

The

Coming Home Network

International

APRIL 2008 NEWSLETTER

JOURNEYS HOME

Out of the Depths

by

Brannen Parrish



In order to understand my conversion to the Catholic faith, I think it is best to first understand my mother's conversion to the Holiness faith. My parents met in Cambridge, England, in the early 1960s. Dad was serving in the Air Force at Mildenhall Air Base. He met my mother while on liberty. She followed my father to America and the two were married. When Dad completed his tour in the service, they moved to Sandy Springs, Georgia, where he worked as an aircraft mechanic. While living in the Atlanta area, they had six children: Amanda, Dean, Kevin, Kerry, Kim, and Jodi in that order.

Dean developed leukemia at the age of seven and died within a few days. I know my mother must have suffered enormous pain. Sadly, it would not be her last ordeal with cancer or the loss of a child.

Shortly after Dean's death, a friend in Atlanta introduced her to a small church in Cartersville, Georgia. Cartersville is about 30 miles north of Sandy Springs. This church is a one-room building that didn't have indoor plumbing until the early 1980s. The congregation numbered about fifty. The majority of the people were related through marriage, which is often the case in Holiness Churches. The pastor, or "preacher" as we called him, was named James.

The women wore dresses, but no make-up or jewelry, as those things were 'worldly' and 'eccentric.' In fact, I don't ever remember my mother or father wearing their wedding rings. The preacher's sermons were loud and unsettling. In a thick Southern accent, he expounded, as though speaking to a congregation of auditory-challenged individuals, about the state of the world. The devil was the cause of every evil in the world, the King James Bible

was the only source for inspired text, and all, except the few thousand members of the small Holiness Churches scattered throughout the South and Appalachia, were lost. Somehow, these were God's chosen people.

The terminology often was nebulous and vague as the preacher shouted about 'walking in the spirit' and the 'spirit moving' on a person. The music was provided by electric, bass, steel and acoustic guitars, drums, banjos, a piano, and the tambourines that women brought with them. My sisters had tambourines in their pre-teen years, and they were proud of them. Some members even decorated their tambourines, and some children went as far as marking those tambourines with crayons and pens

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>Too Busy</i> <i>Marcus Grodi</i>	<i>page 3</i>
<i>Special News of Pope Benedict's Visit to U.S.</i>	<i>page A</i>
<i>Members' Insert</i>	<i>page B</i>
<i>Bulletin Board</i>	<i>page C</i>
<i>Prayer List</i>	<i>page D</i>

while their unsuspecting mothers and fathers were in the throes of the Holy Ghost.

The preaching was loud, the music was loud, and the calling out and moans of the congregation were loud. To enter a service there was like walking into a combination concert and wake. People were jumping around violently, or moaning as though a loved one had died, or both. It was a surreal visual and audio experience, probably best described by Dennis Covington in his book *Salvation on Sand Mountain*.

If there was anything about this church that was unorthodox, even by standards of the tent revivalists during the second Great Awakening it was an aspect of practice that hinged on a literalistic interpretation of two verses in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 16:17-18 states, “And they shall take up deadly serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not harm them.”

The serpent might have been an unwelcome visitor in the Garden of Eden, but not in this church. Most preachers, and some congregants, brought their rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, and even coral snakes with them in wooden boxes resembling briefcases. The boxes had hinged metal screens that opened in the middle. Before services started we used to go up to the pulpit where the boxes were sitting and listen to the ‘sh sh sh sh’ sound of irritated rattlesnakes. During some point in the service, when the twang of the guitars filled the air and people were speaking in tongues, the padlocks would come off the boxes and those who felt ‘moved by the Spirit’ would participate in snake-handling. I should note that I never witnessed a snake bite, though I heard several stories about them, and knew people who had experienced them. For most of my life I believed my mother had never participated in snake-handling, but I was informed by one of my sisters that she actually had handled rattlesnakes.

I don’t know why my mother wasn’t turned off by this practice. I believe her frustration with doctors who were unable to help her child contributed to this. I also believe it had something to do with a case of “blood poisoning” from which she had suffered. As far as I have gathered from family members, she returned from her first service healed from her malady after the congregation prayed over her and anointed her with olive oil.

