



September 2024 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

God Doesn't Know Me

By Jeff Hutson

I grew up in a big family that fit every Catholic stereotype except one—we weren't Catholic. We attended church every Sunday. Mom stayed home, ran the household, and corralled us six kids. Dad was a small-town attorney struggling to keep his large family fed.



I was a third-generation Episcopalian who loved the church. The music, stained glass, and Scripture readings made me feel a peace I didn't get much of at home. And the parishioners, many of my parents' closest friends, were like extra aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

Things changed dramatically when I was about 12 years old. Dad was hospitalized. Mom returned to teaching. I was confirmed in the Episcopal church. Then I had my first experience with Pentecostalism. I didn't know it at the time, but it was the beginning of a 25-year journey that led me to become a Pentecostal deacon by 23 and—shockingly—a Catholic by 37.

Episcopalian to Pentecostal

The summer of 1975 was a season of transition in a stressful year. It began with a gift from my Episcopal parish that was an emotional lifesaver. With Dad sick and eight hungry mouths to feed, money was tight. Stress and anger boiled through our home. Perhaps sensing my distress, the good people of St. Paul's Episcopal Church paid my way to a week of summer church camp. I'm sure they

hoped the fresh air and beautiful hills of Brown County, Indiana, would do me some good.

One of those St. Paul's friends drove me to the camp and, a week later, picked me up. On the way home, he said we'd be going to a picnic at a house church, where we'd meet my parents. That seemed odd. I'd never heard of such a thing. But if my parents were there, it must be okay.

An hour and a half later, we turned down an isolated country road, slicing a narrow gap between corn fields, woods, and pastures. I saw nothing but barns, farmhouses, and a few cattle. We slowed and turned down a long, graveled lane. Behind us trailed a thick cloud of dust as the fields to our right and left shimmered in the hot July sun. But ahead, beneath a cool cluster of shade trees, I saw a tiny one-bedroom cottage. The house church was just that—a little red house that served a congregation of maybe 25 people.

Stepping out of the car was like visiting a foreign country. While our Episcopal church lived up to its reputation as the spiritual home to a professional class—doctors, lawyers, teachers, and businessmen—I met different people at the picnic. These were an openly friendly group of farmers, laborers, mechanics, and factory workers.

Continued on page 2 ➤

...Journeys Home Continued...

They dressed and spoke differently from the Episcopalians I'd known. At St. Paul's, I called adults Mister or Missus, followed by their last name. Not these folks. Everyone here was Brother or Sister so-and-so. The pastor was Brother Merrill, and his wife, Sister Jeannette.

After the picnic, we gathered in the little house for the service. It was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. We began with singing, but there was no entrance hymn followed by liturgical prayers. Instead, it was one song following another, beginning with lively songs, then slowly moving toward gentle, spiritual tunes. They sang *a cappella*, accompanied by just a few tambourines. As they sang, they raised their arms and cried out, first in English—"Praise God" and "Hallelujah"—and later in something like babbling that I couldn't understand. Then Brother Merrill stood in the kitchen and began a passage-by-passage teaching from the King James Bible. Sister Jeannette read the passages; he explained them. I've long since forgotten what verses he taught that night, but I remember his deep passion and simple, heartfelt explanations. He focused everything on building a personal relationship with Jesus. This was a new concept to me. I thought I was a Christian, yet Brother Merrill was telling me I had to get "saved."

Not too many weeks later, my mother and I attended another Sunday evening service at that little red house. The small congregation sat on folding chairs packed tightly in the little living room. At the end of the service, Brother Merrill said God told him that all the children should come forward. I was amazed. Except for the Bible, I'd never heard of God actually speaking to someone. While nervous about standing in front of strangers, I went forward.

We were lined up youngest to oldest. Being the oldest, I was last in line. Brother Merrill began to pray. At the end, he cried out, "In the name of Jesus!" and placed his hand on the forehead of the littlest child who stood first in line. Like a line of dominoes, each child tumbled backward—except for me. I was startled and confused as I gaped at the children sprawled

on the floor. Later, my mother explained that these children were "slain in the Spirit." They were so overcome with the power of the Holy Spirit that they fell to the floor.

As I stood, awkward and embarrassed, in front of the packed living room, I had my first encounter with a fear that God did not know me. Why would every child in that line experience God, except me? This dread was to haunt me for more than 20 years.

Augustine, Aquinas, and Deacon Jeff

I attended that house church with my mother for six years as they grew into a newly built red barn. As an older teenager, I missed more Sundays than I went. In high school, I found I could focus on fun and still get adequate grades. Things changed in 1981, when I headed off to try the same at Butler University. I quickly found I was not ready for college. After one semester, I had a choice: quit and enlist in the military, or learn to be a student. I wanted to quit. My mother persuaded me to try one more semester.

In my second semester, I took an Introduction to Logic class. I loved it! A good grade in that and a few other courses propelled me to the Dean's List. More importantly, I found the joy of academic learning for the first time. I loaded up on more philosophy courses with my logic professor. He introduced me to great thinkers, old and new, including Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, and C.S. Lewis.

It was in these courses that I first discovered why I even believed there was a god, let alone a Judeo-Christian God. I found a lifelong friendship with the ancient philosophers and a stronger belief in God. What I did not fully appreciate at the time was that my atheist professor did an excellent job of exposing me to what I later learned were the Doctors of the Church.

