



November 2024 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

The Perfect Storm

By Gary Morgan

It couldn't have happened at any other point in my life. Let me explain. For most of my adult life, Catholicism had given me the creeps. As a young man of twenty-nine, fresh into ministry, I was privileged to take a mission trip to Campinas, Brazil. While there, our interpreter was kind enough to show us some of the local sites, including the Metropolitan Cathedral. As a budding young Baptist minister, I simply had no box for what I encountered there. The church was very large and magnificent. The outside was topped with impressive statues of I knew not who, and the inside was filled with intricate wood carvings, statuary, and even items of gold. There were also niches, each with its own statue, before which were prostrated several poverty-stricken old women weeping, praying, and burning candles.



Creepy Catholics

Everything about this scene offended my Protestant sensibilities. I was a mission pastor whose first assignment had been to preach in a two-bay volunteer fire station to people living in a small rural subdivision that was interspersed with mobile homes, assorted livestock, and no small amount of junk. I had made significant sacrifices to take this assignment. In fact, I was barely scratching out a living at all.

A kind gentleman with ties to the mission had allowed me to park our mobile home on top of a small quarry in the subdivision that he sometimes used to mine material for his construction proj-

ects. It had electricity and a water well, and he allowed us to live there for free. Unfortunately, the water was not potable and contained such high levels of sulfur that many days you could smell the odor of someone running bathwater all the way into the living area. So, the opulence of this church turned me off. I couldn't understand how a church could spend so much on accouterments while being filled with people who were clearly enduring grinding poverty.

Not only that, but the women who were groveling before the statues made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. How could this be anything but idolatry? It appeared to me that the Catholic Church was preying on the poor and entrapping them in superstitious practices only to further its own extravagance. Somehow, they had lost their

Continued on page 2 ➡

...Journeys Home Continued...

way and were leading people away from God rather than to him. Every Catholic Church I visited subsequently served only to cement this conviction.

The truth is, I was probably biased against the Catholic Church long before this. I had attended school in a small German Catholic farming community, and although they accepted the few of us who were Protestant, it always felt like there was some kind of invisible barrier that existed between us and them that could never be crossed. For example, I instinctively knew that certain girls were simply off limits. The Catholics were going to date and marry each other, not us. We might live among them, but we could never be one of them. I also knew that there was no small amount of drinking and dancing taking place in that community, and that didn't make sense to me.

Even though I was not yet Christian, my grandparents were Pentecostal, my aunt and uncle were staunch Baptists, and my mother had been raised in the Church of Christ. As such, I was already distinctly fundamentalist in my understanding of the Christian faith. I thought the old Baptist saw, "I don't drink, I don't dance, I don't chew, and I don't go out with girls that do," was the essence of Christianity, and it seemed to me that these so-called Catholic Christians were probably not Christian at all. This would be confirmed in my mind some years later when my wife began to regularly encounter one of my old classmates at the store where she worked and was treated almost as a non-person. Overall, Catholics simply had not impressed me much, and I was predisposed to believe the worst about them.

Baptist Life

In 1993, I left the little mission church to pursue a seminary degree at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. We arrived there during the height of the "Baptist Wars." This was a period of unrest in the Southern Baptist Convention in which the conservative wing of the denomination was trying to wrest control from the moderate wing. It was an ugly time in Baptist history, and almost no de-

nominal structure was left unscathed. On our first day on campus, a popular professor had been fired by the conservative board, and the student body was in an uproar. That uproar only increased during our time there, and ultimately, the entire faculty was purged. Politically and spiritually, there was blood in the streets. My Clinical Pastoral Education supervisor told me that many of the students there were exhibiting signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. As for me, I was humbled. I had arrived at the school unapologetically aligned with the conservative wing, but when I saw how they were treating those who disagreed with them, I felt in my bones that something was wrong—that the theological disagreements did not justify the unchristian behavior I was witnessing. I left seminary a changed man.

After seminary, we returned to Texas and began pastoring a small Baptist church in the panhandle. Overall, our experience was a positive one. Money became less of an issue than it had been during the mission and seminary years, and we were glad to be back in a place that felt more like home. However, the community had experienced a dramatic shift in its racial demographics, and the church was struggling with how to address it. There was tension between those who wanted to embrace the change and reach out to their new neighbors and those who just wanted everything to go back to how it was. My seminary years had equipped me for dealing with such tension, and I was able to respectfully speak to those on both sides while moving the church forward. Ultimately, I was able to lead the church to hire a Hispanic pastor to serve alongside me, and the church's identity began to shift in a positive way.

It was about this time that my ministry took a dramatic and unexpected turn. At a pastor's conference, I bumped into a denominational worker who had recently planted a cowboy church south of Dallas. He said, "You know something? You would be perfect for the cowboy church I'm starting." I was aware of this church because it had been written about in our denominational newspaper, *The Baptist Standard*.

