



August 2024 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

To Follow Where He Leads

By Erin Runkles

I wasn't searching. We were doing fine spiritually, our kids were happy, and we were doctrinally settled. There was no need to rock the boat, and I certainly had no idea that I would soon be called out of the boat altogether!



Growing up Baptist

I was raised in a Christian family, within a Baptist church. My grandparents were Baptist on both sides—they taught Sunday school, served in the church constantly, loved the Lord deeply, and passed their faith onto their kids. Several of my aunts, uncles, and cousins are missionaries or pastors. My parents met at Baptist Bible College; my dad also went to seminary and was an associate pastor when I was very young. Even when he was no longer pastoring, my parents were always active in the church; they even helped plant a church when I was in high school. Most importantly, they taught the faith to my siblings and me. It wasn't a "religion" to us; it was genuine faith that led to committed discipleship. I grew up surrounded by people who loved the Lord, shared their faith, and taught us solid Biblical truths. I am grateful that my parents raised me to know the Bible, to know Christ as my Savior, and to build my life around Him. It was their teaching and example that led me to the Lord and gave me the foundation to continue learning about Him and growing closer to Him for the rest of my life.

I prayed to receive Christ as my Savior when I was four and was baptized when I was eight. The churches we attended were always strong on Biblical teaching. We memorized tons of Scripture through Awana and Bible Quizzing; we attended Bible study, Sunday school, and youth group. We lived a life saturated in Scripture, and we took our faith very seriously. I was committed to my faith, never questioning Baptist theology. I do remember coming across some verses that seemed contrary to the "once saved, always saved" teaching, but I figured the Christian adults in my life knew better than I did.

Catholicism was never really talked about. If we did talk about Catholics, we regarded them with pity, as people who were deceived by their own Church. It was possible that some of them *might* be saved in spite of their Church's teachings, but otherwise, anyone who believed what the Catholic Church taught wasn't saved. After all, they taught that we earn salvation by our own works! They worshiped Mary and pieces of bread!

I only had one friend who I knew was Catholic. I remember that she had a St. Christopher's medal hanging from the rear-view mirror of her car, which was supposed to protect her in case of an accident. I also remember her crying one day

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...Journeys Home Continued...

when she thought she might be pregnant, even though she and her boyfriend were “always careful.” That was about it for my exposure to Catholicism.

After high school, I attended Cedarville College, a Baptist liberal arts school in Ohio. There, all students receive a Bible minor in addition to their major. We studied the Old and New Testaments, Christian living, how to study the Bible, and (selective) church history. My experience at Cedarville was wonderful; my faith was strengthened, and I made wonderful friends. I also met my husband there! Heath had been raised in a church setting similar to mine, attending Bible churches, and we shared the same theological views.

We were married in 2000 in my grandparents’ Baptist church. Within a couple years, we were settled in an Evangelical Free church, which was our home for nearly two decades. My husband played guitar on the worship team, I served in children’s ministry, we were part of home groups and Bible studies, and we attended nearly every service, prayer meeting, and event. Our kids were dedicated to the Lord as infants, and when they were old enough and had made a personal profession of faith, the pastors in that church baptized them. The kids were active in Sunday school and then in youth group; we worshiped there, grew spiritually there, and had great friends. We were even sent as missionaries to Honduras for a year. We had no plans to leave our church.

Be Careful What you Read

In 2018 we got together with some good friends, Joel and Jen, with whom we had attended Cedarville College. They had become Catholic several years before this. Their conversion had been shocking news, but after they gave us a book called *Born Fundamentalist; Born Again Catholic* by David Currie, I realized they still believed they were saved by grace, and that’s what mattered. We lived on opposite sides of the country, so we hadn’t kept in touch all that well. But in 2018, Joel and I were discussing a book by email, as we had done from time to time. It was just a casual comment that I made about denomi-

national differences and how we know who’s right. That comment opened the door to a two-year conversation between Joel and me. Discussing how we know theological truths soon led to discussing Catholicism, and that was the beginning of this very unexpected journey.

I started studying Catholicism in order to show Joel where the errors were. However, the more I read about Catholicism from actual Catholic sources, the more sense it started to make. Joel patiently answered all my questions. I found out that Catholics *do* believe that Scripture is inspired and authoritative, they *do* believe we are saved by grace, they *don’t* worship Mary, and their doctrine *wasn’t* invented in the Middle Ages.

The first major change in my thinking was regarding *sola Scriptura*, which I had always firmly believed. Through studying Church history, I realized that the earliest Christians *couldn’t* have had a *sola Scriptura* mindset. They had to rely on the Church to learn the truths of the faith, even after the Apostolic age! I learned that heretics (like those claiming Jesus wasn’t truly God) often appealed to Scripture to make their arguments. The core Christian beliefs that we take for granted had needed to be defended, not by the Bible alone, but by the authority of the successors of the Apostles. When it was pointed out to me that 1 Timothy 3:15 calls *the Church* “the pillar and foundation of truth,” it rocked my world. Could it be true that God gave us the Bible, not as a stand-alone self-study book, but as a tool that functions within the Church’s overall teaching? Could it be true that God indeed set up *His Church* to guard the Truth, and that I needed to align my own Biblical interpretation with hers? When this became apparent to me, it was not a pleasant discovery. I felt shaken, like my very foundation was crumbling. If this life-long tenet of my faith was mistaken, then *everything* was up for grabs! What would become of my faith?!

