



January 2025 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

Finding My Family of Faith: A Eucharistic Miracle

By Heidi Saxton

It's been thirty years since I stood at the "holy fire" of the Easter Vigil outside Holy Family Catholic Parish in South Pasadena. I can still feel the brush of satin as I settled my red sash over my white lace dress and lit a vigil candle from my sponsor's taper. I remember thinking it was all a little surreal, as I climbed the steps outside the church, ready to process up the center aisle with the others.



Inside the dimly lit nave, I waved at two coworkers who had shown up to support me—even up to the last moment, my parents had been praying I'd change my mind, as were most of my friends from Bible school (those I had told about my journey). Sliding into my seat, I slowly drew in my breath and whispered the most appropriate song I could think of at that moment, "I have decided to follow Jesus... though none go with me, still I will follow, no turning back."

Thirty years. Half my life, for I was thirty years old when God finally got through to me, and made me understand that the Catholic Church was not a cult from which poor souls needed rescuing, but an everlasting home for all those who wanted to know Jesus and the Church he established, full of goodness, beauty, and truth... and a family of saints who were praying for me in my darkest moments.

An Impossible Choice

Growing up, I had been a part of lots of different faith communities. I had started playing organ at the age of five (before I could reach the pedals), and by twelve was good enough to start playing in church. My first organist job was in a Lutheran church, where I discovered the beauty of liturgy—having been raised in a Presbyterian/Methodist hybrid, I had fairly memorized the hymnbook but had never experienced the rich cadence of chanted prayer. In my junior year, I became friends with the pastor's daughter of a local Pentecostal church, and during my college years I worshipped with Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, Episcopalians, and several different non-denominational groups, both charismatic and mainline.

There was only one kind of church that remained a mystery to me. My first year of college, when I started dating a Catholic guy, my mother took me aside and warned me that God would not like it if I married a

Continued on page 2

...Journeys Home Continued...

Catholic. “You can go to heaven, or you can marry a Catholic—but not both. The Bible tells us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” I was still a teenager, and my mother was a voice of theological authority in my life. I had known Catholics at school and in the neighborhood, but had never really managed to breach the invisible wall between my world and theirs.

So when my mother told me I had to make a choice.... I chose heaven. And yet, her comment had planted a seed to a question that remained tucked away, dormant, for years: “What’s so bad about being Catholic?” It would take me almost a decade to find the answer to that question.

A Deal with God

In his classic *The Problem of Pain*, CS Lewis observes, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” There are times when his mercy is best seen not from the delights of answered prayers, but from the desolation of a hospital bed.

Early January 1983, I was driving home from work during a snowstorm in northern New Jersey when my car slipped on black ice and skidded into oncoming traffic. I don’t remember the accident or the days that followed apart from a single image of my old Sunday school teacher (who was then a missionary teacher for a blind school in South Korea) standing at the foot of my bed and telling me that I needed to get right with God. I remember telling her that if I got out of the hospital, I would become a missionary to pay God back for saving my life.

Now, of course God doesn’t need us to “pay him back” for his mercies towards us—which is a good thing, since we could never begin to pay such a debt! Yet, like any good father he knows what motivates us and uses those things to help us discover what he wants most for us. And when our beliefs or prejudices create barriers to the path he has in mind, he must sometimes take us on an adventure—like the Israelites who, because of their sin,

wandered for forty years in the desert to arrive at the Promised Land.

I was still on crutches when I applied to and was accepted at Bethany College of Missions in Bloomington, Minnesota. Four years later, I began my career in publishing, working for two years at Bethany House Publishers, first as an assistant publicist and later as a copyeditor. Recognizing my aptitude, the editorial director encouraged me to go back to school, and told me of a special program in California that would enable me to complete my bachelor’s degree in two years.

Just before leaving for California, I took a trip to Mexico to visit missionary friends, who took me to Real de Catorce, an old silver mining town near San Luis Portosi, and was struck by the simple devotion of the locals who climbed the front steps of the church on their knees, then kissed the feet of a statue of St. Francis standing in a small shrine near the back. My friends saw it as an example of the hopeless condition of a people who needed to know Jesus—the reason for their work. I looked and saw a people whose faith held them up through even the darkest times. They knew Jesus. They also knew his friends and trusted those saints to remember them as well.

