



December 2022 CHNewsletter

"Tossed About, Then Reeled In"
By Jennifer Fitz 1

A Note from JonMarc 4

"Weird Grace" By Denise Bossert 5

"Advent Before Becoming Catholic" 6

EWTN's *The Journey Home* schedule 6

Joyful Journeys 7

Prayer List 8

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Tossed About, Then Reeled In

By Jennifer Fitz

I was raised to be a Bad Catholic. Before I elaborate, I want to be completely clear about two things: I have never doubted the sincerity of my parents' and grandparents' faith, and I have never for a moment, not one single moment, doubted their profound love for me and for all their children and grandchildren. Those two gifts have been instrumental in forming me in faith.

A Little Bit Catholic

We were *that* family. The ones who showed up at Easter and Christmas. The ones who barely squeaked their kids through First Communion. We said grace at Thanksgiving and sometimes at other special meals, especially when they were served in my paternal grandparents' formal dining room. We went to Mass so rarely, I didn't understand most of what was going on.

But if you had asked, we'd have told you that we were Catholic. We had our Advent wreath; we put out a Nativity scene with our Christmas tree, and we owned a beautiful leather-bound — and mostly unread — Douay-Rheims Bible.

I had a surprisingly profound faith for someone as ignorant as my little self. The general existence of God, though rarely discussed, was not in question.

My best friend's family attended church every Sunday; they didn't catechize me, but they would be my lifelong Christian role models. My friend and I went to church camp together for several years. There, I learned Christian folk songs and the practice of grabbing my pocket New Testament and heading into the solitude of nature to be

alone with God. In these moments, I truly felt the presence of God.

In junior high, my closest friends were observant Jews, and I was utterly mystified that some people didn't eat bacon cheeseburgers, not ever, because of their faith. Even though I knew that Judaism and Christianity were different, I could not have articulated what that difference was, beyond superficial practicalities like the merits of spreading your presents over eight days or getting them all in one Christmas-morning extravaganza.

Mixed into all this was something of the Catholic faith. I was old enough to prepare for First Holy Communion, and I had a love of the Eucharist. Don't ask me how or why. It was just the grace of God. I knew almost nothing about my faith; we almost never went to Mass, but I knew God was there in the consecrated Host, and I felt His presence powerfully when I received communion.

When I was in high school, we moved from the DC area, where I'd grown up, to a small town in South Carolina, just down the road from my maternal grandfather's family farm. The move was for my father's job, and

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

my mom pounced. She'd been trying for some time to get us to church regularly, and now she claimed cultural insight. She explained that, in the South, it was professional and social suicide to not attend church every Sunday. If we wanted Dad to succeed at his new job, we would go to church and *be seen*.

I thought she was being a hypocrite, and much later I confronted her with that. She explained that she had felt it was the only way she could convince my dad to go to church regularly, and so she'd done what she had to do.

Although I doubted my parents' methods, I did not doubt the basic sincerity of their belief in God. Her ploy did manage to get us into the pews every week though. Only my younger sister

and I were at home by then, and the first few weeks of going to church were rough. We didn't know basic manners, like not passing notes or not opening an interesting novel, if we happened to get bored during the homily. But our pastor was kind, encouraging, and diligent in helping families get caught up on their sacraments. I learned some basic Catholic stuff. I came to love Catholic culture and the various practices of our faith. By my senior year, I was a leader in the youth group, enthusiastic about sharing the faith with others, and I even won the Knights of Columbus award for being the parish's outstanding graduate.

If you'd seen me the week before I started college, you wouldn't have guessed I was on the verge of walking away from it all.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS BUYING GUIDE

For ten years, Pope Saint John Paul II dedicated his Wednesday papal audiences to a thorough discussion of the Creed. Newly brought back to the English language, **THE CHURCH – MYSTERY, SACRAMENT, COMMUNITY** presents the selection of those audiences that address the Church and her place in salvation history. St. John Paul II gives remarkable insights into a wide range of topics such as the unity of the Church, the role of the papacy and ordained clergy, how the laity build up and spread the Kingdom, and the Church's dedication to ecumenism and unity among Christians. The scope and depth of Pope Saint John Paul II's discussion on the Church is a treasure for its readers. #3214



By making a commitment of only twenty to thirty minutes a day, you can prayerfully read through the entire **BIBLE AND/OR CATECHISM IN ONE YEAR!** This handy guide is simply one of the best ways to challenge yourself to a deeper knowledge of Christ in the Scriptures and in His Church. #5003

This revised edition of **JOURNEYS HOME** contains the stories of men and women who, having surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ, heard a call to follow Him more completely. Many of them were pastors or missionaries. Others were lay men and women who, though working in secular jobs, took their calling to serve Christ in the world very seriously. In each case, their desire to follow Christ faithfully and to remain faithful to the truth He taught and to the Church He established led them to embrace the Catholic Church. #2522



A Little Bit Worldly

My senior year of high school, I seriously considered whether I had a vocation to the religious life. I read books from the parish library about life as a consecrated Sister. Ultimately, I decided not to pursue that path.

Meanwhile though, I showed up at college and all that Good Catholic Girl superpower evaporated quickly. There were several factors in my rapid abandonment of the Catholic faith.

Theologically, I was no match for the secular pressures. My professors were kind, well-meaning, smart people, many of whom considered it their duty to assist us in shaking off the remnants of our childhood beliefs. I had only a cursory knowledge of the faith and wasn't even aware that Church history and apologetics existed, let alone that there were rational proofs for the truth of the faith.

