



December 2024 CHNewsletter

Featured Story: Finding Unity by Kevin Finson	1
Truth and Conversion by JonMarc Grodi	4
From Fossils to Faith: BI. Nicholas Steno	6
Your Healing Gifts of Generosity	8
Hidden Meaning Behind a Popular Advent Hymn by Matt Swaim and Rakhi McCormick	9

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

Finding Unity

By Kevin Finson

Each of us exists in two realms at the same time, the physical and the spiritual. It is akin to walking through a swimming pool in water that is just above waist high. The water beneath our waists is like our physical world. We can see it and feel it; it is very concrete to us. We feel it pressing on us and resisting us as we take one step after another. Yet we must have the air above the water for survival. That air is like our spiritual realm. We don't see the air, and unless there is wind, we don't really feel it.



Many people are entirely focused on the water and pay no heed to the air above them unless they slip and fall and find themselves gasping for breath. Conversely, some people are mostly focused on the air above the water and ignore the physical things that impact them, support and buoy them up, and restrict their movement forward.

Then there are people who have an open awareness of both realms. They have some understanding of the qualities of each realm, how one interacts with the other. We were created to be both physical and spiritual. To ignore one aspect or try to excise it is not the way we were created to exist and live. Both are necessary for a truly healthy life.

For as long as I can remember, I have had a keen awareness of the spiritual side as well as the material side. Perhaps it is due to my Native Amer-

ican heritage that I am so sensitive to the hidden spiritual side of life. This sensitivity has allowed me to see prayers answered in amazing ways. For instance, I have felt the Lord directing me away from dangers to which I exposed myself through ignorance or cavalier thinking. Although I have not always understood why something happened to me as it did when it did, looking back on my life, I am grateful for where the Lord led me. In hindsight, I can see His providential hand on me.

For the first half of my life, I was a faithful churchgoer. I had a strong belief that involvement in faith practices through my church congregation was important. That belief carried over into my professional life in how I approached my work and dealt with colleagues. It also carried over into my weekday life. I wasn't a "Bible thumper," as we used to call them in college, but I was Bible literate and believed that this was the road map that God wanted me to follow in life. I was comfortable with my faith life and content to stay where I was in it. That changed when the Lord decided it was time

Continued on page 2

...Journeys Home Continued...

for me to enter the Catholic Church.

As I look back at the spiritual things that occurred to me in my life, I can see how there were many instances — some major, some minor — that began back in my early childhood. The Lord had started setting the foundation stones in place at an early age for my lifelong spiritual growth. At first, I was too young to see where it was leading, and in later years, I was too focused on my Protestantism to want to see where it was leading. For the most part, I liked where I was, and I liked what I was doing. It might seem like my journey to Catholicism started the year before I converted, but that is not really true—it really started in my childhood.

My Growing Up Years

I was obnoxiously faith-centered as a child. Our family attended the local Congregational church. There were no age requirements about who could take communion, so I always partook of it, even as a young elementary-aged child. We had communion once every three months in that church. I was always excited on those days. The ushers would walk down the aisles passing out trays that contained tiny squares of bread. When the tray came by, you would remove one piece and then hand the tray to the person next to you. All of us held onto our little pieces of bread until everyone had one. Then the minister would say a blessing and say something like, “Let us all eat together.” I thought it “cool” that all of us ate our bread at exactly the same time.

Then came the cups. We passed along trays holding tiny cups partially filled with grape juice. I really liked the way those cups fit into my hand! The same protocol for eating the bread was used for drinking the juice. Everyone drank together at the same time.

Our family usually sat in pews toward the front of the church so we kids could see things better. As a result, we

always received our bread and juice relatively early in the communion ritual and had to hold onto them for a “long time” before consuming it. I remember, as I would sit there with my cup of juice, that I would stare down into it, expecting to see Jesus looking back up at me. I never did see that, but it didn’t dampen my thinking that, at some point, I would see Him.

I vividly remember receiving my first Bible. It was a gift from the church to us children as we “came of age” (whatever that meant), around the third grade. I treasured my Bible and read it constantly, using it so much that the binding began to wear out. I would carefully place it on my dresser at home, allowing nothing ever to sit on top of it. My Bible was sacred, and nothing would ever be allowed to violate that sacredness. In a similar way, I never wrote in my Bible. I would write notes and place them inside it, but the pages were never soiled by pen or pencil. I never “dog-eared” any of its pages, either.

In my senior year of high school, our family moved to a small town a couple of hours away from where I grew up. I hated that move, but did find some fulfillment in attending and leading some Bible studies with other high schoolers. We almost managed to establish a “coffee house,” where we could have more Bible studies and faith gatherings, but high schoolers are not known for having a lot of cash.

Eventually, I went off to college, intending to major in Paleontology, having always had a keen interest in fossils. However, after my first year, a friend told me about a major called Earth Science Education. The more I learned about it, the more I was attracted to it. It seemed to me that God was opening a door for me that would allow me to study not only fossils, but many other aspects about the physical world as well. There was also the additional bonus of providing an avenue to share my learning and enthusiasm with children. It was a very comfortable fit for me, so that

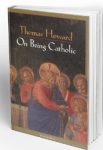
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

ON BEING CATHOLIC

THOMAS HOWARD

Thomas Howard presents his insights on the “glad tidings” of the deeper meaning of Catholic spirituality, rendered in his unique style of lay meditations on Catholic teaching and practice, opening up in practical and simple terms the richness at work in the Catholic experience.