Meanwhile, my husband, Heath, wasn’t interested in discussing this. I can’t blame him. I was considering something very different from the version of faith we’d always known—

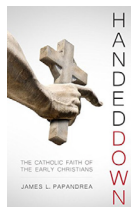
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

HANDED DOWN

DR. JIM PAPANDREA

Dr. Jim Papandrea examines that most-crucial era in the transmission of Christian truth: the time of the early Church. During those few centuries following the apostolic age, the brilliant and holy pastors, teachers, and writers known as the Church Fathers took the gospel they received and from it shaped the Christian religion.

#3261 - \$24.95



THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

JAMES CARDINAL GIBBONS

Cardinal James Gibbons’s famous and eloquent defense of Catholicism stands as one of the finest religious documents of his era, explaining the basic tenets of the Catholic Faith and why we hold them. This reprint is based off of the final edition published in the lifetime of the author, in 1917.

#3240 - \$21.95

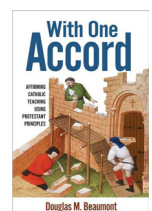


WITH ONE ACCORD

DOUGLAS M. BEAUMONT

Former Evangelical professor Douglas Beaumont shows how to dialogue with Protestants by reasoning from the teachings that they already believe and practice. Using principles that orthodox, Bible-believing Protestants broadly affirm, Beaumont shows that in many cases the division isn’t as wide or as deep as we thought.

#3269 - \$16.95



...Journeys Home Continued...

something different from the foundation on which we'd built our marriage and raised our kids. So I continued to study on my own, reading about 50 books, including every footnote in the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament*, the entire *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and dozens of articles. I listened to hundreds of hours of podcasts and watched many videos. I couldn't get enough, and the more I learned, the harder I prayed. I prayed for wisdom and understanding, and I begged God not to let me be deceived by my friend or any apologist or any philosophy. I just wanted to know God's Truth.

In December 2018, nervously, I set foot in a Catholic Church for the first time in my life. Would their "Protestant detectors" go off? Would they look at me as if I didn't belong? Worse yet, would they make me introduce myself as a visitor?! Fortunately, Catholics do none of those things, and I got in and out without anyone noticing me. I'd been hoping God would give me some climactic moment, where I suddenly either knew Catholicism was true or knew it was false. Nothing like that happened, and my uncertainty continued.

Several weeks later, I attended Mass again. This time, I did feel a pull toward what was happening there, but I didn't know if it was God nudging me or just an emotional experience. I'd never consider making a huge life change based on just an emotional experience, so I continued to pray and study. I started asking the "what about" questions: What about prayers to saints? What about Mary being sinless? What about infant baptism? What about purgatory? What about those people I saw only receiving the bread and not the wine during Communion? These were some important issues that I needed to resolve before I could even consider that Catholicism might be true. As my journey continued, one after another of these issues was resolved. I wasn't the first one to think of them, and I found answers for all of them. I was realizing that Catholicism *wasn't* shallow compared to my Bible-only faith; it was astonishingly deeper.

About ten months into my journey was the Easter season. I attended the Easter Vigil and was enraptured by the beauty of it all. I was brought to tears by the Litany of the Saints. I still didn't know if I believed that praying to the saints was okay, but I *wanted* it to be. I wanted to be a part of the amazing things happening that evening.

In May 2019, I attended my first non-anonymous Catholic event. While searching for information on Catholic beliefs, I had come across the website for the Coming Home Network. I had learned a lot from the website, so when I found out they were having a retreat just a half hour's drive from my home, I was excited to attend. I was also terrified! At Mass, I could go in and out anonymously, but here I'd have to actually talk to people—Catholic people! But I did go, and it turned out to be a very good experience. I made some new friends there—a couple of friends on earth who continued to answer my many questions, and a friend in heaven—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton—who would later become my confirmation Saint.

The summer of 2019 marked a year since my journey had started, and I was exhausted. It wasn't just the hours of study, the unending emails of doctrinal discussion, or the intense

prayer times. It was the inner struggle that was with me every moment of every day, thinking it was all true, then thinking I'd been terribly deceived. Begging to know God's will. Worrying that I was betraying my family. Trying to function in normal life while this battle constantly raged in the back of my mind. But I couldn't go back and "un-know" what I'd learned, so I had to continue studying. As I did, I realized I was moving ever closer to believing in Catholicism.

At this point, I started to feel like the truth I was learning and experiencing was something I had to act upon. But how? My husband was still not willing to talk about it, and I certainly didn't want to damage our relationship or confuse our kids. Also, our parents, pastors, and friends would all be so disappointed in me. But I felt God telling me to take the next step. Over the course of the summer, I spoke to my parents, Heath's parents, and a few of my closest friends and relatives about it. No one disowned me, but I knew I was disappointing these people, and that broke my heart.

