



February 2025 CHNewsletter

Featured Story: My Lord and My God by Gary Wiley.....	1
Stay Awake by JonMarc Grodi.....	4
New <i>On the Journey</i> Series: Sola Scriptura 2.0 by Kenneth Hensley.....	6
Everyday Sacramentality: Candlemas and St. Blaise by Rakhi McCormick.....	9

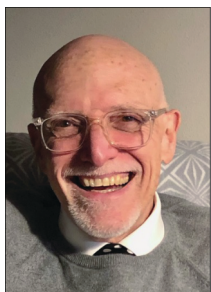
THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

My Lord and My God

By Gary Wiley

“That they might be one.” These are words from the prayer of Jesus the night before He gave His life on the Cross. “...that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21).



My first encounter with this prayer was in June 1968. I was 11 years old, living in Suriname (South America), where my parents were missionaries with the Pilgrim Holiness Church. In my small ecclesiastical world there were big things going on. The Pilgrim Holiness Church was getting ready to merge with another small conservative holiness denomination, the Wesleyan Methodist Church in America. The merging conference theme was “One — That the World May Believe.” My pre-adolescent heart puffed with pride! I was going to be part of something that would help people know Jesus and make us one!

The pride I felt then continued with me in life. I was very active in my youth group, and after high school, I attended two Wesleyan colleges. I met my future wife, Charlotte, at the beginning of my senior year at Indiana Wesleyan University, and we were married while I was working at Wesleyan World Headquarters in my hometown. After Charlotte graduated, we left Indiana so I could attend seminary in Kentucky. This was in response to the call to serve as

a missionary with Wesleyan World Missions. Charlotte had a similar call to serve overseas, stemming from a college mission trip to Honduras.

During the three years I spent in seminary, my world opened to students from other Methodist-like denominations. I discovered liturgy, the Church calendar (including Advent), and I realized that church history went beyond my boyhood heroes of the Wesleyan Church.

Upon graduation in 1983, I accepted the pastorate of a newly-formed congregation church in Michigan. Four years later, in 1987, Charlotte and I sensed that it was time to take that important step to go overseas. We were appointed by the Wesleyan Church to serve as missionaries in Peru. We left the United States with our two young daughters (7 and 4) for the country of Costa Rica to learn Spanish.

The year in Costa Rica opened my world to other Christians: Southern Baptists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Assemblies of God, Charismatics, Oneness Pentecostals, and Non-Denominational Christians. Our conversations tended to focus on the things that made us distinctive, but in spite of this, we found commonality in our love for Jesus.

Continued on page 2

...Journeys Home Continued...

A year later, we arrived in Lima, Peru. Our denomination in Peru had a history going back to the early 1900s. It had been a growing, thriving church until 1968, when the merger that was to bring “oneness” had the opposite effect in Peru. A nasty split ensued and, by the time we had arrived, there were two rival denominations. We seemed so far away from Christ’s prayer that “we would be one so that the world could believe.”

Our central mission in the city of Lima was to start a new congregation. By implication, we were there to win over those who self-identified as Catholics, and we were convinced that our neighbors were at best only culturally Catholic. Most of those we attracted were Catholics who had a desire for community and to learn more about the Bible. The congregation that we started is now 32 years old.

The next chapter of our lives took us to New York City. Our initial mission was to plant a new congregation in Manhattan under the auspices of the Wesleyan Church. While that project did not take root, Charlotte and I did not feel released from NYC. In God’s providence, we discovered a year-old congregation called Origins Church that later became Trinity Grace Church (TGC). Over the course of the next eight years, we found a home there and were able to contribute to the mission of TGC to impact the city under their vision of “Joining God in the Renewal of All Things.”

Joining God in the Renewal of All Things

It sounds like an ambitious goal. It is! But it grabbed my heart and gave purpose to why we were still in New York City in 2007.

After all the years in another culture, especially discovering that I was a “third-culture kid” (a term used to refer to children who were raised in a culture outside of their parents’ original culture for a significant part of their development years), I couldn’t imagine settling down anywhere but a large city with plenty of diversity.

The idea of “Joining God in the Renewal of All Things” was more than a mantra. This was the underlying vision and call for ministry and the incredible planting of new parishes. By 2015, the number of congregations in the TGC family had gone from one to 11!

Over the years, I served in various roles. Then in March of 2012, we helped start the sixth TGC congregation in Washington Heights. Little did we know that our lives were going to change drastically as we approached the last few months of 2013.