I didn't really take the remark seriously because I wasn't in

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

FROM MOHAMMAD TO JESUS

NIKKI KINGSLEY

Despite her being born into the Islamic religion, the Lord Jesus Christ was relentless in pursuing Nikki Kingsley. Nikki's dramatic conversion will leave you filled with hope and wonder at the Living Lord, who even today is searching for His lost sheep.

#3267 - \$15.00

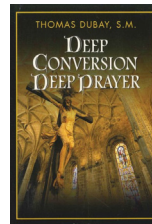


DEEP CONVERSION, DEEP PRAYER

FR. THOMAS DUBAY

Fr. Thomas Dubay gives an overview of the spiritual life for anyone seeking to grow in the love of God and neighbor. Fr. Dubay shares solid practical advice for a deepening moral and spiritual conversion, as well as a radical growth in holiness.

#3262 - \$15.95

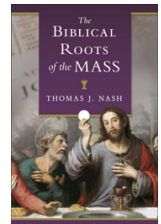


THE BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THE MASS

THOMAS NASH

Thomas Nash explores how the story of the Mass goes deeper than the Last Supper and Christ's Passion and Death; indeed, it's part of an unbroken story that begins in the Garden of Eden and continues today in every parish around the world.

#3196 - \$19.95



God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

any meaningful sense a cowboy. It was true that I talked like one and dressed like one, but that was due to my upbringing more than any actual experience. I had spent the first part of my childhood on my grandfather's ranch in west Texas and so was immersed in the rural culture. My grandfather also owned a concrete construction business that specialized in building stock tanks, and he, my father, and my uncles built many of the concrete stock tanks that still dot the west Texas countryside. When Grandpa retired and sold the ranch and concrete business, we moved to a town that was populated by ranching families. My immediate neighbors were all involved in 4-H and FFA, and one was a veterinarian. Culturally, my needle didn't move very much. A few years later, we moved again, and my brother and I attended school in that little Catholic farming community, where I spent many of my after-school hours putting up barns or driving tractors. These were formative years, and I never really left my boots behind, although my exposure was more tangential than relevant. Nevertheless, I wound up accepting his invitation to pastor the cowboy church he had started.

That turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. When I arrived, the church was already growing rapidly. It was meeting in a livestock exposition barn and was averaging around 300 in attendance, even though it was only a little over a year old. Property had been acquired for its first building, and the atmosphere was electric. Almost immediately, we fell in love with the people, and they fell in love with us. One of my mentors, who worked for the state Baptist convention, remarked that he had never seen a better fit of pastor and church.

Not only that, but because of the church's exponential growth and the novelty of the concept, the church garnered a lot of press. Soon I was being inundated with calls from newspapers like the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Fort Worth Star-Tele-*

gram, and others. At one point, I was even interviewed on the national Fox News Channel. The church had become ground zero for something much bigger than any of us had foreseen.

Trying to ride our wave of success, I teamed up with the denominational worker who had planted the church, and we began putting on clinics to help other interested parties launch their own cowboy churches. At its zenith, we were putting on multiple clinics per year in different parts of the country that were attended by hundreds of people from around the nation. We also organized a quasi-denominational structure to try to resource the new churches that were being built. The reality is that cowboy churches were so different from traditional Baptist churches that the denomination was ill-equipped to serve them.

These were heady days, and I loved being a part of it, although I did suffer a significant burn-out in 2008. I had run too fast for too long, and it finally caught up with me. Fortunately, our church offered us a paid sabbatical, and I adopted a much more sustainable pace when I returned to work. I wound up spending 22 years at Cowboy Church, and I can honestly say that these were some of the best years of my life. I loved the people, was content in my work, and felt honored to have been part of something that felt like a genuine movement of God. I had no plans to go anywhere else and didn't believe that I ever would.

The Storm

Isn't it funny how sometimes a storm can sweep down on you before you even recognize you are in danger? Although I didn't know it, my storm began in 2019 with another unexpected invitation. After services one Sunday morning, a church member approached me and asked if I would like to go to the Holy Land. I replied that I would love to, but that such a trip was well beyond my means. She then asked, "What if it's free?" "Then sign me up!" I replied. She very quickly organized everything, and soon I was headed to Israel with about 30 church members.

I remember being impressed by many of the holy sites we toured, but none touched me more deeply than the Church of the Pater Noster. That church contains many dozens of mosaics of the Our Father (the Lord's Prayer), each in a different language. In that moment, I knew this was what God wanted the church to be—one family made up of people from every people, tribe, and nation, together in one church under the lordship of Christ. I also could not help noticing the hundreds of buses filled with worshipers from all over the world moving between the various sites. They were loaded with people from every race imaginable, speaking an almost infinite number of languages. There was one more thing I could not escape—the majority of them were Catholic. Indeed, as a Protestant, I felt like I was on the outside looking into a world that I didn't completely comprehend. I didn't draw any conclusions from all this, but something was beginning to stir in my heart.

