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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

## Dreams of a Protestant: The Challenge that Led Me to Catholicism

By Joshua Morris

My wife's tone of voice made it obvious; she was about to tell me something hard to hear: "I can't be Protestant anymore, Joshua." I tried my best to remain calm, but this felt like one more challenge added to a difficult few years. It was early 2022, approximately 18 months since my wife, Chelsie, got COVID-19. As a result, she developed "Long COVID" and hadn't been the same since. The hardest times for her were the nights.



In the midst of those lonely nights, Chelsie's anxiety and pain made it challenging to pray, so she combed the internet for prayers she could listen to instead. She felt the most encouraged by the podcast *Sing the Hours*, a sung version of the Catholic Liturgy of the Hours. I was open to these sung prayers as well. I found them beautiful, even if the Marian hymns at the end were a bit off-putting. We were devout Christians and convinced Protestants, but we also prided ourselves on our ecumenism, finding beauty in all the varied bodies that made up God's church. Chelsie couldn't understand, though, why similar prayers from Protestant traditions brought her little solace. This was where the door cracked open, perhaps, but our story began long before.

### The Early Years

Chelsie and I met at Berry College in Rome, Georgia. We never really had a "first date." Instead, we casually spent an increasing amount of time with each other, until it became clear we were actually dating. I was attracted to her intelligence and sense of humor. We married shortly after we graduated in 2009, then moved to Austin, TX, where I began my graduate work in chemistry at the University of Texas. At the time, we were both professed Christians, but we weren't especially committed to our faith. We didn't attend church in Austin for the first few years and generally lived however we pleased. During this time, my life of sin caught up with me. In 2012, we welcomed our oldest daughter, Lillian. I felt convicted for the first time, after a particularly grievous sin, that I really was not a good person, and that my wife and daughter deserved better. So it was that, on Holy Saturday 2012, I repented of my sins and recommitted to a relationship

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Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

with God. At Easter, I felt overjoyed by God's grace. I did not need to be defined by my mistakes. Over the next decade, my wife and I both matured in the faith as we moved between a number of different Baptist and non-denominational churches. After graduating with my PhD in chemistry, we moved to Atlanta, GA, to be near family.

In 2018, we joined the launch team of a multi-ethnic Non-denominational church being planted in Duluth, GA. My wife and I served as the directors of the childrens' ministry, while I also occasionally preached on Sundays. The church was remarkable; it combined what we considered the best from the "liberal" and "conservative" traditions within Protestantism. It was deeply grounded in the Scriptures, with a theology steeped in grace, while also insisting we take social justice seriously. We were to pursue justice *and* mercy. We were taught to read all Scripture in light of the gospel, to consider all sin in light of God's grace, and to pursue all righteousness by the power of Jesus's cross. Most of my friends were from this church; the last thing I wanted was to leave these friends and the congregation that I loved.

Due to Chelsie's illness, though, she had already ceased attending church, but still produced the childrens' curriculum from home. Through our church's teaching, we became convinced of the need to learn from Christians who came from a diverse range of backgrounds. This openness to diversity made us readily interested in learning from Christians throughout history, and so Chelsie read *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a famous story of an Orthodox peasant who wanders around Russia praying the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me"). This sparked her interest in the Orthodox faith and led her to read more about this tradition.

She began to feel that *sola Scriptura* was impossible, that Tradition played a central role in our faith even if we didn't admit it, and that, ultimately, Scripture was a beautifully crafted and inspired story of redemption which drew us into the life of God, not a systematic theology textbook or a book of church order.

Scripture answered many questions central to our faith, but left many others open to a variety of interpretations. For example, should we baptize infants or only adults? How should we organize church government? Who can administer communion? How exactly should we understand the relationship between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit? Is Christ present in the Eucharist? Is the Church a visible entity? Which texts should be considered canonical?

Christians have wrestled with these questions for centuries. They gathered church leaders from far and wide, coming to a surprising level of agreement, remaining unified for hundreds of years. Then, over a thousand years later, we were told to follow a different set of Christians and their new answers to these questions. To my wife, it seemed that Tradition had been smuggled into the whole system, even if each Protestant claimed their answers to these questions were guided by proper exegesis. Should we not follow instead those who plainly acknowledged their allegiance to both Scripture *and* Tradition?

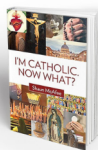
I agreed that *sola Scriptura* was untenable if it meant we had no authority besides Scripture. We plainly must add reason (how else can you do exegesis?) and a respect for historic Christianity. Scripture was simply our final authority, before which all others must bow. But I also insisted that it wasn't shocking to find a diversity of opinions on important questions. This was true in all human endeavors, not just religion. Finding ourselves with less information than we'd like, we all had to seek the truth as best we could.