#3054 - \$14.95

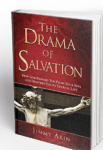


THE DRAMA OF SALVATION

JIMMY AKIN

Catholic Answers Senior Apologist Jimmy Akin uses his expertise in Sacred Scripture and Church teaching to cut through the confusion and provide clear answers on important issues that often divide Catholics and Protestants, such as what we need to do to be saved, and how faith and works relate.

#3208 - \$21.95



JESUS AND THE JEWISH ROOTS OF MARY

DR. BRANT PITRE

Dr. Brant Pitre takes readers from the Garden of Eden to the Book of Revelation, relying on the wisdom and practice of Ancient Judaism to unlock how the Bible itself teaches that Mary is the new Eve, the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and the new Ark of the Covenant.

#3250 - \$24.00



was the road I took.

During this time, I usually made it a point to take our house mother to church on Sundays. Any guy in our house going to church was a novelty, but I persisted, and soon several others were dragging themselves out of bed early Sunday morning to go with us. I would also travel home on Saturdays to serve as our church's youth group leader.

While continuing my studies, I met my wife, Chris. A buddy and I had both just broken up with our girlfriends and were in the student union one day, washing away our sorrows over a couple of sodas. It was then that a woman friend of ours arrived at our table, bringing along with her several of her friends. We all sat around the table, and when I looked into Chris's eyes, a voice in my head shouted, "She is the one!" Unbeknownst to me, Chris had that same exact voice in her head at the very same moment. Later, when I found out about it, I was certain it was providence. I sought her out by first combing through the student directory because I couldn't remember her last name, but knew who her roommate was. Fortunately, her last name started with the letter "C," so my search didn't last long. We began dating, and the more we were together, the more obvious it was that the Lord intended for us to be with each other. We were finding amazing ways to support each other and grow in our faith. After we graduated, we married and soon started our family.

My Adult Protestant Years

Shortly after our children were born, we began attending our local Presbyterian church in Auburn, Kansas. Our town was very small, as was the church. That made it very easy to get to know the minister well. We became friends and conversed frequently about science and faith issues. He was interested in my perspective about faith since I was a science educator, and I was interested in his perspective about faith in science. It wasn't long before I found myself serving on the board (called the Session) of that church. The Session made most of the decisions regarding the direction of the local church and oversaw its finances. Each of us was provided a "Book of Order" from the national denomination office so we could be sure to follow the rules when we made our local decisions. I was evidently good at it, and before long was elected as an elder in the church. Church elders had the responsibility of leading the congregation in faith matters and consulting regularly with the minister.

We eventually departed Auburn, Kansas for North Dakota, where I taught college for a couple of years. That was not a very active faith time for me or my family. Folks there were polite, but we felt like outsiders. We were never included in gatherings outside of church services. We then moved to Illinois, where I took a position at the local university in Macomb. There, we joined the First Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. Within the year, I was elected to serve as an elder in the church. The role of elders in that church were much the same as they were in the Auburn Presbyterian Church years earlier, but they

were even more involved with faith and worship matters. Elders were also responsible for serving communion to the congregation each Sunday and taking communion out into the neighborhoods to church members who were shut-ins. Twelve elders were active at one time; when one decided to step down due to age, health, or some other reason, the congregation would elect someone to fill his or her place. After a year, I was elected by the elders to chair the group, conducting all the meetings. Elders also served as part of the church board, which consisted of about fifty people, and it was not long until the board elected me to chair the board. Most people only chaired the board for one year; I served three.

Within the congregation were several subgroups that all seemed to compete for authority, control, and power. I never understood how they kept re-electing me to chair the board when any one of them could have run for the office themselves. I guess they did not really want the work involved, but just wanted to have control. Somehow, I managed to keep them all in check and working in some form of unity.

Each year, the elders would conduct evaluations of the church staff, including the minister. The task was rather perfunctory, and the elders would meet with each staff member individually to review the results. In my last year and a half there, the subgroups began stirring up others with the idea that the evaluation results should be shared with the entire congregation. I resisted, due to "personnel privacy" concerns, but was overridden by the majority of the church board.

During this time, I was feeling extreme pressure from church members and from circumstances at work. The education program at the university was being decimated, placing my employment in jeopardy.

I was also president of our local school board, and some of us had been doing battle with the superintendent over several significant issues, including teacher negotiations and expenditures of district funds. In addition, there was a "good old boys" network in the school board that resisted any change or accountability.

I was powerless to head off any of these situations and felt I needed some additional spiritual support to get through it all. I mentioned that need to our minister one day, and he suggested I get a spiritual advisor. It had to be someone other than him. I had never had one, so I began thinking about whom I might ask. It would be a few more months before I made a decision about that.

When it came time to conduct the church staff evaluations, the subgroups' claws came out, and I knew we would have to modify the evaluation protocols to include the entire congregation. I had exhausted all my options to deal with it as I thought best. Once the evaluations were completed, the elders compiled the ratings and comments and prepared for them to be shared with the congregation at its annual meeting. It was my duty to speak before the entire congregation to share the results of the evaluations.



Truth and Conversion



Dear Friends,

One of the benefits of hearing so many amazing conversion stories over the years at the Coming Home Network International is that we begin to recognize common patterns that elucidate the nature of *conversion* itself. One broad theme that has always struck me is the connection between *conversion of heart* and our ability to *receive and understand the truth*. Most conversion stories

involve the search for deeper truth through an intellectual element of reading, studying, and asking good questions. However, in these stories and many of the Gospel accounts and parables of Jesus, this cautionary theme also emerges: The truth will set you free (John 8:32), but in order to hear and receive the truth you must have a changed and open heart.