After Mom’s miraculous healing, things began to change in the Parrish household. Gradually, the family’s attire changed as the boys began wearing long pants, and the girls were required to wear dresses. Even my father was affected by my mother’s newfound faith — my mother stopped going dancing with him.

A few years after Dean’s death, Kerry was diagnosed with bone cancer in his left leg. The leg was amputated above the knee. Kerry dealt with the loss of his appendage rather well. He played electric guitar, loved the band KISS (which irritated my mother to no end), and learned to ride a skate board. Whenever my father and I discuss Kerry, Dad always recounts my brother’s skateboarding prowess.

Shortly after Kerry’s ordeal, I was born to these parents in a small house in Rainesville, Alabama, that was owned by some church friends. After Dean’s death, Kerry’s battle with cancer, and mom’s experience with faith healing, she decided we would no longer place our trust in mere men or doctors. Mom’s best friend, a fellow churchgoer who was trained as a midwife, delivered me. I was named ‘Brannen Dean Parrish’ in honor of my deceased brother. We moved to Warner Robins, Georgia, about 100 miles south of Atlanta, where my father took a job as an aircraft mechanic at Robins Air Force Base.

When I was three or four, Kerry was diagnosed with lung cancer. The cancer in his leg had spread to his lungs. We awoke one morning after my fifth birthday to find he had died during the night. Shortly after Kerry’s death, Mom informed me that she was pregnant, and several months later we welcomed Rebecca Dale into the family. Rebecca received Kerry’s middle name. Mom was 40 years old.

During the spring term of my first year of school, mom began to develop a malaise. She often was too weak to pick me up, so I walked home a lot. I remember coming home to find her in the recliner, but she never told me exactly what was wrong.

Over the summer she deteriorated quickly. By the time I started second grade my mom was bedridden. She went from sleeping in the recliner in our living room to a hospital bed, and people from church drove hours from Atlanta to stay at our home, pray over my mother, and help out around the home. Many afternoons I returned from school to discover as many as fifteen people praying in mournful tones. It was as though church had moved south of Cartersville to Warner Robins.

I was as much a ‘momma’s boy’ as any boy could be. In my infancy if anyone attempted to hold me, they had better be prepared for an ensuing tantrum. My mother doted over me and I loved it. Even after the birth of my younger sister, I received more than a fair share of attention. Perhaps she was attempting to compensate for what she knew I would be without. I remember praying to God on many occasions to heal my mother. I had a quiet sort of optimism that she would get better, even after my father told me that she might not recover.

continued on page 4 . . .

Too Busy

By Marcus Grodi

Tradition has it that several millennia ago, along the shore of the sea of Galilee, there once lived a man named Jethro ben Tubizzi. He made a living repairing kitchen appliances, like oil lamps, grinding wheels, and spatulas. One afternoon, on a Saturday, his usual day off, his neighbor, the blind Methuselah ben Hoepin, came feeling his way along the street wall to Jethro's front door.

"Jethro, you there?"

"Where else?"

"Did you hear? Remember that preacher man from Nazareth I told you about?"

"How could I not hear. Every time I go to a home to fix something, that's all they talk about. Just in the last week, I've repaired fourteen spatulas that husbands have broken over the heads of their fanatical wives."

"But he's coming here! In fact, Samuel ben Samuel ben Samuel ben Humble told me he's on his way, right now, in this direction coming down our street. Can't you hear the noise?"

"Sure I heard the noise. What do you think I am, deaf? Oh, sorry, Meth, but listen, you'll not catch me running out after every self-proclaimed messiah. Remember my uncle Izzi? How he got caught up in the hubbub over that zealot from Bethsaida, the one who claimed miraculous catches of fish by spitting on his nets? The Scribes and Pharisees went out to investigate and caught that charlatan's disciples in the very act of delusion. The Scribes noticed strange reeds sticking up out of the water around where the nets had been cast way out in the deep water. One wise Scribe decided to test the power of his own spit by drooling it down one of the reeds. Out of the deep burst a coughing disciple, who apparently had been putting fish in the nets. Uncle Izzi barely escaped with his life."

"But I've been told this Yeshua is not like that at all. No one, including the Scribes and Pharisees, has any explanation for his miracles. It's said that he turned water into wine, that he has healed lepers and the lame, the deaf, and even the blind!"