The Happy Day Express

As mentioned earlier, even before I was a teenager, I was intrigued with the idea of the unity of the body of Christ—His Church. Throughout the years, I’ve had the opportunity to meet and know other Christians who did not come from my particular ecclesiastical pedigree. It was an enriching experience, but it also brought up a lot of questions. How could we read the same Bible, yet differ on some very significant doctrines of the faith? Did it matter? And if it didn’t, why did we tend to hold each other at arm’s length?

I count it a blessing that I grew up in a Christian home and that there is a heritage of faith on both sides of my family. I distinctly remember praying to invite Jesus into my heart at the age of six. My desire to follow my Lord never abated, even with the innumerable ups and downs of adolescence.

As a kid, I had a visual image of the church as a train. In my mind, those closest to the truth of Christ found themselves in the engine, where I knew I was with my family and our church. Each succeeding car had churches that differed to a greater degree from what I knew to be the pure truth of the gospel. What is amusing is that, 40+ years later, I shared this image with a friend who grew up in a very different church from mine, and he too had the same image of the train—of course his church was in the engine!

This image was challenged as I got to know other Christians

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

ROOTS OF THE REFORMATION

KARL ADAMS

Many Protestants only understand the Reformation from the perspective of their own tradition. As a Catholic, Karl Adam gives a historically sensitive and accurate analysis of the Reformation that stands as a valid and sometimes unsettling challenge to the presuppositions of Protestants and Catholics alike.

#2523 - \$5.95



WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

MARCUS GRODI

Many Christians believe that all that is necessary for salvation is an individual’s faith in Jesus. But is this biblically, theologically, and historically sound? Marcus Grodi argues, from the perspective of a biblical hermeneutic of continuity, that salvation has always involved more than this simplistic expression of modern individualism.

#3141 - \$6.95

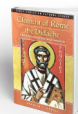


CLEMENT OF ROME AND THE DIDACHE

DR. KENNETH HOWELL

Clement’s letter and the Didache, both written in the first century A.D., reveal how Christians were implementing and living out the faith taught by Jesus and passed on by the twelve apostles. Among the earliest of all Christian writings, they are records of some of the most enduring wisdom known to the church.

#3145 - \$14.95



from other traditions. When Charlotte and I were received into the Catholic Church, I found myself among those for whom I hadn't made any room as a child on the Happy Day Express.

Christ Is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

For most of my life, I had never thought of Easter as more than one Sunday in the spring when we celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus. Of course I celebrated Easter, but after that, life, even life in the church, went back to its normal pace. In the past, one of the criticisms I had harbored of Catholics was that they focused so much on Good Friday and Jesus on the Cross, but did not give Easter its proper attention. Imagine my surprise when I learned that Catholics celebrate an Octave of Easter, where the seven days following are like Easter all over again—and then there are seven weeks of Eastertide, all the way up to Pentecost Sunday!

I share this as I return to the last part of 2013 and the intensification of the challenge God would place before me: "Are you really serious about Jesus' prayer that we all be one, even as He and the Father are one?"

It was October 2013. The Trinity Grace Church parish in Washington Heights was now 18 months old. The one-year anniversary was a high point, but following that, there were the normal and persistent struggles that a church plant goes through. As a pastor, I was discerning how to lead the parish forward.

On Sunday, October 13, Charlotte's mom suffered a heart attack, and by the following Sunday, she had passed away. The next morning, Charlotte's dad came out of his bedroom and sat down with three of his nine children and me. We could tell there was something heavy on his heart that he needed to express. He talked about faith and how he and his wife had sought to love and follow God and love Jesus. He expressed how important their Catholic faith was to them. He said that his wife loved Jesus just as Charlotte did, which challenged us both, especially Charlotte.

He expressed sadness and confusion over why faith seemed to be such a divisive issue in the family instead of being something that drew us together. As he spoke, I began to regret all the wasted opportunities to affirm them in their faith and find commonality with them. His was a gentle rebuke, but I was convicted that I had discounted the genuineness of their faith in the Catholic tradition. I had stated often that I wouldn't rule out that there were real Christians in the Catholic Church, not because of the Church, but in spite of it.

Suddenly my preconceived notions were being held up to the light of the experience of someone who was asking me why I held that view. I had no idea at that time where this would lead, but I knew I owed it to my wife's parents to take a serious look at their faith and give my father-in-law the courtesy I would to another Christian brother.

Fruit Inspector

I confess that I have been a long-time fruit inspector. I've never worked for Dole, Tropicana, or Chiquita, but I could have been an asset to their teams. No fruit that was blemished, bruised or aged would pass my approval. It had to look "perfect" to enter

my mouth! (I've mellowed out over the years.)