In his book, *Deep Conversion, Deep Prayer*, Fr. Thomas Dubay draws our attention to Jesus' first words in his public ministry in the Gospel of Mark: "*Be converted and accept the gospel*" (Mark 1:15). He points out the peculiarity of placing "conversion" prior to "accepting the Gospel." We would normally expect it the other way around—that discovering the truth prompts and facilitates conversion. But in *this* formulation Our Lord emphasizes an apparent paradox: if your heart is not ready, if you have not "converted" in some fundamental sense, then the Gospel will fall upon deaf ears. You will "see but not see" and "hear but not understand" (Matthew 13:13).

Human beings, endowed by God with the power of a rational intellect, tend to overestimate the ability and independence of this faculty. We tend to think the truth and our relationship with it is simply a matter of information, feeling a sense of pride as we learn. The problem arises as we then begin reducing the "truth" to the particular images and understandings we have in our own heads, when in reality, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Hamlet*). We have a tendency, even among Christians, to think holiness, conversion, and deepening our relationship with Christ is primarily a matter of the *mind*, and thus of consuming *information*—reading more books, listening to more podcasts, etc.

But throughout the Gospel we encounter this great mystery: so many who hear and see the truth just don't "get it." The "not getting it" is neither due to a lack of *intelligence* or *information*. So many who rejected Christ's teaching were precisely learned academics and theologians of the time — the priests, elders, scribes, and pharisees who would have had the most access and training in the "truth," and who thus should have been the most equipped to recognize and accept Jesus for who He was. Hearing and accepting the truth is not merely a head issue, but a heart issue.

Indeed, this connection between an unconverted heart and the inability to perceive the truth is the crux of Jesus' de-

bate with the Pharisees in John 8. His Jewish interlocutors stand on their academic credentials and their identity as "Children of Abraham," but Christ pleads with them to recognize that "He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (John 8:47). Jesus also gets at this "head and the heart" issue in His Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) in which the "seed," which is the "word of the kingdom of God," takes root and bears fruit *only* in the "good soil," which is "he who hears the word and understands it" (Matthew 13:23). Simply having access to truthful information is not enough; we must have hearts open and ready for the fullness of truth to take root and bear the fruit of conversion.

As is evidenced in many conversion stories, God sometimes intervenes by grace to miraculously open a person's heart to truths they were previously deaf to, and this is certainly our prayer for friends and family who just don't yet "see" the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church. But for we who have been blessed, by grace, to come to know Christ and His Church, we now have a heightened responsibility to continually tend that soil—to do the hard work of making our hearts ever more open and ready to receive and act upon the truth. There is still learning to be done, but we must remain vigilant in ensuring that we do not make an idol out of information, especially in our modern information-saturated world. As St. James reminds us, we must be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving [our]selves" (James 1:22).

The most important virtue of the heart that we must continually cultivate and pray for in this regard is humility, which perhaps can be best defined as a *conversion and surrender to truth!* In humility, we turn away from ourselves, and instead, look outward and upward, desiring to see things as they truly are—*who God is and who I am in Him*. We can only "understand" what we will humble ourselves to "stand under"—we can only "look up" to the degree that we "step down." No matter the God-given innate intelligence of a particular person, and no matter the immense training and information they have available to them, it is ultimately only the humble heart that can receive the fullness of truth and allow it to bear the fruit of continual conversion in their life.

As this network of truthseekers continues the journey together, may we pray for and practice the virtue of humility, so that the Gospel can take root, transform our lives, and make us ever more faithful witnesses of the love of Jesus Christ and the truth of His Church.

In Christ,

JonMarc Grodi

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

Are you currently attending or leading OCIA/RCIA classes? Let us know! Email info@chnetwork.org.

Joyful Journey Updates

Ann W., formerly New Age

I was confirmed and received into the Church on November 30th last year at a Thursday evening Mass. It was lovely and simple. What was one of the best moments was a few days earlier when I had my first confession. I prepared myself and kept it fairly brief, and though I read from my notes, lots of tears were shed as I sincerely repented. Afterwards I was so happy! The absolution was absolute—I was free and forgiven—what joy!

Since last year I am getting to know more people at church. Some of us went to London in

May to the Westminster Cathedral to be present at the inauguration of our first Bishop of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham for England and Wales. And in October, I was excited to join our annual parish pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham for first time!

I go to Mass every Sunday at our beautiful church, which is celebrating its 100th birthday. We have a magnificent organ that is played beautifully. When I am receiving the Eucharist, immediately tears well up in my eyes. I can't help crying every time—I feel immense gratitude in that moment.

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

“Beautiful is what we see.
More beautiful is what we comprehend.
Most beautiful is what we do not comprehend.”

BL. NICOLAS STENO—FEAST DAY: DECEMBER 5

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

Monday, Dec. 2

Rebecca Frech

Former Agnostic, Catholic Revert

Orig. Air Date: 8/17/20

Monday, Dec. 9

Luke Nelson, Jr.