The biggest emotional struggle and moral dilemma with all this was that my husband wasn't on board. To his credit, he never told me not to study or not to move forward on my journey, but I knew he didn't like it, and there was a terrible wall between us. I've always believed that, as a wife, I should submit to my husband as unto the Lord; he is the leader of our family. And he's always been an easy person to submit to, because he is kind and selfless and places my preferences above his own. This was the first time that I had to choose between what I thought was right and what my husband wanted (even if he never spoke it aloud). I can't say with 100 percent certainty that I handled that dilemma correctly, but I followed God's voice the best I knew how, and God ultimately used it for good, as He always does.

In September 2019, I joined RCIA. I'd already studied much more deeply than what the curriculum provided, but there were a couple of people in that group who spent huge amounts of time helping me with my in-depth questions. I will always be grateful for their help!

The Decision is Made

In October, I attended my 20th college reunion. Jen and Joel, who'd been helping me for over a year at this point, also came, and we had some really good discussions. Jen and I attended a Protestant worship service together. During the "altar call," I felt God telling me that I needed to follow where He was leading. So in that moment, at my *Baptist alma mater*, I surrendered to His call to become Catholic. Sometimes God has an amazing sense of humor! I asked Joel to be my sponsor, since he was the one who had started me on the journey and had spent over a year teaching me. He and Jen continued to answer my questions and support me through the difficult journey.

In the next few months, my resolve and my faith went through many ups and downs. Even though I had made my decision, some days I'd suddenly panic. Had I been deceived? What in the world was I doing? But God held on to me. The prayers of my sponsor and RCIA teachers were of immeasurable value in overcoming the attacks of doubt and fear. And for the first time, I even asked my heavenly friends for prayer.



God's Hiddenness



Dear Friends,

This month we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (August 6). In the midst of their journey with Christ during His earthly life, Peter, James, and John are given an astounding glimpse of the Lord's Glory, a glimpse which sends them to the ground upon their faces in awe. Yet, almost as soon as it has been given, it is taken away. Elements of this amazing event touch on our own experiences of the Lord's glory. More commonly, though,

we experience His hiddenness in our ordinary lives. Although we long for the extraordinary, God comes to us most often hidden in the ordinary and speaks to us only in the "still, small voice." There is a providential purpose behind this divine subtlety, as we discover in the Scriptures and through experience.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read that after Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a high mountain: "He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him" (Matthew 17:2-3). Then, a few verses later, after the excitable St. Peter has suggested that camp be set up so they can all stay on the mountain together, the voice of the Father speaks from on high once again: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Upon hearing this, the apostles fall on their faces in terror and awe. And then, all at once, the vision has passed. Jesus comforts them and instructs them to tell no one what they have seen until after His resurrection.

Most of us can probably point to moments in our lives when God blessed us with particular experiences of His reality, presence, and goodness which precipitated a conversion of our hearts and a decision to follow Him. We are grateful for such experiences and trust they were given to us for a providential reason. The challenge of faith is to *continue* trusting in God's providence when the vision has passed and the Lord hides his glory once again. Like St. Peter, we try to hold on to the mountaintop experiences, grasping at the emotions and trying to prompt them by our prayers and good works—but there is a reason for God's hiddenness. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:28 that "in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." God *could* give us a continual experience of his transfigured glory. As He doesn't, we must conclude, in faith, that it is for our benefit and sanctification that He chooses to come to us in hidden ways and to speak to us in the still, small voice. We are not destined to stay on the mountaintop hoping for another brief glimpse of God's glory, but rather to go down the mountain with Christ, picking up our crosses, and following Him to a glory that will have no end.

The event of the transfiguration itself gives us some clues to this mystery. Like the apostles, while we desire the mountaintop experience, the reality is that we cannot stand before God's glory as sons and friends—yet. At present, unless God shouts, we are

not very good at listening to His voice or following in His ways. At times, we think we'd rather have God shout so we would be forced to listen and compelled to obey. But our Father knows best. As Paul reflects in his letter to the Corinthians:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. (1 Corinthians 13:11-12)

God doesn't shout because His goal is not for us to remain children, but for us to "grow up." Being the good Father that He is, God makes Himself small and hidden and bids us to walk to Him, to respond freely in faith to His gift of grace. It is only through this journey—carrying our crosses in imitation of Christ—that we become true sons and daughters, capable of seeing God face to face in glory.

Prayer is absolutely fundamental to the Christian life because it is the primary way that we accept and embrace this relationship with the hidden God. Indeed, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, prayer is not a *means* to the relationship with God, but rather *is* the relationship itself. Most of the time, God speaks and makes His presence known in only the subtlest of ways. But it is in persevering on this journey of prayer that we are changed. Our minds become conformed to truth and our hearts to love. As we persevere in prayer, by grace we are slowly remade into the sort of people who truly could meet Him in glory.

It is in light of this journey of prayer that the sacraments—and the sacramental worldview of the Catholic Church—take on additional significance. The sacraments are given to us as particular opportunities to approach the hidden God. Christ promises to come to us through the waters of baptism, the words of absolution, the sacred oil of anointing, and in the bread and the wine which become truly, yet mysteriously, His Body and Blood for our spiritual nourishment. As we avail ourselves of these pre-eminent sacramental experiences of God's presence, we become more aware of God's sacramental presence throughout all of His creation—and especially in and through our neighbor. It is in loving our neighbor who is visible, that we come to love, in truth, our God who is hidden (1 John 4:20).