Jesus tells us in St. Matthew's Gospel that "by their fruits you will know them." Growing up in a conservative Christian environment, there were certain things that were indicators of how spiritual someone was or how committed they were to Christ. The "gospel train" that I referred to earlier was my way of categorizing and organizing how "good" a person's fruit was. Of course, doing that was way above my pay grade. Yet that had been my way of assessing the faith of a person who hadn't grown up with the same spiritual DNA.

As I was approaching my 50th birthday, I asked the Lord to prevent me from becoming calcified in my spirit and outlook. I wanted to be open to God so that the Holy Spirit would always have complete access to my life. Until that point, I thought I had pretty much achieved that. Yet God took my prayer very seriously. (Of course it was God who birthed that prayer in my heart!) Little did I know that I was beginning a journey I could never have anticipated.

In the early days of exploring the Catholic Faith, I didn't share with anyone what I was doing. Looking back over my journal of that time, I was very careful what I wrote. I remember fearing someone would pick up my journal, read my thoughts, and not understand what I was doing. While I presumed I was just being kind to the memory of my wife's mother, something else was already at work.

Part of me did not want to investigate, yet another part of me felt drawn to it. But how was I to go about it? A book on my shelf—*In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* by Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest—caught my eye as I was more than a year into a church plant and desperate to be a better leader. A quote from the prologue grabbed my attention:

I... came to see that I should not worry about tomorrow, next week, next year, or the next century. The more willing I was to look honestly at what I was thinking and saying and doing now, the more easily I would come into touch with the movement of God's Spirit in me, leading me to the future. God is a God of the present and reveals to those who are willing to listen carefully to the moment in which they live the steps they are to take toward the future. "Do not worry about tomorrow," Jesus says. "Tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:34)

Okay, Lord! I trust you to lead me on this journey. You will not despise my sincere heart.

In 2012, I had read a book by the then-Presbyterian sociologist Christian Smith, called *The Bible Made Impossible*. Several in our local congregation had read the book and found it helpful in making sense of some of the issues that tend to divide and separate Evangelicals as they seek to follow Scripture. In late 2013, I heard through the grapevine that the author had become Catholic. As I googled it to verify, I found another book he wrote after that: *How to Go from Being a Good Evangelical to a*

Stay Awake A LETTER FROM JONMARC



Dear Friends,

February tends to be a sleepy sort of month here in Ohio. While the days are growing a bit longer and the sky a bit lighter, for the most part it remains dark and cold. All of winter's charms and the cheer of the holidays have long since begun to dwindle. Liturgically, we are in that little sliver of "ordinary time" between the Christmas and Lenten seasons. And even some of the initial excitement and freshness we felt in January at

the prospect of a new year—resolutions, goals, dreams—may have by now become familiar and mundane, if they have not altogether fallen by the wayside. It is a good time to focus precisely on "staying awake" with Christ during the "ordinary" times of this journey of life.

The Scriptures talk a lot about "sleep" and "wakefulness," using these physically experiential images as powerful metaphors for the spiritual life and our journey through it. Consider Ephesians 5:14, which says, "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" or a favorite of mine, Psalm 57:8: "Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!" Many significant biblical events also involve sleep and wakefulness. For example, we recall the prophet Samuel being called in his sleep by God and responding (according to the instruction of his master, Eli) "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!" (1 Samuel 3:9). On the other hand, in the Garden of Gethsemane we see the disciples literally falling asleep, unable to watch and pray one hour with the Lord during His passion. This comes after Jesus had so often exhorted them to "stay awake," both directly and indirectly through his parables, as in the story of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-9).

What emerges from these and many other examples is this notion of "staying awake" as a metaphor for a key quality and habit of the Christian's life. When by God's grace we have been awakened to Christ Jesus and to His Church, we have to *remain awake* so these graces of conversion can continue to bear fruit through our actions and daily-living. The journey of this life is typically a marathon—not a sprint. And thus the ever-present danger is that we will become too comfortable, distracted, and forgetful about the true purpose and goal of our lives—that we will fall back and be found "sleeping" when the master comes.

An important virtue that is connected to this spiritual "wakefulness" is the virtue of Prudence. Traditionally and colloquially associated with "good decision making" or perhaps even just the avoidance of rash action or judgement, there is so much more to this foundational virtue. Prudence is, in a sense, a conversion of our intellect and will from "sleepiness" to "awakeness." We so often stumble through life in a dreamlike state, either limply following the whims of our desires or anxiously trying to micromanage every situation as if we ourselves were God. Prudence is the conscious turning away from such delusions and turning towards the truth of things—and especially the most up-close-and-personal truths of the reality of God's presence, His loving providence, and His call for us to discern and take the next right steps.