Chelsie's prior announcement then took a surprising turn—she insisted she wouldn't leave the Protestant faith without me. If she was willing to remain in our shared tradition for the sake of unity, then I felt I owed her an honest inquiry. "I will give these questions a serious look," I told her. While planning to do so genuinely, I also expected to return telling her that Protestants were right all along.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### I'M CATHOLIC. NOW WHAT? SHAUN MCAFEE

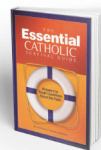
Shaun McAfee has been where you are. He knew what it looked like on paper to be Catholic, but wasn't sure how to begin the practical daily work of living as a Catholic once OCIA was finished. If you are trying to get your "sea legs" in the Church, Shaun's book is the perfect resource for you!



#3256 - \$19.95

### THE ESSENTIAL CATHOLIC SURVIVAL GUIDE CATHOLIC ANSWERS

Seventy of the best tracts in one cohesive, comprehensive book that can be used by anyone, anytime, anywhere to defend the Catholic faith. It covers the questions and misconceptions people have about the Catholic faith on a variety of topics, including, Mary, the saints, the papacy, and more.



#3082 - \$24.95

### NOW WHAT? A GUIDE FOR NEW CATHOLICS PATRICK MADRID

If you're at a loss about how to participate fully in the Church, connect with your local parish, and understand all those "quirky" Catholic things they didn't cover in OCIA, this book can help. Patrick Madrid offers a practical guide for all those who feel out of their element now that they are in the Catholic Church.



#3199 - \$14.99

## Dreams, Mass, and the Eucharist

This wasn't the first time we had questioned our Reformation heritage. A year earlier, in the midst of our church's emphasis on social justice, I had dreamt of the Apocalypse. In my dream, I stood in a crowd of people, confused, debating how to best survive the end of the world. I looked away from the crowd and saw a narrow path between two chain link fences. A soldier helped those fleeing the coming calamity as they hurried down the path to safety. At that moment in my dream, I understood this narrow path was the Catholic Church.

The next day, I reached out to my older brother, who was Catholic. We had grown up in a family with six siblings, born to devout Protestant parents, to whom we owed our heritage: our baptism, our view of family as a deep good, our hope in a faith that could be integrated into our lives experientially and intellectually. My brother had converted to Catholicism during his time in Law School at Notre Dame. I expressed to him my interest in going to Mass, and we set a date in the near future.

The Mass we attended took place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I had not been to an in-person service for months. I was moved by the liturgy, bored by the homily, and brought to tears by the Eucharist. I walked forward to receive a blessing from the priest and returned to my pew and knelt. Behind my face mask, I quietly wept, hoping no one would notice. The emotions I felt were familiar to me, but complicated. It is always this way when I simultaneously experience the lowly nature of humanity and the exalted nature of Christ, when I see my sins plainly before Christ's sacrifice. I saw this same contrast now in the Eucharist; the Body and Blood of Christ revered with the greatest of care, yet chewed on like common food.

Later that week, I had another dream. This time I wept because I couldn't receive the Eucharist. When I shared all of this with my wife, she was alarmed. A Catholic? They seem suspiciously Roman don't they? And what about all of that business about Mary? Didn't they decide only recently that she was assumed into heaven? Isn't she considered the Queen of Heaven? How could we associate with such an organization?

Despite her alarm, she faithfully reached out to a local RCIA director to ensure I wouldn't avoid this potential calling. One night around this time, however, I turned on the local Catholic radio station and heard a group of people droning in unison, "*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee...*" Sure, I thought, they claim they don't worship Mary, but that sure sounded like worship to me. Besides, I didn't make decisions based on dreams and spiritual experiences. Instead, I based my worldview on reason and argument, and here the argument was plain: the Catholic Church promotes an idolatrous worship of Mary, thus the emotional appeal of the Church must be ignored. Chelsie told the RCIA director I was no longer interested.

## Reading Scripture with the Early Church

Only a year later, my wife's announcement brought these old questions back to the surface. How should I investigate her claims that Tradition was unavoidable and undermined *sola Scriptura*?

From the outset, I was persuaded that *sola Scriptura* was a practical doctrine. Yet, to Christians in the ancient Church, such a doctrine would make little sense—the words of Peter or Paul were trustworthy, no matter how they were delivered. Thus Paul tells the church at Thessalonica: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

The problem, of course, was that we had no access to the spoken teachings of the Apostles at this point. Were we really to trust a game of telephone that's been going on for 2,000 years? In my mind, it was exactly this game of telephone that led to the accumulation of so many false trappings in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. It was for this reason that the Reformation was a much needed movement back to simplicity. I assumed the Reformers had stripped away from the faith everything wrongly accumulated through age, corruption, and human machinations.

The Scriptures, so my reasoning went, were the only access we had to those beliefs of the early Church that hadn't been corrupted. As I began my investigation, though, I discovered this wasn't true. We had access to early Christian writers whose lifespans overlapped with the Apostles and who lived in the communities they had established. Surely these writings would provide an important guide for reading and interpreting Scripture consistently with all the Apostles had passed on "by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Wouldn't we be better off reading Scripture through the lens of the early Church's beliefs? Imagine if C.S. Lewis had lived in ancient Rome and knew the Apostles—wouldn't we pay even closer attention to what he said?