That was in the spring of 2019. By early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began washing up on American shores wreaking havoc in all our lives. It began as a faint rumor from someplace far away, but by the second half of the year, elected

Big and Little Steps



Dear Friends,

This side of heaven, all of us remain people on the journey, whether we know and embrace it or not. This has been one of the most foundational themes in my life, impressed upon me from my earliest years as the result of seeing my father bring our family home to the Catholic Church. Its impact has endured as I have heard him and so many others like him share their experience of conversion. The

content of the testimonies—the people and places, the reasons and arguments, and the stories of unexpected encounters with God’s providence—have always moved and edified me to be sure. But it has always been the storytellers themselves who have broken my heart and reminded me of this fact: you and I remain people on the journey. We have the choice every day to be mindful of this reality and take the next steps on the journey of faith in Jesus,—“big” or “little”—or else to wander, become distracted, get too comfortable, and ultimately forget that we are not yet home, in the deepest sense.

One particular lesson about the journey that emerges from so many conversion stories is that we humans look at the “bigness” and “smallness” of each step of the journey through merely human eyes, and as a result our estimation is usually wrong. Our perspective is naturally limited by our human nature—we are not God. But it is further limited and indeed skewed by original and actual sin. As a result, we all tend to view the question of what is “God’s will for my life” through a filter informed by our own fears, desires, our sense of self, and our sense of the way we are viewed, positively or negatively, by other people.

There are certain moments on the journey, where God gives us the grace to question our own assumptions about “big” and “little” steps on the journey—assumptions which are of themselves the biggest barrier. What do we really know of such things? How can we ever presume to know the fruits that might come from even the apparently small, humble, ordinary steps He is asking us to take today? Furthermore, could any fruit really come from “big” important things that are not His will for our lives?

This is something that many converts—clergy converts and their families especially—wrestle with as a result of being drawn home to the Catholic Church. These ministers surrendered their life to Jesus and were convicted of their call to preach the Gospel—and God had indeed given them many “big” opportunities to do just that. Many have been successful pastors of large congregations, popular preachers, and effective evangelists who people would look up to—and even point to as the reason they were a Christian in the first place. Becoming

Catholic means laying down these opportunities, with no certainty of being able to pick them back up.

As these converts affirm in their testimonies, however, and as we have all learned in many ways in our own journeys, it is precisely in those moments that faith is tested and hearts are purified. It is when God’s will seems to run counter to our own estimation of things—our own sense of what is important, fruitful, and fulfilling—that we are being invited into a deeper walk of faith. It is on the other side of those moments that we are reminded that without God we can do nothing (John 15:5) and that any good we have done or could do comes from Him. In an important sense, there really are no “big” or “little” things in God. There are no more or less important ministries or vocations. There are no tasks or projects or life-changes that are more or less impactful. In the most immediate and practical sense, there is only one ultimate question: what is God calling me to do today?

A number of years ago in a talk he was giving, my father, Marcus, reflected on this topic of our perception of “bigness” and “littleness”. At the time, he was still flying back and forth to the EWTN Studio in Alabama each week to host the *Journey Home* program as a live broadcast. My father posed this thought experiment: *What if the plane crashed and I found myself before the Lord being asked: “What did you do with the life I gave you?” What would immediately come to my mind were ministries I had been involved with or founded, books I had written, and the Catholic television program I had been on a plane to go host! But what if, after I had shared all of these things with the Lord, expecting Him to be quite pleased and impressed, he were to say: “Well, that is all very well. But tell me about the people I put beside you on those airplanes all these years for you to love and share the gospel with?” What if those “little” opportunities that I had taken for granted, were the whole point all along?*

In the end, there are no “big” or “little” things — only God’s will. In the end, denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus (Matthew 16:24) includes letting go of your own ideas of even what that denial, cross, and following might look like. It is to “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5-6) It is receiving the journey itself as a gift, one step at a time.

As the journey continues, may we give thanks for each step, receive it as a gift, and take it boldly with great love.

In Christ,

JonMarc

Executive Director of The Coming Home Network
Host of EWTN's *The Journey Home*

November 28th is
Giving Tuesday

Your generous gift this #GivingTuesday helps us share the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church with those making the journey home!

chnetwork.org/givingtuesday



COMING HOME IN THE WILD WEST



Long before cowboy churches entered the Protestant landscape of the United States, one quite well known cowboy made his journey into the Catholic Church. William Frederick Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, was one the most famous figures of the American Old West. Gaining his moniker due to his work as a buffalo hunter after the American Civil War, Cody would go on to create *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, a circus-type stage show portraying a version of life in the American West. This show would eventually become a world-wide phenomenon, traveling across the U.S. and Europe, and included Native Americans invited by Cody to tour with him to provide an accurate representation of their heritage.