While the Doctors competed for my mind, something new—the collision of Evangelical Christianity and pop culture—grabbed my ears and touched my heart. I loved the rock music of the late 1970s, with Boston, Foreigner, Journey, Kan-

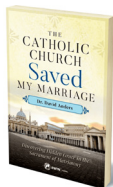
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

THE CHURCH SAVED MY MARRIAGE

DR. DAVID ANDERS

In the early 2000s, Dr. David Anders' marriage was so painful that he and his wife had just one thing in common: contempt for each other. He shares the journey of discovery that led him to Catholic teaching on marriage, and brought about healing in his family.

#3245 - \$17.95



THE WANDERER TALKS TRUTH

DION DIMUCCI

Dion came up out of the Bronx in the 50s and tore through the music charts in a ferocious display of talent, eventually being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He shares the long and winding path that brought him back to his Catholic roots.

#3133 - \$9.00
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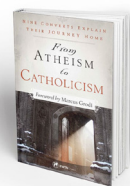


FROM ATHEISM TO CATHOLICISM

NINE CONVERSION STORIES

Joseph Pearce, Fr. John Bartunek, Dr. Kevin Vost, and other Catholic converts from atheist backgrounds share the journeys that led them from rejecting the idea of God to eventually finding a spiritual home in the Church.

#3224 - \$14.95



sas, and Styx among my favorites, alongside Dylan, Fogelberg, and The Eagles.

Sometime around 1983, while tuning the radio, I found a sound I liked and settled in to study. It was a guy named Mylon Lefevre, and he had some Christian lyrics. This was not surprising since Kansas, Bob Dylan, and Paul Davis had been singing Gospel-tinged songs for years. But then I noticed the next few songs were also contemporary sounding with Gospel themes. I had stumbled on Contemporary Christian Music and one of CCM's early full-time FM stations. As they sang, my heart sang.

By this time, it had probably been four years since I had regularly attended any church. I don't remember why, but I decided to visit that house church that had since grown into a big red barn church. While there, I learned they had just opened a church in Indianapolis, near my school. I visited the church and was quickly hooked. The Indianapolis branch had adopted the contemporary Christian music style I had grown to love. I threw myself wholeheartedly into life at the church. After graduation, at the age of 23, I was named a deacon. Mostly, I ran the soundboard and made sure the diaper pail was emptied.

A Decade of Restlessness

My main draw to the Indianapolis church was the modern praise and worship music. So many of the contemporary worship songs made me feel close to God. However, I became increasingly uncomfortable with spontaneous prophecies from attendees, often in King James English and at other times in unintelligible tongues.

I wasn't ready to give up believing that speaking in tongues was the litmus test for every Spirit-filled Christian, but we ignored the instructions on prophecy, tongues, and orderly worship (1 Corinthians 14).

Through it all, I remained haunted by that childhood fear that God did not know me. Each Sunday, I watched as people sprang to their feet, hands in the air, rejoicing loudly as guitars and drums banged out songs of praise. I longed to consistently experience that same joy and happiness, visible signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet inside, I faced continued doubt.

It was my dark secret. My pastor had asked me to be a deacon, to minister to young people, and to encourage the old. Yet, I felt like a pretender. What else could explain the inner fear I battled?

Finally, I yielded to that inner conflict. I told my pastor I could no longer be a deacon. I wasn't entirely honest about why, or my plans to leave the church. I didn't want to admit how I felt or that I was coming to disagree with the Pentecostalism I saw in action.

About this time, in early 1988, I read an article in a charismatic Christian magazine titled "Renewal in Missouri." The article profiled a movement of the Spirit in Missouri Synod Lutheran churches. "What a great option," I thought. "Combine openness to spiritual gifts with the discipline of a liturgical church." I immediately wrote to the Renewal in Missouri organization. They referred me to Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Lord of Life's early Sunday service was liturgical, and

the later morning service was "contemporary."

I spent two meaningful years at Lord of Life until a new job took me 70 miles away to Richmond, Indiana, near where I grew up. However, my pastor, Stephen Farrar, and I spent significant time in one on one weekly discipleship in those short years. Before Pastor Farrar's teaching, I believed that understanding the Bible came mainly from personal interpretation led by the Spirit. If my interpretation wasn't yours, one of us wasn't hearing the Spirit. I learned at Lord of Life that you could have both emotional praise *and* intellectual rigor.

After moving to Richmond, I attended a traditional Lutheran church, where I made good friends, taught Sunday School, and happily celebrated Reformation Sunday. However, I struggled spiritually and emotionally and blamed it on the lack of contemporary Christian music and weighty sermons. While I did not miss Pentecostalism, I clearly missed the Evangelical style, which I equated to "openness to the Holy Spirit." I began searching my small city for a new church home—of any brand—that would lift my spirit and mind.

Despite a large Catholic community in Richmond, attending Mass was out of the question. Since my teen years, I had picked up a strong anti-Catholic undertone common in Pentecostal and Evangelical circles and media. It was under that influence that I embraced the teaching that the Catholic Church was the "Whore of Babylon" in the book of Revelation. And I was horrified by the perception that Mary and other statuesque saints were worshipped.