"Meth, my old friend. You know I wish you well, but I warn

you: don't get your hopes up. Life is found not in the wistful hopes of miracle workers but in the tangible realities of today."

These last words were lost in the rising noise from the street.

"Meth? You still out there?" But there was no answer. All Jethro heard was the rising bedlam of seemingly everyone in town gathering to catch a glimpse of the passing preacher.



Jethro started to rise from his workbench, wiping his hands on a rag, but then stopped.

"Why waste my time? And why should I even let my neighbors see me come to the window, as if I had any interest at all in this charlatan!"

Throwing the rag across the room into a corner, Jethro returned to his work. In time the street noise got so loud, he could no longer concentrate. He wanted to rush to the door and shout for them all to be quiet: "Have you no respect? Can't you see I have work to do!"

But instead, he rose from his workbench and left his small house by the back door, for a long walk out in the country away from the crazy misguided mayhem of his neighbors.

When he returned several hours later, the crowds had dispersed, except for pockets of neighbors gathered in small hushed groups. Avoiding them, he entered his house by the back door and returned to his work.

"Jethro!" came a voice from his front door, familiar, yet with a boldness he had never heard.

He turned expecting to see the usual slumped composure of his old blind friend Meth. Instead before him stood a new Meth, fully erect, his arms extended in a welcoming greeting, his face beaming with joy, his smile struggling to be contained within the confines of his wrinkled face. But the most startling

continued on next page . . .

thing about him was his eyes, wide open and seemingly exuding their own light.

“Methuselah, what has happened?” Jethro said rising slowly, dropping his tools as he realized what his friend must have gained and what he sadly had lost.

In October, 1979, I was living in a studio apartment on Beacon Street, Boston. Three doors down was the *Bull and Finch Pub*, later to become famous as *Cheers*, where I ate three nights a week (I think they based the character of Cliff the mailman on me). Directly across the street was the beautiful and extensive Boston Gardens. I was taking a year off from seminary, working as an engineer while discerning whether or not God was calling me back to seminary.

On one particular day, I was off of work and looking forward to relaxing in front of the television and later a long jog along the Charles River. In passing I had heard and read that Boston was being granted the great “privilege” of a visit by the new Catholic pope, John Paul II. *The Boston Globe*, in my view, had wasted far too many pages discussing the papal visit — articles which, of course, I’d never read.

And yes indeed, as the day progressed, the crowds came. Thousands of people filled the street and the Garden, but I

didn’t so much as poke my head out the door. Why should I? Why should I have any more interest in a Catholic pope than if, say, the head of the Unification Church were passing by? And besides, I hate crowds.

So, I escaped by the alley door for an afternoon jog along the Charles, “far from the madding crowd.”

It wasn’t until many years later that I fully realized what a great privilege I had squandered, especially on that day in 2005 when we mourned his death. It’s not that I’m saying that the presence of Pope John Paul II outside my door was equivalent to the presence of Jesus, but yet I have come to fully realize that in the very presence of the successor of Peter, we have the continuous historical fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to build His Church on Peter and his successors; the fulfillment of His promise that the gates of hell will never prevail against it; and His promise that He will be with us always.

This April, our present successor of Peter, Pope Benedict XVI, will grace our shores. He will travel from Washington, New York, and his travels will be fully covered on EWTN. Will we be too busy to appreciate this moment or, if possible, will we take the time to be in his presence, to listen to his messages, and to pray for him and our Church?

continued from conversion story by B. Parrish on page 2

On December 9, 1985, at around 9:00 PM, I was coloring in my room. Dad appeared at the door and said, “It’s over.” I only muttered a defiant contradiction, “No.” I was wrong. Death has a way of stamping change. It screams that change is at hand. People can get ill and everyone adapts to the events. The hospital bed is moved into the living room and you take it as it come. The front door is no longer accessible because a portable toilet has been placed in the living room and so you enter your home through another door without question. But when someone dies, especially the source of your confidence and perceived safety, you know that your life is about to change.

My mother never sought treatment for her illness. I have been told she died of cancer because there were tumors, but I’m not sure that a doctor made the diagnosis. Hospice was brought in to assist, and my older siblings have told me that mom received medication for pain management — but I never saw a doctor.