As we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration this month, let us thank God for the providential experiences of His glorious presence that He gives to the Church. Let us also trust that this providence extends beyond the extraordinary and into the ordinary. May we embrace in faith the gift of God's presence in the sacraments *and* in our neighbor, and may we persevere in prayer and the works of mercy to which we have been called.

In Christ,

JonMarc Grodi

Executive Director and Host of EWTN's *The Journey Home*

FROM WARSAW TO KRAKOW BUT NOT ON FOOT!

by Kenneth Hensley

In 1901, the great Catholic historian and apologist, Hilaire Belloc, made a pilgrimage to the Eternal City of Rome. Because he wanted to “see all Europe which the Christian Faith had saved,” Belloc vowed to travel the entire distance—about 720 miles—crossing both the Alps and the Apennines on foot wearing the same pair of boots. He absolutely refused to set foot in any wheeled vehicle. He attended Mass every morning along the way and arrived in Rome in time for Mass at the Basilica of Saint Peter’s on June 29, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Belloc took his pilgrimages seriously.

As we prepare for our 2024 Deep in History Pilgrimage to Poland, we are asked: What is it like to experience a pilgrimage with the Coming Home Network? While we won’t be walking the entire distance wearing the same pair of boots (swim fins might be more appropriate), our pilgrimages are very much like Belloc’s.

First, as three former Protestant

ministers who thought and prayed our way into the Catholic Church, each of us leading the Coming Home Network pilgrimage trips (Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson, Kenny Burchard and myself) are lovers of Church history and natural apologists who love to share the reasons for our decisions to become Catholic.

Second, since becoming “deep in history” was so much a part of our ceasing to be Protestant, while we want and fully intend to experience everything Poland has to offer—her landscapes, art, architecture, and food—our focus will be on the history of the Catholic Church in this wonderful land that has suffered so much, and on the stories of her saints.

Third, like Belloc, we intend to attend Mass each day on our pilgrimage. In fact, we will celebrate Mass in some of the most beautiful churches in the world. We want the worship of our Lord Jesus to be at the center of everything we do.

Fourth, while we aren’t traveling alone as Belloc did, our pilgrimages are designed to be intimate experiences. We keep our trips small so we can experience everything together—sharing our meals, exchanging stories on the bus, praying together and establishing friendships that will continue long after we’ve come home.

Please pray for us as we launch out on pilgrimage this September!

WHAT IS A HOLY DAY OF OBLIGATION?

One of the beautiful characteristics of the Catholic Church is its universality, leading to a rich array of feasts, solemnities, and celebrations within the life of the body of Christ throughout the world. At the same time, the Church remains unified in its observance of the key tenets of our faith. Holy Days of Obligation provide an opportunity for the faithful to remember and celebrate together the core mysteries of our faith. In fact, they are so important, they are included in the first Precept of the Church alongside Sunday Mass: *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.*

While the word “obligation” can cause some to bristle, these days are not a mindless dictate, but rather a collective celebration of the family of God. Like in our own families, where special events and dates are memorialized and celebrated, the Church does the same. We remember together the important moments that define our faith, that remind us of who we are, who God is, and what God has done for us.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accordance with Canon 1246 of the Code of Canon Law, have identified the following as Holy Days of Obligation in addition to the Sunday obligation:

- January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
- Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter, the solemnity of the Ascension
- **August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- November 1, the solemnity of All Saints
- December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
- December 25, the solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

ST. EDITH STEIN: PHILOSOPHER, CONVERT, NUN, & MARTYR



In a world where truth can seem subjective and we may be tempted to become entrenched in ideological affinities, what could a Jewish convert to Catholicism from the early 20th century possibly teach us? As it turns out, quite a lot!

St. Edith Stein was born in 1891 to a Jewish family in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland). From an early age, Edith sought after truth. Despite her family’s adherence to Judaism, Edith became an atheist in her adolescence—not seeing the fruit of people’s faith, she came to the conclusion they did not *truly* believe in the existence of God.

Despite this, she continued her quest for truth in her study of philosophy and advocacy for the rights and dignity of women. Through her studies, Edith encountered the power of the Cross during a reluctant visit with her Protestant professor’s widow: “It was the moment when my unbelief collapsed and Christ began to shine his light on me—Christ in the mystery of the Cross.” Not long after, Edith read an au-

tobiography of St. Teresa of Avila and became convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith.

St. Edith Stein entered the Catholic Church in 1922 and joined the Carmelite order in 1933, taking the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. In the decade between, Edith devoted herself to scholarly work, translating the writings of Catholic thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John Henry Newman. She continued her intellectual endeavors within the Carmelite order until her work came to an abrupt end upon her arrest by the Gestapo in 1942 due to her Jewish ancestry.

St. Edith Stein died in Auschwitz on August 9, 1942, and was canonized by Pope St. John Paul II on October 11, 1998. In April 2024, a request was made to Pope Francis to recognize St. Edith Stein as a Doctor of the Church for her significant contributions to the field of theology in her unrelenting quest for truth. St. Edith Stein demonstrates how the pursuit of objective truth leads us home to God. “God is Truth. All who seek truth seek God, whether this is clear to them or not.”