My church search—the fourth in six years—took me to Christ Presbyterian, a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) church that embraced Reformed theology. Again, I met wonderful people, and in its pastor, I found a man with a love of God and as sharp an intellect as any I'd met.

I learned about Calvinism for the first time, and while perhaps it was not what was intended, I realized what my problem with God was. I had always thought of Jesus as a sort of life ring tossed to me—a man drowning in sin—so that I could grasp it and avoid death. Through Calvinism, I learned it was more accurate to see myself as a man drowned and entirely dead on the floor of a lake. If I became saved—one of the elect—it was because Jesus chose to breathe new life into me. If he didn't, I would not be saved.

With that understanding, my fear that God did not know me seemed plausible. Perhaps I was simply not one of the elect. I could attend church all I wanted, worship God, and beseech Jesus. But because I was not "elect," I could not be saved. God foreknew it and was sorry, but I just wasn't chosen. Still, my hope that I was wrong—along with friendships, wonderful music, and thought-provoking sermons—kept me returning each Sunday.

By 1993, I had been a church-hopper for over a decade. I'd been Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. I'd visited an assortment of churches: Assemblies of God, Church of God, Methodist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, and Quaker. And I'd studied the Ministry of Writing at a Quaker seminary.

But something big happened in 1994—I met a girl.

The Cross, Rightly Considered

"An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered."

G.K. CHESTERTON

Dear Friends,

This classic quip from G.K. Chesterton has always been a favorite of mine. It is a poignant reminder that God and His providential will are not to be found "out there" in the form of some esoteric

knowledge, but rather "right here" in the events, tasks, and relationships of everyday life. Of course, He is to be found not only in the planned and subjectively "positive" things but also in the surprising and apparently negative things that happen as well. This is the nature of "adventure." It is not something you wholly choose for yourself, but something that befalls you. It is something—like the cross—about which you say "Not my will, but thy will be done" (Luke 22:42).

Another reason why I have loved this particular Chestertonism is that it draws our attention to the importance of...well, attention! The quote illustrates the necessary role of our free will and intellect in how—and whether—we receive the events of day-to-day life as a grand adventure or a mere inconvenience. We know that suffering is a part of our Christian life. But sometimes we can forget that it is not simply the experience of suffering but rather our free, intentional, loving endurance of suffering and our offering it to Christ that produces fruit. If we are to follow after Christ, we must not be like the "bad thief" who suffered involuntarily and resented both his executioners as well as his savior, but rather the good thief who, in his final moments, accepted his cross and received eternal life.

Shakespeare famously placed in the mouth of the embittered Hamlet the words: "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." (Act II, Scene 2) Such a sentiment could of course be applied too broadly and used to justify all sorts of error, but there is indeed at least one element of truth in it. As Christians we know that nothing occurs apart from God's indicative or permissive will and thus we can—indeed we must—learn to see everything that happens as being willed or allowed by God for our spiritual benefit (Romans 8:28). The key, however, is that we only receive the benefit to the degree that we make the conscious, free choice to receive the present circumstances from God—to say with Christ, "Not my will, but thy will be done." All that God does or allows is "good." But He leaves it to our thought and choice as to whether we will accept the gift. It is our "right consideration" that allows us to see and receive each apparent inconvenience as what it truly is: Christ's invitation for us to take part in His redemptive sacrifice.

Much of the time, we walk around simply as spectators of

the 24/7 livestream of whatever thoughts, feelings, and sensations (and indeed temptations) happen to flit through our minds. If we are to "consider rightly," we must move from passive spectators to active participants in our thought-life. When we become aware of our thoughts and seek to move them in a more holy direction, we will soon notice the effects of the "information diet" we have been consuming. What we allow to populate our minds on a daily basis—news, social media, negativity, gossip, etc.—becomes the noise that affects our ability to "consider rightly." We reap what we sow.

The ability to "rightly consider" itself is something that must be practiced and can be strengthened. How? The first and primary way is by prayer. Whenever we pray we are practicing this most foundational of skills. In all the various modes of prayer—praise, worship, contrition, thanksgiving, and petition—we are placing our minds in right-relation to reality and to reality's author. The more we pray, the more our mind conforms to this reality and the more our habits of mind and soul dispose us to seeing, receiving, and responding rightly to God's will.

At the Coming Home Network, we are in constant conversation with people on the journey to the Catholic Church. These journeys can be arduous and they take time. It is easy to begin considering obstacles or hurdles that pop up on any journey as interruptions in God's will and thus a cause for frustration. However as Christians, we must constantly remind each other that, considered rightly, these "inconveniences" are "adventures"—indeed the "crosses" that we are being invited to pick up and carry. It is in meeting and embracing these crosses that we will be conformed to Christ. It is for this reason that so much of our work comes down to prayer and encouragement. These are our most powerful means of considering rightly the "inconvenient" crosses that arise and helping each other to carry them in courage and in love.

Right now many members of the network are starting OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults. Joining the class can be an intimidating prospect, just another hurdle between them and the goal they have been working towards. However, as we have heard from so many people over the years, OCIA (rightly considered) turned out to be an incredible adventure not only of learning but of developing holy friendships that accompanied them into the Church and beyond.