We stopped going to church after my mother died. Dad began dating and my sisters began wearing make-up, jeans, jewelry, and all of the other ‘worldly’ attire that had been forbidden when mom was living. I know my sisters all

struggled with my mother’s death and my youngest sister, who was two years old, would have to grow up without knowing her.

I was extremely upset to learn that my mother, despite being in heaven, couldn’t see me or hear me. I was entirely on my own. I began usurping my friends’ mothers seeking their attention and approval in place of my own. Now that I am Catholic, I often wonder how much positive influence I might have enjoyed had Our Lady been part of the equation. Today, I believe that she took pity on us with her prayerful intercession even though we never knew or believed such a thing was possible.

My siblings tried their best to rear me, and for that I am forever grateful. My brother, Kevin, maintained close ties with the churches in Cartersville and South Georgia where we sometimes attended while mom was living. Mom was elevated to the status of saint in our family, and by comparison, any and all of my father’s shortcomings were multiplied.

At age 12, I began attending a local Baptist Church. I got saved, got baptized, and then got lost. My high

continued on page 5 . . .

Pope to Visit United States in April

Pope Benedict XVI will be visiting the United States this April. We encourage everyone to pray that this event turns into a moment of renewal and refocus in our country during these troubled times. If anyone is able to journey to the areas of his visit, or take part in the events that are planned, please tell us about your experience.

Schedule of Pope Benedict's Visit

April 15: Arrives in Washington, D.C.

April 16: On the pope's 81st birthday, he'll get an official welcome with President Bush at the White House in the morning. And, he'll meet with U.S. bishops at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

April 17: He'll have a mass at Nationals Stadium and meet with Catholic University of America presidents and diocesan heads of education from around the USA. Inter-religious event at the John Paul II Cultural Center.

April 18: On his third anniversary of his election as pope, he'll arrive in New York, address the United Nations, and speak at an ecumenical event at a local parish.

April 19: Mass with priests, deacons, and members of religious orders at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Meeting with seminarians at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers.

April 20: Visit to Ground Zero. Mass at Yankee Stadium.



As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10:15



CHNI Bulletin Board



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Former Baptist

April 21
Pre-Tape

April 28
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PO Box 8290 · ZANESVILLE · OH · 43702
740-450-1175

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Please pray ...

✧ Clergy ✧

- ✧ For Doug, a Baptist seminary student in Massachusetts, who after many late nights of intense study, prayer, reflection, and, most persuasively, through some unexplainable inward work of God, is finding himself becoming Catholic.
- ✧ For Chris, a recent Catholic convert at a Fundamentalist university in Virginia, who feels God's call to the priesthood.
- ✧ For Bryan, an Assemblies of God minister in Ohio, that the Holy Spirit would guide him and his family as they journey to full communion with the holy Catholic Church.
- ✧ For Dan, a Non-denominational minister in California, that his heart may open to all that God wishes for him and his ministry.
- ✧ For Kevin, a Southern Baptist minister in California, as he and his wife embark on the journey to understand more about Catholic Christianity.
- ✧ For an Eastern bishop and priest who seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as to how they are come to the Catholic Church.
- ✧ For Joel, a Disciples of Christ seminarian, that he would hear the voice of Jesus calling him to the fullness of the Christian faith in the Catholic Church.
- ✧ For William, a Southern Baptist minister in Pennsylvania, who longs to pour out his heart in confession, receive instruction and be confirmed,

and partake of the Holy Eucharist.

- ✧ For Cory, an Arminian, Wesleyan in Colorado, who is undergoing a study of the early Church Fathers and needs a helpful guide.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. Each person mentioned has contacted us and is somewhere along their journey home. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs in general and specific of the *CHNetwork*, its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to :

CHN Prayer List
P. O. Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702

You may also email your prayer requests to:

prayers@chnetwork.org

We use only first names to preserve anonymity, and the following codes:

(QV) Quo Vadis Requests

- ✧ For Chad, who was a hyper anti-catholic and an active member of Chick Publications, that the Holy Spirit of God would totally free him of all the lies that he was previously taught.
- ✧ For Brian, a Congregational minister in Virginia, who has come to understand the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist in the Catholic Church that other churches don't acknowledge.