## Apostolic Succession and The Real Presence of Christ

I began with the earliest of these texts, the *Epistle of Clement*, written in the late first century while the Apostle John still lived. Clement, the Bishop of Rome, wrote to the church at Corinth about a recent controversy. It seems the Corinthians had recently thrown out their leaders and replaced them with ones more to their liking. Clement argued that, just as Moses established an ongoing priesthood in the Levites, so too, Christ has established an ongoing ministry through the Bishops.

Still, from my point of view, Clement wasn't an infallible guide, so I returned to Scripture, my final authority. Read in light of Clement's letter, hints at apostolic succession showed up all over the place. Throughout Acts and the Epistles, the Apostles pass on their authority through the laying on of hands and make clear they expect these leaders to do the same. Paul tells Titus, "This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). Was it not plain, then, that Paul was over Titus, and Titus over the elders he appointed? How clear was it, then, that a person in Crete, without a connection to an Apostle, could not just appoint himself as a leader of a new Christian community?

My low-church Protestant worldview was starting to feel less secure. It's easy now to write without anxiety, but at the time, my stress level was growing daily. After a night of reading *First*



# Fasting Well, Feasting Well



Dear Friends,

First and foremost, allow me to wish you and your families a very happy and blessed Easter! Our Lord is risen—He is risen indeed! Alleluia! After the long winter and the penitential season of Lent, we now enter this great feast in His honor. The Easter season is not merely a single day or week but spans 50 days, culminating in Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, empowering the Church to proclaim the risen Christ.

Here at the Coming Home Network, we are joyfully immersed in receiving and responding to "Joyful Journey" updates from members celebrating their entrance into full communion with the Catholic Church—and from many more marking anniversaries of the same. It's a time of great joy and gratitude! These stories of conversion and renewal naturally invite us to reflect on how we should properly celebrate this Easter season.

As we enter into the Easter Season, I wanted to reflect with you today about the place of the "feast" in the Christian life. To a certain degree, we as human beings are often actually more comfortable with the concept of the "fast," Lenten or otherwise. This stems, in part, from our common struggle to use created goods—food, drink, sweets, and the like—in a healthy and holy way. Each year, when the Lenten season arrives, we generally recognize our need for self-denial, and "offering up" sweets, alcohol, chocolate, etc feels right (and is probably overdue!). But when Easter dawns, a connected and vital question emerges: *What does it truly mean to feast?* We may have gone all out on Easter Sunday, excitedly reintroducing the pleasures we sacrificed, only to find that this burst of indulgence grows old quickly. Before long, most of us have forgotten that we're still in the Easter season—and even if we remember, we're often unsure how to celebrate this extended "feast" meaningfully and fruitfully.

Part of this uncertainty about the nature of the Christian "feast" reflects a deep, existential tension in the life of every Christian, and indeed every human being, one that philosopher Josef Pieper explores in his profound work, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. Pieper shines light on the problematic and indeed backwards relationship between our "work" and the "leisure" that God commands us to practice on the Sabbath day. We tend to think of our work and striving as the deepest and most important thing in life, and the weekend "rest" as being simply the means to the end of getting back out there on Monday to do more work! But this is precisely backwards and connected to the Original Temptation that led to the Original Sin. In our concupiscence, we continually strive to grasp at happiness by our own efforts, rather than opening our hands to receive God's abundant love and mercy. As Pieper notes,

***"Leisure is only possible when we are at one with ourselves. We tend to overwork as a means of self-escape, as a way of trying to justify our existence."***

This is the reason for the commandment to "keep the Lord's day holy." It is on this day that God calls us to feast, to set aside our work (and fasting!), and instead, to rediscover that all of life is a gift of His grace—even the ways He invites us to participate in His work of salvation.

This brings us back to our dilemma: What does it truly mean to "feast" during the Easter Season and on Sundays which are our "mini Easters" throughout the year? When God gave us the commandment to rest and to keep the Sabbath day holy, we know He didn't intend it to be a day for scrolling social media, watching football for hours on end, or overindulging in food and drink. So, what is the nature of the feast? When we step back and imagine true rest and leisure, we don't picture binge-watching, doom-scrolling, or overconsuming food or drink. We often settle for these things precisely because we're too weary or weak to enjoy what we know is truly good and what we most deeply desire: relationships with friends and family, beauty, true rest, physical activity that honors the gift of our bodies, and, ultimately, loving worship of God Himself. This is the heart of the Sabbath feast: surrendering control and learning to receive God's love—without which we will always revert to prideful self-reliance, rejecting God's invitation to true "leisure" in favor of mere indulgence that leaves us empty.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* underscores this primacy of the feast, noting Sunday's unique role: "Jesus rose from the dead 'on the first day of the week' ... Because it is the 'first day,' the day of Christ's Resurrection recalls the first creation. Because it is the 'eighth day' following the sabbath, it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by Christ's Resurrection" (CCC 2174). Sunday is thus both the First Day and the Eighth Day—the beginning and the fulfillment—reflecting the resurrection and the promise of eternal life. It is this "feast" of God's love—and the Eucharist at the center of this feast—that is the source of our strength and the summit toward which we journey, by God's grace.