Prudence is the engagement of our intellect in the consideration of what is ultimately true and the exertion of our will in carrying out the next right step. It precisely describes this move from spiritual sleepiness to awakeness. Only to the degree that we "stay awake" in this fundamental sense, can we be open to receiving God's grace, hearing His call to conversion, and then—in love and obedience—to freely take the next steps of the journey He places before us.

Sometimes when we read the scriptural exhortations to "stay awake" it can be a daunting proposition. This is where we need to qualify the metaphor a bit. Physical sleep is a biological necessity designed by God, and He doesn't want or expect us to literally "stay awake" throughout this journey, although indeed there are moments when we have to endure physical sleepiness for the sake of carrying out our duties as spouses, parents, etc.

But spiritually, on the other hand, we are indeed exhorted to strive to remain "awake" until the end. There is never a time in which we can set aside and take a break from the Christian life. There is no real "neutral territory" in our lives—no time, no money, no opportunities; just those things and times that are or aren't given over and surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In this sense, staying spiritually "awake" is a fundamental demand of the Christian life.

We can take comfort in the fact that Prudence—this spiritual wakefulness—is a *virtue*. It is a "habit of soul" that can be practiced and strengthened. In fact, Prudence is not just one among the many virtues, but rather has been considered in Catholic tradition to be the "mother" or even "charioteer" of all the other virtues. Prudence is, in a sense, the meta-habit of "spiritual wakefulness" that creates the conditions for the formation and engagement of all the other virtues—Justice, Courage, Temperance, Faith, Hope, and Charity, and their many sub-virtues thereafter. The more that we learn and practice "staying awake" with Christ, the more we are able to receive and consciously cooperate with His sanctifying and transforming graces.

As we persevere through this and any other of the "ordinary times" of the Christian life, let us heed Christ's warnings to stay awake and watchful for His coming. Let us take solace in the fact that this does not imply or require an anxious dependence on our own strength, but rather, simply, the keeping of our eyes on Jesus and trusting in His transforming graces. The more we practice this staying awake with Christ, in and through all the activities of life, **but especially and most powerfully through prayer**, the more this wakefulness will become part of our very being and character—and we will be found waiting, vigilantly but peacefully, when the Master arrives.

In Christ,
JonMarc Grodi

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

WESLEYAN & METHODIST CONVERTS

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

Visit chnetwork.org/methodist to read and watch the stories of former Methodists and those of other Wesleyan backgrounds 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.



For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6

“Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown. Give me faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with You.”

ST. BRENDAN THE NAVIGATOR

The Sundays and weeks of Ordinary Time take us through the life of Christ. This is the time of conversion. This is living the life of Christ. Ordinary Time is a time for growth and maturation, a time in which the mystery of Christ is called to penetrate ever more deeply into history until all things are finally caught up in Christ. *(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)*

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

Monday, Feb. 3

Fr. Doug Martin

Former Episcopal Priest

Monday, Feb. 10

Amanda Martin

Former Episcopalian

Monday, Feb. 17

Dr. Brian Duncan

Former Baptist Minister

Monday, Feb. 24

Sr. John Dominic Rasmussen, O.P.

Formerly Secular



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, Mar. 3

Dr. Justus Hunter

Former Free Methodist

Schedule is subject to change.

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

NEW ON THE JOURNEY SERIES: SOLA SCRIPTURA 2.0

Kenneth Hensley, Former Baptist Pastor & Director of Pastoral Care

At the time of the Northridge earthquake on January 17, 1994, my family lived seven miles from the epicenter. I was raised in Southern California and I loved earthquakes—but not this one!

I can still remember waking to what sounded like a freight train barreling straight toward my house. Within seconds I was bouncing back and forth against the walls of the hallway as I made my way to the kids' bedrooms. My house was jumping. I kept thinking the floor was going to tear open beneath me. The sound of breaking glass was unbelievable. When it ended, our living room was a pile of furniture. Thank God, we were fine.

There's little that is more frightening than the feeling of the earth giving way beneath your feet. This is the foundation on which we stand. When this becomes uncertain, everything becomes uncertain.

In a similar way, my conversion to Catholicism began the moment I felt the foundation of my worldview as a Protestant giving way beneath my feet. That foundation was *sola Scriptura*—the conviction that Scripture serves as the sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith and practice for the individual Christian. Yes, for the 20 years I was an Evangelical Protestant, including 11 as a Baptist pastor, I believed that “the Bible—nothing more, nothing less, and nothing *else*—is all that is necessary for faith and practice” (Geisler and MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, p. 178).