This pressure to leave faith behind was subtle, yet appealing. I was eager to be sophisticated and knowledgeable, and my secular professors were the most educated people I'd ever met. In contrast, the few students I knew who were serious about their Christian faith generally came off as country bumpkins. Then there were the evangelical missionaries who showed disregard for my beliefs and questions but wanted me to instantly embrace their script for conversion.

Finally, ceasing to be Catholic was easy. It was easier to go along with what my agnostic friends were doing than to stand up for the remnants of my faith. It was easier to be off camping in the mountains every weekend than to get to Mass on Sundays. It was easier to justify doing what I felt like doing rather than cling to basic Church practices.

Throughout my undergrad years, I wrestled with religion, still occasionally turning to the practice of the faith in certain moments. However, when I eventually planned my wedding, I did not seek to hold the ceremony in our beautiful, historic hometown parish because I knew that it would be hypocritical for me to pretend to believe in a faith that was no longer mine.

We ended up having a civil wedding presided over by a family friend. In our quest for wedding venues, we had begun attending the local Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregation, which theologically was the closest match for me, but eventually we stopped

Continued on page 3 ➤

attending there, as well. We asked my husband's ardently Baptist grandfather to give the invocation. I was okay with a little bit of Jesus, and his grandparents provided more than a little of that.

By the time I finished graduate school, I was vocally NOT Christian. In interviewing for jobs, for example, there were cities I simply didn't want to relocate to because they had a reputation for being too Evangelical, too religious right. Even though I was still strongly anti-abortion, I didn't like what I viewed as an unnecessarily restrictive, anti-feminist moral outlook that dominated the Christian South.

Likewise, I rejected any religious outlook that wasn't pluralistic and open to harmonizing all religions. Because of my family's deep, steadfast love for us children, it was easy for me to believe that God was loving, even if I was increasingly vague on who this "God" actually was. My spirituality was becoming a mix of monotheism infused with certain Native American and Buddhist beliefs and practices.

My long-standing love of the Eucharist, though largely neglected and ignored, had not, however, gone away.

Weird Grace

There is one incident from my college years which, at the time, I did not view as part of my spiritual trajectory but was, in fact, a pivotal moment for me. My senior year, I started studying accounting, and in one of the introductory classes, our professor had us do an exercise on thinking through different ways of reporting a given expense. He presented a scenario and three possible options — methods A, B, or C. We were divided into three groups, each with the task of defending its appointed method.

My group was supposed to defend method C. But in studying the problem, I could clearly see that method B was the better choice. I figured that I'd make the strongest case possible for method C, but my professor would in the end show us why B was the more accurate way to report that financial transaction.

I came to class prepared, and initially the debate unfolded as expected. Group A presented, my professor asked a few questions, and the group conceded that method A would give a false representation of the transaction. Group B presented, and with my professor's probing, this was found to be a good method.

Then it was our turn.

I made my defense of Method C, which I knew very well was wrong. My professor asked questions that were designed to show that B, rather than C, was the better method.

I argued doggedly, convincingly. And to my horror, my professor was persuaded. On the outside, I was calmly victorious. Inside, I was appalled that this expert in the subject had been talked into the wrong answer by some kid taking a first-year accounting class.

This was my first serious reckoning with the immense reality of objective truth.

A Wealthy Aunt, a Baptist Boss, and an Evangelical Friend

My grandmother's aunt had managed to become wealthy through a combination of Depression-era frugality and a dash of good luck. Every year, she escaped the cold, gray late winter in the city by renting a block of four condos in a small town in rural Florida for the entire month of March. She and her bachelor son, a retired golf pro, would stay in one of the condos, and various guests would be invited for a week's stay in the other three units. When my grandmother went down for her week, I was invited to go along for my spring break.

Three of the other guests, who were invited each year, were an auxiliary bishop and two priests from my aunt's home diocese, all of whom were golf buddies of our cousin. When our week coincided with theirs, they'd work on us all. They said Mass every afternoon before we'd all go out for the early-bird special at the local restaurant, and their conversation at supper would naturally touch on some Catholic topic. This was nothing confrontational; they just took it for granted that we aspired to be sincere and diligent in our practice of the faith. One of the priests was Father Declan, whose animated and perceptive personality made him one of my favorite guests; he encouraged me to read the Bible, and I recall that by the same time the following year, I could be found on the docks behind the apartment building doing just that.

When Catholicism reached out to meet me, it was like an old, familiar friend, but then, I would return to college and move on.

As I finished graduate school and started working, I longed for ways to express myself spiritually. I wanted to sing songs to God like we did in Girl Scouts when I was a child. I wanted more prayer in my life. I wanted to talk about God. All of this I attempted clumsily. But the great turning point in my conversion came on a trip to Texas.

My husband invited me on a business trip to San Antonio. It's a good city for a history buff, and I toured the historic mission churches. One of these was still an active parish. Even though I no longer considered myself Catholic, I approached the parish building with respectful reverence.

I knew that, if the sanctuary lamp was lit (and I could see that it was), then the Eucharist was present in the tabernacle. I was accustomed to sensing the presence of the Eucharist within the tabernacle when I entered a Catholic parish.

I took this for granted; it was a simple fact, happening without fail. But that day, stepping into the silence of that ancient stone church, I felt nothing. I visually confirmed: the lantern was lit; God was there. It was I who had lost my ability to sense Him.