In your charity, please pray for our members who are in OCIA or are prayerfully considering it. Also pray for (and thank!) the catechists and others at the parish level who work so tirelessly to help people come home to the sacraments.

May God bless and be with you today,



JonMarc Grodi

ARE YOU PLANNING TO START OCIA/RCIA CLASSES THIS FALL? LET US KNOW! EMAIL INFO@CHNETWORK.ORG.

ST. TERESA OF KOLKATA: A MODEL OF MERCY

FEAST DAY: SEPTEMBER 5

by Rakhi McCormick



The longer I have been Catholic, the more I have come to believe that the *saints* find *you*. This is certainly the case when it comes to my relationship with St. Teresa of Kolkata. Serving the poorest of the poor in the city my parents grew up in, I knew of her throughout my life, but from a distance—never much talked about or thought of beyond her humanitarian work. Certainly we, as a Hindu family, didn't discuss in depth her Catholic faith or how it was the foundation of all she did. It wasn't until her death on my birthday in 1997, a little over a year after my conversion, that my connection to her began to intensify.

Suddenly, she was popping up everywhere I looked. What struck me most was her love for the forgotten and dying on the streets. Mother Teresa took in and cared for those who had no one, the ones left as disposable. It didn't matter whether they professed a faith in Christ—to her, they were "Jesus in distressing disguise." Instead of attempting to convince them of the truth of Christ, she loved them as He would, so they could encounter His

divine love. As I saw it, she was the gospel personified. *"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"* (Matthew 25:40). It was seeing this passage lived out that led to *my own* first, profound encounter with Christ.

Christ commands us to love one another, and the works of mercy show us how we are called to do so. *"The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities"* (CCC 2447) The Catholic Church, in her wisdom, identifies both *corporal and spiritual* works of mercy to care for the *whole* person—body, mind, and soul.

Mother Teresa's life demonstrates the ability of radical, gospel-centered love to convict hearts, to draw others to Christ and His Church through the school of Love. By practicing these works of mercy well ourselves—with pure hearts filled with love of neighbor—we give witness to the goodness of God which has the power to provoke curiosity and lead people to a profound encounter with Christ.

St. Teresa of Kolkata, pray for us.

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Visit the imprisoned
- Bury the dead

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Admonish sinners
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive offenses willingly
- Comfort the afflicted
- Pray for the living and dead

COMMUNITY QUESTION

CROSS to CRUCIFIX

On September 14, the Catholic Church celebrates the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The use of the crucifix in the Catholic Faith can be a jarring shift from the bare crosses displayed in many Protestant churches. We asked our community members about their experience with the difference, and here is what some of them had to say:

"When I was a Protestant, I asked a priest that I was friends with why the corpus was included. He answered 'Was it the power of the cross or the power of the man on the cross that redeemed us?' That really resonated with me."

Mike I.

"In the independent Baptist Church where I was married, there was no cross of any kind. I was told that having crosses in churches was idolatrous, and that Catholics kept Jesus nailed to the cross because they didn't preach the Resurrection. Decades later, the priest in the Episcopal church I began attending told me the crucifix was there to hold continually before our eyes the price Christ paid for our redemption. That made it all clear to me."

Rosemary A.

"Many Protestants tend to not like to be confronted with suffering. The bare cross is neat, tidy, and covered over by the resurrection and the empty tomb. The crucifixes with the body of my Lord and Savior still on it reminded me of the terrible price He paid for my sin and rebellion. I wanted to let it sink in until it hurt me. It was actually a draw to the Catholic Church for me."

Howard H.

"I have a fundamentalist Baptist background and it surprised me that it hadn't occurred to me before I joined in full communion with the Church that the bare cross is an insult to God. His purpose for becoming incarnate was fulfilled on the Cross."

Dan S.

Joyful Journey Updates

Eric, a former Anabaptist

I entered the Church in January 2023. I used to carry so much guilt and shame for past choices which has begun to be cleared through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I am so thankful for God's merciful love in this sacrament and the ability to be reunited with Him after I fail. ■

Michael, a former Protestant pastor

I have never felt more peaceful and fulfilled than I have since formally being received into the Catholic Church. I pray daily for the wholesale conversion of the entire Protestant world by the power and gentle moving of the Holy Spirit. It's encouraging to hear that you are working with so many influencers and Protestant pastors. ■

Brent, a former Protestant pastor

Our family of six entered the Church at the Easter Vigil—my son was baptized, and the rest of us confirmed. It has been beautiful to see my family thrive over the last 50+ days: my son is overjoyed to serve on the altar, my daughters have joined the youth revival leadership team, and my wife (our most hesitant convert) is diving deeply into the lives of the saints and has developed a remarkable love for our Lady. A dozen years ago, while recovering from church planting, I started thinking about Catholicism. What a gift finally to have arrived here with my whole family. ■

Do you have a journey update to share?
Submit it to info@chnetwork.org.



SIGN UP NOW!