This was the foundation of my entire system of thought as a Christian. It was the atmosphere in which I lived, and moved, and had my being as a disciple of Christ. The only problem is—and this is something I only began to see many years after having come to faith Christ—*sola Scriptura* (a) doesn't work, (b) was never the teaching of Christianity until the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, (c) is taught nowhere in the Bible, and (d) turns out in the end to be a self-refuting proposition.

As the Director of Pastoral Care for the Coming Home Network, I work with a great number of Protestant clergy, academics, and missionaries who find themselves on a path toward the Catholic Church. Almost without exception, it is questions and doubts about *sola Scriptura*, the foundation they had always assumed to be beyond question, that sets them on this path. This is the key issue—bar none.

If you're curious about this topic, are struggling with it, or have friends and family you would like to be able to discuss this foundational issue with, I encourage you to check out the new series we've launched on our podcast, *On the Journey with Matt, Ken & Kenny*. The series highlights how and why we, three former Protestants, came to abandon *sola Scriptura* and to embrace the Catholic Church. Find it at chnetwork.org/OTJ or wherever you get your podcasts. ■



CALLING ALL CLERGY CONVERTS Save the Date!

We are extremely excited to announce a special conference taking place later this spring for **clergy converts** hosted by the Coming Home Network in collaboration with the Saint Paul Center for Biblical Theology. The conference is scheduled to be held the

weekend of **May 30—June 1, 2025** at the Saint Paul Center facility in Steubenville, Ohio. Intended for former Protestant pastors and ministers who have become Catholic *as well* as those who are preparing to enter the Church, this will be a **one of a kind** event!

The event will be focused on fellowship among clergy converts, encouragement on the ongoing journey of faith, and on reigniting the fire for living out and sharing the Gospel now as Catholics. The conference will feature talks from former clergy converts such as **Ken Hensley, Kenny Burchard, Dr. Scott Hahn, and Dr. John Bergsma**. Space will be limited. Additional details will be forthcoming closer to the event. Please email ken@chnetwork.org for more information and to be added to the waitlist.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Nicklaus, a Presbyterian seminarian** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for some years and recently decided to pursue full communion with the Church after completing his Master's program this month, that the Holy Spirit will lead his family as they move to a new location and he begins a new job.

■ **For Gideon, a Protestant Youth Minister** who has been on the journey for some time, has now enrolled in OCIA and is on his way into the Church, that the Lord will bless him as he rethinks his future with Christ.

■ **For Guillaume, an Evangelical Pastor** who was baptized and raised Catholic, later became Protestant and now finds himself wanting to go back, that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and guide him as he struggles still with certain issues and seeks to lead his family into the Church.

■ **For Karl, a Mennonite Missionary** on the journey into the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him answers to questions that remain.

■ **For Andrew, a Protestant in ministry** for many years who has begun exploring the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him in his studies.

■ **For Paul, a Baptist minister** who has become convinced that the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* isn't true and is struggling with what to do in an area of the country with few, if any, Catholic Churches, that the Lord will give him wisdom and courage to do what he increasingly sees he must do.

■ **For Scott, an Anglican priest** who just entered the Church with his wife this past Advent, that the Lord will help him to find new work as a Catholic.

■ **For Cameron, a Baptist pastor** exploring the Catholic Faith and dealing with many questions, that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire him to seek the answers he needs.

■ **For Nicholas, a Lutheran minister** in OCIA and praying there will be a way for him to work in ministry in the Catholic Church, that the Lord will grant him the desire of his heart, unless He has something better in mind.

■ **For Brian, a former Baptist pastor** who was received into the Church with his wife last Easter Vigil, that the Lord will continue to help him lead his family into their new life in the Catholic Church.

■ **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 and he seeks to lead his wife and children into the Church as well.

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

Laity

■ **For Isaac,** that the Holy Spirit would bless and guide him as he prepares for his baptism.

■ **For Gavin, a Methodist,** that our Lord Jesus would motivate him to enter into full-communication with the Catholic Church.

■ **For William, a Southern Baptist,** that the saints would pray that he overcome his fear to ask for their intercession.

■ **For Joseph,** that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide his OCIA journey to the Easter sacraments.

■ **For Roman, a Russian Orthodox brother,** that he may find grace and joy in coming into full-communication with the Catholic Church.

■ **For Edwin,** that the Holy Spirit would guide him back home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For William, a Methodist,** that he may find guidance to the resources for

which he searches that with answer his questions about the Church.