I knew in that moment that I had done something horribly wrong. I had considered myself a spiritual person, but now I was shaken to the core. How had I drifted so far from God, and what could be done about it?

Continued on page 10 ➤

A Note from Jon Marc



Greetings Friends,

By the time you read this letter, I hope you and your family have already had a good start to Advent — this season of our collective anticipation of the birth of Christ. In that spirit, allow me to share with you a few reflections on Advent and on the ministry of this monthly newsletter.

The Weird Grace of Advent Darkness

It is appropriate that the theme of this month's newsletter is "Weird Graces" — those unexpected ways that God breaks into our world to call us to conversion. The Incarnation is, of course, the pre-eminent example of this, for nothing could be weirder than the God of the universe choosing to be born as a human baby, on a cold dark night in Bethlehem, amidst the sounds and smells of a stable! But it also points us to the larger reality — what we as Catholics might call the "sacramental reality" — of the world: God is the creator and author of the world, and He chooses to work through created things and people to impart grace and conversion.

Advent is the liturgical season that most puts me in mind of this sacramental reality. As my family and I journey through Advent to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord at Christmas — attempting to resist societal and social pressure to start (and end) the celebration early — I am always touched by the ways in which even the weather helps to remind us of the mysteries we are approaching. Here in Ohio, as we trudge toward the end of the year, the world is marked by cold, grey days that grow ever shorter. Trees have shed their leaves and animals have gone into hibernation — it is eerily quiet. The daunting winter dreariness can creep in, and it is tempting to shut out the cold, turn on the lights, strike up the Christmas music, and start the party early! But the cold, the silence, the grey simplicity of the days, and the darkness of the nights — I believe these are "weird graces" that can draw us into holy anticipation of the Incarnation if we permit them. Our world would indeed be cold, empty, and dark without Jesus, and Advent is a time to remember this contrast — to be reminded of God's presence by an experience of His absence.

Catholic tradition (big "T" and little "t") provides many great ways to embrace the Advent season. One simple thing that has become a beloved tradition in our family is to have the kids turn off all the lights as we gather for our family dinner, speaking in hushed tones and helping the littles to find their places in the semi-darkness. Then, by the flickering light of the candles on our Advent wreath, we sing the ancient hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel!" This small ritual, involving a time of waiting, an experience of darkness, and a bit of

both holy music and silence, has become a beloved family tradition and powerful way to recall who we are waiting and longing for during the Advent season. My encouragement to you is to find small ways to embrace the "weird Advent graces" of silence and darkness as you prepare for the joy of Christmas this year.

The CHNewsletter

I also want to share a little reflection (and announcement) this month about the unique ministry of the newsletter which you hold in your hands. You may or may not be aware: the CHNetwork newsletter has been running nearly continuously for almost 30 years. In a much simpler form, the newsletter was one of my father's first initiatives in the formation of this support network for converts and inquirers into the Catholic Church. When he brought our family into the Catholic Church and began to realize that we weren't alone in this journey — that other Protestant pastors were becoming Catholic and were similarly in need of resources and fellowship—the idea of the newsletter was to connect converts and inquirers, to share stories and prayer requests, and to facilitate mutual support and encouragement among converts and those on the journey.

Over the years, as the network has grown and the newsletter has developed into its current form, I have at times almost felt sheepish even calling it a "newsletter" for fear that an outsider might underestimate what a unique resource it is and what a powerful ministry it performs. Through the support of our generous donors — mostly cradle Catholics and fellow converts — we are able to compile, design, and send out this resource — for free — every month to thousands of men and women who are new converts or considering becoming Catholic. They receive a new conversion story, educational articles, prayer requests, Joyful Journey updates, as well as news & announcements from around the network. Many of these journeyers are in an extended and unique "Advent" time in their spiritual lives — waiting in anticipation of entering full communion with the Church and receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Our goal has always been for the newsletter to be a source of encouragement and inspiration, and we are always prayerfully considering ways to make it better.

If you've been following the CHNewsletter this past year, you may have noticed that our team has been including even more supplemental materials — quotes from the *Catechism* or early Church Fathers, breakout boxes, beautiful artwork, and other elements to elaborate on the monthly theme. Our goal is for the CHNewsletter to be something ever more precious and powerful — a bit of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty that arrives in the mailbox every month to encourage each member of the network to take the next steps on their spiritual journey.

Continued on page 5 ➤

A Note from JonMarc (continued)

With all of that in mind — and in keeping with the theme of Advent darkness giving way to Christ's light — you'll notice when you receive your January edition of the CHNewsletter that it is now going to be printed in full color. It is another small way we hope to bring a little more light to those who journey with Christ through darkness and difficulty. THANK YOU to all of our friends and partners for continuing to make this unique aspect of our ministry possible!

Onward and Upward

It's been an exciting year at the Coming Home Network as you know — a year of reflection and transition, as well

as a year of anticipation and planning for the future. On behalf of my father, Marcus, and my incredible team, I want to thank you for your continued readership and support of this newsletter and of the work of the Coming Home Network International! Together, let us continue to "convert" — to turn more deeply and fully to Christ and His Church every day, and to share the truth and beauty with everyone we meet. God bless you and be near to you and your family this Advent and Christmas season.

Yours In Christ,
JonMarc Grodi

Weird Grace

By Denise Bossert, Pastoral Care & Publications Coordinator



At the Coming Home Network, we have the privilege of witnessing actual grace up close, how it reaches into a person's life and permits him or her to turn toward Christ and the Church. Actual Grace is an ecclesiastical term, but I have begun subdividing actual grace into the weird and the miraculous. Weird graces are events that are seemingly odd, silly, coincidental, or even tragic, but those experiences impact our faith journey and make possible our assent to God's plan.