During this Easter season, make time for true leisure, rest, connection with family and friends, and a renewed commitment to prayer—not as burdensome "work we have to do," but as precious moments we get to spend resting in God's love. The feast is not a break from the fast; the feast is the point and purpose, drawing us into the heart of the risen Christ and teaching us to live as beloved children of our Heavenly Father all year long.

God bless and be with you today. Happy Easter!

JonMarc Grodi

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

# Clergy Convert Conference

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Marcus Grodi



Dr. John Bergsma



Ken Hensley



Dr. Jeffrey Morrow



Kenny Burchard



Dr. Scott Hahn

*"Did not our hearts burn within us?" Luke 24:32*

**May 30 – June 1, 2025**  
**St. Paul Center in Steubenville, Ohio**

There's still time to join us for our first ever conference designed specifically for clergy converts to Catholicism! Hear from members of the Coming Home Network and St. Paul Center teams—including **Marcus Grodi, Dr. Scott Hahn, Ken Hensley, Dr. John Bergsma, Dr. Jeff Morrow, and Kenny Burchard**—and cultivate relationships with other clergy converts.

There will be a block of rooms available at the Best Western Plus Franciscan Square Inn and Suites in Steubenville. Find full details and register at [chnetwork.org/clergyconference](http://chnetwork.org/clergyconference).



**"Look up from earth to heaven, to lift your eyes to the One to whom succeeding generations have looked for two thousand years, and in whom they have discovered life's ultimate meaning. Strengthened by faith in God, devote yourselves fervently to consolidating his Kingdom on earth, a Kingdom of goodness, justice, solidarity and mercy. I ask you to bear courageous witness to the Gospel before today's world, bringing hope to the poor, the suffering, the lost and abandoned, the desperate, and those yearning for freedom, truth, and peace. By doing good to your neighbor and showing your concern for the common good, you bear witness that God is love."**

*Pope Benedict XVI, 2006 Homily on the Solemnity of the Ascension*

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

Monday, May 5

**Fr. Andrew Crabtree**

*Former Non-denominational Evangelical*

Monday, May 12

**Mike Iversen**

*Former Evangelical Youth Minister*

Monday, May 19

**Justine Callis**

*Former Non-denominational Evangelical*

Monday, May 26

**Nathan Wigfield**

*Former Presbyterian Seminarian*  
*Original Air Date: 10/12/20*



### TELEVISION

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Tues. 1AM ET, Thurs. 2PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Sat. 6PM ET

### RADIO

Mon. 8PM ET  
 Encores: Sat. 7AM ET, Sun. 1AM ET and 5PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Mon.–Fri. 1AM ET

Monday, June 2

**Christopher O'Keefe**

*Former Mennonite Pastor*

*Schedule is subject to change.*

To access the full archive of past *Journey Home* programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home)



# St. Joseph the Worker

by Wes Baker, Former Nazarene

Wood ought to have a special place in the heart of every Christian. It cradled Our Lord at His Birth. It was worked by His holy hands as He hallowed human labor during His Hidden Life. It was saturated by His Precious Blood as He wrought our redemption on the Cross.

As a traditional woodcarver, this reverence for wood is familiar to me, as is the dignity of human work that is evoked by this Feast of St. Joseph. Woodcarving is a craft little changed by the passage of time, and my saws, drawknives, planes, chisels, gouges, and mallets would not, on the whole, be unfamiliar to the calloused hands of St. Joseph or his Apprentice. I am grateful to be able to provide for my family by the work of my hands, as they did.

In one corner of my shop is a panel that will be carved and gilded to hold a priceless relic of the True Cross. In another stands an altarpiece to house a crucifix which will hang above the Tabernacle in our parish church. Upstairs, away from the sawdust and wood chips, several statues are being restored and repainted: St. Joseph holding the Child Jesus; St. Therese with her roses and crucifix; St. Jude with his large wooden club. Thank God for good work!

This autumn will mark ten years of carving professionally, but wood has been a significant part of my life since childhood. My father was a carpenter and he and I worked together for years, and I think the pungent scent of freshly cut pine will forever remind me of him. My mother and I spent countless hours in the woods, marveling at the beauty that surrounded us. Both have been crucially formative to my work today.

I learned from my father that what I build should be built with as much strength and durability as possible. Those hikes with my mother laid the foundation of a sense of timeless beauty that I endeavor to impart to all my carvings. Both are necessary. Especially when something is to adorn God's house or to be used in the supreme act of worship that is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it must be built to last and possess an unfading beauty which facilitates contemplative prayer.

I suspect there is a connection between my fond memories of childhood and my favorite depictions of the Holy Family: at work in Nazareth. Our Lady sits in the doorway with her drop spindle and distaff while St. Joseph and the Child Jesus ply their woodcraft. That picture of their family working together has long drawn me, especially in our age when the family is being flung to pieces. When the norm is for father to work in one place at a job he does not love, mother to work in another where her unique, maternal dignity is not revered, and for children to study in yet other places where they are not seen as gifts from God, these images of the Holy Family at Work serve as critical reminders that things weren't always this way—that they don't have to be this way.