Returning to the U.S., I started school at Azusa Pacific University, working three different part-time jobs to be able to afford classes. One of those jobs was playing piano and directing the choir of a small Baptist church in Orange, California. It was a wonderful, close-knit church with a pastor who had been serving there for seventeen years. It was my favorite “gig” of the week... until just before I left on a summer outreach program to Poland, when the pastor announced from the pulpit that he was resigning his position in order to become Catholic.

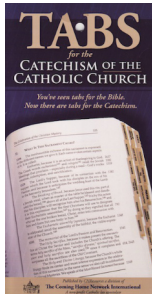
No one saw it coming, least of all me! Later that week, I called and invited Pastor John to lunch, and he told me his story. Placing a stack of books and tape series on the table, Pastor John said to me, “I don’t know if this is something you will want to explore for

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

TABS FOR THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Published exclusively by CHNetwork, these handy tabs give quick and easy reference to the teachings of the Church on 25 topics and include a subject index.

#5001 - \$5.00



READ THE BIBLE AND CATECHISM IN A YEAR

By committing to only twenty to thirty minutes a day, you can prayerfully read through the entire Bible and/or Catechism in one year! This handy guide is simply one of the best ways to challenge yourself to a deeper knowledge of Christ in the Scriptures and in His Church.

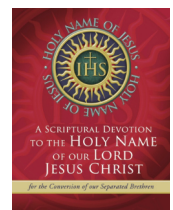
#5003 - \$5.00



A SCRIPTURAL DEVOTION TO THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS

Our Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples: “If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:14) This scriptural devotion consists of a series of 15 Scripture readings focused on devotion to the Name of Jesus. 12 page booklet.

#3122 - \$1.95



yourself, Heidi. But I've been studying this for a couple of years now, and I believe it's God's plan for me." I looked at the stack: *Rome, Sweet Home* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* by Karl Keating, lots of other books by ancient writers. "The Patristics," he said. "Cardinal Newman (another convert) was right: 'To read deeply of Church history is to cease to be Protestant.'"

I wrote down a few titles to look up later. Then, a few days later, I got on the plane with a dozen classmates and flew to Budapest. We were going to meet up with our Polish teammates—Pentecostal Christians and musicians who would accompany us on our summer outreach across Poland. As the oldest student with significant travel experience, I was appointed the team leader—at the time that meant making sure we arrived at our concerts on time. But then we lost our chaplain (who was the only one who could communicate with the Hungarian bus driver) and translator (whose wife was six months pregnant and had to go back early). That left me with \$200 "emergency funds" in my pocket to spend two weeks on a bus with 27 young adults, until we could meet up with the other teams in Frankfurt, Germany.

If it was a test, I felt like an abject failure. I was also very angry that God had put me in such a predicament. When I finally returned home, I remember being unable to pray—it felt like my prayers were bouncing off the ceiling, that God wasn't listening. I had rented a room down the street from a large Non-denominational church until I could find a full-time job. But I only attended services at Lake Avenue for a few weeks—I felt like a hypocrite worshipping alongside so many happy Christians.

Looking for More

One night I found myself perched on a seat at a local bar, contemplating my life over a cranberry vodka with lime. I didn't want to go back to my tiny room or deal with the incessant yammering of my many housemates. Even though I had recently found a full-time job as an executive assistant at a large firm in downtown Los Angeles, it felt like my life was in a holding pattern... but what was I waiting for?

I purposely kept my eyes down, not wanting conversation—but I didn't need to worry. The place was nearly empty except for the bartender. It was an odd place to have a conversation with the Almighty, but I wasn't having a lot of luck at the traditional places.

"You know, God, I don't understand what's going on in my life right now..."

Silence.

"You seem really far away, and now that I'm done with school, I'm not sure where to go from here."

More silence.

The bartender started wiping down the other end of the bar area, working his way toward me. I had just a few ice cubes in the bottom of my glass. I tossed them down and chewed the ice. Then, a thought came to me as loud as a shout.

But there's more.

More what? More school? More vodka? God forbid, another mission trip? Shaking my head, I paid my tab and left. Whatever it

was, it would have to wait.

That Sunday, instead of going to Lake Avenue, I crossed the street and entered the little mission-style Catholic parish I had passed every week, Holy Family. I'm still not sure what made me do it. Maybe something Pastor John had said before my trip had softened my heart. Maybe traveling across Poland in a bus full of Quakers and Charismatics had affected my point of view. It was the last place on earth I expected to find Jesus, yet there I was. I still had no idea what the "more" was, but I was pretty sure I wanted to try to find out.