*St. Edith Stein, pray for us.
(Feast Day: Aug. 9)*

Joyful Journey Updates

From Jasmin J., former Methodist

As St Elizabeth Seton said, "Catholicism has enabled divinity to penetrate my life." How true this is for me too! I feel the saints with me supporting me along this journey. Ordinary people who gave all to God. My heart is softer, my mind turned more to Christ than ever before. Life for me is more missional. How wonderful it is to believe that Christ is in the sacraments and that daily I can touch Him. ■

From Cindy G., former Calvary Chapel

I was confirmed a year ago (2023) at the Easter Vigil and my life with God is wonderful. I am so thankful that God blessed me by showing me how magnificent the Catholic faith is and drawing me into a closer relationship every day. I serve at St. Vincent De Paul every week. I have always had a heart for the poor and compromised. I also serve in the Baptism ministry of our parish. ■

Do you have an update on your journey to share with us? Send it to info@chnetwork.org.



SAVE THE DATE!

Join us for the CHNetwork 2024 Fall Retreat

November 11-14

Saint Benedict, Louisiana

CHNetwork Retreats are opportunities to meet (or catch up with) our staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Intended for both converts and those on the journey to Catholicism, whether lay or clergy, the goal is to meet with others who are facing tough questions or decisions, and to encourage all in an ever deeper walk with Christ. For more information, visit chnetwork.org/retreats



ARE YOU PLANNING TO START OCIA/RCIA CLASSES THIS FALL?
LET US KNOW! EMAIL [INFO@CHNETWORK.ORG](mailto:info@chnetwork.org).

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



TELEVISION

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Tues. 1AM ET, Thurs. 2PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Sat. 6PM ET

RADIO

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Sat. 7 AM ET, Sun. 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Mon.–Fri. 1 AM ET

Monday, Aug. 5
Keith Nester
Former Methodist Pastor
 Orig Air Date: 3/30/20

Monday, Aug. 12
Bishop Scott McCaig
Former Presbyterian & Anglican
 Orig Air Date: 4/6/20

Monday, Aug. 19
Jeremy Rivera
Catholic "Revert" / Former Evangelical Protestant

Monday, Aug. 26
Bobbyjon Bauman
Former Presbyterian Minister
 Orig Air Date: 4/20/20

Monday, Sept. 2
Zubair Simonson
Former Muslim
 Orig Air Date: 6/1/20

6 *Schedule is subject to change.*

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



Maureen Aaron
Donor since 2005 - 19 years

I was raised in Singapore by a Catholic father and Methodist mother, baptized Catholic at four years old, and grew up with a strong calling to become a physician like my father. Having been awarded a scholarship, I attended medical school in Canada, and within weeks of leaving home, also left any hint of my Christian faith behind.

At the time, I embraced the secular women's liberation ideals and sexual ethics of my generation and remained in that state of mind for around twenty-seven years. As it often happens, when I became a mother, my spiritual hunger was reawakened. For several years, I moved between the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations.

Though I wasn't dissatisfied with my church, in 1992 a colleague at work invited me to a Cursillo retreat where I was reintroduced to the Catholic Mass—it was very different from the Latin-only Mass of my childhood in Singapore. At once I felt I could understand the Mass. I went to confession, returned fully to the Church, and continued to be overwhelmed by the love of God and the beauty of the liturgy.

I had never opened or even seen a Bible in my home while growing up, but now I was eager to learn as much as I could about my faith and discovered EWTN and *The Journey Home* program which helped me understand the Catholic Faith in deeper ways. For years I attended the *Deep in History* conferences, and over the past couple of years, the *On The Journey* podcast with Matt, Ken, and Kenny has helped me to grow, and to more deeply appreciate the unique charism of the CHNetwork to help non-Catholic ministers come into full communion with the Church.

In many ways, I have the heart of a convert (though some would call me a "revert"). This has made me passionate about the New Evangelization, inspiring me to host parish Bible studies, provide resources to others for their spiritual growth, and participate in pro-life work.

My strong convictions about helping non-Catholic clergy have what they need to make this difficult journey while supporting Catholic ministries that help me grow in my faith have led me to support the CHNetwork for the past 19 years! When I heard about The Shepherds' Fund (now The Shepherds' Initiative), I felt called to offer the charter gift to launch it and inspire others to help reach a new generation of non-Catholic clergy as they come home. I hope everyone reading will prayerfully consider joining me in supporting this work in whatever way they can. ■

Dr. Maureen Aaron has been a partner in mission since 2005. In addition to sharing a monthly gift through COMPASS, she was the charter donor to The Shepherds' Fund (now The Shepherds' Initiative) which began in November of 2021, and which has since raised nearly \$90,000 to assist non-Catholic ministers on their journey into full communion.

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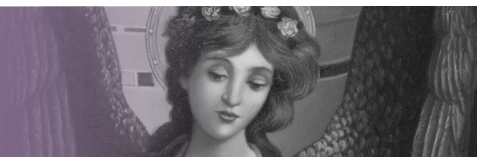
CHNetwork was founded to help men and women, clergy and laity, from every background imaginable, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and make the journey home.