■ **For James, a Non-denominational Christian,** that he may be granted the grace and conviction he needs to inform his anti-Catholic parents of his journey to the Church.

■ **For Tom, a Baptist,** that he may find the answers for which he is searching about the Catholic faith and that his family would not erect stumbling blocks in his path.

■ **For Bijith, a Hindu,** that our Lord Jesus Christ would reveal himself to him as the one true God and guide him to his holy Church.

■ **For Simon, an Evangelical,** that the love and grace of God the Father would enable him to overcome his objections to Catholic teachings.

■ **For Nathan,** that his conversations with Catholic friends and priests would enable him to get over his Ecclesial angst.

■ **For Penelope, an Anglican,** that she may be granted humility and grace as she makes this journey, and serve as an inspiration to friends and family.

■ **For Cathy, an Evangelical,** that she may receive the grace to share her journey with family and friends and that the Holy Spirit would strengthen her through her journey home to the Church.

■ **For Sonja, an Episcopalian,** that her journey will be meaningful and that she is doing God's will.

■ **For Lynn, a Methodist,** that she may have unity in faith within her family.

■ **For Madison, an Evangelical,** that God would guide her on her journey of faith and grant her the grace to submit to His will.

■ **For Claire, a Non-denominational Christian,** that she may increase in trust to follow God wherever He leads.

■ **For Martha, an Evangelical** on her way home, that she may be granted unity in faith for her family and that her becoming Catholic will begin a ripple effect within it.

CHN COMMUNITY UPDATE chnetwork.org/community

We now have **SIX** weekly opportunities for members of the CHNetwork Online Community to come together LIVE via Video Call. Join us!

THE HOLY ROSARY
Mondays at 4:30pm ET

TOPIC DISCUSSIONS
Wednesdays at 4:00pm ET

MORNING PRAYER
Thursdays at 10:15am ET

BOOK CLUB
Thursdays at 10:30am ET

FELLOWSHIP FRIDAY
Fridays at 2:00pm ET
THE DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET
Fridays at 3:00pm ET (will follow Fellowship Friday on the same call)

Info about each event can be found under 'Events' in our online community"

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.

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.

PIONEER

\$10/month

PATHFINDER

\$25/month

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.



Everyday SACRAMENTALITY: CANDLEMAS & ST. BLAISE

By Rakhi McCormick

One of the things I have come to love since coming into the Catholic Church is the intentional, yet organic, way in which her liturgical seasons and traditions coincide with the natural seasons and rhythms of life around us. The Lord in His providence and the Church in her wisdom encourage us through an “everyday sacramentality,” using ordinary things around us to give us a glimpse of the divine, drawing us closer into the heart and mind of God.

Take for instance Candlemas on February 2. Occurring 40 days after the birth of Christ to observe the Presentation of the Lord, this celebration takes place just as the dreariness of winter threatens to overtake us. Now, not all of the world is steeped in winter’s gloom, but the lull between the excitement of the Christmas season and the gravity of Lent impacts us all.

During this feast, all the candles to be used by the church in the coming year are blessed. The faithful are also invited to bring their candles from home to receive a blessing, so as they are used for prayer throughout the year, they remind us of the light of Christ—“a light to reveal you to the nations” (Luke 2:32).

While this feast in a dimly lit February is beautiful in itself, the celebration doesn’t stop there. The next day, February 3, the Church observes the feast of St. Blaise, during which time you may encounter a blessing of the throat—with candles—in Catholic Churches around the world. For a new Catholic or curious onlooker, this might seem rather odd. The story of St. Blaise sheds some light on its origin.

Blaise was a doctor in the 4th century who became a bishop in Armenia, eventually martyred for his faith. On his feast, we recall the story of a miraculous healing associated with him, where, as the story goes, Blaise saved the life of a boy choking on a fish bone. For this reason, as well as other reported healings of those with objects stuck in their throats, St. Blaise became an intercessor for protection against ailments of the throat.

But why is the throat blessed with candles? In another story, it is said that while being taken to prison, Blaise rescued an old woman’s pig from a wolf. To show her gratitude, she brought him two fine wax candles to brighten up his dark prison cell. Centuries later, candles blessed during Candlemas are crossed over the throat for a blessing on the feast of St. Blaise.

While to the casual observer these feasts may look strange, the Church—in a dreary season when many are prone to sickness—leads us to reflect on the light of Christ and seek the intercession of a Saint for protection against illness, creating a beautiful intersection of the divine and natural worlds to guide us closer to Christ. ■

CANTICLE OF SIMEON

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
your word has been fulfilled:
my own eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:
a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.