Praying Catholic Style

It was an entirely different experience for me, walking up that aisle and sinking down on the kneeler near that little red lamp at the front of the church. It was so quiet, so peaceful. Nobody approached me or asked me what I was doing there. And yet, I had the strong sense that Someone was listening. So, I started talking.

I talked about my Poland disaster.

I told him about how angry I was, how frustrated, how lost.

I told him how lonely I had been, how much I needed to belong *somewhere*.

I asked him what he wanted from me, where he wanted me. I had given him my life when I was a young girl. If he still wanted me, he had to give me a sign.

At that moment, the organ started warming up and people started filing in. So I got up and went to the back of the church, and slid into the last pew. I had never been to Mass, but decided I had come this far, there was no going back.

Next to me, a kindly older lady pulled out a booklet from the Bible rack and showed me where to find the prayers and readings. During the Our Father, she held out her hand; I grabbed it and didn't let go until the end. When everyone started going forward,

**In His goodness and wisdom
God chose to reveal Himself
and to make known to us
the hidden purpose of His
will by which, through
Christ, the Word made flesh,
man might in the Holy Spirit
have access to the Father
and come to share in the
divine nature.**

DEI VERBUM, 2

The Ripple Effect of Conversion



Dear Friends,

This past Autumn in our CHNetwork Online Community, members of the Network, fellow staff, and I were doing a book study on *Deep Conversion, Deep Prayer* by Fr. Thomas Dubay. In one of the final chapters of the book, as Dubay is relaying various motives for accepting and pursuing the Christian vocation to holiness, he makes the important following note about the connection between holiness

and evangelical effectiveness:

"To bring people closer to God, competency and clarity are important, but they are not enough. Of themselves they do not touch hearts deeply. Personal sanctity and goodness do. It is the saints who light fires. There is a direct correlation between the beauty of holiness and the fruitfulness of our work and interpersonal relationships."

Fr. Dubay reminds us that the fruitfulness of our work for the kingdom will derive not from our own strength and wisdom, nor from the multiplication of our efforts, but from our utter dependence on Jesus. Christ has indeed called us to make disciples of all nations, to bear much fruit, and to obey His commands—that is, to "work" by His grace to build the kingdom. But all of this "doing" depends on prior "being". If we are to serve effectively and fruitfully, both in terms of good effects on our own lives and the lives of others, then everything depends on our knowing and loving Christ first. The Christian life, founded upon prayer and cooperating with God's sanctifying grace, ripples outward and touches other souls in ways we can never predict.

This is an important message and reminder to those of us who have been called to take part in the mission of the Coming Home Network. If we want to be more effective in sharing the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and helping people come home, the most important thing is our personal surrender to Jesus Christ, our commitment and perseverance in prayer, and our earnest cooperation with the grace of God who desires to make us holy like himself. It is for this reason that the CHNetwork staff meets every morning at 10 AM to pray Morning Prayer together, and that together with members of the CHNetwork Online Community, that we gather multiple times a week to pray the Rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Our work of assisting converts and others who are thinking of converting to the Catholic Church, must be founded upon our own personal commitments to prayer and ongoing conversion to Jesus Christ.

The reminder of the connection between holiness and evangelical effectiveness is also an important message for the people we work with—the Protestant pastors, laypeople, and others who are considering becoming Catholic. So many of these people hear the call to go deeper in their faith and to consider the claims of Catholicism in the midst of evangelical ministry and intentional Christian lives. They are people rightly concerned with sharing the Gospel and bearing the fruit of conversion through

their words, work, and witness. When Christ opens their minds and hearts to the Catholic Church, they are faced with a difficult test of faith. Especially for pastors and other Christians involved in ministry, becoming Catholic means laying down these visible ways they were able to preach the Gospel and build up the kingdom, with no certainty as to how or whether they will be restored inside the Catholic Church. But God is generous and He works powerfully and unexpectedly through the fidelity of these journeyers. As we have seen time and time again, the faithful witness of one convert ripples outward and draws so many others into a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, at whatever stage of the spiritual journey we might be on, wherever we might be in relationship to the Catholic Church, and no matter the present test of faith we might be facing, our daily task is the same and must be our constant encouragement to each other: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33). The truth will be made clear and the path forward will be revealed only to the degree that we keep our eyes on Jesus. Whatever good we attempt and might hope to accomplish will only bear fruit to the degree that we cling to Him. As Fr. Dubay noted, "It is the saints who light fires." We might add that it is *the convert*—in the general sense of which we are all called to continual conversion to Jesus Christ—that makes waves!