Former Wesleyan Pastor

Monday, Dec. 16

Taylor Kemp

Former Pro Soccer Player & Catholic “Revert”

Monday, Dec. 23

John Levi Davidson

Catholic “Revert”

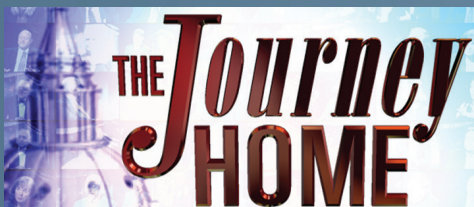
Orig. Air Date: 8/24/20

Monday, Dec. 30

Rachelle Parker

Former Church of Christ Member

Orig. Air Date: 8/31/20



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, Jan. 6

Reza Akhtar

Former Muslim & Anglican

Schedule is subject to change.

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

From Fossils to Faith

BL. NICHOLAS STENO

FEAST DAY: DECEMBER 5



In this season of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the Incarnation, we are called to quiet down and prepare our hearts to receive Christ anew, to be moved in awe at His presence. We are not asked to do this on blind faith alone. Throughout creation, God has left us signs and wonders of Himself, if only we would take notice.

In his 1998 encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, Pope St. John Paul II begins, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth..." In our contemplation of the Word along with the created world, we discover the fullness of the truth of Christ. Blessed Nicolas Steno provides a poignant witness of this through his life.

A world-renowned 17th century scientist, Nicolas Steno is known as the father of modern geology, paleontology, and crystallography. Born into a Danish Lutheran family in 1638, Steno's whole life revolved around scientific research. After receiving his medical degree, he became well known in intellectual circles of the time and landed in Florence, Italy, with the Medici Scholars as their Anatomist at Court. Instead of becoming an obstacle to his faith, Steno's relentless pursuit of scientific truth laid the foundation for his embrace of the fullness of faith found in the Catholic Church.

Nicolas was dedicated to the use of comparative analysis in his research. It was through this method of inquiry that Steno discovered the heart was a muscle, women have ovaries, glands produce saliva, and eventually, inconsistencies in another scholar's work on the similarities between shark teeth and fossilized rock formations, which changed the landscape of geology and paleontology. In fact, it was this dedication that gained him close friendships with other scholars on the Medici Court, including Francesco Redi, who would play a pivotal role in Steno's spiritual journey.

Redi's shared passion for anatomy and scientific research led to the development of a close friendship as the scholars traveled throughout Italy. While Steno was Lutheran, Redi was a devout Catholic. It is clear their conversations

included religion, as Redi reportedly wrote to a priest friend about his hope that Nicolas was close to embracing Catholicism. However, Nicolas was not quite yet ready. When the Medici Scholars returned to Florence, Steno did not join them. Instead, he opted to pursue his newfound interest in fossils and travel throughout Italy to meet other scholars.

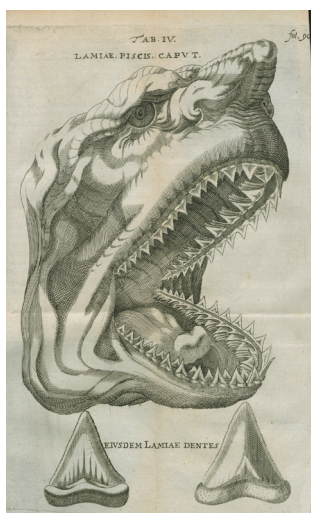
Redi's influence remained strong, however. He asked his friend, Lavinia Arnolfini, and her husband to receive Steno at their palace in Lucca during his visit and help focus his attention. Whether he meant this theologically is not known, but Redi shared enough of their discussions about faith that Lavinia guided her conversations with Nicolas toward religious matters. Though he did not turn his attention to religion right away, Steno was deeply moved by her impassioned plea for him to embrace the Catholic Faith as a matter of life and death.

It was a profound experience later, in June 1667, that would propel Steno into a deep exploration of his religious beliefs. While continuing his research in Livorno and wrestling with "the uncertainty of his soul," Steno witnessed a Eucharistic procession for the feast of Corpus Christi. "When I saw that host carried in procession with such pomp throughout the city, I felt waking up in my mind these arguments: either that host is a simple piece of bread and silly are those who give so much honor to it, or here is the True Body of Christ and why don't I honor it too?" This question turned Steno's attention to a vigorous analysis of religion.

Nicolas dedicated himself to reading everything there was to read on the matter and met with Lavinia's confessor for spiritual discussions. While convicted that "the spirit of Truth cannot be the author of opposed churches," Steno still was not convinced that the true Church was the Catholic Church. Absorbed in information, he encountered something many of our members find on their own journeys—analysis paralysis. His scientific temperament made him wonder if he'd studied deeply enough to make a decision.

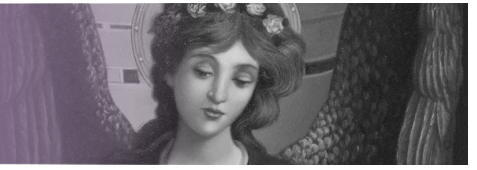
It was by finally surrendering his need for intellectual certainty to "the totally accepted divine certitude of divine grace," that Nicolas Steno entered the Catholic Church on November 2, 1667. Eventually, Steno was ordained a priest in 1675, and went on to serve as a bishop until his death in 1686, during which time he wrote several theological books and generously served the poor. He was beatified by St. John Paul II in 1988.

Nicolas Steno's journey parallels so many of our members' experiences with their own "comparative analysis" of faith. Instead of Steno's seeming hyperfixation on subjects becoming a barrier to deeper faith, it poignantly illustrates the way God weaves the fullness of our person and experiences together to lead us into full communion with Him.



