years progressed, some members of the church and also the pastor planted seeds in my mind of becoming a pastor. I considered it, but didn't move on it until I had a dramatic conversion experience.

About a year into the church crisis, I met and started “dating” (meaning “sleeping with”) a man who I thought would eventually become my husband and a father to my daughter. He was a wonderful guy. It never occurred to me that this was ungodly behavior. We belonged to a singles group which invited a nearby Presbyterian pastor to talk about the ethics of sexual behavior. He said that as long as there was true love involved, we were mature adults and could make the decision to have sex.

Then the church crisis came to a head. I was asked to attend a Session (church council) meeting. At the meeting, I was told that I was fired for spreading rumors about the people involved in the crisis. The meeting took place on

a Sunday evening. I had to clear out all my belongings on Monday morning. I was devastated.

Wednesday was Valentine's Day. My boyfriend dumped me that day. So in one week, I had lost my whole future: a rewarding career in church and a future husband.

That night, February 14, 1996, I threw myself face-down on the floor and cried out to Jesus. I had lost everything but Him. I told Him I was His and would do whatever He desired. I gave myself to Him completely. In the night I had a vivid dream. In it, Mary Rentmeester, owner of a local variety store, offered me a job in her offices. I'm sure that dream would mean nothing to most people, but it was the first of my “Marian” dreams — dreams in which someone in my life named Mary appears to offer me help or guidance or reassurance. This first Mary was offering me a job in her “offices,” which I believed meant the church. To my mind it was also significant that “Rentmeester” is the Dutch word for “land agent” or “steward.” (Coincidentally,

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

the Presbyterian church hired me back a week later, when some elders who knew the truth of the situation but who had been out of town during the meeting, came back and exonerated me.) At this point, I decided to pursue a course leading to ordination. I researched Presbyterian seminaries and chose Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Another move for my poor daughter.

Seminary was wonderful, even though I was reeling from my recent rejections. Being academically minded, I thrived on theology and Bible study. My professors encouraged me to continue for my Ph.D. with the aim of coming back to teach in seminary. I thought, however, a person shouldn't teach in a seminary without having practical experience as a pastor first.

After graduation, I had trouble finding a "call" to a congregation. I was a conservative woman, so I didn't fit into either liberal or conservative churches. I ended up serving in two churches within two years. It was a disaster. I just was not strong enough to stand up for my ideals on issues which were tearing the denomination apart at the time. Near the end of my time at the second church, I kept getting the spiritual message: "leave now!" I didn't understand it, but the thought came into my mind that I was to leave before the next eucharist was to be celebrated. At the time, I didn't know why that was, but now I wonder if it was because as a woman, I should not be celebrating the eucharist.

After crashing and burning as a pastor, I joined a wonderful, large Episcopal church and stayed there for eight years. I was not in any leadership position; that was an essential aspect of my healing. I learned during this time that I am bipolar, or manic depressive. I could write a whole paper about how that condition is a disease mixed with a blessing. Among other things, I believe that the condition has led to my composing many songs to, for, and about God. On the other hand, I am firmly convinced that manic depressives should not be pastors.

I eventually felt confident enough to leave the Episcopal church and take a choir conducting job. There was also a period of visiting many different denominations: conservative Baptist, liberal Mennonite, Black Pentecostal, and a Hebrew Roots house church.

But God was not finished with me and kept sending me Mary dreams! In one, the Episcopal church I was attending made a decision to sell their Mary chapel. If Mary is so important in my life, I thought, why was I being involved with churches that do

not pay attention to her? The only place I could think of finding her again was either the Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches. But I had had some bad experiences with a Catholic parish regarding my mother's final illness. Her pastor would not give her last rites and did not conduct her funeral. (One good thing, though: while Mother was dying, I told her all about Jesus, and you should have seen the gleam in her eyes! Thank you again, long-ago neighbors Helen and Mary for your prayers.)

In about 2017, I wandered into the library in my Jewish neighborhood looking for books on religion. It certainly was not the first place I would look for Catholic literature, but what did I find on the shelf but a book about Mary entitled *Hail, Holy Queen!* Reading it cracked open a door to a wonderful world.

After moving to Sax-onburg, PA to take up a position at the Lutheran church (2018), I continued reading and then began watching EWTN's *Journey Home* program.

In 2020, I made an appointment to meet with Father Ward Stakem at the nearest Catholic church, St. Joseph in Cabot, PA. He listened carefully to my story and turned me over to the Adult Formation Coordinator, Angie. Angie has a doctorate in

theology from Duquesne University. She was the ideal person to do RCIA with me, as I kept shooting her all sorts of questions. At one point, she said she felt like she was back in oral defense of her dissertation! I was won over to the Catholic Church completely.