Once again, as we look ahead to this new year in light of the Gospel, let me encourage you to do two things:

First and foremost, renew your own commitment to daily prayer, (if you are Catholic) to frequent reception of the sacraments, and to the pursuit of holiness in imitation of Christ. This is the way—the only way—that we will be effective and fruitful in the roles, responsibilities, vocations, and opportunities He has given us.

Second, a simple and powerful "ripple effect" that you can have as a part of the CHNetwork is to simply *share this newsletter with the Catholic Converts in your life* and help them to subscribe (for free). If 100 readers could lead 5 new converts (or those curious about the Catholic Church) to become members of CHNetwork—can you imagine the ripple effect that it would have? Not only could we encourage them in their own continuing journey of prayer and conversion, but through their witness and invitation we could cast an even wider "net" to catch those friends and family members who may be on the journey home to the Catholic Church.

May this year bring deeper prayer, deeper conversion, and by God's grace, more ripples that touch the lives of those around us and draw them to the heart of Jesus.

In Christ,
JonMarc Grodi

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan M. Grodi". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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

Joyful Journey Updates

Erik B., former Christian and Missionary Alliance minister

On November 1st, I returned to the Catholic Church—a joyful moment because I can now live in full communion with the Church again. My confession before Mass was my first time, and I experienced it as a very special moment. I've gone from a Christian and Missionary minister to now being a Church member with much joy because it is good to be home again! ■

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

BAPTIST CONVERTS TO CATHOLICISM



Are you a convert or exploring the Catholic Faith from a Baptist background?

Visit chnetwork.org/baptist to read and watch the stories of former Baptists who have come into the Catholic Church!

Do you know someone who is curious about the Catholic Church? We would love to hear from them! Invite them to join our network at chnetwork.org/join.

“God the Word became flesh, that through His Incarnation our flesh might attain to union with God the Word.”

ST. HILARY OF POITIERS
FEAST DAY: JANUARY 13

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

Monday, Jan. 6

Reza Akhtar

Former Muslim & Anglican

Monday, Jan. 13

Deacon Lester Loh

Former Agnostic

Monday, Jan. 20

Dr. John Bruchalski & Kerstin Pakka

Pro-Life Roundtable

Monday, Jan. 27

Deacon Lee Ashton

Former Episcopalian and Evangelical



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, Feb. 3

Fr. Doug Martin

Former Episcopal Priest

Schedule is subject to change.

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

2024 WAS A GREAT YEAR! We recorded more new episodes of *The Journey Home*, held more retreats, took a pilgrimage to Poland, and went to conferences in several states—can't wait to see what 2025 holds for the CHNetwork family!



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY JANUARY 18-25, 2025

Every year since 1908, beginning on January 18 and ending on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on January 25, the Graymoor Institute and the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement have been promoting a focused week of prayer and reflection, asking God to bring unity to the body of Christ.

The idea of an octave of prayer for unity among Christians was the brainchild of Servant of God Fr. Paul Wattson, who conceived of it while he was still an Anglican. He and his community would go on to enter full communion with the Catholic Church in 1909, only a year after founding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us:

“Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: ‘That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, ... so that the world may know that you have sent me.’ The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC, 820)

Please join us this month in praying for greater unity among all who profess belief in the Holy Name of Jesus. ■





The Father's Most Eloquent Word

By Ken Hensley, Former Baptist Pastor

In 2019, Pope Francis established the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time as Word of God Sunday—devoted to the celebration, study, and dissemination of the word of God. *This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity.* (Interestingly, the timing providentially coincides with the Week of Christian Unity in the United States.)

When we think of God's Word, what comes to mind? To begin, we ought to think of creation itself, which was spoken into existence (Heb 11:3) and reveals to us the one who made it. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). We ought to think as well of the sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments. This also is God's Word to us. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). But behind creation, behind

the inspired Scriptures, there is that Word who was in the beginning with God, who was God, and through whom all things were made (John 1:1-3).