William Cody was not an overly religious man for much of his life, though he grew up in a religious household, his mother a devout Quaker. Cody's way of living certainly did not betray any affinity to a life of Christian virtue—rumors of his infidelity and drunkenness were widespread, especially after his attempt to divorce his wife. This began to change in the early 1900s, however, as his correspondence with his sister Julia would reveal. He writes,

"Let us show the Lord we are Christians. And will carry our cross. God ever bless you my patient brave sister. Remember our brave Christian mother and what she endured." (*Letters from Buffalo Bill*)

We do not know the full extent of what changed his heart, though there is much conjecture and folklore, the story changing with the storyteller. We do know that a number of the Native Americans who toured with Buffalo Bill were Catholic. One of those was Black Elk, an Lakota Sioux healer who himself was a convert to Catholicism, taking the name Nicholas at his baptism. While it does not appear that Nicholas Black Elk traveled with Buffalo Bill following his conversion, the timeline suggests that he quite likely may have been in attendance when Cody was granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII in March of 1890.

Given what we know, it is also a distinct possibility that the Native Americans touring with Buffalo Bill across Europe in later years, during Cody's spiritual transformation, could have been recipients of Nicholas Black Elk's instruction in the faith. Nicholas Black Elk became a trusted catechist to indigenous people across many tribes following his conversion, working alongside the Jesuit missionaries who were instrumental in his own journey into the Catholic Church.

As for Buffalo Bill, the fallout of a failed divorce, the witness of those on his tour and his commitment to their good, combined with the fruits of his audience with Pope Leo XIII worked together to help him turn his life around. He was "trying to live on earth as God would be pleased to have me live," committed to remaining sober for the rest of his life and healing his relationship with his then estranged wife (*Letters from Buffalo Bill*). Eventually, William Cody would return to Colorado, living near his sister who had become a Catholic. With his life now committed to Christian living, Buffalo Bill would request to be baptized into the Catholic Church just before his death in 1917.

Like so many on the journey, Buffalo Bill's life took a number of twists and turns on his way into the Church. He undoubtedly received inspiration and conviction from unlikely sources at the time, like the Native Americans he toured with and the difficulties in his marriage. Yet, we see that the persistence of God is undeniable—in his life and in ours. ■

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"For the last thirty years I have lived very differently from what the white man told about me. I am a believer. Accordingly, I say in my own Sioux Indian language, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,' as Christ taught us and instructed us to say. I say the Apostle's Creed and I believe it all...I send my people on the straight road that Christ's church has taught us about. While I live, I will never fall from faith in Christ."

From *The Last Testament of Nicholas Black Elk, Servant of God*

IN MEMORIAM

Please join us in praying for these and all members of our Coming Home Network family who have gone on to their eternal rest over the past year.

Sr. Philomena Bahr, ASC
Shirley Bateson *
Bishop George W. Coleman, Jr.
Cris Cris
Norman P. Dusseault, Sr.
Dolores Estrada
Fr. John A. Franey
Zita Gavin
Eugene Gerlach
Mary Greytak

Georgeana Guza
Gregory Hillis
Dorothy G. Holland
Robert Knueven
Albert Alex Kresta +
James Laffey
Raymond Leisner
James Likoudis +
George Lundy, Sr.
George Maalouf
Hubert Meunier

Kenny Moore *
Donald V. Murray
James Nevins
Veronica Niehaus
Ford Peckham
John De Pol
Fr. Dean Purdy +
Connie Regener ^
Bishop Daniel P. Reilly
Thomas Rogus
Leo Edward Salzman

Fr. Charles P. Scillieri, Jr.
Joseph Sentinella, Jr.
Lee South +
Preston Stemmann
Loren Taylor
Geraldine Timoney
Fr. Thomas Tobin
Sheila Fitzgerald Trust
Gerard D. Webster, Jr.
Rev. Robert White

* Family members of CHNetwork Staff

+ Appeared on *The Journey Home*

^ Written testimony at chnetwork.org/story

Joyful Journey Updates

David S., former Baptist pastor

A local parish announced that they were seeking a new youth minister. Now that I'm done with my master's degree from the Augustine Institute, Victoria and I prayed about whether I should submit my resume for the position. After we prayed, she asked what I thought God was saying. I told her, "That I'm not supposed to be a youth minister, but that, oddly enough, I am supposed to apply for this position." She said that's exactly what she thought God was saying, too. Then she added, "I think this is what's going to happen: they are going to interview you, and then they're going to say, 'you know what? We need a Director of Evangelization here.' And they're going to hire you as their first-ever director of Evangelization." And that's exactly what happened. I started 2 weeks ago. We regularly pray for you and the other folks there at the Coming Home Network—so grateful for the blessing that you have been to us! ■

Howard H., former Methodist minister

"I got to tell somebody what Jesus did for me" is a line from the ballad by Christian musician Don Francisco about Jesus raising Jairus the synagogue leader's daughter from the dead and ordering Jairus to tell no one about it. But Jairus finds it impossible to do so because of the overwhelming joy and gratitude to Jesus for giving him joy when his hope was dead.