In this process, though, I did struggle with some various teachings of the Catholic Faith. One of the issues I had a difficult time with was papal authority. By nature, I am fiercely independent and don't like to have to answer to authority figures. But as a pastor, I struggled with issues of authority. I had asked a seminary professor once, "How do you get authority?" His answer, I believe, was something like, "experience." Which was good as far as it went. But later, I discovered a small book by Watchman Nee titled *Spiritual Authority*. It was a revelation to me. Like the centurion in Matthew 8:9, Nee emphasized that we must be *under* authority in order to effectively exercise authority.

As a pastor in the PCUSA, whom was I under? Jesus Christ, of course. But what earthly authority? It took me years to realize (and not until RCIA) that Jesus gave Peter and Peter only the keys of the Kingdom, and *that* is where the line of earthly authority begins.

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist was another teaching I had to come to accept. I had never actually paid much



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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

attention to the meaning of the Eucharist. In seminary, we were taught that Jesus is spiritually present in the elements, but not physically. As I went through RCIA, Angie introduced me to a helpful instructional video on the Eucharist. It made so much sense to me. Then, I attended my first Mass in years and found myself bursting into tears as the people went up to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. My belief that Jesus is truly bodily present in the Eucharist was cemented when I read Peter Kreeft's *Symbol or Substance*, where he explores what C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham, and J.R.R. Tolkien would have discussed about the Eucharist. My favorite was Tolkien — the Catholic!

As I mentioned above, Mary has been present in my dream life. Reading *Hail, Holy Queen* made me fall in love with Mary. After reading the book, I wrote a song about Mary as the woman in Revelation 12. It is a good song, but the ending is ambivalent because at the time I had no conception of Mary's Assumption. One of the arguments for the Assumption is that no relics of Mary's body have been found. To me, that is a convincing argument, since there are relics of most saints and surely hers would have been the most popular if her body was still on earth.

I have been pro-life since my pregnancy in 1982 and I realized that the Catholic Church is the only Church that has been consistently pro-life through all the abortion debate. I have also come to believe in the Church's stance on contraception. The Bible is clear that sex is meant not only for pleasure but also to bring about children. I once heard a doctor defending birth control pills as a remedy for bad menstrual cramps. As she spoke about how women now have control over their bodies instead of being baby factories, the thought dropped into my mind: "this is witchcraft."

Divorce and remarriage is another area where I believe the Catholic Church has the most consistent views. During seminary, I researched sexuality, divorce, and remarriage extensively. I was convinced that Scripture is clear: God hates divorce and remarriage is adultery. The Church takes these truths seriously while maintaining a compassionate and merciful attitude.

After exploring all these areas and more, I made my confession in the summer of 2020. It was such a freeing experience! I felt the burdens just roll off my back. What joy! I then was welcomed back into the Catholic Church and received my first communion in 50 years! Praise God!

But how do I view my role in the Church given my background as a Presbyterian pastor? First of all, I have an admission to make: subconsciously, I never wanted to be a pastor; I wanted to be a pastor's wife! I wanted to serve as musician and Sunday school teacher, as I did when I worked in Wisconsin. Though I did not go to seminary to search for a husband, as I truly love scholarship and devoted myself to studies, it was at the back of my mind all the time. I don't claim that all women have this desire, but it was mine. I have no desire to be a pastor again.

I am currently music director at the Lutheran church and piano teacher at a music studio in an area north of Pittsburgh. The Lutheran pastor and I agreed that it would be permissible for me to

continue in music, but I should not teach, as I have accepted new doctrine. However, I long to be free to celebrate at St. Joseph's on Sundays and holy days. I attend the 5:30 pm Saturday Mass, but I prefer the larger congregation on Sunday mornings. I would love to sing in the choir and hopefully to cantor. I trust that God will eventually make a way for me to participate more fully in His Church — probably in some way I have never guessed. My daughter is grown and has lost interest in the Church, which is a great grief to me. But I remember my relationship with my own mother and I have hope that the Holy Spirit will eventually bring my daughter back home.

Meanwhile, God has given me the gift of song-writing. I am living out my dream of sharing with the Lutheran congregation the songs that God has sent me. I believe they are being used by God to lift and lighten people's hearts. I am also working on a CD that I hope to have finished soon. So God is using me, which is all I can ask. ■



*HOLLY PUETT is originally from Minnesota and has lived in many places, until during her retirement years she has settled in the small town of Saxonburg, PA. She was raised Catholic, but drifted from agnosticism through various denominations, until finally returning to her Catholic roots. She went to seminary and served as a Presbyterian pastor for two years. God soon gave her clear direction that she should renounce the pastoral role. Since then, she has worked in offices, taught music, and directed church choirs. She looks forward to continuing her musical activities as she moves deeper into the life of her "new" Catholic faith.*

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