PARTNERS IN
Mission

"If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself."

ST. AUGUSTINE, FEAST DAY: AUGUST 28

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Noah, a Protestant seminary student** who has begun examining the case for Catholicism, that the Lord will lead him in his studies.

■ **For Daniel, a Protestant minister** raised by very anti-Catholic parents who has recently come to believe that "Bible only" Christianity cannot be true and finds himself on a path toward the Church, that the Lord will provide guidance and consolation.

■ **For Gary, a former Protestant minister** who entered the Church at the Easter Vigil in 2023 and has been hired as a Director of Evangelism for a large Catholic parish, that the Holy Spirit will fill him and use him powerfully as a new Catholic.

■ **For Jerome, a Protestant missionary** who has begun wrestling with the claims of the Catholic Church and has many questions, that the Lord would provide clarity and wisdom.

■ **For Nickolas, a Lutheran pastor** wrestling with how he will support his family if he leaves the ministry to enter the Catholic Church, that the Lord will reveal His providence.

■ **For Austin, a Baptist pastor** on the road into the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will go before him to soften the hearts of his wife and family.

■ **For Dustin, a Presbyterian pastor** who finds himself drawn powerfully to the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him wisdom and grace as he continues to reveal his thoughts to his wife and soon to the leadership of his church.

■ **For Jay, a non-denominational pastor** with a wife and four children, who was raised Catholic, feels drawn back to the Church, and is meeting regularly with a Catholic priest, that the Lord will lead him home.

■ **For Steve, a pastor in the Reformed Church in America** who feels strongly drawn toward the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will open his wife's heart to the things he has tried, unsuccessfully so far, to share.

■ **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 Dylan, a student at a Protestant seminary** whose eyes have been opened to the errors in his historical tradition and is having a hard time finding people to discuss his ideas with without defensiveness, that the Lord would send him companions on his journey.

■ **For John, a Baptist pastor** who has been attracted to Catholicism for some time but is turned off by some of the things he sees happening in the Church, that the Holy Spirit would remove any obstacles to clear discernment.

■ **For Wieslaw, a former Evangelical pastor** who was received with his wife into the Church last year, has been asked now to do some teaching in the Church, and is seeking prayer for their son Kamil and his wife and daughter, Natalia and Maja, that they will all be united in one Church.

Laity

■ **For Amber, a non-Denominational Protestant**, that she may experience marital unity in the faith, and receive wisdom as she continues to seek truth.

■ **For Chelsy, a newly confirmed Catholic**, that God would bless her husband and her with more children.

■ **For Karen, a former Methodist**, that her husband may experience a reversion to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Laura, an Episcopalian**, that God would remove any obstacle to her coming into full communion with the Church and provide grace and consolation in the waiting.

■ **For Leslie, a non-Denominational Protestant**, that there may be family unity in the faith, to always bring the light of Jesus to her family.

■ **For Miriam, a Presbyterian**, that she may receive God's grace as she

continues to learn and explore the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Ruth, a Presbyterian**, that she may experience solid spiritual direction as she seeks communion with the Church, guidance for new employment, and the conversion of her husband to the Christian faith.

■ **For Creighton, a Lutheran**, that as he attends Mass, our Lord Jesus would give him a hunger for His Body and Blood in the holy Eucharist.

■ **For Dean, an Episcopalian**, that he and his wife may find the guidance they need to successfully navigate the annulment process.

■ **For Eduardo, a Baptist**, that he may successfully journey back home to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of his youth.

■ **For Kevin, a Methodist**, that he might find answers to his questions about purgatory and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

■ **For Larry, a Lutheran**, that he would find a loving, welcoming home in the Catholic Church that will help to heal the rejections of the past.

■ **For Michael, a Southern Baptist**, that despite his work schedule, he may be able to get the catechesis he needs to become a Catholic Christian.

■ **For Moses, a Jewish brother**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him home to the Church founded by his Messiah.

■ **For Paul, an Anglican**, that he may find guidance in his journey to full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ **For Rajah, a Hindu**, that he may soon find his home, with his family, at the Altar of the one true God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

■ **For Sam, a United Methodist**, that his family would see the hand of Christ in his journey into the truth of the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Werner, a Pentecostal**, that as he explores the truths of the Catholic Faith, he will develop a hunger to receive the sacraments of the Church.

■ **For Younes, a former Muslim**, that his family will accept his new found faith in his risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A Convert Actor Discovers His Patron Saint

ST. GENESIUS OF ROME—FEAST DAY: AUGUST 25

Did you know that the patron saint of actors is a convert? His name was Genesisius—and before his conversion, he was working as an actor, performing in plays that made a mockery of all kinds of things, especially Christianity. One day, when doing a performance for the emperor Diocletian, Genesisius came to the portion of the play that was making fun of Baptism. While acting that scene, he had a profound experience of God's presence, and an immediate conversion. This was in the early 4th century, when Diocletian had developed a reputation for hunting down and persecuting Christians. Genesisius proclaimed his newfound faith, and the emperor was furious, handing him over to be tortured and beheaded. Though given the opportunity to denounce his newfound faith, Genesisius was willing to suffer heroically for the name of the Lord he had once mocked.