From the start, my wife and I were convinced that there must be another way. When we met, married, converted, and started our family during college, we knew we wanted our home to be more than just the place we slept after long days spent elsewhere. We wanted it to be the center of our family's life spent together. I had continued to work with my hands to support our growing family in the midst of my studies, and, upon graduation, I was left at a crossroads.

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood..." to use the words of Mr. Frost.

Down the one, by way of further education and a graduate degree, a career in academia was faintly discernable. Down the other, little trodden in our time, was the life of a craftsman surrounded by his family—like that depicted in those images of the Holy Family in Nazareth—not unlike the one I had known as a child. Ultimately,

"I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference." ■

*Wes Baker's woodwork can be found at [contrastswoodcarving.com](http://contrastswoodcarving.com).*

## PRAYER FOR THE UNEMPLOYED THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF ST. JOSEPH

Silent and well-known carpenter in Nazareth, model of workers, by the work of your hands you gave your contribution to the work of the Creator; you earned your living, and you provided for the needs of the Holy Family. Intercede for all workers, in the difficulties of their daily lives especially for the unemployed, in their anxieties for tomorrow, so that through the guidance of God, the great Architect and Builder, they all may use their strength and talents to make visible God's new creation, to offer a concrete service to society, and to earn wages worthy of their efforts. With confidence and trust we make this prayer through Jesus.

Amen.

# Prayer List

## Clergy

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

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

■ **For Rick, a Baptist pastor** who has been wanting to become Catholic for a long time but faces a number of obstacles that at this point seem insurmountable, that the Lord will give him peace as he seeks a way forward.

■ **For Caleb, a young Presbyterian pastor** who left the ministry and is now working for Catholic Charities as he works towards entering the Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead him as he attempts to lead his family.

■ **For Mitchell, a Protestant pastor** who has known for some time that he needs 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 Joseph, who after many years as a pastor in various Protestant denominations** has begun to explore Catholic teaching and finds himself drawn to the Church, that the Lord will encourage him as he attempts to communicate what he is learning to his family, some of whom are extremely anti-Catholic.

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

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

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

■ **For 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 is just beginning the serious study of the theological issues.

■ **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.

## Laity

■ **For Nathan, a Baptist** who just finished reading the entire Catechism of the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit would guide his new-found knowledge.

■ **For Craig, a former Presbyterian**, that he and his wife may experience the fullness of grace and truth in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Ken, a brother who is struggling to understand the Catholic Faith**, that he may find faithful Catholic friends to assist him.

■ **For guidance and direction for a Muslim** who wishes to be baptized but would be killed for doing so in his home country.

■ **For Kendall, an Episcopalian** who desires to fullness of the sacramental life, that he and his wife may find their way home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Randy, an Amish man**, that he may discover and embrace the fullness of the faith of Jesus in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Cristino, an Anglican**, that the Holy Spirit may guide his understanding, and also that of his wife.

■ **For Ben, a former Agnostic**, that our Lord Jesus would grant him the grace to understand and embrace the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Chris, an Evangelical**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to a group of supportive Catholic friends.

■ **For Mike, a Presbyterian**, that he may discover strength and guidance in the true Catholic teachings.

■ **For Filippo, a Baptist**, that our Lord Jesus will guide him back home to the Catholic Church of his youth.

■ **For Misael, an Anglican**, that he may find answers to his many questions, especially about the saints and the papacy.

■ **For Meg, a Lutheran**, that the Lord may bless her with patience, and grant her husband wisdom and discernment.

■ **For Anita, a Baptist**, that she may experience good family relations and good health for her husband.

■ **For Lynnette, a Baptist**, that her family would let go of their fears and come to a true understanding of Catholicism, and that her sister who has cancer may receive healing.

■ **For Lara, a Presbyterian**, that she may receive grace as she goes through the sale of a beloved home, perseverance as she seeks to join the Church, and for family unity and peace.

■ **For Lauren, a Baptist**, that she may experience God's grace as her family continues their journey home to the Church.

■ **For Alex, a Non-denominational Protestant**, that she may find fellowship in the Catholic Church as she continues her journey and the grace needed to stay on the path home.

# Joyful Journey Updates

## Sharalyn P., Former Non-Denominational Protestant

My husband, 5 of my sons, and I all came into the Catholic Church at last year's Easter Vigil. We are doing well. Two of my sons have become altar servers. I teach first year confirmation classes and our

parish's baptism classes and my husband is part of the Lectors Ministry. We are enjoying our life as Catholics. Thank you for all that The Coming Home Network does, and the role you all played in our conversion. We continue to find the *On The Journey* podcast and *The Journey Home* conversion stories helpful and encouraging. ■

Do you have a journey update to share? Submit it to [info@chnetwork.org](mailto:info@chnetwork.org).

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# THE VISITATION OF THE Queen Mother

by Ken Hensley, Director of Pastoral Care

On May 31, we celebrate the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which commemorates her visit to her cousin, Elizabeth. As a Protestant, I didn't think much about this event. It's not like a Baptist ever thinks of reciting the Magnificat. I didn't realize at the time that in terms of biblical typology, this passage is one of the richest in the entire New Testament.