On the other hand, some conversion graces are big and bold, miraculous, akin to the waters parting for the Israelites. Weird grace, however, is more like hearing your donkey speak or seeing a bodiless hand writing on the wall, or a kid landing a stone with his slingshot in the middle of a giant's forehead. *Weird.*

Advent is replete with the miraculous and the weird. Some guys on night shift in a field become the first to witness the promised Messiah-King and Incarnate One. Magi follow a star in search of a new king, but they find Mary with her baby in a humble corner of Bethlehem. Instead of quietly putting away their presents for a grown king in his palatial home, they give precious metal, incense, and scented oil to an infant.

When we encounter the divine, it usually isn't how we expected, but grace permits us to give our unconditional "Yes" to God. We simply aren't capable of that kind of assent without grace. In the Nativity, grace caused the poor to leave the fields and find a stable; it caused the rich to follow a star.

My weird grace was tragic, coming in the form of a father's sudden death during the Christmas season. Then, it was a series of books I "stumbled across" by a guy named Augustine, a Carmelite named John of the Cross, and his spiritual companion Teresa of Avila. And then, there was the random letter from a woman who appeared on *The Journey Home*.

Our Pastoral Care Director, Ken Hensley, was a pastor when a parishioner handed him a tape by Scott Hahn and wanted tips on how to refute what Hahn had to say — but the last time Ken heard *that* name, Scott was a peer and friend with strong Reformed theology. With the *Catholic*-Hahn cassette tape, the race was on.

JonMarc Grodi, the CHN Executive Director, cites intense argument and an ensuing friendship with an honest atheist in a class on Frederick Nietzsche as a moment of intellectual conversion, as well as falling asleep in the parish chapel and awakening to a palpable sense of the Eucharistic presence of Jesus.

Our web and new media specialist, Seth Paine, remembers old churches he saw in Europe and his travels to Peru where he attended Mass and understood everything though it was in Spanish. Weird grace is sometimes seen more readily with hindsight, like when Seth realized he had been

ACTUAL GRACE

Grace has a far more robust definition in the Catholic Faith than most of us experienced in the Protestant world. A deep dive into Catholic theology yields two kinds of grace: Actual Grace and Sanctifying Grace.

The first, Actual Grace, leads the pilgrim to the Sacramental life of the Church and to Christ. The second, Sanctifying Grace, is habitual and stable, making us holy, enabling us to live with God for eternity. Both require our yes, our response, our engaged free will.

Actual Grace is not to be confused with Sanctifying Grace, which persists unless or until we choose to end our friendship with Christ by way of serious sin (which requires the healing power of the Confessional and the words of absolution). Unlike Actual Grace, which is a momentary gift, Sanctifying Grace is a state of being in which our soul becomes infused by the Holy Spirit on account of Christ's sacrifice, and we grow in holiness.

Continued on page 6 ➡

confirmed, married, and had his first child baptized in the same church—a parish he'd chosen out of the yellow pages because the listing had a beautiful etched image of the church facade.

Kenny Burchard, our Director of Development, toured the L.A. Cathedral during (Protestant) seminary, and thought, "I sense Jesus here! I could imagine myself as a Catholic." He recalls reading a Catholic theologian and telling his seminary professor it was a better approach to Christology than any Protestant ones he'd read.

Jim Anderson, Ministry Membership and Pastoral Care Coordinator, said when he was a Methodist child, he thought the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade signaled the beginning of Advent. Matt Swaim, Director of Outreach, vaguely remembers a wreath in his Methodist Church. Later, as a Nazarene kid, he didn't hear about Advent but does remember creating a Christmas countdown calendar. It began with December 1 and each day, he glued another cotton ball on Santa's beard. He began hearing more about Advent when he worked in a Christian bookstore, but the idea of two dis-

tinct liturgical seasons (Advent and Christmas) was foreign prior to his Catholic conversion. The Macy's Parade and cotton balls on Santa's beard pointed imperfectly to the Christ-child; though fragments of early graces, they led to more - eventually.

I have reviewed hundreds of conversion stories in the last year and possibly thousands since becoming Catholic. Sometimes, I find myself reading about the event that leads to conversion and think, "Weird. That's just weird."

And then, I smile.

The donkey just spoke. The hand just wrote on a wall. The march around a city just resulted in tumbling walls. The cocky giant just crashed to the ground with a thud.

An animal is bleating in the bushes at just the moment Isaac is about to be killed. Dagon is face-down again, and the pagans all have hemorrhoids.