BLESSED NICOLAS STENO, PRAY FOR US.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Aaron, a Protestant pastor** who just recently resigned his ministry to enter the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him as he considers what kind of occupation to pursue in his new life as a Catholic.

■ **For Erik, a Mennonite minister** who is beginning the OCIA process and planning to enter the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him wisdom as he seeks to lead his wife and children into the Church as well.

■ **For Mathieu, a Protestant seminarian** who has begun to study Catholic theology, but has many questions as he is reading widely and being drawn powerfully toward the Church, that Jesus will lead him home.

■ **For Mark, an evangelical pastor** and evangelist who reunited with the Catholic Church last Easter and has since been rejected by virtually every church that used to invite him to preach but has found work driving a delivery truck, that the Holy Spirit will fill his heart with gratefulness and joy as he looks forward.

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

■ **For Matthew, an Eastern Orthodox priest** who has begun the lengthy process of entering the Catholic Church and being received as a Catholic priest, that he will find a way to support his wife and four children during this time.

■ **For Michael, an Anglican priest** who very much 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 clear the way for him.

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

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

■ **For 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 John, a Baptist pastor** who has been attracted to Catholicism for some time but struggles with some of the things he sees happening in the Church, that the Lord will help him to work through these difficulties.

■ **For Sergio, a Protestant evangelist** who was received into the Catholic Church with his wife and child this fall, that the Holy Spirit will give him tremendous wisdom as he rethinks his family's life moving forward.

Lay

■ **For Gerald, a lapsed Catholic**, that the Lord would guide him as he talks to his priest and investigates the truths of the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Alex, a life-long Protestant**, that his studies of the early Church Fathers would give him a hunger for the Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

■ **For Sean, a Reformed Baptist**, that the Holy Spirit would soften and open his wife's heart toward the Catholic Church.

■ **For Stacey, an Evangelical brother**, that he may one day join his Catholic future wife at the altar of our Lord.

■ **For Gary, a Free Will Baptist**, that the Holy Spirit would bless, anoint, and guide his and his wife's OCIA journey.

■ **For Rick**, that all obstacles that he feels are in the way of him joining the Catholic Church would be cleared away.

■ **For Aaron, a former Atheist**, that the Father would fully conform him into the very image of our Lord Jesus.

■ **For Matthew, a former Baptist seminarian**, that his journey to full-communion with the Catholic Church would be one of clarity and joy.

■ **For Jonathan, an Evangelical Free brother**, that he may find doctrinal clarity in the apostolic authority of the Catholic Church.

■ **For Jacob, a former Pentecostal and Mormon**, that the fullness of the truth in the Catholic Church would grant him peace and freedom.

■ **For John, a Seventh-day Adventist**, that the Holy Spirit would successfully guide him through any doctrinal difficulties he may encounter.

■ **For David, a Non-denominational Evangelical**, that our Lord Jesus Christ would clear away all of his misconceptions about the Catholic Faith and guide him back to the Church of his baptism.

■ **For Michelle, who is on the journey**, that she and her husband might seek more deeply for God's will.

■ **For Sarra, a Presbyterian**, that she and her husband will have unity in faith.

■ **For Christy, a recent convert**, that she and her husband will find their place in their new parish home.

■ **For Karina, an Adventist**, that the Lord would grant her guidance and wisdom.

■ **For Cynthia, a secular lapsed Catholic**, that she may find grace and consolation for the loss of her beloved mom.

■ **For Janice, an Evangelical** on the journey, that she and her family may receive consolation after the loss of her mom.

YOUR HEALING GIFTS OF GENEROSITY

By Kenny Burchard, Director of Development



Every Advent I am struck with an incredible realization. God entered the world as a baby and grew up with one mission—to heal the mortal wound of human sinfulness which He did not inflict, and to repair a world broken by human failure which He did not break. The words *gave*, *giving*, and *gift* saturate the New Testament when its writers are looking for ways to explain God's purpose in the mission of Jesus;

For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son... (Jn. 3:16)
God did not spare His own Son but gave him for us all... (Rom. 8:32)
Our Lord gave himself for our sins to deliver us... (Gal.1:4)
The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me ... (Gal. 2:20)
Christ loved us and gave himself up for us... (Eph. 5:2)

I could go on and on, but you get the point. God's self-giving love is His healing gift to us. As Christians, we enter into this story and the work of God's redeeming generosity through what we do with our own lives.

This theme of healing, self-giving generosity calls to mind a phrase in the *Catechism* that drives the mission of The Coming Home Network. It speaks of another kind of wound, one we feel the Lord has given us a particular charism to heal—*Wounds to Unity*, as the heading that precedes paragraphs 817-822 reads. We address these wounds and their far-reaching impact every day as we work with non-Catholic clergy and their families to help them return to full communion with the Church.

As much as we see ourselves on the front lines of this healing work, we realize that it is the generosity of our donors that makes all of this possible. Over and over we hear from them that they care about what we do. They want to see the disunity healed. They want to see Protestant ministers and Christians discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and make the journey home. They want to see lapsed and fallen-away Catholics come back home to Christ and the Sacraments. It is *their* healing gifts of generosity that keep this mission going.

As the year draws to a close, I want to invite everyone reading this to join our mission with your own Advent gift. In the spirit of Christ, Who *gives* Himself for those far from God, will you join us with a gift on behalf of those far from Christ's beautiful Catholic Church? I hope you will. Your generosity will surely bring healing to many! ■

Kenny Burchard (Director of Development at CHNetwork) is a former Pentecostal pastor who, along with his wife MaryJo and their son Victor came home to the Church in 2019. They have been donors to the Coming Home Network since July 2018, and monthly donors to COMPASS since September 2020. To make a year-end gift, visit chnetwork.org/donate, or use the enclosed envelope.