✧ Laity ✧

- ✧ For Shelly and John on their journey.
- ✧ For Sandra and her husband
- ✧ For Paula and James in the struggles of the journey
- ✧ For all the new Helpers within the Network
- ✧ For the planning of the 2008 Deep in History Conference
- ✧ For All those entered the Church this Easter. May their jounries in the Catholic Church be filled with joy and blessings as they experience Christ through the Sacraments and the solid teachings of His Church.
- ✧ For Rob and Bernadette Rodgers, their family, and all who have prayed for baby Ambrose. Ambrose has gone to be in the arms of God, and the love, thoughts, and prayers of those who have walked alongside the Rodgers during this time is appreciated. Please continue to remember them, and remember Ambrose, as we continue through the loss and the sorrow toward the hope that is in Christ Jesus.
- ✧ For Ona and Zack as they discern their road to marriage.
- ✧ For Julie and her new contacts.
- ✧ For Claudia, Jean, Toby, and his wife, and all who are struggling with family issues as they look to enter the Church



continued from page 4...

school years were a mixture of angst over not fitting in with others and jealousy and bitterness of all the things I lacked – most notably a mother. Then, during my senior year of high school, Jodi's second child was diagnosed with leukemia and he died just over a month after his first birthday. I always felt that there was a God, but because of the long line of tragic events in my life, I often was angry with Him.

I graduated high school and reported to Paris Island for Marine Corps basic training. I served as a military journalist in Okinawa and North Carolina. In 2000, I fulfilled my contract and began attending college at Kennesaw State University. During my service in the Marine Corps, two of my sisters began attending a Holiness church in Cumming, Georgia. It did not practice snake-handling. It appeared that the family was coming full circle. Even my father was attending church. When I visited, I was always encouraged to attend, but I never felt right with it. The depressing moans of women who were always crying, the loud music, and people jumping around, gyrating and speaking in tongues, were all too much for me.

While living in Kennesaw, I began working as a security guard at a retirement community. My boss was a Catholic man named Frank LeBeau, a first generation French-American, who had studied at Brown University. He had taught at several colleges up north, and I immediately respected his academic prowess.

We began discussing the areas of faith and religion, and he began introducing me to GK Chesterton and Fulton Sheen. I didn't read these books immediately, but we became good friends. Though I came from a background that distrusted Catholics and their 'Mary, idol, and artifact worship,' I began to develop a sincere respect for the Catholic Church.

I transferred to the University of Alabama in August, 2002. Frank gave me three books before I left. One was a Notre Dame football pictorial, another was a photo book of the NFL's greatest hits, and the final book was *Three to Get Married*. Frank and I remained in contact. I visited when possible and we exchanged telephone calls.

Life seemed to be on track. I was attending the only university I had ever wanted to attend, and I'd discovered the works of protestant apologists like Ravi Zacharias, who brought intelligent thoughtful discussions to the table. He also infused his messages with quotes from men like GK Chesterton, Malcolm Muggeridge, and St. Augustine.

One evening, while watching an old broadcast of a poignant and insightful priest on EWTN, I called Frank and said to him, "There is an old show on EWTN, called *Life is Worth Living* and the host is awesome."

Frank said to me, "That's Fulton Sheen, Brannen. I gave you his book, *Three to Get Married*." That book had been sitting on my corner table for over a year and I'd never read it. Frank later gave me a copy of *Life of Christ*, which I have found to be one of the most amazing and insightful texts on the life and death of Jesus Christ.

In 2003, I received a call that my brother, Kevin, had been diagnosed with colon cancer. I no longer could contain myself. My brother was 38 and a faithful churchgoer. He lived his life based upon his faith and was constantly harping on me to go back to church. He didn't smoke or drink, yet everything was shaken. I feared losing my last brother, and I feared the possibility that my own body might turn against me. I began questioning what the whole point of life was supposed to be: "If I get 40 years on this earth and then I'm just taken away, what is the point?"

My brother started chemotherapy but they discovered he also had a sarcoma in his leg. The cancer spread to his lungs and he moved from his home in Tifton, Georgia, to stay with my sisters. On a Saturday in October, 2004, he went with my sisters to a church service and lay down on a pew in the front row. He fell asleep during the service and when my sisters went to wake him, they discovered he had died. For my brother there is no other place he would rather have died.