It's weird. And yet, here we are. Under the Mantle of Grace - where each moment points to the Messiah. Come and adore. ■

Advent Before Becoming Catholic

By CHNetwork Staff

I was the pastor of an evangelical Baptist Church in Southern California. Advent was as foreign to me then as celebrating Ramadan. Of course, I knew that this was something Catholics and Orthodox and much-higher-church Protestants did, but it wasn't on our evangelical radar, and it wasn't on our church calendar. We talked about Christmas as it approached; we decorated the church: I preached on Jesus' birth the Sunday before Christmas, and that was about it. —KEN HENSLEY

In my family growing up, Advent was used in reference to the Advent calendar which we always hoped would be the one that had a piece of chocolate under each day. That period did feel like a greater anticipation of Christmas, but it held no special spiritual significance. The weeks leading up to Christmas were

exciting, though mainly due to the anticipation of presents. It always felt like a crash after a sugar rush when

Christmas (Day) came and left so quickly. I love being Catholic and having a period of spiritual preparation before Christmas and a lengthened time to celebrate Christ's birth. —SETH PAINE

I never heard the word Advent in the 38 years before becoming Catholic. Now, Advent gives light and anticipation to Christmas, which was once just another holiday. —BILL BATESON

Continued on page 7 ➤



EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by JonMarc Grodi, CHNetwork Executive Director



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Saturday 6 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Monday-Friday 1 AM ET

December 5

Norman bin Yazid*
Former Seventh Day Adventist

December 12

Dean Waldt*
Former Presbyterian minister

December 19

Deacon Graham Galloway*
Former Presbyterian

December 26

Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP*
*Catholic revert, former atheist
(re-air from 10/28/19)*

January 5

Arthur Lohsen*
*Former Lutheran
(re-air from 11/11/19)*

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

When we were Wesleyan, we had a Christmas play during Advent, though we did not use the word Advent. All of the girls wanted to be Mary, even though she had a small part in our version of the play. We knew she was still the biggest “girl” part in the pageant. We had a Nativity set at home, and my sister, brother, and I would take turns telling the Christmas story. Our parents (dad a Wesleyan pastor) loved to listen and watch as we moved the little statues around and told a kid-version of the Christmas story. Nobody stopped to think about how

“bad” it was to have these tiny statues of Mary and Joseph. Nobody thought twice about having a Nativity set which had first been instituted by St. Francis of Assisi, a Catholic saint. When Dad became a Presbyterian pastor, there was talk of lighting candles each Sunday at church. Today, as Catholics, Advent is a holy time of waiting and penance, a time for decorating the Jesse Tree with Old Testament-themed ornaments made by the grandchildren, and a time for children's shoes to be filled with tiny things on St. Nick Day. —DENISE BOSSERT ■



From A Benedictine Brother I almost never use my email address as we really don't send emails. I am writing to you on paper, which I find to be much more enjoyable. . . I also had to wait to write this letter, as we don't write during Advent, as it is a time of penance and preparation for Christmas, the Coming of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Everything is well since I joined the monastery. I arrived the 5th of October and entered the 7th of October for the Feast of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary. I was kindly welcomed by the community. Along with the Divine Office and its eight services per “day” as well as times for private prayers (silent prayers and rosary), I am learning Latin intensely. After some time. . . my study of Latin will be less academic and more focused on translating some writings and homilies from the Church Fathers. The (Novice) Master gives me regular lessons on the Rule of Saint Benedict. . . I also study the Psalms and have some spiritual readings and also works that sum up the Benedictine Life. Of course, we also have daily private Masses and the Solemn Mass. I am very much comforted in the discernment of my vocation, and I (more than ever) sense that I am called to the contemplative life. Before I entered

this Benedictine monastery, I was attracted to the Carthusian Order. This attraction is still there. We will continue my discernment process in order to know if that attraction is from above or if it will eventually fall away.

I would greatly appreciate your prayers. I continue with great peace, knowing that the Lord will guide and enlighten us in due time.

I still receive the CHN newsletter (which the Master (over novices) has allowed, and pray for the requests mentioned in the month prayer list.

I regularly pray for you and the apostolate as well as the conversion of Protestants.

An update from Fr. Bill McNeeley My family is doing well, having three children and four grandchildren. Sherri, my wife, is retired. I am the pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Knoxville. I like to say, “Holy Ghost's brand is all things traditional.” We have three English Masses, a Latin, and a Spanish Mass. Once a month, we have a Mass in Swahili. Next month I start saying the Ordinariate Mass while one of my parishioners, Jeff Baker (former Anglican), goes through the ordination process and establishes an ordinariate community in the Knoxville area. We have five Masses here

every Sunday, and last evening, we had about 80 young people in Fidelis and Fraternalis youth/young adult ministry. Hands and Feet Ministry does very effective outreach to the homeless and hungry, including going out to their homeless camps in this part of town. I pray we will build a new rectory and parish life center in the next few years.

I am very busy at the parish, doing double-time catching up on decades of delayed maintenance, building up ministries internally, helping our homeless neighbors, and planning improvements to the facility to set [us] on a positive trajectory for the future. It's hard work, but I am loving it. My parish is an interesting mix of fourth-generation families, [with] ten or twelve Hispanic countries represented and also five or six African countries.

From Mary, recent convert from Mennonite tradition Daily Mass has become one of the anchoring points of my life. I love making the responses, speaking ancient truth out loud. It's as though we assemble every morning to take our turn declaring the glory of God in our neighborhood. Who knows what false and foolish things I may say during the day, but if I've been to Mass, I know that I've spoken at least something worthwhile. ■

Prayer List



Clergy

- **For Jonathan, a Wesleyan pastor** who has been studying the historical and biblical case for Catholicism and is strongly attracted but has questions about the status of the Orthodox Church.
- **For Jon, an Anglican preacher** who put his journey toward the Catholic Church on hold last year but now finds himself drawn once again, that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead him home.
- **For Scott, a Pentecostal 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 Nicolas, a Lutheran pastor** convinced of the truth of Catholicism and struggling with how he will support his family if he leaves the only work he's ever known, that he will receive peace and be comforted by divine providence and a Lord who does not disappoint.
- **For Houston, a Methodist pastor** who recently told his church that he will be leaving at the end of the year and intends to become Catholic, that the Lord will be with him as he and his wife participate in RCIA and he finishes out his pastoral ministry.
- **For Keith, a former Pentecostal pastor and church planter** who finds himself on a journey back to the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him success in bringing his family along with him.
- **For Jeffrey, an Anglican priest** who wants to become Catholic but has several difficult hurdles that would have to be cleared on the way.
- **For Denis, 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 Angel**, who recently informed his church and denomination that he is leaving the ministry to become Catholic, that the Lord will comfort him and his wife, as well as the confused and saddened congregation they leave behind.