Here's how one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture puts it: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb 1:3). In other words, in Jesus "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Jesus is the Father's most eloquent Word. Only Jesus could ever say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). As Catholics we may not describe ourselves as "people of the Book." But we certainly are "people of the Word." ■

CHNETWORK 2025 SPRING RETREAT

March 31 - April 3

Mount Angel Abbey | Saint Benedict, Oregon

Join us as we gather with our staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Intended for both converts and those on the journey to Catholicism, whether lay or clergy, the goal is to meet with others facing tough questions or decisions, and to encourage all in an ever deeper walk with Christ.

Register at chnetwork.org/retreats



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



740.450.1175



info@chnetwork.org

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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.

COMPASS

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Join **COMPASS**—an ever-growing community of donors who give a monthly gift of \$10-\$100 (or more) to support the CHNetwork as we help to guide men and women who are coming home to the Catholic Church.

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GUIDE

\$50/month

NAVIGATOR

\$100/month

CHNetwork.org/Compass

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or via email ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions.

TAX LETTERS

Tax letters for 2024 contributions will be emailed 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.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Mitchell, a Protestant pastor** who has known for some time now that he wants to become Catholic but whose wife has no interest whatsoever, that the Holy Spirit will give him wisdom as he navigates this very difficult time of life.

■ **For James, a Lutheran minister and chaplain** who has left his church and been removed from the parsonage, that the Lord will bless him as he moves quickly in the direction of becoming Catholic and attempts to become a Catholic chaplain.

■ **For Joseph, an Anglican priest** who finds himself drawn back to the Catholic Church 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 Rick, a Baptist pastor** who has been wanting to become Catholic for a long time but faces a number of obstacles that seem insurmountable, that the Lord will give him peace as he seeks a way forward.

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

■ **For Erik, a former Christian Missionary and Alliance pastor** who was received this past November into the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him as he discerns his role within the Church.

■ **For Christopher, a United Methodist minister** who finds himself increasingly nostalgic for the Catholic Church of his childhood and fed-up with the changes that have taken place within the Methodist Church, that the Lord will enlighten him as he begins the serious study of the theological issues involved.

■ **For Joseph**, who after many years as a pastor in various Protestant denominations has begun to explore Catholic teaching and finds himself

increasingly drawn to the Church, that the Lord will encourage him as he attempts to communicate what he is learning to his family.

■ **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 Jacobus, a former Dutch Reformed pastor** who recently resigned his position and is moving toward becoming Catholic, that the Lord will show him how he can provide an income for his family.

■ **For Thomas, an Anglican priest** curious about the Catholic Church and beginning to investigate it more deeply, that the Holy Spirit will lead him in his journey.

■ **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 courage to follow His leading.

Lay

■ **For Tamera, an Evangelical** seeking to leave her work as a Children's Minister in her church for a new position, that the Lord may guide her next steps.

■ **For Vivian, a Baptist**, that the Holy Spirit may guide her and her husband as they discern God's will in their journey.

■ **For Anita, who is on the journey** and in search of a Church, that she may find guidance on returning to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Ann, a recent convert to the Catholic Church**, that there may be unity in the faith among her family members, especially her husband.

■ **For Marcia, a Non-denominational Christian**, that she may experience God's

grace as she moves forward with confirmation, and that her family and friends would find peace about her decision.

■ **For Jasmin, an Anglican**, that she and her family may receive guidance as they begin their journey home to the Church, as well as fellowship with other Catholics.

■ **For Martin, a Seventh-day Adventist**, in discovering of the truth about the Catholic Faith through the early Church Fathers, he may answer the call to come home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For John, a lapsed Catholic**, that the Holy Spirit would grant him patience and guide his annulment process to enable him to return to the Church.

■ **For Jacob, a Presbyterian (PCA)**, that he may be guided to find the wisdom to know how to share with his family and friends that he is in OCIA.

■ **For Andrew, a member of the Global Methodist church**, that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide his OCIA journey.

■ **For Adrian, a Pentecostal**, that his hunger for our Lord Jesus in the holy Eucharist would draw him to full-communication with the Catholic Church.

■ **For Neil, a Presbyterian**, that the Holy Spirit would soften the heart of his strongly Calvinist wife.

■ **For Joshua**, that, as he learns more about the Catholic Faith, he may deepen his relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

■ **For Chris, a member of a Community church**, that he may find his lasting home in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus.