As you may know, a "type" in Scripture is a person or thing or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows a person, thing, or event in the New Testament. Typology is evidence of God's providential rule over history.

For example, how would it have ever entered the minds of Old Covenant Israel that their entire history was a type foreshadowing the New Covenant Israel, the Church? Would the children of Israel have ever imagined that their bondage in Egypt was a type of the bondage of every human being to sin? Or that their deliverance by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was a type of the Lamb of God who set the world free from sin and death? Or that their crossing of the Red Sea was a type of Baptism, the manna from heaven a type of the Eucharist? Or that the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night that led them through the desert was a type of the Holy Spirit who leads the Church through the wilderness of this world toward the heavenly Jerusalem? They could not have known any of this. But God knew where he was taking humanity.

All of this I understood when I was a Baptist pastor. What would have never crossed my mind is that the role of the Queen Mother within the kingdom of David was also a type of the role the Blessed Virgin Mary now occupies in heaven, and that is presented to us in the story of the Visitation.

In ancient Middle-Eastern kingdoms the most important Queen was not the wife of the king, but was instead the king's mother. She was the Queen Mother, a position of tremendous authority and importance.

We learn a great deal about the unique status of the Queen Mother in Israel from the story of Bathsheba, the mother of King Solomon. In 1 Kings 1:15-18, Bathsheba comes to her husband, King David, to request something of him. She bows down before

him and refers to him as "my Lord." However, when David dies and her son Solomon is seated on the throne, the roles are entirely reversed. Now when Bathsheba goes to see the king, it is the king who rises to meet his mother and bows before her in humble obeisance! Solomon orders a throne to be brought and has the Queen Mother sit at his right hand (2 Kings 2:19-20).

How does this relate to Mary and her visit to Elizabeth? In the Annunciation narrative Mary is presented as the mother of the son of David, heir to the Davidic Kingdom. As the angel Gabriel explains, to her son Jesus "the Lord God will give . . . the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:30-33). If Jesus is the King, Mary is the Queen Mother. We see this as Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth.

We learn from Luke 1:5 that Elizabeth was a direct descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses himself, and the original High Priest in Israel. She is also the wife of Zachariah, a priest. Moreover, she is advanced in years and known for her great holiness. Luke says that she and Zechariah "were both righteous before the Lord, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly."

Mary is nobody in comparison to Elizabeth, just a teenage girl from the backwaters of Galilee. Yet when Mary appears at her door, Elizabeth responds as though the privilege is more than she can comprehend. "Why is this granted me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). Elizabeth reveals her understanding that Mary has been chosen to be the Queen Mother, seated at the Lord's right hand in a kingdom that shall never end. Mary's response reveals that she understands this as well.

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name . . . He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. (Luke 1:47-49,52)*

As we prepare to celebrate the Feast of the Visitation this month, may our devotions and prayers demonstrate that we, too, have come to understand Mary's important role as foreshadowed and revealed through the Scriptures.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Clement, I knelt beside my bed and asked God to give me clarity. “Give me a dream which points me to the truth,” I asked. That night, I tossed and turned as if in a fever dream with only one image before me—a set of four books bound as if one. I heard, “Pray with the four books of the Catholics.” Upon waking, I thought, “What an odd dream! Do Catholics even pray with four books?” I turned to Google: “What books do Catholics pray with?” No results. When I shared my quandary with my wife, she looked at me, as if to say, “Seriously!?” and then said: “The breviary is four volumes.” I googled “How many volumes are in the breviary?” Google’s top line summary read, “Modern breviaries are nearly always printed in four volumes.” I began to pray these prayers each morning.

After Clement, I turned to the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. He served as the Bishop of Antioch and was martyred sometime in the early to mid-100s. On his way to Rome to face his death, he wrote a series of letters to various churches as he passed by them. His emphasis on church leadership was as strong as Clement’s, but he also pointed to a view of communion unfamiliar to me. As Ignatius headed off to die, he pleaded with the Roman Church not to prevent him from attaining martyrdom. He adds:

**“I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible” (Ignatius’s Epistle to the Romans, 7).**

This wasn’t a one-off mention of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It was found throughout the writings of the early Church. For example, another early Christian writer, Justin Martyr, wrote to the Roman government, pleading with them to stop the persecution of Christians. In his letter, he described at length early Christian worship. About the Eucharist he said:

**“We have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh” (First Apology, 66).**

It was in the midst of these investigations that I attended a meeting to determine just how communion should be served in my Protestant church. At the meeting, we read from 1 Corinthians

11, where Paul gives instructions on communion. As we read, verses I had scarcely noticed before were highlighted in my mind: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27). This didn’t sound like a memorial meal. And then: “For any one who eats and drinks *without discerning* the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Corinthians 11:29; emphasis added). Just as in the case of apostolic succession, verses hinting at the Real Presence of Christ were easy to find when Scripture was read in light of the early Church’s beliefs.

Finally, as my beloved church decided how we ought to practice communion based on this text, one last line at the end of the chapter stood out to me: “About the other things I will give directions when I come” (1 Corinthians 11:34). Chelsie was right, I had to admit. The Apostles never intended us to guide our church life by Scripture alone; they left us with more.