During this period I had become a Baptist, so I tried to find a Baptist Church to attend. I shopped around, looking for a pastor who was intelligent and moving with his presentation, but I found none. I was struggling with the Bible and relativism. Someone had shown me a Gnostic gospel and I couldn't understand why those books weren't included in the Bible. I had many questions, including the question of whether I was supposed to be in the Holiness Church even though I felt uncomfortable with the charismatic approach. It all seemed like preconceived emotionalism to me.

One afternoon, in 2005, I was driving home from work, listening to National Public Radio, when I heard a news story that first opened my heart to the Catholic Church. It was about the newly elected Pope Benedict XVI, and the subject of the story focused on his 'attack' on relativism in the Church and society.

Not long before this, I had encountered a post-modern, relativist literature professor while studying at Kennesaw

State University. At Frank's urging, I had spoken to a priest in Kennesaw about the professor, but the priest didn't impress me. He didn't look like a priest. In fact, from his answers I concluded that priests weren't much different from liberal Protestant ministers. After all, they dressed the same.

Meanwhile, I surprisingly had begun to realize that confession seemed to be a logical solution to fighting sin, at least from a pragmatic standpoint. I noticed that my spiritual fervor dwindled after I committed a mortal sin, and kneeling down at the edge of the bed, asking for God's forgiveness did not ease my conscience. I didn't understand the graces involved, but I knew that Catholics had to go to confession if they committed a sin, otherwise they were not to receive communion. It also made sense from a psychological perspective. If I do things that result in a negative self perception, then isn't the best way to feel good about myself to stop doing those things? Furthermore, if I have trouble refraining from those acts then the thought of confessing them to a person certainly could act as a deterrent. From my perspective, the Catholics had the right idea about confession.

As an opponent of relativism, my ears perked up to the radio broadcast and I listened intently. As the Pope defended the reality of Truth, I amazingly found myself considering, for the first time, conversion to the Catholic Church. I was totally unaware of what this might involve, but as I contemplated the move, I also considered how drastic this would appear to my family.

I strongly believed, and still do, that guilty consciences are the greatest contributors to the neurosis that plagues our society. I was approaching the Church from a pragmatic perspective of alleviating my own guilt, though I didn't understand the spiritual power of the graces provided in the sacrament, it made sense.

When classes resumed in January, 2006, I approached the priest at St. Francis University Parish and informed him of my interest in the faith. I found out that RCIA started in September, and that new candidates were brought into the Church at Easter. I received a copy of a mini-catechism called *This Is Our Faith*, and he connected me with the RCIA director. Because I had been reading Catholic authors and learning about the faith, I was told that I could attend the classes, and if I wanted to become a Catholic at Easter I would be confirmed, provided I covered the material the RCIA class had covered in the previous semester. The priest asked that I continue to participate in the following RCIA class, either at St. Francis or at another parish since I was preparing to

graduate in the summer of 2006. I told him I'd catch up and make a decision.

Flannery O'Connor once stated that "You don't join the Catholic Church, you become Catholic." That is what happened to me. I took the book and began studying the Catholic Church's doctrines and beliefs.

Through my reading, I discovered that I already believed most of what the Catholic Church taught. I didn't understand the sacraments at first, but I could accept anointing of the sick, baptism, and I was already there on confession. I also found the Catholic teaching on the existence of Satan to be consistent with what my mother taught me. I'd known many Protestants who questioned the existence of Satan and Hell. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the saints was more of a relief to me. Knowing that I had a mother in heaven who was praying for me and interceding on my behalf fulfilled me. I realized that I wasn't alone in my spiritual life. I even felt a bit cheated by my Protestant roots because they had contributed to feelings of loneliness and futility by not allowing me a conversation with my mother or Our Blessed Mother. I also learned that it was the Catholic Church that canonized the Gospel writings and not the other way around, as is presumed by most Protestant Bible based churches.

I had witnessed first-hand the ramifications of a Church scandal and a pastor's departure. Congregations can change significantly when a minister leaves. Members get annoyed or become disappointed with a new pastor's speaking style or with family members, and they leave. As a result, a Protestant can spend months trying to find a place where he or she "feels" comfortable. And then there were splits. Everybody had a brother-in-law who was a preacher and if one group within a congregation became offended, they broke away, found a new leader, and planted their own church. It is a vicious cycle that repeats itself over and over. There is a sort of pastor worship that exists. The well catechized Catholic understands that the Mass is not the priest's entertainment hour, but our opportunity to enter into an event that exists outside of space and time. So, we don't have as much of a problem with splits.