■ **For Erik, an Episcopalian**, that his wife becomes open to the Catholic Faith and that our Lord Jesus would heal her cancer.

■ **For Jaiyme**, that the Holy Spirit would bless, anoint, and guide his journey back to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Adam, a convert from Judaism** who drifted away from the Church, that his Messiah would rekindle his first love.

■ **For Raymond, an Evangelical**, that he would be granted the grace to answer the call he feels in his heart to come home to the Catholic Church.

...Journeys Home Continued...

I stayed in my seat that first week, but after a few weeks, I started going forward, too. At first I started crossing my arms like I'd seen the little kids do. But after a while, not knowing it was inappropriate, I joined the other adults:

“The Body of Christ.”

“Amen.”

Slowly, I started to get my life in order, and kept going each week to Mass—though I was careful not to mention it to anyone, since I couldn't really explain what was drawing me there. But after a few months, I decided I should make it official and made an appointment with the Director of Religious Education, Dawn Ponnet. Kindly but pointedly, she told me I should stop receiving the Eucharist until I had made my first confession. She then invited me to attend weekly classes with others who were exploring the Catholic Faith.

At the first session Dawn introduced me to my first sponsor, who quit after about three weeks because I asked too many hard questions. Then I became Dawn and Frank's special problem. And they welcomed me with open arms—as did Monsignor Connelly, who invited me for Chinese and listened patiently as I spewed out all the reasons I didn't belong there. Kindly, he patted my hand and with his Irish brogue intoned,

“Ah, Heidi... you are a gift to us.”

Months later, at my first confession, I got into an argument with a Filipino priest who insisted that I was a good person—I knew for certain that I was not. This was a pattern that would be repeated every month until I was ready to accept the fact that God might have a different way of looking at me than I'd been accustomed to looking at myself. It entailed a true “renewing of the mind” I'd so often read about in Scripture. The fact was, there was a lot of Scripture it felt like I was seeing for the very first time. And most of it had to do with the Eucharist.

Seeing the Gospel of John

As a Bible school student, I had read the Bible cover to cover and memorized key chapters of the text so that I could teach and witness to the truth of the Gospel to those who had never heard it—in my mind, that included Catholics. And yet for some reason I had never noticed what Jesus taught about the Eucharist towards the end of chapter six in John's Gospel:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you (John 6:51–53).

I had spent my life interpreting Scripture as literally as possible, and yet for some inexplicable reason, I had never noticed that Jesus was speaking of what I had always presumed was a symbol, a memorial, a sign—not the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that, “behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

In this, and in so many other things, it was as if I had to become like a child again (Matthew 18:2–4). Instead of leading worship, I was learning new prayers and hymns. Instead of confidently quoting Bible verses and leading Bible studies and Sunday school classes, I had to be carefully taught from the historic tradition of the faith. Instead of leading, I had to learn to obey.

Of course, in this and in many other things, the Lord did have a plan to use me—in the words of Oswald Chambers, “If you are going to be used by God, he will take you through a myriad of experiences that are not meant for you at all. They are meant to make you useful in his hands.”

He took my love for books and my skill as an editor and brought me to a charismatic Catholic publishing house that had imprints for both Protestants and Catholics. Then he sent me back to school, so I could receive training in Catholic theology.

He took my love for children, and brought a couple of little kids from Catholic Social Services into my home, so I could raise them to know and love God, too—and to believe in their guardian angel, who watches over them and brings their praises and prayers to God each Sunday at Mass.

He gave me a wonderful husband who welcomed my mother, with whom I'd been estranged for many years, into our home when she was too sick for my father to take care of her. And while she was with us, she went to church with us each week until she, too, decided to become Catholic.

Thirty years have passed since that first moment I processed up the center aisle at Holy Family Catholic Parish. I am so grateful to God that he found a way to bring me truly home, and into the fullness of the Catholic Faith.

That's not to say there haven't been challenges. I've seen so many of my brothers and sisters in Christ struggle to keep the faith amidst the scandals and controversies within the Church, for as an institution she is both human and divine, a hospital for sinners as well as a school for saints.

But what I am most thankful for—what I have found to be true over and over again—is that in this Body of Christ, the Church, there is always “something more.” More to learn. More to give. More to receive. And more to grow.

As a Protestant I believed I had to have all the answers.

As a Catholic I believe God is infinitely greater than my understanding.