The Real Presence of Christ and apostolic succession became linked together in my mind. Could just *anyone* pray the prayer that “by transmutation” brings forth the body of Christ from bread? Christ claims, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51). Has this bread ever passed through my lips? What wouldn’t I sacrifice for this spiritual food?

### Mother of the Church

In search of this divine food, I went looking through the history of schisms in the early Church. Christians remained united until the mid-400s, when the Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches split off over disputes about Christ’s nature. In the 1000s, the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church split over disputes on the nature of the Holy Spirit and the role of the pope. Each of these churches has unbroken lines of Apostolic Succession back to the great Church, and each church maintains the importance of this succession.

As I began to read about these ancient churches, I was struck by their commonalities. All of them believed that baptism actually forgives our sins and is essential for salvation. All of them affirmed the Real Presence of Christ in communion. All of them practiced the Sacrament of Penance (Confession). All of them venerated the saints, including Mary. All of them had an episcopal form of government. All of them believed the Church should be guided by Scripture and Tradition. In all these ways, they seemed to be more

# READ, PRAY, GIVE AWAY!

Once you’ve finished reading this issue of the CHNewsletter, consider sharing it with someone who might enjoy it as well! (They can always sign up to receive their own at [chnetwork.org/join](http://chnetwork.org/join).)

similar to the early Church than to Protestants. If Tradition had led them down such similar paths, perhaps the game of telephone was more reliable than I thought. I began to sense it was very unlikely that the 16th century Reformers should be trusted over such a great cloud of witnesses.

There were, of course, differences as well. How the Real Presence was articulated varied. How they thought of Mary's exalted status varied, and, most importantly, their view of the bishop of Rome, the pope, varied.

At this point, our spiritual experiences were strongly pointing to the Catholic Faith. But would these experiences align with reason and a plausible view of history? Like the views of the Trinity, the canon of Scripture, and the nature of Christ, the role of the pope took time to be solidified. In all these cases, trails of hints from the beginning became clarified over time. By the Second Ecumenical Council, in 381, Roman primacy was affirmed in passing as a part of another ruling.

## Holy Mary, Mother of God

As I mentioned earlier, I had given up my previous interest in the Catholic Church after hearing their veneration of Mary on a local radio program. Now, I followed my standard protocol: learn about the beliefs of the early Church, then reexamine the texts of Scripture. In this case, Mary was revered from the earliest days of the Church. Irenaeus, a second century bishop, considered her the "new Eve," the mother of the new creation. The earliest Marian hymn we have dates to the mid-200s and reads:

**"Beneath thy compassion, we take refuge, O Theotokos (God-bearer): do not despise our petitions in time of trouble: but rescue us from dangers, only pure one, only blessed one."**

Returning to Scripture, Mary was portrayed as the heroine who accepts God's demands to take on a child not fathered by her husband (Luke 1). This victory is highlighted through Zechariah's failure to accept a message with far fewer personal difficulties. Elizabeth stands in the Old Covenant, elderly and barren despite persistent natural relations. Mary turns this pattern on its head—young and with child despite never knowing a man. Mary is said to be "full of grace" and called blessed four times in this chapter. She prophesies that this title will be recalled through all generations. As far as I could tell, *I was the one* living outside of the guideposts of Scripture, not the Catholics on the radio, venerating Mary.

## Heading Home

Even after these investigations, I still wasn't sure I fully agreed with Chelsie. I thought it might be possible to articulate *sola Scriptura* in a way that was coherent, provided we set Scripture as our final—but not only—authority. However, her insight about Tradition was exactly correct. For many questions, the data of Scripture left us with many seemingly plausible interpretations. The question then became, which framework ought we to prefer? The pride of place should be given to those who knew the Apostles

and lived among them. We ought to let *them* tell us how to understand open questions in Scripture. Wasn't this what we Protestants did when faced with the arguments of non-Nicene groups like Jehovah's Witnesses or Oneness Pentecostals, who don't believe in the Trinity? They had proof texts and could make arguments from Scripture, just like us. We didn't typically line up the number of texts in each column and reassess our belief in the Trinity. Instead, we knew that to reject the Trinity was to reject the view of Scripture that was the consensus of the early Church. We needed to trust this consensus more often.

Throughout this entire journey, my wife and I had continually processed all of these things together: the writings of the early Church, our dreams, our visions, and our views of *sola Scriptura*. These all pointed in one direction: the Catholic Church. With a heavy heart, I told our pastor that we would soon be leaving his congregation to begin attending the local Catholic parish. We were sad to leave, but happy to head towards our true home. Through dreams, visions, and arguments, we had landed in the Catholic Church, but we still had much to learn of daily Catholic life. Through RCIA, we grew in our practical knowledge of the faith. We came to love the Theology of the Body; I learned from the Holy Family what it meant to be a father and a son; we came to realize the centrality of the Sacraments and longed to experience the fullness of the faith. After a year of inquiry and many years of nudging, we were ready to enter the Church.