Crippling fear had been crushing the hope out of me tempting me to despair of life but being able to receive Jesus in His fullness through the Catholic Church He founded and all her channels of grace literally saved my life and restored hope in the midst of the crucible of life in this world.

Fourteen years after becoming Catholic, every once in awhile I just can't keep the source of my joy secret anymore and it just bursts out of me because I long for others to have the joy I have found, even if they would rather not hear about it. ■

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

THE EUCHARIST is a sacrifice of THANKSGIVING to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all "thanksgiving."

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1360

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

Monday, Nov. 4

Megan Thomas

Former Evangelical
Protestant

Monday, Nov. 11

**Seth & Julianne
Burkholder**

Catholic "Revert" & Former
Presbyterian

Monday, Nov. 18

Joe Ward

Former Calvinist

Monday, Nov. 25

Dino Remedios

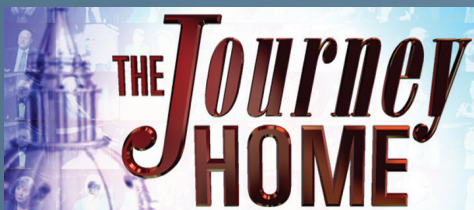
Catholic "Revert"

Monday, Dec. 2

Rebecca Frech

Former Agnostic, Catholic
Revert

Orig. Air Date: 8/17/20



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

Schedule is subject
to change.

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

PARTNERS IN *Mission*



Justin Hibbard

Donor since 2023—1 year

My whole upbringing was immersed in Protestant Christianity. My family were active members in the Seventh Day Baptist denomination, and I attended Protestant Christian schools from preschool through college. In high school, I fell in love with Christian apologetics and wrote a weekly essay that I emailed to any address I could find. Following college, I entered into bivocational pastoral ministry, and after 11 exhausting years, I stepped down and entered into the unfamiliar world of church shopping.

Over six years at various churches, I felt increasingly frustrated by the church experience. I was missing something substantial, and I couldn't put my finger on it. During the Covid lockdown, I compiled a mental list of what I hoped to find when churches reopened: Christ-centered, global, multicultural, charitable, tuned into church history, a structure of accountability, etc. When I got to the end of my list, I asked myself the most frightening question: "Am I really looking for the Catholic Church?"

Coming from anti-Catholic circles and realizing I learned most of Catholicism from Protestants, I was desperate to find authentic sources that could help me understand Catholicism. However, I always struggled listening to Catholics talk about Catholicism because their language seemed so other-worldly (which I realize now was due to the sacramental worldview). I thought, "Maybe, just maybe there's a Protestant out there that's converted to Catholicism. Maybe they even have a podcast." After a brief search, I found the *On the Journey* podcast with Matt, Ken, and Kenny. In addition to Catholic theology, they helped me understand Catholicism using words and ideas familiar to my Protestant upbringing.

In listening to this podcast, I learned about the Coming Home Network. Mind you, I thought I was alone. I knew only of a couple of Protestants who had converted to Catholicism. As a former Protestant pastor, however, I thought I was in uncharted territory.

When I logged into the Coming Home Network for the first time, I was blown away. I wasn't alone at all. Before me was a well-worn path. Beside me, were hundreds of pilgrims on the journey as well. It turns out neither my anxious feelings nor my theological questions were new, and the Coming Home Network provided a safe space to find answers and glean advice.

I support the Coming Home Network financially out of a sense of gratitude—the Coming Home Network had a tremendous impact on me coming home to the Catholic Church. I also support it out of mission—I want to help as many people find the fullness of Christianity. From experience, I know how much God uses this wonderful apostolate as a guide for the prodigal son and daughter on their journey home. ■

Justin Hibbard is a former pastor in the Seventh Day Baptist tradition and is now the host of the "Why Catholic" Podcast—whycatholic.substack.com. He has been supporting the Coming Home Network as a part of COMPASS since November of 2023. To join him with a gift, use the enclosed envelope or visit chnetwork.org/donate.

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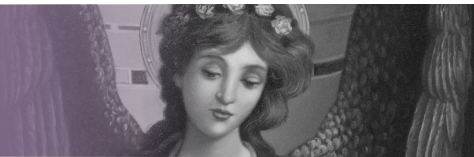
 The Coming Home Network International

 CHNetwork

 ComingHomeNetwork

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.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Jacobus, who just resigned his pastoral position with the Dutch Reformed Church** and is moving toward becoming Catholic, that the Lord will show him how he can provide an income for this family.