We talked to Ashley Stinnett—a convert with a filmmaking background—about his own conversion, and the extraordinary way that St. Genesisius ended up becoming his confirmation saint.

CHN: What kind of faith background did you come from?

Ashley: I grew up United Methodist but considered myself a Protestant mutt. I left the UM church shortly after high school and was a member of a Freewill Baptist church for several years. After college I was a Pentecostal for nearly 15 years before finally coming home to the Catholic Church.

CHN: How did you get into acting?

A: I started acting in theatre as a child and then later as a hobby all through middle and high school. I got into acting professionally in 2001, working on a show called *Dawson's Creek*. One of my favorite aspects of the industry is meeting so many unique and diverse individuals from all walks of life, and learning about their lives and stories.

CHN: When and how did you start to become interested in the Catholic Faith?

A: I became deeply interested in the Catholic faith during college and even started RCIA way back in 2005 through a friend who attended a parish in West Virginia. Unfortunately, my grandmother had a stroke, which required my mother and I to move in and take care of her of full-time. This difficult period of my life forced me to step away from RCIA, but I never lost the interest or the desire to learn more about the Church and her history.

CHN: How did you end up coming across St. Genesisius, and what was it like to discover him?

A: During the final process of RCIA, we were asked to research and pick our confirmation saint. I had no clue

where to begin since there are literally hundreds upon hundreds of saints. So, I started to research if there were any saints that represented actors or entertainers and sure enough, I found St. Genesisius of Rome.

His story, his conversion, and his ultimate martyrdom—as well as the fact that his feast day is on my birthday (August 25)—was such a powerful and spiritual moment in my life. It moved me to tears and confirmed it was divine intervention for me to get confirmed with his name.

CHN: What would you say to anyone who's interested in becoming Catholic but is struggling to find a confirmation saint?

A: To those who are struggling to find their saint, I would say to pray about it first. I would recommend researching a saint that best represents who you are, or what obstacles you have overcome in your life, because so many of our saints had their own deep personal struggles. The good news is there is a saint out there for literally everyone, no matter your background or circumstance.

It isn't always an easy choice but never make your choice on impulse because it such an important and meaningful decision. Take your time, do your homework, speak to your RCIA brothers and sisters, talk to your priest, and most importantly, stay in faithful prayer. ■



Ashley Stinnett is an American actor, author, writer and filmmaker. Ashley currently resides in West Virginia with his wife and three sons. His filmography is at [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1507114/) and can also be found on Instagram: [@ashleystinnettactor](https://www.instagram.com/ashleystinnettactor)

I'd always thought prayer was a form of worship, something to be directed only to God. But what I learned was that "praying to saints" did not mean worshiping them. Instead, it was asking them—the righteous ones who live in God's presence—to pray for me, just as I ask my earthly friends to pray for me. I realized that if holy people on earth care enough about me to pray for me, it only makes sense that fully purified saints in Heaven would care even more, and their prayers would be effective (see James 5:16). So I prayed my first Hail Mary, and I also asked St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to pray for me. Of course, before and after doing so, I told God that I hoped I wasn't offending Him with these prayers, and to please forgive me if I was!

I knew I needed to share with my pastors at some point, so I finally worked up the courage to send them an email. Then I met with two of the pastors, and both times I left the meetings feeling confident in my decision, yet heartbroken at not following the advice of these wise, godly, caring men who had loved our family and had been our teachers for so many years.

By the start of the new year, my remaining doctrinal issues were basically resolved. Perhaps more importantly, I was realizing that, as I entrusted myself to the care of Christ's Church, I didn't have to stress about things I didn't understand. I didn't have the responsibility of a bishop, but the role of a faithful follower. Yes, I should seek to understand my faith as fully as possible, but the weight of having to prove every minute doctrinal issue was lifted from my shoulders. I rested in the comfort that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide His Church.

But in February, I was having doubts again. It was almost time for the Rite of Election with the Bishop for those who would be confirmed at Easter. I'd made my decision, and yet that troublesome second-guessing wouldn't go away. I decided to spend a full day in fasting and prayer on a mini pilgrimage. I made plans to spend time at the Seton Shrine and the Grotto near there. I wrote in my journal:

Lord, how desperately I need You. It's been 20 months of this search. I feel Your leading, and yet I doubt and second-guess. I hope and I grieve, I trust and I despair, I move forward and I hesitate. Lord, I want this decision to be made! I want this wavering to be behind me!... Will You give me Your final answer and assure me, "This is the way; walk in it"?

My mini retreat was a beautiful day with the Lord. At the end of it, I felt at peace. And even more than that—I felt com-

elled that I *must* follow through and join the Church. Again, from my journal:

God, you have given me faith and courage. You have guided my steps. I don't understand everything, and I don't have 100 percent certainty. But I have enough certainty that I cannot remain outside the Catholic Church. If I have failed in any way to discern Your will, O Lord, forgive me. And now, trusting in Your goodness and Your unfailing mercy, I follow where it seems You have led me. Here I stand; I can do no other.