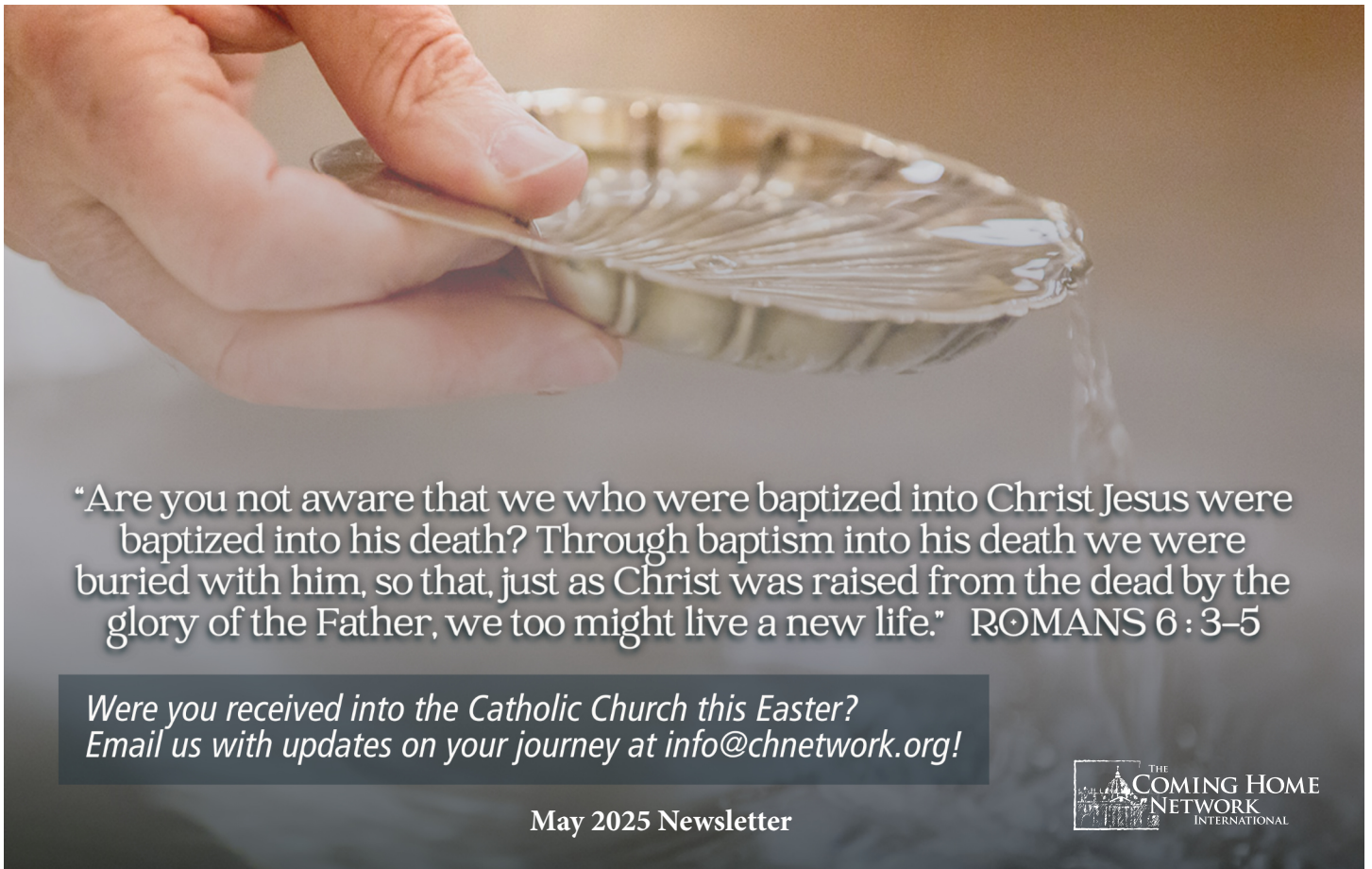
On the Saturday after Easter in 2023, I knelt beside my chronically ill wife before the altar where Christ's sacrifice is offered, and received the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Savior and Lord. One week later, my sweet daughters, Lillian and Sarah, joined us, partaking of the same Sacrament. The Catholic Church is everything our Protestant Christianity always was, but more.

The hardest thing to convey about joining the Church is the palpable experience of Christ's power in our lives. I love attending Mass, and I love going to Confession. In them both, I experience a tangible conduit of God's power in my life, filled with visible signs of invisible realities. God delights to work through His material creation to show us His mercy. I look forward to each day of my life in the Church, to attending Mass each day in retirement, and to dying in the bosom of the Church. ■

Josh Morris is an Associate Professor of Chemistry at Georgia Gwinnett College and creator of the YouTube channel Real Chemistry (<https://www.youtube.com/@RealChemistryVideos>). He grew up in Atlanta, Georgia in a devout Protestant family as the fourth of six children. In 2013, he received his PhD in physical chemistry from the University of Texas at Austin, then returned to Atlanta, where he lives with his wife, Chelsie, and his two daughters, Lillian and Sarah. He also has a portly beagle named Emmy-Bagel.

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“Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Through baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.” ROMANS 6 : 3-5

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