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

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

Monday, Sept. 2

Zubair Simonson

Former Muslim

Orig Air Date: 6/1/20

Monday, Sept. 9

Elvis Gutierrez

Catholic "Revert"

Monday, Sept. 16

Chuck Gaidica

Former Non-denominational & Nazarene Pastor

Monday, Sept. 23

Everett Franklin

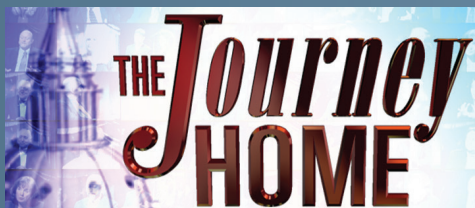
Former Church of God Military Chaplain

Monday, Sept. 30

Phally Budock

Former Agnostic & Genocide Survivor

Orig. Air Date: 6/29/20



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, Oct. 7

Fr. Jerry Byrd

Former Southern Baptist Pastor

Schedule is subject to change.

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



Charlie & Ramona Frentz
Donors since 2005 - 19 years

My husband and I are baptized, confirmed Catholics. Like so many of our generation, we unwisely spent time away from the Church. But through the grace of God—and with a push from His Poor Clare nun, Mother Angelica—we joyfully returned to our Catholic Faith and the sacraments in the year 2000.

We wanted to know more about our faith, so we became a part of the audience, or "family," of EWTN as Mother Angelica called us. A special part of that family was Marcus Grodi and the *Journey Home* program. Every week, I especially looked forward to hearing another voice from my newly rediscovered family.

Each story was unique and inspiring. Here were people from all walks of life, backgrounds, and religions who came into communion with the Catholic Church. Many told stories of their love for Jesus, the gospel, and their faith communities. Others told stories of having no faith. Others of their lives as Hindu, Muslim, or Mormon. One specific episode came very close to home when the guest was a former Episcopalian priest, Father Warren Tanghe, whose conversion happened in my diocese (Baltimore) and who had recently celebrated Mass at my home parish.

Looking back now over these many years, I see the fruit of the Coming Home Network in these inspiring stories. How many other converts were inspired by these stories to join the Church? How many are praying for an answer about possible conversion? How many cradle Catholics were strengthened in their faith from these stories? There are many more stories to be told, more families who want to share our Catholic Faith, more barriers to overcome.

It is a great privilege to donate to a ministry that means so much to so many. I would encourage watching *The Journey Home* or *On the Journey* to get a glimpse of how the Lord works in each person step by step on their journey of faith. When that journey leads to the Catholic Church, we have the great joy of welcoming home another member of the family. Please consider donating—this is a unique ministry and a much-needed one! ■

Charlie & Ramona Frentz have been partners in the mission of the Coming Home Network with regular and annual gifts since 2005. To join them in supporting our mission, use the enclosed envelope or give online at chnetwork.org/donate

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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.

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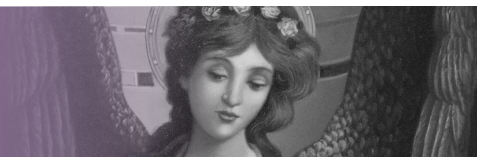
"Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

GALATIANS 6:14

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

MARK 8:34

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Caleb, a young Presbyterian pastor** who was immediately removed from ministry when he told his elder board that he was heading in the direction of the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him as he attempts to lead his family.

■ **For Christopher, who entered the Church** in 2023, that the Lord will continue to bless the decision he made as he applies everything he learned as a Protestant pastor to his current work assisting grieving families at a funeral home.

■ **For Corbin, a young and newly married Protestant pastor** who has been exposed to the writings of the early Church and begun to struggle, that God will give him much wisdom as he continues to pursue the truth for his ministry and family.

■ **For James, a Lutheran minister and chaplain**, that the Lord will bless him as he moves quickly in the direction of becoming Catholic and works to navigate the steps involved in becoming a Catholic chaplain.

■ **For Michael, a Protestant seminarian** who began reading the Early Church Fathers, left the seminary, and has been moving toward entering the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead him home.

■ **For Michael, an Anglican priest** who desperately wants to become a Catholic priest of the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter and bring his entire congregation into the Catholic Church, that the Lord will make a clear path for him.

■ **For Phillip, a former Protestant minister** who made the decision to enter the Catholic Church this past Easter Vigil, that the Holy Spirit will inspire his efforts to find his place in the Church.

■ **For Phil, an Evangelical missionary** working in a foreign country who finds himself drawn back to the Catholic Church in which he was baptized and raised, that the Lord will help him to navigate the difficult situation concerning the success of the mission if he and his wife were to leave it.

■ **For Jeremiah, an Evangelical pastor** struggling deeply with how he would make a living and support his family if he were to leave his current position to become Catholic, that God will give him courage and wisdom.

■ **For Michael, a former Hindu** and current director of a Baptist ministry to the homeless who entered the Church this Easter Vigil, that the Lord will bless him with a new way to live as he is forced to resign his position.

■ **For James, a Baptist pastor** who resigned his ministry, moved his family to a new city where he has a new job, and entered the Church early this year, that the Lord will bless him as he attempts to create a new Catholic life for his family.

Lay

■ **For Pete, a member of the Assembly of God**, that as his Catholic friend discusses the Catholic Faith with him, his heart would become open to the fullness of the truth.

■ **For Lucas, a Baptist**, that the Holy Spirit would grant him the wisdom he needs as he shares his newly found Catholic faith with his wife.

■ **For Wayne, a Congregationalist**, that as he reads the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, he would be granted a hunger for the holy sacraments of the Church.