Through Frank, I was familiar with the doctrine of the Eucharist being the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. I have been told that the Eucharist is a major hang up for many Protestants, but I didn't have a problem with it. Everything in Catholic doctrine fits like puzzle pieces, creating a beautiful picture of how to live a life. It made sense that sin separates you from God and from His

Church. Receiving communion, therefore, when one was not in true communion with God and the Church would be a lie.

It was during my second or third RCIA class that we began discussing the Eucharist. The first thing that caught my attention was how careful the priest is to cleanse the vessels. The fact that the smallest drop of wine and the tiniest crumb from the host was still treated as Christ, showed me the seriousness and logic of the doctrine. If it is the King on the altar, then kneeling, bowing, and reverencing His presence seemed like the proper conduct in a sanctuary. The way the priest ensured every drop of our Lord's blood and every piece of his body was properly consumed was vital to me. I can honestly say that had the Church's teaching about proper handling of the hosts and cleansing of vessels been inconsistent with the doctrine of the Eucharist, I probably would have considered it a superficial doctrine.

The second aspect that caught my attention is much more subjective than I normally would like to admit. Our priest told a story about a young Catholic who was attending a retreat. At one point during a discussion about the Eucharist, she looked up with tears in her eyes and said, "I can't see how a person could make it through the week without receiving the Eucharist." That sealed it for me. From that moment, I knew that I would be a Catholic. I desired one thing after that – receiving Our Lord's body and blood, soul and divinity. I was attending Mass every Sunday and often during the week. It was the first time in years I was attending any church service on a regular basis, but in this case I was attending not because of the charisma of the minister, but because I longed to see Jesus and to drink from the cup of communion.

I kept my conversion a secret from my family for most of the process. I didn't want to deal with their questions because I wasn't sure how to answer them. We had known plenty of Catholics who weren't the picture of holiness, but then again we knew plenty of Protestants, including the preacher at our old church, who had caused scandal as well.

When I finally informed my family about my decision, they were much more supportive than I expected. One of my sisters made the four and a half hour drive to my confirmation despite having other commitments.

After my reception into the Church, I developed a deep desire to serve in some way. I had already discovered the

value of volunteering. It was a process that began just before I entered into RCIA, but the intensity to give of myself and thus forget myself became great.

This desire to serve was a major departure from the previous me. One night just 10 months earlier, I told a friend that I didn't feel the need to help other people because I had a most difficult time helping myself. I had been bitter and full of selfishness at all the events I believed to be responsible for my troubles and emptiness. Now I was beginning to see Christ in others and to love people because they are a creation of God, and not because of their accomplishments or ability to help me. I had devoted most of my twenties to what I wanted for me; I now wanted what God wanted for me.

Over the next several months I prayed and meditated about what my next step should be. I decided to apply for a position as a medical missionary with Catholic Medical Mission Board. My degree is in Healthcare Management, so I sent an e-mail to the organization with my resume. I was told it would be sent to the missionary sites and if anyone was interested I would be contacted.



I waited for over a month and did not hear from CMMB. I decide that perhaps missionary work was not what God had in mind and continued my job search. About two days later I received an e-mail from a priest in Uganda, the CEO of a small Catholic Hospital in Fort Portal. He was interested in my credentials and asked if I would come.

After consulting with my family, who were extremely supportive of the decision to do missionary work, I arranged to travel to Uganda in February, 2007. I have not regretted my decision at all. I had the opportunity to see a continent I never thought I'd see, and to grow spiritually in a challenging environment. I loved Uganda and the people, and hope that one day soon I will be able to return.

I am currently developing a program proposal for a center devoted to promulgating the *Theology of the Body* in Uganda. If proper Church and international support become available, I will return to Africa to implement the project.

Brannen Parrish returned to the United States on February 23, 2008. He is currently re-acclimatizing to life in the West. He lives in Cumming, Georgia, about 40 miles northeast of Atlanta, and is working at a retirement community in Atlanta. He intends to begin preparing for the GMAT in order to earn his MBA.

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