CHNETWORK STAFF, ADVISORS, & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President/Founder
Marcus Grodi
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Executive Director
JonMarc Grodi

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

Office Manager
Ann Moore

Studio Manager
Bill Bateson
(former Secularist)

Director of Pastoral Care
Ken Hensley
(former Baptist minister)

Director of Outreach
Matt Swaim
(former Methodist)

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

Director of Development
Kenny Burchard
(former Foursquare pastor)

Communications Coordinator
Rakhi McCormick
(former Hindu)

Pastoral Care Coordinator
Melissa Slagle
(former Baptist)

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

Financial Advisor
Kevin Lowry
(former Presbyterian)


Spiritual Advisor
Br. Rex Anthony Norris
(former Anglican)

Office Assistant
Karlie Carpenter

BOARD OF DIRECTORS


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

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

 740.450.1175

 info@chnetwork.org

Find us on Social Media

 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.

TAX LETTERS

Tax letters for 2024 contributions will be e-mailed to donors who have email addresses on file. If you would like to receive your tax letter by postal mail, please contact **Ann Moore** at ann@chnetwork.org or call 740.450.1175 x101.

THE HIDDEN MEANING BEHIND A POPULAR ADVENT HYMN

Matt Swaim and Rakhi McCormick

One of the most familiar hymns of this time of year, sung by Christians of every tradition, is *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. However, those outside the Catholic tradition may not realize that the text of this hymn is rooted in an ancient liturgical observance known as the "O Antiphons."

An "antiphon," as St. John Henry Newman explained it, is a "verse that gives emphasis to what follows, such as a prayer, psalm, Scripture or canticle."

The "O Antiphons" are sung in the days leading up to Christmas (beginning on December 17 and ending December 23) during evening prayer in the Catholic Church's Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), before and after the Magnificat, in a tradition that dates back as early as the 8th century!

Each of these verses refers to a Messianic title for Christ, using biblical imagery drawn from the Old Testament to recall the whole of salvation history and anticipate the birth of Christ. They express the longing we feel for the coming of the Messiah—at Christmas, anew in our hearts, and at the end of time. The Messianic titles, in Latin and English, are:

December 17—*O Sapientia* (O Wisdom)

December 18—*O Adonai* (O Lord)

December 19—*O Radix Jesse* (O Root of Jesse)

December 20—*O Clavis David* (O Key of David)

December 21—*O Oriens* (O Light from the East)

December 22—*O Rex Gentium* (O King of the Nations)

December 23—*O Emmanuel* (O God With Us)

You may recognize in the verses of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* the variations on these antiphons; for instance, the verse which begins "O come Thou Dayspring" is a reference to *O Oriens*, and the verse which begins "O come, Desire of Nations" refers to *O Rex Gentium*.

There is even a hidden message in the first letters of each antiphon—beginning with "E" for "Emmanuel" and working backwards, the first letter of each antiphon can be assembled to spell the phrase *ero cras*, which is Latin for "tomorrow, I come," a reference to the fact that the next day is Christmas Eve.

So the next time you find yourself singing this beloved hymn, perhaps even while visiting non-Catholic relatives this Advent, know that you are joining in prayer with those who have sung these verses for centuries as a rich part of Catholic tradition and liturgy.

END OF YEAR GIVING

Please remember the Coming Home Network as an integral part of your year-end giving plans.

Join our mission to help men and women—clergy and laity—from every background imaginable, find their way home to the Catholic Church. Use the enclosed envelope to make your year-end gift, or give through our secure donor portal at chnetwork.org/donate. You may also make your gift over the phone by calling (740) 450-1175.

TESTIMONIALS

"I support the Coming Home Network financially out of a sense of gratitude—they had a tremendous impact on me coming home to the Catholic Church. I also support it out of mission—I want to help many others 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, former Seventh Day Baptist pastor

"I have found CHN to be a faithful, caring, and supportive apostolate that has helped many of us navigate the sometimes difficult waters of conversion. I decided at the beginning of my journey in August of 2016 that this was a ministry I wanted to contribute

to, not only because they meant so much to my journey, but also are doing so much to help others on the way home. Your support will make a difference!"
—Kathy Norman, former Evangelical Protestant

"It wasn't long after we began learning about the important work of the CHNetwork that we felt we should become monthly donors. It's a personal joy to us to know that our gifts help provide counsel, care, resources, and much-needed assistance to help guide these dear people home. We want to encourage everyone reading this to join us in giving frequently and even monthly to ensure that the CHNetwork continues its important work."
—Vern & Pat Berg, lifelong Catholics

Before that, I had several lengthy meetings with our minister regarding his evaluation and obtained his permission to share the results with everyone. I resisted the idea of baring everything in this way, but he thought it best and told me I should follow through with it. That, we thought, would appease the power-hungry subgroups.

In hindsight, it was a mistake. Some saw what they perceived as cracks in the defensive wall around the minister and attacked. It was anything but faith-based and loving. I was feeling more in need of a spiritual advisor than ever before.