As a Protestant I believed it was my job to convert hearts toward God.

As a Catholic I believe it is my job to be faithful to the truth God has revealed to me. I have a responsibility to help my husband and children get to heaven through my prayers, but it is ultimately the Holy Spirit's job to change hearts.

As a Protestant I believed Jesus lives in my heart, and that I will go to heaven, because of a prayer I prayed when I was twelve.

As a Catholic I understand that Jesus offers me his divine life through the sacraments, that I must “run with endurance the race set before us,” and that “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Revelation 2:26).

Bringing My Family Home

In the first draft of my book, *Stories of the Eucharist*, I shared a story of how I taught my children to participate actively in Mass, so that they have a beautiful offering for their angel to take to God in heaven when they join the other angels. This understanding of the unseen world and its mysteries—the angels and saints, the heavenly battles and blessings, and the veil between heaven and earth that becomes whisper-thin when we worship—is a beautiful part of the Catholic Faith.

This “sacramental worldview” is at the heart of Catholic spirituality—that God reaches out to us through the physical world, because he made us as body-soul creatures. So he speaks to us, touches us, through our senses: the wafting of the incense, the taste of the wine, the calming repetition of the Rosary beads, the clamoring of the bells. As we fulfill our calling to be our children’s first teachers, we reinforce in our own hearts the great mysteries of our faith.

Our call to “become like children” and ask God to help us to look beyond physical realities to see with what St. Catherine of Siena called “the eyes of faith” was one of the greatest challenges for me—as it is for many Protestant “seekers.” When we begin to recognize that the theological opinions and ideas to which we have been clinging so stubbornly and confidently might actually be encumbrances to spiritual renewal or the conversion of our hearts, we are forced to admit that the god that sits on the throne of our hearts bears a striking resemblance to ourselves.

God forbid we stay that way! Our God is infinitely greater, infinitely wiser, infinitely more merciful than we are. In the Eucharist, he keeps his promise to remain with us “to the end of the age.” He feeds us his own divine life so that we, too, might follow him faithfully all our lives and ultimately, live with him forever in heaven. His plans for us are infinitely greater than the dreams we create for ourselves.

In becoming like little children, we make ourselves little in order to fit through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13–14) so we can embark upon that journey toward “something more” that God has in store for us. Refusing to settle for a faith that fits in our own limited minds, we emerge like children, full of wonder and ready to receive Jesus “with the palate of holy desire. The corporal palate

tastes only the savor of the bread; but the palate of the soul, which is holy desire, tastes God and Man.” (St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*).

It has been thirty years since I lit that vigil candle and walked through those open wooden doors of the church to begin my new life as a Catholic Christian. Thirty years of discovery. Thirty years of peace. Thirty years of learning from my older brothers and sisters in faith, whose wisdom transcends my own. Thirty years of Jesus meeting with me, week after week, to pour his divine life into me, restoring my mind, healing my soul. And—miracle of miracles—healing family relationships as well.

Just before the pandemic, when my mother became too ill for my father to care for her and she came to live with us, she began attending Mass with us each week. After about a year, she decided she wanted to receive Jesus in the Eucharist as well. Our pastor told me to take her home and teach her what she needed to know. Each night she would say, “Okay, Heidi... let’s read.” And I began to share with her some of the beautiful books I’d worked on over the years. A few months later, in her hospital room, our pastor came and gave her the sacraments for the first time. As I watched her eyes light up as he held up the consecrated host, I silently thanked God for bringing us on this journey into the family of faith. ■