- **For Robert, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi** who is drawn to the Catholic Church and unsure what to do, that the Holy Spirit will give him peace and courage during this time.
- **For Jeremiah, a Baptist pastor** who, having faced tremendous family opposition to his study of Catholicism, has decided not to make the journey at this time, that the Lord will be with him and continue to lead him home eventually.
- **For Bret, a former Baptist pastor** who has begun examining the teachings of the Catholic Church and attending Mass and is attracted but struggling to reconcile his Protestant background and understanding with what he's now learning.

Laity

- **For Jadyn, a Lutheran**, that she may continue to grow in her prayer life as she prays the Rosary and confidently trusts Mary with her petitions.
- **For D.N., a Baptist** who struggles with the Catholic focus on Mary, that he may receive extra grace to settle and put to rest this troubling thought and be given a peace that is lasting and trustworthy.
- **For Amy, a Presbyterian in RCIA**, who just learned her daughter has an aggressive form of leukemia, and this diagnosis may affect their ability to attend RCIA this year.
- **For J.M., a Baptist** who feels called to the Catholic Church but his spouse does not, that God will bind them together in perfect unity by way of love, marital grace, and the sacramental life of the Church.
- **For S.S., a Baptist**, and for all like him who feel the journey to Easter Vigil is so long and so far away, that grace may be poured into every soul that waits with great anticipation the intimate moment of receiving Christ sacramentally and entering into the life-long journey with the sacraments.
- **For M.P.** who may lose the security of a home because family members are hostile to the Catholic Faith and have made pursuing the Faith practically inconsistent with living under the same roof.
- **For John, a Pentecostal in Oregon**, that the Holy Spirit would guide his journey home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Michael, an Evangelical in British Columbia**, that God would enable him to sort out his concerns between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches.
- **For Donald and Peggy, Non-denominational Evangelicals in Virginia**, that the Lord would open the needed doors to enable them to approach the Eucharistic Altar.
- **For Joel, a Presbyterian in Florida**, that the love of God the Father would calm the strife in his marriage caused by his interest in the Catholic faith.
- **For Austin, a Reformed Baptist in South Carolina**, that our Lord Jesus would guide and bless his RCIA journey.
- **For Josh, a Pentecostal in Tennessee**, that he and his wife would find their true home in the Catholic Church.
- **For Graham, a member of the Church of England**, that he may be blessed by the fullness of the faith in full communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- **For Noah, a Reformed brother in California**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to a fuller understanding concerning the relationship of faith-filled works.
- **For Stephen, a Lutheran in Maryland**, that he may find and follow the path home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Roger, an Anglican in New Zealand**, that his wife would have a spiritual hunger for the truth and explore the Catholic faith with an open mind and heart.

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.

Overheard

AROUND THE STAFF WATERCOOLER

My grandson, Albert the Great, loves keys. I let him play with a set of car keys, and they went missing. Keep in mind, we bought the car second-hand and only one set of keys came with the car. I searched all over the house for the key, in toy boxes, in the car. Eventually, I called the dealer, and they said the kind of key we have requires bringing the car into the dealer and having them change the computer to create a completely different electronic key. We were facing a price tag of around a thousand dollars for resetting the computer and issuing the two new keys. I renewed my efforts, still no keys. At the last minute, my wife gasped and pointed. The keys were resting in a little corner some feet away from my wife. She told me she had just asked St. Anthony to help us find the missing keys; she even showed me in her prayer journal where she had written down her prayer request just a few minutes earlier and the website where she found the prayer to St. Anthony, a prayer specifically for interceding for lost things. She had just finished praying the prayer and logging it in her prayer journal. That's when her eyes went to the keys. —KEN HENSLEY

At this, Brother Rex and Denise shared similar stories, marveling at how this petition is no joke. Our Lord seems to enjoy hearing and answering St. Anthony's requests so that we, who are troubled so deeply by lost things, might be restored to peace of mind and recognize the divine response to a saint's request. ■

CHNETWORK STAFF, ADVISORS, & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President/Founder
Marcus Grodi
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Executive Director
JonMarc Grodi

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

Office Manager
Ann Moore

Studio Manager
Bill Bateson
(former Secularist)

Director of Pastoral Care
Ken Hensley
(former Baptist minister)

Director of Outreach
Matt Swaim
(former Methodist)

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

Director of Development
Kenny Burchard
(former Foursquare pastor)

Pastoral Care & Publications Coordinator
Denise Bossert
(former Presbyterian)

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

Financial Advisor
Kevin Lowry
(former Presbyterian)

Spiritual Advisor
Brother Rex Anthony Norris
(former Anglican)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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



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



740.450.1175



info@chnetwork.org



The Coming Home Network International

YEAR END GIVING

Please remember the Coming Home Network as an integral part of your year-end giving plans. Join our mission to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy, and laity, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church. Consider one of **THREE** year-end giving options.