■ **For Joseph, an Anglican priest** who finds himself drawn back to the Catholic Church in which he was baptized and raised, that the Holy Spirit will lead him as he considers what this would mean for his wife and children, not to mention his ability to earn a living.

■ **For Christopher, an Episcopal priest** planning to enter the Catholic Church in the near future and strategizing how to make the move, that the Lord will show him the path forward.

■ **For Derrick, an Adventist academic** who is firmly on the journey toward the Church and surrounded by Adventists with no interest whatsoever – including his family – that the Holy Spirit will grant him wisdom and courage as he navigates a very difficult situation.

■ **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 Jerome, a Protestant missionary** who has begun to wrestle with the claims of the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him in his studies.

■ **For Joseph, who after many years as a pastor in various Protestant denominations** has begun to explore Catholic teaching and finds himself drawn to the Church, that the Lord will encourage him as he attempts to communicate what he is learning to his family.

■ **For Nickolas, a Lutheran pastor** who hasn't a clue as to how he would support his family if he were to leave his pastoral ministry to enter the Catholic

Church, that the Lord will open a path for him.

■ **For Daniel, a Protestant minister** raised by extremely 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 Holy Spirit will give him the courage to follow His lead.

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

Laitiy

■ **For Grant, a Pentecostal**, that the Lord would guide him to a solid, engaging OCIA program.

■ **For a Muslim man in Bangladesh**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him on his journey to Christianity.

■ **For John, an Orthodox Christian**, that our Lord Jesus would assist him in his struggles to accept the authority of the Bishop of Rome.

■ **For Benjamin**, who has been trapped by the Occult for some time, that the Lord would grant him spiritual freedom in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Michael, a member of the Assemblies of God**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to the answers he needs about the teachings of the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Dan, a former Missouri Synod Lutheran**, that he may find a mentor in his area who will give him guidance on his journey to the Church.

■ **For Bruce, an Evangelical**, that Jesus would grant him the grace to come home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For the Dimar family**, that they may be blessed to be able to enter into full-communication with the Catholic Church as a family.

■ **For Jed, a former Catholic**, that he may be granted the grace to make a good confession and return to the altar of the Lord Jesus.

■ **For Anthony, a Reformed Baptist**, that he may gain understanding of the truth of the Catholic Faith and discover answers to the objections of the Protestant reformers.

■ **For Charlie, a former agnostic** in Japan, that our Lord Jesus Christ would guide him home to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

■ **For Viet, a Non-denominational Evangelical**, that he may find grace and clarity in the fullness of the truth in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Sheila, a Baptist**, that she may know the Lord's guidance as she begins her journey, and that her family will soon join her on this journey.

■ **For Arlene, a "Revert"**, that she might find perseverance in her Catholic faith and she may experience greater family unity.

■ **For Rebecca, a Seventh Day Adventist**, that her family may be granted mental, physical and spiritual health and wellness, and that the Lord give her strength as she cares for them.

■ **For Trisha, a former Methodist**, that she may be blessed with good health and find good caregivers for at-home care.

■ **For Lisa, a Lutheran on the journey**, that Lord grants her wisdom as she begins OCIA as well as family unity in the faith.

■ **For Shayla, on the journey**, that she can find an OCIA class to join this year.

■ **For Alicia, an Anglican**, that she may receive healing from a recent fall, and that the Lord would grant protection and graces for her mom and sisters.

Military Conversion Stories

November 11th has long been a day of significance in the Catholic Church. It marks the feast of St. Martin of Tours, a 4th century Roman soldier who, after encountering Christ in the guise of a beggar, had a major conversion, going on to become a hermit and eventually a bishop. For centuries, St. Martin has been considered a patron saint of soldiers, along with St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. George, St. Michael the Archangel, and others.

In fact, it was on St. Martin's Feast day in 1918—the eleventh day of the eleventh month, at eleven o'clock in the morning—that the armistice was signed ending World War I, known then as the Great War. That armistice was celebrated on various dates over the years, but since 1978, the national day to honor veterans of the United States military is November 11th, bringing it into formal alignment with the feast of St. Martin of Tours, soldier and convert.

Recently, The Coming Home Network created a special landing page to showcase the stories of our members who've served in various branches of the military, from infantry to chaplaincy, to give insight into the way that their experience in the armed forces has shaped their respective journeys into the Catholic Church. Those stories, in both written and video formats, can be viewed at chnetwork.org/military.