Luke 2:29-32

Seasons of Life

“All of the seasons of life come together in the soul. Sometimes we feel winter’s sterility, distraction, distaste, and boredom, sometimes spring’s dew, with the fragrance of holy blossoms, and sometimes a burning desire to please our good God. What remains is autumn, and even then we may see no great harvest.

Yet it often happens that in threshing the wheat and pressing the grape we find a greater yield than we had expected. We want it always to be spring and summer, but there must be vicissitudes of the interior life as well as the exterior.

Only in heaven will everything be springtime in its beauty, autumn in its fruitfulness, and summer in its ardor. There will be no winter there; but here winter is necessary for the work of abnegation and for the thousand minor but beautiful virtues that we exercise in a fallow time.

Let us, then, continue to put one foot in front of the other. Provided our hearts be true, we will walk aright.”

St. Francis de Sales,
*Roses Among Thorns: Simple Advice
for Renewing Your Spiritual Journal*

As he spoke, I began to regret all the wasted opportunities to affirm them in their faith and find commonality with them. His was a gentle rebuke, but I was convicted that I had discounted the genuineness of their faith in the Catholic tradition.

Committed Catholic in Ninety-Five Difficult Steps. Step by step, the author laid out the misconceptions that I had regarding the Catholic Church. I was beginning to see and hear things from a different perspective. On December 7, 2013, I wrote in my journal:

Charlotte asked me if I was recording my evolving thought process regarding faith expression. I said I was, but realize that I haven't written anything specific related to my own thoughts (in case someone might read it). I want to be careful and thorough and keep my heart and mind open to what the Holy Spirit is doing in me through the Word and through the other resources available to me. Suffice it to say for now, these are significant times in my life, and I feel or sense that I'm being drawn "home."

I find my heart continually drawn in one direction as I continue to read and meditate. It is as if I were being led or drawn home to a place of deep roots with deep and rich significance. The implications are massive and must be weighed accordingly. I am in continual conversation with Charlotte, and she is supportive. I certainly want to pursue this with great care and due diligence and with utmost prayer and devotion. Any decision this important merits my full and dedicated attention.

"A Gift for You!"

In the two months I spent trying to fully understand my mother-in-law's faith after her death, I found myself treading deep waters. I read books from a Catholic perspective. I listened to and read testimonies of men and women who had come into the

Catholic Church after being lifelong Evangelicals. The story of Scott and Kimberly Hahn in *Rome Sweet Home* was particularly powerful. The best way to describe what was going on in me is to revisit my journal from that time:

December 27, 2013—Feast of Saint John the Beloved

This morning my mind needs to refocus and take in your glory and the majesty of your grace in our lives. I look to you and trust you to show me the way you would have me to go. What's your plan and purpose for me? I have no desire to cling to something, especially a role or a position that causes your kingdom to stall. Holy Spirit, I ask you for wisdom and illumination so that it will become clear to me what it is you are calling me to. Either these thoughts and readings are the direction you are leading me or they are a distraction to your original call for me. Spirit of God, make that abundantly clear to me. Either lead me unswervingly into the bosom of the Catholic Church or deeper and more committed to where I am with a greater appreciation for what you are doing on a larger scale. I recognize that this is a process and there are questions you want me to ask and allow you to answer. I do ask that in this process you enable me to look to you, to gaze on your face and live in your grace and do all to the glory of God.

Recognizing that moving away from what I had always known would cost me my ministry, my livelihood, and possibly my reputation, later that same morning I wrote:

Father, I humbly come into your presence and ask you to reveal truth to me. I have desired you all my life. I don't want anything to keep me from fully and faithfully loving or serving you. You know what is happening in my world and how my spirit is restless in this search. I don't want to go where I shouldn't, but I also don't want to resist where you are leading me. I sense deep in my being that you are calling me "home" to the beauty and fullness of the Catholic Church. That feels strange and uncomfortable on one level to say, but on another level, it feels like truth and the natural and logical next step. So Holy Spirit, you are the One who leads into all truth. I come to you and ask you to lead me. Point me to Jesus my Lord, my Savior, my God and my King! You know my heart and my wholehearted desire to obey you. I have always desired that. Make your will for me very evident.

About 20 minutes later, I went downstairs to get the mail. What I found in the mailbox was either an answer to my prayer or just a coincidence. In those days of searching, I used a membership to help get books at no cost. One of the books I had requested arrived that morning: *A Catechism for Adults*. There was nothing unusual about that. However inside the white paper wrapping was not only the book I ordered, but a card and another package wrapped in Christmas paper from a woman in Lexington, Kentucky, whom I did not know. The card had these

...Journeys Home Continued...

words: “What’s in the package is a gift for you!” Inside the package were two books I had not ordered: *Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth: The Catholic Church* and *God’s Plan for You* and *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic: How Engaging 1% of Catholics Could Change the World*. In my journal, I wrote:

Honestly, I can’t take this as anything less than the beginning of the answer to my prayer. Even as I write this, I feel scared and a little warm. O God, show me the way!