■ **For Alan, a Pentecostal**, that our Lord Jesus would send brothers and sisters who will provide the answers and guidance he needs in his journey to the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Michael, a Reformed Presbyterian**, that the wounds he and his wife received from an insensitive priest would find healing and that the Lord would open the doors of the Church to them.

■ **For Tyler, a former Atheist**, that our Lord Jesus would shower him with the graces he needs to find the answers he is looking for in the Catholic Church.

■ **For James, a Southern Baptist**, that his devotion to Blessed Mother Mary would bring him into full communion with the Church founded by her Son.

■ **For Jeremiah, a Baptist**, that the beauty, unity, and richness of the Catholic Church would bring him home to the holy Eucharist of Jesus.

■ **For Dan, a brother in the Assembly of God**, that he and his wife would find the guidance they need to accomplish their journey home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Ray, a former Catholic**, that the Holy Spirit would heal the distortions and misconceptions about the Catholic Faith that currently plague him.

■ **For Lisa, a Lutheran**, that the hearts of her family will be open to learning about the faith, and that she may find courage to be more open about her faith.

■ **For Patty, a former Baptist**, that her newborn son would grow strong and experience excellent health.

■ **For Amber, an Evangelical Non-Denominational Protestant**, that she might receive guidance and wisdom as she continues her journey to the Church, as well as find marital unity of faith.

■ **For Tanja, an Assemblies of God member**, that the Lord may help her and her husband to grow in faith and bestow grace for her husband to lead them in this journey.

■ **For Yasmin, a recent convert**, that she may grow in discernment as she seeks to know her vocation.

ENGLAND'S NAZARETH

A HISTORY OF OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM FEAST DAY: SEPTEMBER 24

by Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson

For those who may be interested in exploring Catholic holy sites in the United Kingdom, I always suggest putting the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham at the head of the list. It's about 120 miles north-northeast of London, in a rural area of East Anglia near the North Sea coast. It is not a simple journey, even with today's transport options. That encourages us to reflect on the steadfast resolve of pilgrims in the Middle Ages who made this the principal Marian pilgrimage site in northern Europe.

In 1061, Richeldis de Faverches, lady of the manor of Walsingham, had three visions in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to her; she took her to Nazareth, to the house where the Archangel Gabriel had visited her at the Annunciation. Mary then asked Richeldis to build an exact replica of the holy house in Walsingham. "All that seek me there will find help in need," she promised (according to the 15th century "Pynson Ballad").

Walsingham would soon become an important place of pilgrimage, supported by the establishment of the Augustinian Priory of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1153. Many English kings made pilgrimages; King Henry III made a dozen visits. The young Henry VIII is reported to have made a pilgrimage in about 1510, perhaps to have asked for the Blessed Mother to give him and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, a son. Their son Henry was born on January 1, 1511, but died only seven weeks later.

Henry VIII had been raised a faithful Catholic, but perhaps this experience had something to do with his decision to abandon the Church. He had not learned the key to prayer: "not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). In 1538, the Shrine at Walsingham was torn down by his imperial edict, and the famed statue of Our Lady of Walsingham was taken to London and destroyed.

Even the great scholar Erasmus, while he was teaching at Cambridge, made a pilgrimage to Walsingham in 1511. He was moved by the elegant simplicity of the Holy House and the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but he would later speak satirically about the intensely pious and enthusiastic devotions of the pilgrims.

Converts sometimes have difficulty understanding the popular Marian devotions they encounter in the Catholic Church. I personally found the dogmatic definitions (Immaculate Conception, Assumption) easier to receive, simply by reflecting on Paragraph 487 of the Catechism: "What the Catholic Faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ."

But what about all those Marian apparitions and devotions? Shouldn't that be tempered by Scripture? Mary simply says, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). The Holy See has found it a great challenge to judge the legitimacy of such apparitions, but the shared experience of the faithful has always been an important criterion. The Church teaches that we are not required to accept private revelations which go beyond the apostolic

deposit of faith (CCC 67). But think of when we see children so deeply in love with their mother that they gush forth with praise for her: it is their love which we remember most.

In 2015, I had the great privilege of making a pilgrimage to Walsingham with my two colleagues, the Ordinaries of the Ordinariates of Our Lady of Walsingham (UK) and Our Lady of the Southern Cross (Australia). We were so moved by the ecumenical cooperation between the Catholic and Anglican shrine churches and seeing so many pilgrims at prayer. The restoration of this holy place had begun in the late 19th century, and it has grown to be a major pilgrimage site with some quarter million visitors annually. What good fortune that on the surviving original seal of the Augustinian priory was found an image of the original statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. This was used to reproduce the beautiful statue so beloved today of Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, on whose lap sits the Son of God.

If a trip to England is not feasible, one could visit the wonderful outdoor shrine and the holy house chapel at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Walsingham in Houston, TX. Here is where the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter was first established in 2011. But the foundations were laid in the parish's Anglican days, a fitting testimony to those wise words from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* 8, about those elements of sanctification and truth which lead toward Catholic unity. ■

Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson is a former bishop in the Episcopal Church who was received into full communion with the Catholic Church in 2007, and served as the first ordinary for the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter. He is Ecclesial Advisor and Chaplain to The Coming Home Network.