1 MAKE A MONTHLY GIFT

Join Compass and choose from one of four giving circles with a monthly gift.

PIONEER \$10 MONTHLY	PATHFINDER \$25 MONTHLY
GUIDE \$50 MONTHLY	NAVIGATOR \$100 MONTHLY

2 MAKE A MINIMUM GIFT

Consider a year-end minimum gift of \$100 to help us reach our year-end goals.

3 MAKE A MAJOR GIFT

Major donors are those who share at least \$1,000 or more a year toward our mission.

You may also wish to talk with us about other giving options (*gifts of stock, a gift from your donor advised fund, foundation, or through your IRA annual minimum distribution*). Contact kenny@chnetwork.org to schedule a phone or ZOOM appointment.

USE the enclosed envelope to make your year-end gift, or give through our secure donor portal at chnetwork.org/donate. You may also make your gift over the phone by calling: 740.450.1175



Ancient Israel, with their distinctive view of their own election, history and relationship to their God, YHWH, is a historical reality of enormous significance to the history of the rest of humanity. Christian mission of the nations is deeply rooted in the calling of this people and in the way they saw themselves and their story. In Old Testament terms the story had a past and a future....

Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God, "Shaping a Missional Hermeneutic"* p. 56



...Journeys Home Continued...

It was on a subsequent trip, one dark night, when I was driving home alone, coming down the mountains of southwest Virginia, that I found myself feeling that separation and absence so painfully. I wept openly at the desolation of my situation. I cried out to God and begged Him to let me know Him again.

I immersed myself in the study of religions. I learned all I could about Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism... and even a little about Christianity. During this time, God was working all angles. My husband had also been raised Bad Catholic and had not been religious when we met. But he was now asking serious spiritual questions. We had a new friend, Susan, who was studying at the local Evangelical seminary in preparation for the mission field, and suddenly it seemed like she was always around, fielding every spiritual question we had. Her answers were straight-up, unapologetic Christianity, although she didn't pressure us to convert.

This was true friendship. She was vulnerable and open with us, sharing her own personal struggles, and we relied on each other for friendship and support.

Because I was seeking a way to express my faith, I would suggest to Jon that we start looking at churches. He didn't want to go back to the UU, and he didn't want to look at non-Christian religions, either. His rationale was that we lived in a Christian culture, so rather than practicing a religion that was foreign to the place where we lived, we should find something local.

It took a few tries, but eventually I got my husband out the door on a Sunday morning. Susan was more than ready to suggest congregations to visit.

In the summer of 1998, I was working as an accountant at a local manufacturing firm. The company had gone through some changes, and my new supervisor, Tim, was an active, personable Baptist, not much older than Jon and me. Every month, our department had a meeting with the point-person for our chief client, a guy named Alan — who happened to also be a Baptist deacon and friends with Tim. Since he was my boss, Tim could not openly evangelize me. Alan, on the other hand, was the customer. He could say whatever he wanted — and I welcomed the good-natured banter about religion.

A Little Bit Non-Denominational, a Little Bit Catholic

One August morning, Jon and I got lost on our way to visiting the latest church Susan had suggested, and we ended up drop-

ping in at this intriguing non-denominational congregation. The service was enthusiastic, joy-filled, and seeker-sensitive. My husband and I looked at each other part way through the praise and worship, and we knew we had found where we needed to be. We could feel the Holy Spirit moving. We started attending every Sunday morning and Wednesday night and quickly became actively involved.

There was no moment of conversion around the choice. We just landed there and considered ourselves home.

All that fall, if someone asked me whether I was a Christian, I would insist that I was. To my secular friends, however, I downplayed any mention of Christianity and emphasized that I went to a non-denominational church. I wasn't going to lie, but I would have wanted secular friends to assume that "non-denominational" meant I was a universalist, believing anything goes.

But there was nothing vague about this congregation. It was unabashedly Evangelical, and I belted out the hymns enthusiastically and studied my Bible diligently. But I also began to secretly pray every worship service for the answer to the crucial question: *Jesus, are you real?*

Jon was not interested in Catholicism, because he felt betrayed by the tepid Catholic catechesis he had received as a child. On Sunday nights, I began attending Mass by myself and even made friends with another young Catholic woman whose husband also didn't come.

This created a conflict — I was Evangelical Protestant in the morning and Catholic at night — so I began haunting the library and the local Christian bookstores, reading everything I could about the differences between Catholics and Protestants.

In February 1999, my prayer, *Jesus, are you real?* was answered.

Because I am introverted, I was hoping this question would be answered the same way it had been posed in San Antonio: Let me have a private moment of spiritual revelation in some tucked-away chapel, perhaps one with ancient stone walls and a beam of sunlight streaming through the stained glass. Nope. It all happened at that monthly pricing meeting with our client's finance guy and deacon-on-the-side, Alan.

Our two companies shared a building, and that Tuesday morning I walked over to his office with religion on my mind. I had harmonized and synthesized Catholic and Evangelical concepts of salvation, and I wanted to talk about that during our habitual chit-chat before we got down to business. "Alan, I want to — "

Continued on page 11 ➤

...Journeys Home Continued...

He stopped me. “Nope. We’re not getting into theology.” He pulled his Bible from a bookshelf. “Sit down. Let’s look at this.”