TESTIMONIES INCLUDE:

Nathan Crankfield, a convert from Lutheranism, whose experience in Airborne and Ranger school helped form him in the disciplines necessary to grow in his Catholic Faith;

Everett Franklin, a former Church of God Army chaplain, who began to ask questions about the Eucharist after an encounter with a Catholic soldier when they were serving together in Iraq;

Jeff Miller, a Naval aircraft carrier technician whose wife's prayers bore great fruit in leading him from a life of atheism to Carmelite spirituality in the Catholic Church;

Lonna Graves, whose family's experience of being stationed all over the world led her to explore Catholic architecture and eventually become fascinated by the Church's history;

Tony Faul, a Navy pilot who was brought back to faith through the witness of Protestant friends at a base chapel, and who later felt called to return the Catholic Faith of his youth;

Matthew Persons, a combat medic whose visible and invisible wounds from serving in Iraq led him to seek God and eventually find a home in the Catholic Church;

...and many more! Find them all at chnetwork.org/military.



Please share these stories with anyone you know who's served our country, and let them know that The Coming Home Network would be honored to stand beside them as they seek to grow closer to Jesus Christ in His Church.

PRAYER FOR VETERANS

**Lord God, Almighty Father,
Creator of mankind and author of peace,
As we are ever mindful of the cost paid for the liberty we possess,
We ask you to bless the members of our armed forces.
Give them courage, hope and strength.
May they ever experience your firm support,
gentle love and compassionate healing.
Be their power and protector, leading
them from darkness to light.
To you be all glory, honor and praise, now and forever. Amen.**

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021

...Journeys Home Continued...

officials were panicking, and in most areas, they were directing churches to close and curtailing social gatherings. In our area, they shut down most non-essential businesses for several weeks. It was so odd. I had never seen the interstate highway so empty. Everything was eerily quiet and empty. Most churches, including my own, chose to cooperate with local officials and temporarily halt live services in the name of public safety. No one liked it, but the last thing we wanted to do was make things worse. Few of you will have to imagine the blowback that resulted from all of this, because you lived through it, too. People became angry. Conspiracy theories began to fly. People also began to pick sides, some generally supportive of public safety measures and others believing the whole thing was made up. The hostility that I witnessed between my fellow Christians during this time was unlike anything I had ever encountered. For a pastor, there was simply no winning position. No matter what you did you were going to make enemies. I remember telling my brother many times during this period, “Man, we need an adult in the room.”

But that was not to be. 2020 was an election year, and our already divided nation was undergoing one of the most divisive and acrimonious presidential races in modern history. Some people became so inflamed that they severed relationships and “unfriended” anyone on Facebook suspected of embracing the opposite view. No dissension was allowed inside the camp. Sadly, this carried over into the church. Although I had always endeavored to keep politics out of the church, this was a tsunami before which I seemed to be powerless. I could control the content of the service, but I couldn’t control the attitudes of the people. Despite my best efforts, political remarks did sometimes slip from the stage, and keeping voter guides and other political materials out of the church became a game of whack-a-mole. Much less could I control the conversations in the pews. It finally got to the point where some members no longer felt welcome and left the church because it had become “too political,” while others threatened to leave because it was not political enough. A cowboy pastor down the road even made national news by declaring from the pulpit that “You are not voting for Democrat or Republican, you’re voting for good or evil, one or the other.” He almost made it sound like people were going to hell if they didn’t vote for “his” candidate. I

know he was convinced that he was doing the right thing, but I was witnessing first-hand the carnage this kind of rhetoric was inflicting on the church and the damage it was doing to souls, and I sensed in my spirit that something was truly and deeply wrong. But the storm was not over yet.

It was about this time that we received a call from our youngest son, Jonathan. He had come out as an atheist several years before, but was now calling to tell us that he had converted to Orthodoxy. Sadly, I must admit that I didn’t really know what Orthodoxy was. All I knew at the time was that a few reputable Protestant Christians, such as Hank Hanegraaff and Frederica Mathewes-Green, had converted, so I assumed that it must be, well, orthodox. We had also had an Orthodox guide during our time in Israel. He had impressed us with his mature faith and knowledge of the Bible, so we were delighted that our son was moving in this direction, and I was anxious to learn more about his new faith so that I might better encourage him in it. At this juncture, I resolved to do two things simultaneously: 1) learn more about Orthodoxy, and 2) begin reading the Church Fathers. I knew about the Church Fathers from my seminary days and was aware that there were several volumes of their collected writings. I had always wanted to explore them but had never found the right time or motivation. But now, the right time and motivation had come, so I found a collection of their works online and began reading at volume one, chapter one, page one.

Oh No!

It didn’t take long for the foundations of my Baptist/Evangelical faith to begin to crumble. I very quickly began encountering passages such as these:

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. (Letter to the Corinthians Ch. 44—Clement of Rome)

See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do



**Arise, soldiers of Christ,
throw away the works
of darkness and put on
the armor of light.**

St. Cecilia, Feast Day—November 22

anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid. (The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, Ch. 8)

It is well to reverence both God and the bishop. He who honours the bishop has been honoured by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, does [in reality] serve the devil. (The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, Ch. 9)

Understand, these were very early writings, probably late first century, and they threw me into an almost immediate crisis, because there was one thing I could not escape --- whatever the early church was, it certainly didn't resemble my Evangelical faith.