PRAYER FOR THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM

Grant, we pray thee, O Lord God, that as in the mystery of the Incarnation the blessed and ever-Virgin Mary conceived thy Son in her heart before she conceived him in her womb: so we, thy pilgrim people, rejoicing in her patronage, may welcome him into our hearts; and, like her, be made a holy house fit for his eternal dwelling; who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (Divine Worship: The Missal, Sept. 24).

Right Photo: Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson in Walsingham, February 2015



Following a tremendous January snowstorm, I volunteered to use my Jeep to deliver stranded nurses to the local hospital. Heather's bright blue eyes peering from beneath her parka hood caught my attention even before she climbed in. It was love at first sight for one of us. The other took some convincing. We were engaged on Christmas Eve of 1994 and married the following September.

After moving to the rural community where I grew up, we began to seek a church home that would fit us both. We struggled to find something that had the substance we were seeking, but without a focus on the pastor and great musicians. Yet we couldn't quite explain what that might look like.

Sundays would come, and we had no desire to return to a church or visit a new one. However, we had heard of a Brethren church on an old road south of our small town. So, on a sunny Sunday morning, we pulled in among the ancient trees and silent tombstones to visit that little country church. Inside, we found anything but peace. We had walked into the middle of another historical fact of Protestantism: a protest.

Members of the congregation were furious with each other. After a perfunctory prayer, the brethren, one by one, took to the pulpit to express their anger. It seems the church leaders had fired the pastor for some perceived transgression. The congregation split into factions: followers of the fired pastor and those eager to get on with the search for a new one. Disagreement moved to personal insults. It was painful and uncomfortable to witness, like walking into the middle of a private family fight. As we slunk from the building, someone assured us this was usually a loving and peaceful congregation. We were urged to come back another day. We chose not to.

We drove away depressed. I was numb. We traveled in silence as I gazed at the passing fields and pastures. Finally, Heather spoke up: "There is one church we haven't visited." I was beyond caring but asked anyway, "What church is that?"

"Saint Elizabeth's in Cambridge City," she said. I was done and at the end of my rope. I couldn't imagine that a Sunday checking out the pagan rites of the Romanists could be any worse than what we'd just experienced. "Sure," I dejectedly agreed. "Let's go."

Visiting Babylon

We visited St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church for the first time on Palm Sunday of 1999. Having learned a hard lesson from the Brethren, I insisted we sit in the back, where we could make a quick escape if necessary.

It surprised me that the church was packed. I'd heard many pastors insist the Catholic Church was lifeless, hemorrhaging membership, and full of superstitious octogenarians. At St. Elizabeth's, I saw a church full of extended families with grandparents, parents, teens, and noisy preschoolers. And the service was full of Scripture, with readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, an Epistle, and a Gospel. I was surprised. As a Bible-believing Christian, I thought Catholics weren't interested in the Scriptures. Even more surprising was the number of biblical passages permeating the rest of the liturgy.

Something else struck me about the service: it wasn't en-

tertaining. No musical performances rose to crescendos before the soft melodic pleadings of an altar call. There was music, but it was not the central part of the service. There was preaching, but it was short and to the point. As we slipped out following Mass, I felt I had encountered something sacred, something ancient, something deeply loving.

"So, what'd you think," Heather asked.

"Did you hear all those babies crying?" I demanded. "It was bedlam in there. I could hardly hear the service."

I get grouchy when I'm conflicted, and my answer to Heather reflected that. I left St. Elizabeth's that Sunday irritated and confused by what I felt—a sense of the sacred and peace. Those feelings hadn't come from praise and worship music or polished oration. I knew I was going back; I knew I wanted to. I just didn't understand why.

A Hike to Emmaus

It was during the Eucharistic Prayer at our second Mass that the emotion kicked in. Like the disciples who unknowingly walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:32), I felt something I couldn't explain that nearly brought tears to my eyes. While resignation and fear had brought me to that Mass, this Emmaus-like experience compelled me to return. Only later did I understand this was an encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

These two Sundays, Heather and I managed to bashfully dodge Fr. John Luerman by slipping out the side door. On the third Sunday, he was ready for us. After Mass, he made a bee-line to our pew, leaving his astonished flock to see themselves out. He introduced himself and, learning we were not Catholic (I think it was apparent), demanded we wait while he trotted back to his office for a book. That was our introduction to the first rule of St. Elizabeth's: you just can't say "no" to Fr. Luerman. We waited.

Fr. Luerman was an old-school Catholic, ordained in the mid-1950s, with decades of pastoring under his belt. St. Elizabeth was his sixth parish, and while he was just two years from retiring, his energy and enthusiasm rivaled any 20-something Evangelical.

He returned with Fr. Oscar Lukefahr's book, *We Believe... A Survey of the Catholic Faith*. This little book provided an excellent overview, not only of Catholic beliefs but, more importantly to me, why Catholics hold these views.

I couldn't deny that something ancient, loving, and powerful—the Holy Spirit—was opening my heart to the Catholic Church. Yet I would need God's help to find the humility to explore and possibly reconsider my beliefs regarding the Catholic Church.

Then I remembered something hiding in the corner of a dusty bookcase. Years earlier, while I attended Christ Presbyterian, my Catholic convert sister had sent me a copy of Scott and Kimberly Hahn's book, *Rome Sweet Home*. I wasn't interested, but I'm a book lover and could never throw one away. So I found it, blew off the dust, and dug in. Their story encouraged me to keep inquiring.