As I thought and prayed about a spiritual advisor, a voice in my mind told me to go across the street from our church and speak with the priest at the Catholic parish. On a sunny spring day, I knocked on the rectory door. The priest answered the door, and I introduced myself, telling him that I was looking for a spiritual advisor and wondered if he would be willing to be mine? He pursed his lips, slightly puffed out one cheek, and after a moment said, "Sure. Come back this same time next week and we'll start." I was so relieved! I didn't know what lay ahead, but this encounter changed my life.

I had been meeting with the priest for about two months when the time came for me to present our church staff evaluation results to the congregation. The presentation seemed to go well, but at the end, when questions were taken, I could sense things had gone awry. It seemed as though we were going to have to allow the problematic subgroups more control and more say about the minister. The coup had come to a head, and the situation was deteriorating quickly. Some were now advocating for the removal of the minister from his pastorate. There was enough support in the congregation for such ideas to override the church board and acquiesce to many of the subgroups' demands.

A few months later, the minister was thinking about leaving for better pastures, and I was thinking the same. I was longing for a church where there was unity among its membership about its minister (or priest), where such coups would not be allowed. I was now wanting to be someplace where faith meant more than lip service and where there was true spiritual strength based on Biblical principles. I decided that the Catholic Church was that place. Shortly thereafter, I resigned my offices at our church and made preparations to leave the congregation for the pastures offered across the street at the Catholic parish.

Conversion

Before I made the decision to join the Catholic Church, I needed to know more about it. To begin, I went to a bookstore and purchased a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I read it cover to cover, making copious notes and highlighting passages in it. When I told the priest what I had done, he was amazed. He said he had not known of anyone doing that before. Typically, people only read designated parts of it as they progressed through the preparation for entry into the Church. I told him that, with each part I read, I would say to myself, "Yes, that makes clear sense. Yes, I agree with that."

He also directed me to several good books to read. I remember one was Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*, one was *The Story of a Soul* about St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and another was *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. He told me that I should be careful, because I might decide to convert. I told him I was willing to take that chance. As it turned out, he was right. Within two months, after much prayer and much time kneeling before the tabernacle in the church, I felt I had no choice but to convert. God was pulling me in.

The obvious next step was to begin the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The next class at the parish was starting in the fall, but it met on the same night I taught a class at the university. The priest then suggested I try the Newman Center, across the street from my campus building. Their focus was mainly on college students,

but it could still work for me. Unfortunately, their RCIA sessions met on the same night that I had to lead school board meetings. I thought I was at a standstill. When the priest heard of the situation, he decided to arrange for me to do a "private" RCIA with a couple of RCIA team members. The three of us met weekly during the day and again each Saturday morning.

I knew my decision to convert would be a shock to my family. To lessen that, I began going alone to the earliest Mass on Sunday mornings, then attending First Christian Church with my family at its regular mid-morning worship service. That seemed to be a workable solution to our church-going. It was, however, not without its issues.

I remember a time when our regular minister was out of town, and we had a substitute minister come to lead the worship service. My wife practically had to hold me down when I heard the words he used at the beginning of communion. I remember him holding up the bread, then the grape juice, saying each time, "This is a symbol



Within two months, after much prayer and much time kneeling before the tabernacle in the church, I felt I had no choice but to convert. God was pulling me in.

...Journeys Home Continued...

of Christ,” rather than “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” From what I had grown up with, I had always believed it was Christ, not just a symbol.

In RCIA, we had yet to fully discuss the Catholic understanding of the Body and Blood of Christ in communion and His Real Presence in the sacrament. Nevertheless, I felt the substitute minister’s words were disrespectful of Jesus. They were clearly not the words in the Bible or theologically accurate. I was going to correct him on our way out the front door, but my wife grabbed my arm and quickly ushered me out before I could say anything.

During my months in RCIA, I frequently went to the Catholic parish during the day. I would find a time when the church was empty of other people and would kneel before the tabernacle, praying and listening for long periods of time in silence. A group from the parish met at a local coffee house every Saturday morning, where we would discuss Scripture, a reading from what I later found out was the Divine Office (or Liturgy of the Hours), and pray.

Throughout RCIA, I was gaining significant knowledge about the Catholic Church. I was learning facts about doctrine, practices, Church structure and governance, and many other things. It all seemed to be very logical, making it difficult to justify any group’s separation from it. It was what one would experience by walking in a swimming pool while keeping his eyes fixed on that dual concreteness, as I described earlier in my story.

That was not the limit of what the Lord had in store for me, though. He wanted my conversion to be fuller and more robust, so He provided me powerful spiritual experiences in the form of mystical dreams. The dreams presented me views of something holy, of answers to possible worries in my heart. Some dreams spoke to me of the spiritual threats I would encounter, which were plentiful, while others spoke of the protections the Lord offered me. Still others were about the grandeur of the Church and how welcoming it was to me as an individual.

Easter finally arrived, and I was enthralled with the Easter Vigil. I invited my wife and one daughter to attend with me. Even afterwards, they were still in disbelief that I had carried through with my decision to convert to Catholicism.

The news was also taken hard by some of our friends at First Christian Church. Some cried, some gasped, others

just turned away in silence.

It was a time of joy for me, but a time of grieving for many others. Once I entered the Church, my family was, in a very real sense, in grief. Some who had been friends no longer remained as such. In their eyes, I was now forever lost to them. Nevertheless, my wife and two daughters decided to follow and entered RCIA in 2005.

The Holy Spirit guided us for several years, until the time seemed right to share our conversion with our parents. When we finally told them, they all accepted it lovingly. More amazingly, my father-in-law, who had always seemed very anti-Catholic, started sharing email messages and posts that were definitely apologetics for the Church, although I doubt he would have admitted it.