What was happening? Alan, prompted by the Holy Spirit, felt called to share the “Roman Road” with me. It’s a series of Bible verses from the Book of Romans — he had them each highlighted in his Bible — that lays out the need for salvation and how to accept Jesus as your Savior.

He pointed to verse after verse and had me read each one. It was very plain. I didn’t like it one bit. I wanted a sophisticated, private, intellectual Jesus. This was just plain old country-bumpkin Jesus. But it was God.

“Let’s go to the cafeteria,” he said, looking for a quiet place to make the final pitch for me to accept Jesus. I followed him.

I did not want to convert this way, but on the walk to the cafeteria, the air was thick with the Spirit. And I knew internally that this was my one chance. I could either accept Jesus then and there, or I could risk dying and going to Hell, no more chances. I did what I had to do.

There were others in the cafeteria, so we ended up going outside to the picnic tables. Alan led me through The Sinner’s Prayer, a basic confession of Christian repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Alan congratulated me. Tim, my boss, was of course elated when he heard what had happened. But two other things occurred that Alan and Tim couldn’t have predicted.

The first is that upon saying that prayer, my lifelong fear of death vanished. The reality of eternal life welled up within me. I was filled with light. The second is that, as I was walking back into the building, I was suddenly filled with an overpowering need to attend a Catholic Mass.

I went straight to my cubicle, pulled out the Yellow Pages and looked up Mass times. If it had been possible, I would have left work immediately. That’s how strong this pull was. As it happened, the next available Mass in the city was 8:30 the next morning. *Well, okay, guess I’m going to be late to work.* I wasn’t worried because my office was good about letting us flex our hours when needed. Frankly, I didn’t care. I had to go.

That Mass was unlike any Mass I had ever attended. Now understand, this was a basic daily Mass. I knew all the words. I could recite all the prayers in my head along with the priest as he said them. But I didn’t *really* know the prayers.

All those years I’d been censoring Jesus. I’d take whatever was being prayed and translate it in my mind to a generic spirituality that was empty of the demands of Christianity.

Beyond Generic Jesus

That morning, I heard the Gospel as though for the first time. My ears suddenly opened; the words of the Mass were dripping with the Gospel start to finish. Suddenly, the possibility of not being Catholic was unthinkable. This was home.

It was a visiting priest, Fr. Jim LeBlanc, who celebrated the Mass that Wednesday morning. On Saturday, I sought him out at his home parish to hear my confession, and I ended up stay-

ing for the vigil Mass. I joined his parish, and that spring I attended daily Mass there on my lunch break whenever possible, in addition to Saturday evenings.

Father Jim answered my questions about the faith, and he helped Jon and me find the path to sacramental marriage through convalidation; he also introduced us to Church teaching on contraception and Natural Family Planning.

I won’t say all this was easy on our marriage. It would be many long years before my husband returned to the Catholic faith. Some nights my efforts at evangelizing my husband were downright stormy. Jon believed in a form of the Real Presence long before his final conversion, a belief he based on the fact that the Bible said it plainly, end of story.

God also used our divergent conversions to catechize me. I hadn’t read my way into the Church. My conversion was deeply spiritual, not intellectually theological.

But because of the theological disagreements in our marriage, I read Catholic apologetics extensively after my conversion.

The debate in that accounting class years earlier had been part of the larger trend toward critical thinking, the practice of learning to justify something. Truth itself was a nebulous concept with very little firm foundation. My conversion, however, had been a spiritual answer to a logical question of objective truth.

Now, my mind was opened to rational thinking. I began to see my way through arguments, dodging false dichotomies and other fallacies to pick out the thread of truth. That took time.

I studied apologetics and learned about the rational evidence for the truth of the Catholic faith. I joined a forum on Natural Family Planning (NFP). Well-meaning Evangelical friends also gave me opportunities to explain and defend the Catholic faith as they attempted to steer me away from what they considered a dangerous and false path.

However doubtful they were of Catholicism, because of the way my conversion had happened, my Evangelical friends were unable to deny that my Christianity was real.

I had left Christ behind, as so many “Bad Catholics” do. I found Christ among the Evangelicals. But Christ called me back to the Mass, where I could receive all of Him. Thanks be to God, He is there in the Eucharist, and my ability to sense His Presence has been restored. ■



JENNIFER FITZ is a freelance writer and the author of *The How-To Book of Evangelization: Everything You Need to Know But No One Ever Taught You (Our Sunday Visitor 2020)*. She writes about evangelization and discipleship at JenniferFitz.substack.com. Find links to all her work at JenniferFitz.com.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

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

The Coming Home Network International

PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

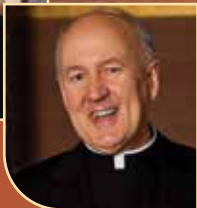


HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE

APRIL 21 – MAY 2, 2023



Ken Hensley



Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson

Join us on a journey through the Holy Land! Our pilgrimage will begin on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in Tel Aviv. We will visit the ancient cities of Joppa and Caesarea, where St. Paul was imprisoned, and the Cave of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. From there we will travel to Nazareth and Cana and then wind our way to the Mt. of Beatitudes and Tabgha, where Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes. We will celebrate Mass along the way and explore the shores of the Sea of Galilee. We will also learn about the roots of our Faith, as we encounter sites associated with Saul, Joshua, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The latter half of our journey will be spent in Jerusalem, spending time walking in Our Lord's footsteps, from the Church of the Nativity to the Via Dolorosa.

FOR MORE INFORMATION please contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org or visit our website: <https://chnetwork.org/pilgrimage>