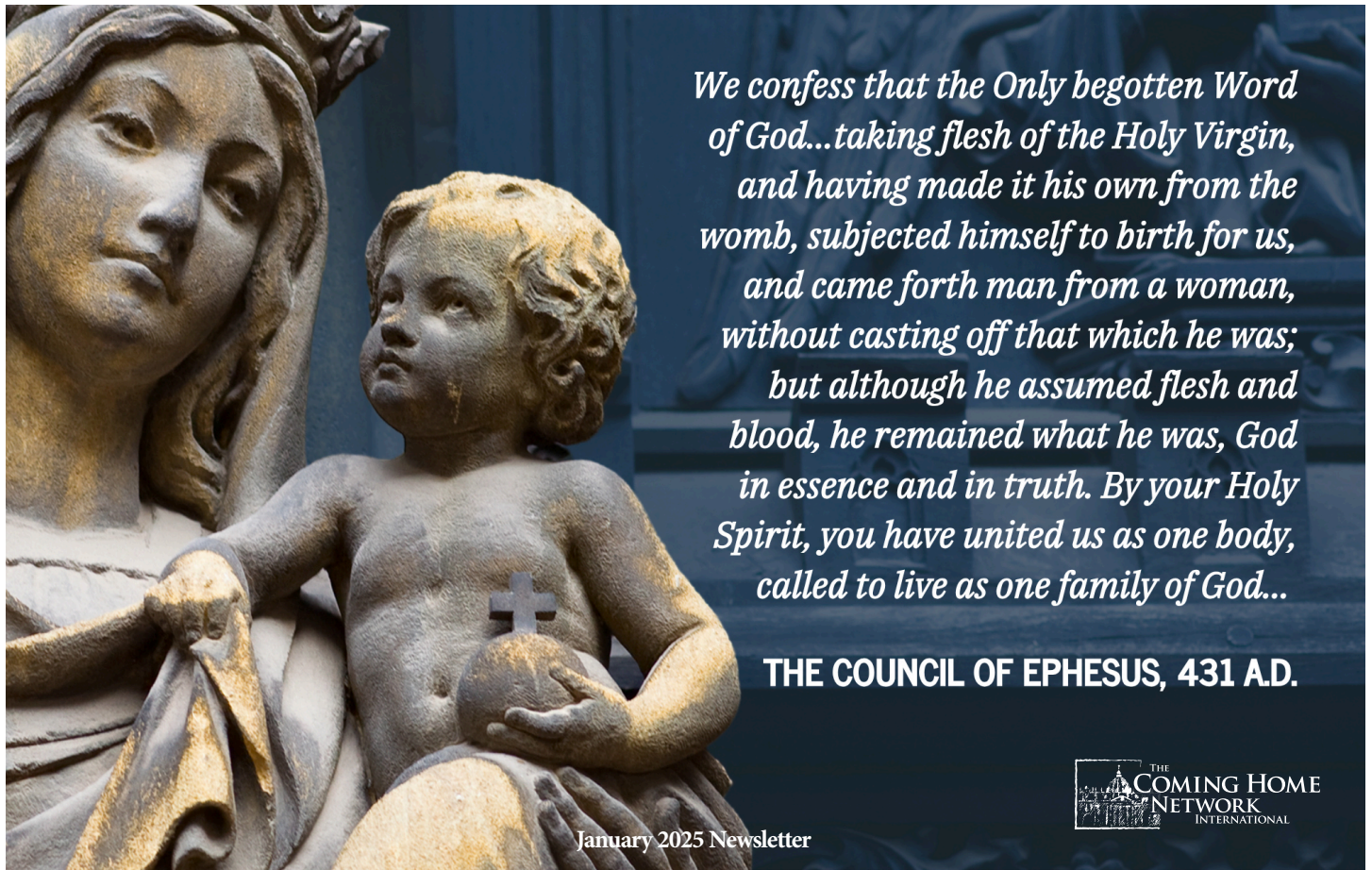
*Heidi Hess Saxton is the author of several books, most recently *Stories of the Eucharist: A Family Treasury of Saints and Seekers*, published by Our Sunday Visitor. Raised in the Evangelical tradition, from her teenage years Heidi served in a variety of Protestant communities and groups, graduating from Bethany College of Missions (now Bethany Global University) in 1989. After completing her undergraduate degree in Azusa, California, Heidi was confirmed in the Catholic Faith at Holy Family Catholic Parish in South Pasadena. She later completed her Masters Degree in Theology from Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. Heidi has worked in Catholic publishing for thirty years, and she and her husband Craig (also a convert) have two young adult children, whom they foster-adopted in 2005. She and her family live in East Jordan, Michigan.*

“Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen.”

THOMAS AQUINAS—FEAST DAY: JANUARY 28

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

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*We confess that the Only begotten Word
of God...taking flesh of the Holy Virgin,
and having made it his own from the
womb, subjected himself to birth for us,
and came forth man from a woman,
without casting off that which he was;
but although he assumed flesh and
blood, he remained what he was, God
in essence and in truth. By your Holy
Spirit, you have united us as one body,
called to live as one family of God...*

THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS, 431 A.D.

January 2025 Newsletter

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