Since my conversion, I have served as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) as well as a team member for our parish’s RCIA program. I chaired the EMHCs of one parish and was responsible for training new ones, as well as providing annual refreshers for the rest. I began preparations for entering the diaconate, but there were roadblocks that convinced me that the Lord wanted me to go in a different direction. Now that I am retired, I have been writing books for my grandchildren. The books vary in their focus, but most teach something about Catholic morality, the importance of seeking Christ in all things, and of giving oneself selflessly to others who are in need. ■

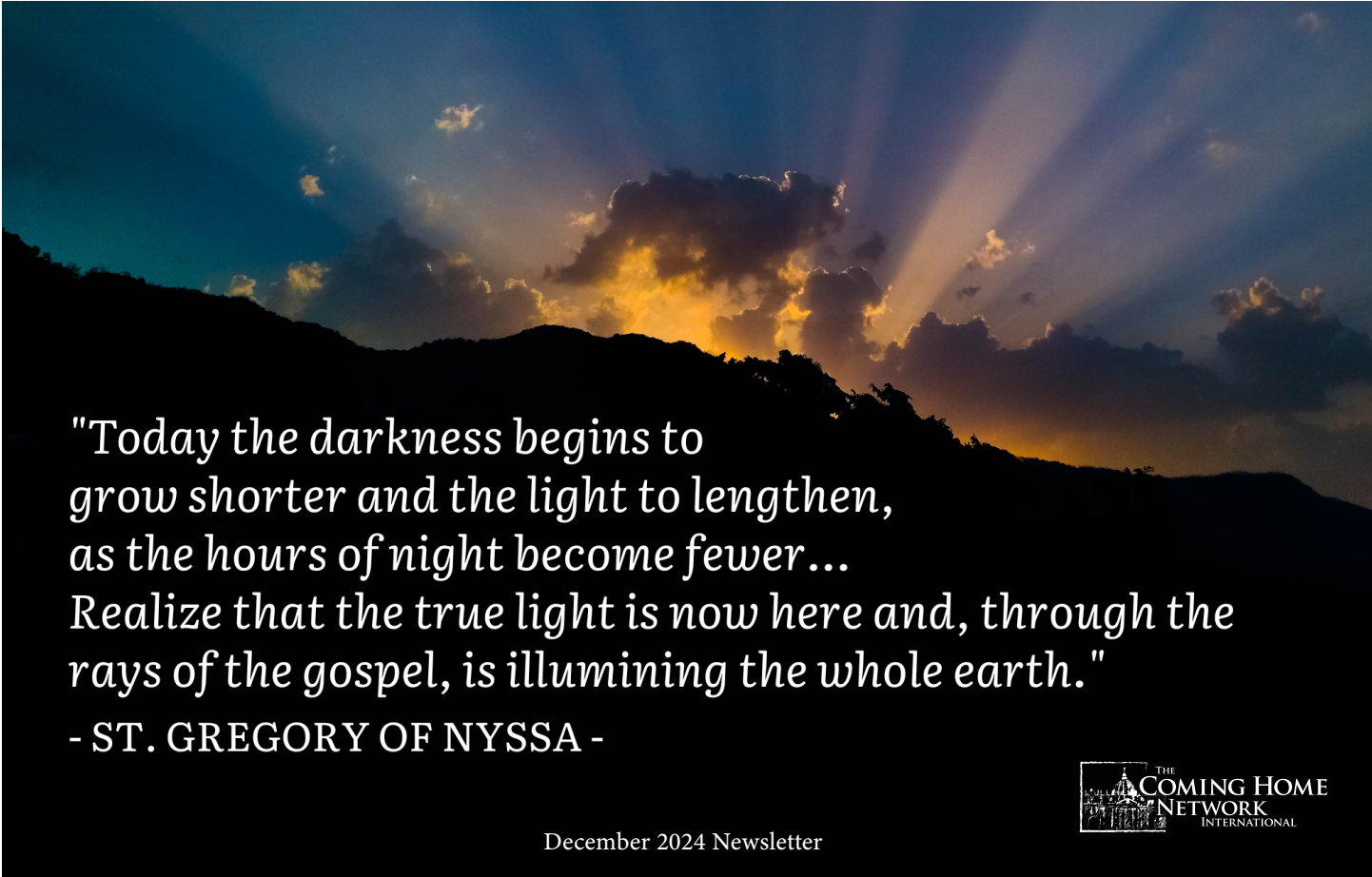
*Kevin Finson is a retired professor of science education. He taught earth and physical science for 34 years at the college level, two at the high school level, and five at the middle school level. During his working career, Kevin was heavily involved in service to professional science education associations and academic publications with a major focus on science for students with disabilities and on students’ perceptions about scientists and visual data. Since his retirement, he started to write children’s books for his grandchildren. Being led by mystical dreams and study of the Catechism, Kevin converted to Catholicism in 2000, followed by his wife and two children several years later. He has written about his journey in his recently published book, *Mystical Dreams of a Sojourner: A Journey About Faith*, currently available on Amazon.*

“**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only
Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**”

JOHN 1:14

The Coming Home Network International
PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702-8290

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



*"Today the darkness begins to
grow shorter and the light to lengthen,
as the hours of night become fewer...
Realize that the true light is now here and, through the
rays of the gospel, is illumining the whole earth."*

- ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA -

December 2024 Newsletter