Meanwhile, I was watching Orthodoxy videos on YouTube and learned that it was closely related to Catholicism, something which, if I had ever known, I had long since forgotten. Furthermore, my reading was revealing that the early church was indisputably sacramental, hierarchical, and was already being referred to as "catholic" from its earliest days. That the early church was Catholic didn't surprise me, because I had always understood that to be the case.

What did stun me was just how Catholic it was and how early. I had never really thought it through. I think I envisioned Jesus as sort of a 1960s-style guru hanging out on the shores of the Sea of Galilee with his merry group of fishermen-disciples who, "filled with the Spirit," would go out after the resurrection, preaching the evangelical good news and planting house churches. I had always believed that most of the Catholic trappings came much later, as the church gained acceptance under Constantine. I was now beginning to realize just how naïve this was. The reality is that I had always favored the simplicity of Evangelicalism and had never seriously deconstructed my faith. But now that I was in that process, I was being confronted with the unthinkable possibility that Catholicism might be true.

At this point, however, Orthodoxy was still a possibility. I continued to scour the internet for information about the differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism and watched several online debates. I also viewed several Catholic and Orthodox services online. But honestly, Orthodoxy felt very alien to me as a Westerner, and I harbored serious doubts about my ability to adapt to it. Furthermore, it seemed to carry in its DNA some of the same weaknesses that the pandemic and election had forced me to confront in Protestantism. They had no "grown-up" in the room, no central authority equivalent to the Papacy that might enable them to resolve theological disputes or address serious cultural concerns. Moreover, their congregations tended to be largely ethnic and homogenous, and that was very unlike the vision that had so inspired me in the Church of the Pater Noster. So, I struck Orthodoxy off my list and began to focus solely on Catholicism. I read numerous

books and watched countless hours of debate. I wanted to be sure that what I was beginning to believe to be true really was.

The Aftermath

I'm still not sure when my conversion took place. My heart converted before my mind was even aware of it. I sometimes compare it to watching a football game where you are not rooting for either side but are just watching to be entertained. However, as the game unfolds, things happen that begin to draw you in, and soon you find that you really do care and are rooting for one team to win and the other to lose. I'm not sure when it happened, but that's what my conversion was like. Once I determined to set aside my Protestant lenses and follow the evidence wherever it led, I found myself rooting for Catholicism to win. That's when I knew that I was going to wind up coming into the Church. My heart had left Evangelicalism and was now Catholic. That's when I contacted the Coming Home Network. It's also when I told my wife.

In retrospect, I wish I had shared more of my journey with her sooner, because then it wouldn't have been such a shock. But the reality is, I didn't want to risk disrupting her faith until I was sure. Thankfully, our marriage is strong, and even though she had serious reservations, she was willing to listen to me with an open mind. I made two requests of her. First, that she would listen to the *On the Journey* series with Matt and Ken, and secondly, that she would attend an upcoming CHNetwork retreat with me. She reluctantly agreed to both, and God used those means. Shortly after the retreat, we began attending Mass together and making final preparations for my retirement. I preached my last sermon on Palm Sunday 2023, and we were received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. Much to my surprise, our priest offered me a job shortly before we entered the Church, and I am currently serving our parish as Adult Faith Formation Coordinator.

This whole journey has felt a bit like *Alice in Wonderland*, but I see God's hand in it all. Catholicism is not a place I thought I would ever be. It was too alien, too strange, too wrong. God had to work to get me here. But, with a gentle tug in the Holy Land, a sharp elbow during the election and pandemic, and finally the blinding epiphany of my son's conversion, I tumbled down the rabbit hole and discovered the most wondrous place—the Church that Jesus founded, the barque of St. Peter, filled with saints of every time, tribe, and nation joyfully praising and serving God together in his eternal Kingdom. I could not have gotten here at any other time or in any other way. It required a perfect storm, but I'm so glad that God, by his grace, sent it, because now, I am home. ■

Gary Morgan is a former Baptist pastor best known for his leadership in the Cowboy Church movement. After an unexpected encounter with the Church Fathers, he retired following 35 years of ministry and was received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil 2023 along with his wife, Donna. He currently serves as Adult Faith Formation Coordinator for St. Jude Catholic Church in Mansfield, Texas.

The Coming Home Network International
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Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

LORD, JESUS CHRIST, OUR SOVEREIGN KING,



The beginning and end of all things,

You have made your Church to be a people that bears witness to the goodness and beauty of your kingdom.

By your Holy Spirit, you have united us as one body, called to live as one family of God.

Fill our hearts with your grace, that we would be close to you by being close to the vulnerable and marginalized.

Give us the patience to share one another's burdens, and give us the courage to always be friends of the truth.

May we remain with you always. Amen.

(USCCB Prayer to Christ the King)

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ,
King of the Universe: **November 24**