Shortly before Christmas, Fr. Luerman invited Heather

and me to attend RCIA. He said it stood for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and was the process through which people came into the Catholic Church. I wasn't sure I wanted in; I still worried the Church had many unbiblical practices, such as worshipping Mary and praying to saints. However, after his assurance that we could attend without committing to join the Church, we decided to go. We both agreed that entering the Church would be a personal decision. Neither would try to influence the other to become Catholic.

RCIA helped me understand two things that opened the door to me becoming Catholic. One was emotional—my Emmaus-like experience during the Eucharistic Prayer. The other was logical, related to *sola Scriptura*, the Protestant belief that the Bible is the lone infallible source of authority for Christian belief and practice. As it turned out, the real question was the role of Scripture versus Tradition in guiding Church beliefs and practices.

In my Evangelical years, many I worshipped with believed the Catholic Church embraced the traditions of men, as opposed to God's will, as identified in the Bible. Our handy test to root out Catholic traditions of men was simple: Ask, "Where's that in the Bible?" If the practice wasn't in the Bible, it wasn't scriptural. If it wasn't scriptural, it must be a tradition of men. And if it was a tradition of men, it definitely was not Christian.

In RCIA, I was reminded that the Protestant Old Testament canon contains 39 books, while the Catholic canon has 46. It dawned on me that one's position on what constitutes the canon of Holy Scripture was a tradition, albeit one that we Protestants would argue was divinely inspired. I learned that the canon of the Bible was widely established during a time when "catholic" simply meant "universal," long before Protestantism.

This left me with a huge stumbling block. Just as the seven sacraments do not appear in a Biblical bullet list, the New and Old Testament canons did not appear within the Scriptures. Therefore, I was forced to rely on tradition—the inspired teaching of Spirit-guided church leaders—to accept the canon of the Bible. I could not be Bible-believing and reject Tradition. It became apparent that, as an Evangelical, I had fully embraced the tradition of the Bible—including the entire New Testament—while rejecting the source of that tradition.

A small, quietly ignored crack in my assumptions about the Catholic Church became a growing breach. If the ancient Catholics had gotten it right—or even mostly right—about the canon of the Bible, I felt compelled as a Bible-believing Christian to examine other Catholic teachings based on Tradition.

I began to understand that the authority underlying the Catholic Church was not one of tyranny but of knowledge—handed down from Jesus to His apostles and from them to the generations. I was guilty of hubris, presuming a nearly limitless ability to interpret the Holy Scriptures while ignoring the millennia of apostolic knowledge.

This removed the chip from my shoulder. Finally, I could sit and learn at the feet of those with a foundation in two thousand years of apostolic teaching.

My new openness to Church tradition brought a powerful new book into my life: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This 900-page volume was unlike anything I had found among Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. It systematically outlines the history and tradition of the Church's doctrine, providing good foundations for hard-to-accept beliefs such as Mary, purgatory, and how salvation works. And to my surprise, I found these teachings also had strong Biblical underpinnings.

As my knowledge grew, I found the fear that God does not know me easing. I learned that "God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end" (CCC 1037). And unlike what Calvinism told me, I learned I was truly free to accept or reject God's saving grace. "To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of 'predestination,' he includes in it each person's free response to his grace..." (CCC 600).

Finally, as a Bible-believing Christian, I learned to accept that God has known me since conception (Psalm 139). I had to accept His word on this, whether I felt it or saw proof through some personal, supernatural experience. I learned to stop comparing my faith experiences to that of others. As St. Paul noted, there are all sorts of gifts from the Holy Spirit, "...inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." (1 Corinthians 12:4–11).

A Never-Ending Conversion

While our journey took different paths, Heather and I both came into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in 2000. She came via the Sacrament of Baptism; having already been baptized, I entered through the Sacrament of Confirmation.

As an adult, I had attended seven different churches in 19 years. Anyone who knew me had every reason to be skeptical that I'd stay long in the Catholic Church. Even I doubted myself. Was this a true conversion, or just another stop in the desert? More than two decades later, I've found it to be a never-ending conversion. It appears those seeds from Rome fell on good soil and continue to bring forth grain (Matthew 13).

As with all of God's people, time has given me physical, spiritual, and emotional peaks and valleys. And in those years, the Church herself has been both battered and had occasion to rejoice. But the truth—built on the rock of Peter and supported by 2000 years of tradition—has not changed. It is here today and will continue to be here for every generation. It's a place where God covers us with his pinions, and under his wings, we find refuge. (Psalm 91:4). ■

Jeff Hutson and his wife live in Indianapolis, where he is a retirement and financial wellness consultant, and she is a nurse. He has often been asked by Evangelical friends how he could possibly become Catholic, and intensely curious Catholics have questioned how a trip through Evangelical, Pentecostal, and mainline Protestant circles could lead to Rome. Jeff blogs about this faith journey—and a few odds and ends—at jeffhutson.com.

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PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS BEFORE A CRUCIFIX

*"Most High glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my
heart. Give me right faith,
sure hope and perfect charity.
Fill me with understanding
and knowledge that I may
fulfill your command."*

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: September 14