I felt such joy and peace about my decision! However, the rift between my husband and me only deepened, and my worry about hurting those I loved was a palpable pain. The first time I chose not to participate in communion at our home church, I cried. I knew I couldn't participate in good conscience anymore, and yet I felt myself ripped apart from others who loved my Lord and who had helped me grow closer to Him over so many years. I pondered, "Lord, is this how You feel when You see the division within Your Body? Forgive us, Lord. Unite us and make us one."

On March 1st, I participated in the Rite of Election with all the others in our diocese who would be confirmed at the Easter Vigil. Now there was no backing out! It was time to prepare for Lent, and then for my Confirmation at the Easter Vigil. My dear friends Joel and Jen would fly across the country to be there—Joel as my sponsor, and Jen with the kids to celebrate with me. It continued to be a very difficult journey, but I was excited to be so close and was looking forward to reaching the culmination of the past two years' struggle. I couldn't wait!

The Day Arrives

But this was March of 2020. A piece of advice to any potential converts out there: try not to have a global pandemic happen at the time of your Confirmation! COVID-19 arrived around the start of Lent. Joel and Jen had to cancel their travel plans. My Confirmation was postponed, and Easter celebrations were canceled. Instead of Confirmation and celebration, my family found ourselves at home alone on Easter Sunday. It was devastating! I was told that I might be confirmed at Pentecost. That didn't happen either. As the world reeled from the physical and social effects of the virus, my soul ached over the cancellation of all I'd been looking forward to.

Finally, my Confirmation was scheduled for a private Mass on June 27th, just the RCIA candidates and their families. But that afternoon, I nearly backed out again. My husband finally



As my journey continued, one after another of [my] issues was resolved...I was realizing that Catholicism wasn't shallow compared to my Bible-only faith; it was astonishingly deeper.

...Journeys Home Continued...

told me how devastated he was and asked me not to go through with it. I didn't know what to do! I was so sure of God's leading that I felt it would be an act of disobedience not to go through with it. However, I have never felt like such a cruel person as I did walking into the church. I was breaking my husband's heart and refusing pretty much the only thing he'd ever asked of me. It was a terrible feeling.

There were only about a dozen people in the church—the three of us being confirmed, plus their families and a few of our RCIA candidates. One friend I had met at the Seton retreat drove an hour to be there for me, which was so very kind of her. But my closest friends, my sponsor, my husband, my children, and all the family and friends from the first forty-two years of my life were absent. We were confirmed with everyone wearing masks and standing six feet apart. The reception of the Precious Blood had been canceled due to COVID-19, and we received Christ's Body from behind a plexiglass window. Unlike the previous year, when I'd watched as the newly confirmed were hugged and welcomed by the entire congregation, our ceremony was subdued and sterile. Yes, there was joy, but it was a very somber joy, buried below the circumstances of the pandemic and the personal pain of following Christ even though it meant hurting my family. We couldn't have any celebrations at the church, and there was no one in my family who thought this was something to celebrate. So I went home alone, clinging only to Christ, seeking only the comfort of His embrace.

The next several months were rough. The pain of this crisis forced Heath and me to finally talk about things, which was greatly needed. But several times, I thought, "Now that we're actually talking maybe I should quit Catholicism to save our marriage!" There was no Mass or church activities because of the pandemic, so I didn't have anyone to help me in person. Fortunately, my sponsor and a couple of my RCIA leaders kept encouraging me and wouldn't let me give up.

I prayed continually for Christ to lead Heath and me to unity, but we didn't talk about it much. The next few years are Heath's story to tell. But skipping to the present, I can tell you the exciting news that my husband and our two daughters are

now also part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church! God is amazing, and His ways are beyond our understanding!

The Journey Continues

None of our friends or extended family have followed us into the Church, and neither have our two sons. Our prayer is that God will one day bring them, too, into full communion. Sometimes I struggle to feel at home as a Catholic and often feel like an expatriate living in a culture that isn't my own. It's painful to be in a different church, away from our sons! On the other hand, we have a richer and deeper faith than we've ever had! We have the sacraments to help us on our journey; we're more connected with the saints from all the world and all time; and we're being drawn ever closer to the Lord as He continues to guide us each step of the way. Even though it's a difficult journey, it's right where we need to be.

As I said in the beginning, I wasn't searching. I would never have chosen this path for myself or chosen to put my family through it. But when God calls, we must obey. Where He leads, we must follow. And as He has promised, He works ALL things for our good. It's not always easy to say yes to Jesus, but it's always worth it.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21) ■

Erin is a wife, mom (through birth and adoption), homeschool teacher, and ESL teacher. She and her husband Heath have been Christians since childhood but lived the first 40 years of their lives without the slightest hint that they would one day be Catholic. Erin was received into the Catholic Church in June 2020, and Heath in December 2021. They live in Maryland with their four teen/young-adult children, and attend Holy Transfiguration Melkite Greek Catholic Church in McLean, Virginia.

The Transfiguration "is the sacrament of the second regeneration": our own Resurrection. From now on we share in the Lord's Resurrection through the Spirit who acts in the sacraments of the Body of Christ. The Transfiguration gives us a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming, when he "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body."

(CCC 556)

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION:
AUGUST 6

“...a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said,

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying,

“Rise, and do not be afraid.”

MATTHEW 17:5-8