I wrote to the woman in Lexington and asked her about the package she sent me. Since it came by media mail it had been on the way several days before I asked God to give me a clear sign as to what He wanted in my life. She wrote back and said she was prompted to do so because someone else had sent her some gift-wrapped books. God only knows why she chose those specific books to send me. I thanked her for being an instrument that God used in that part of my journey.

From the Shadows into the True Light

Two years before my conversion, in the course of my reading, I came across Karl Adam’s *The Spirit of Catholicism*. In it, he laid out the sacraments and showed how Christ ministers directly to His Church through them. I read about the reality of all that Christ has done, is doing, and will do, are experienced in the sacraments that He established and entrusted to His Church. This was new to me.

I began to realize I had been living in the shadows. Hebrews 10:1 says, “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves.” We understand that Christ is the fulfillment of the law in every way. What hit me, though, is that in the Protestant Reformation, we threw out five of the seven sacraments, and the two that remained were watered down until we were left with a “shadow” of the reality once again. We long for the fullness of what Christ offers, but we are hamstrung by our pernicious interpretation of his ministry to us through the Church. Hence, we can only offer something greatly reduced or weakened that lacks authority or saving grace to our lives.

In my previous Christian tradition, the Lord’s Supper or Communion was observed at least four times a year, but we didn’t believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The bread and grape juice were symbols. Yet, what I remember most is that our pastor would strongly emphasize that we should never receive Communion unworthily.

As I read myself into the Catholic Church, I came to believe what the Church taught—what our Lord taught: Christ is present in the Eucharist—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. The highlight of RCIA for me was when our priest gave us a walk through the Mass and told us that many Catholics repeat the words of St. Thomas when the host is elevated at the consecration: “My Lord and my God!” In those months of going to Mass and not being able to receive, I felt actual pain at not being able to receive my Lord.

On March 26, 2016, at the Easter Vigil, my wife Charlotte and

I were received into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Manhattan. I received our Lord in the Eucharist for the very first time. The shadows receded; the light of the truth came on. I recognized that something dynamic, life-changing, and unmistakable had taken place.

The first three months after coming into the Church, I was reading *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* by St. John Henry Newman, who in the mid-nineteenth century made the journey from the Anglican Church to the Catholic Church. His journey was prolonged, misunderstood, and second-guessed. In this book, he attempted to explain how God led him to do what he did. A quote from Cardinal Newman written in 1845 after he was received into Catholic Church captured my sentiments twelve weeks in:

From the time that I became a Catholic, of course I have no further history of my religious opinions to narrate. In saying this, I do not mean to say that my mind has been idle, or that I have given up thinking on theological subjects; but that I have had no variations to record, and have had no anxiety of heart whatever. I have been in perfect peace and contentment; I have never had one doubt. I was not conscious to myself, on my conversion, of any change, intellectual or moral, wrought in my mind. I was not conscious of firmer faith in the fundamental truths of Revelation, or of more self-command; I had not more fervour; but it was like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without interruption. (p. 155)

It wasn’t until recently that I learned St. John Henry Newman’s tombstone is engraved with the phrase, “Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem”—“From shadows and symbols into truth.” As I move ever deeper into the light of the Truth, I experience regret on one hand, and gratitude on the other. Regret because I did not come to this light earlier in my life, something that would have shaped me through the faithful reception of the sacraments, impacting my life as a man, a husband, a father, and a friend; but also great gratitude that God in his great mercy constantly pursued me and brought me into Christ’s Church at the age of 59! My life has never been the same. ■

Gary Wiley is the Coordinator of Adult Formation at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Madison, where he lives with Charlotte, his wife of 46 years. They have three adult children and eleven grandchildren. In 2013, Gary began a journey that took him from Protestant Evangelical pastoral ministry to consider the truths of the Catholic Church. At the 2016 Easter Vigil Gary and Charlotte were received into the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Manhattan. Gary is passionate about his Catholic faith and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Join us on the



COMING HOME NETWORK 2025 SPRING RETREAT

MARCH 31 - APRIL 3, 2025
MOUNT ANGEL ABBEY
ST. BENEDICT, OR



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. Visit chnetwork.org/retreats to get the full details and register.