

The

Coming Home Network International

NOVEMBER 2006 NEWSLETTER

JOURNEYS HOME

A HOMECOMING

BY GARY ALLEN

FORMER UNITED METHODIST MINISTER



“Why would a ‘former-Catholic’, who was ordained a United Methodist minister, having served 18 years in the church, leave his ministry and return to the Catholic Church?” That’s what a friend asked after hearing an announcement that I was joining the Catholic Church. My response was, “That’s a really good question.” Then I stopped for a moment and thought about it. I saw my life flash before my eyes: My early youth in the Catholic Church, leaving the Catholic Church to become an evangelical, going to Bible College, then seminary, serving churches and in pastoral care ministry, pouring out my life and soul to serve Christ. All of that raced through my mind along with the joys, triumphs, successes and disappointments, failures and struggles that come with Christian ministry. Meanwhile, my friend stood there, waiting for an answer.

At first I didn’t know what to say. He obviously didn’t understand why I would leave the Methodist church. In his voice there were undertones of confusion, disappointment, and betrayal. Suddenly I had the answer. It was a very simple answer, yet a very complete one. It is the answer for him, and anyone else who asks me why I became Catholic: It is simply hard to be a Protestant when you’re really a Catholic.

My journey began August 31, 1957 when I was born the second child of a “mixed-marriage” family. My father, who was of a nominal Lutheran background, married an Italian Catholic. Religion was not mentioned in our home because of an argument my parents had when I was to be baptized. My father wanted me baptized in his church, but being a devote Catholic, my mother would have no part it, so I was baptized in the Catholic faith. My father then stated he would not talk about anything religious in our home, and kept his promise for many years. The five Allen children went to Mass with Mom faithfully every Sunday, sitting in the front pew so a four-foot ten-inch Italian woman and her five children could see the altar.

I sensed a call to the ordained ministry when I was confirmed in the Catholic Church at eleven years old. I remember I wanted to be holy, and I wanted more of God in my life. I began to attend Mass on a daily basis before rushing off to the public school every morning. I bought a Bible and read it faithfully, hoping to learn more about this God who loved us and sent his Son to die for our sins. This hunger for a deeper relationship with God was so powerful that eventually I became involved in the Charismatic Renewal.

Later, as a result of studying Martin Luther and the Reformation in high school social studies, I left the Catholic faith. My father, who had remained silent for most of my life about spiritual matters, broke his rule and

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began to share his faith. Soon the entire family decided to leave the Catholic Church, and we began attending independent charismatic congregations. When I was seventeen my parents moved to Florida and I attended a Mennonite congregation that was mildly charismatic. By this time I had come to the conclusion that much of the teaching from early in my life in the Catholic Church was wrong. Yes, I would think, there were truths to be learned, but most of the trappings, the ritual, and teachings were beyond the Bible and should be ignored.

Yet deep inside of me, I knew that it was wrong to leave the Church. Anytime someone asked about my religious background, I was always ashamed to identify myself as a “former-Catholic.” I wondered why there was such a conviction that I had done something wrong, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on what it might be.

In 1977, I married Connie, and she has been my wife for twenty-nine years. Connie was eighteen when we married and I had just turned twenty. Within a year we had our first of three children. During that time, I was studying at an Assemblies of God Bible College in Lakeland, Florida. While the charismatic and Pentecostal traditions are so vibrant and enthusiastic, eventually I came to question what I felt was the shallowness of the teaching. Questions began cropping up in my mind, such as what about the rest of the Church through history, were they not Christians who had experienced the Holy Spirit?

A special moment occurred in 1979 when we were taking communion privately in our home during Holy Week. My belief was that it was only a “memorial” and “any Christian can do this.” Then I read the passage from St. Paul in I Corinthians 11 and what Paul had to say about holy communion. At the time, we understood communion as merely a “memorial”. But we read the passage and realized Paul was talking about something more than just a memorial – he was talking about something so deep that to not respect it was actually costing the lives of some believers. It was much more than just remembering, it was a Sacrament. In fact, it was

God! God was at work in me during those years, and little was I aware that he was also working on my wife.

While in Bible College I studied a man named John Wesley, who founded the Methodist Church. The Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions have a strong affiliation to Wesley because it was the Methodist movement that would eventually spawn these church renewals. Much of Pentecostal theology is Wesleyan in nature. The wonderful thing about Wesley was his



appreciation of the early church fathers. Wanting to know more about this John Wesley, I transferred to a Wesleyan Church college in Indiana and finished my bachelor’s degree in Biblical Literature.

In 1985, my family and I moved to Wilmore, Kentucky where I studied for the United Methodist ministry at Asbury

Theological Seminary. While advanced learning is meant to be challenging, I was not prepared for the shaking of my faith that happened in Seminary. Studying Wesley’s theology and his approach to worship challenged and nearly broke me at the time. A professor of worship and homiletics deeply rattled my beliefs in the sacraments and liturgy. In class we learned that the early Church was a liturgical church with traditions that went back to the Apostles. But this was the Catholic Church I had grown up with! Why would a Protestant seminary be teaching us about the Mass, and how communion is transformed into the actual Body and Blood of Christ? One day following a class I was enraged that one professor was challenging us to return to the early Church, which, from my experience, was Catholic. I went to his office, tears in my eyes, and said, “Professor, I left all that when I left the Catholic Church.” We sat and talked even though he was late for another class. He gently listened to my story of “leaving the Catholic Church”. In a quiet voice full of compassion he asked, “Gary, have you thought that perhaps you had thrown the baby out with the bathwater?” He then stood up, patted me on the shoulder and left for his class. The events of that day shook me up.

I went home and prayed and realized how wrong I had been for leaving the Catholic faith. Nevertheless,

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Meet the Staff of The Coming Home Network International

During the past year we have added and replaced several staff members, so with great excitement for our Coming Home Network International team, let me introduce you to . . .

Sharon Coen



A cradle Catholic, Sharon was raised on a dairy farm in nearby Delaware County. She taught school for 30 years, but after retirement, she decided to return to work and felt the Lord sent her here. Sharon started as Resource Specialist working in the mailroom and answering the telephone. Now as the Administrative Assistant, she is our front-line contact for all incoming phone calls, emails, and mails. She assists Marcus, Jim, & Rob with

correspondence, speaking engagements, and travel arrangements, and shares in many duties across the apostolate. She also manages the registration table at our fall conferences. Sharon lives with her husband Bob, five cats, and a dog. They have a son Mike and her stepdaughter BJ is expecting their first grandchild in February. In April 2003, Bob entered the Church, and after 16 years of marriage they were married in the Church.

Marcus Grodi

A cradle Protestant, Marcus received an engineering degree and worked as a plastics engineer before attending Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. After receiving his Masters in Divinity degree, he was ordained to the Protestant ministry, serving nine years before he, his wife Marilyn, and their sons were received into the Catholic Church in 1992. He helped found the CHNetwork in 1993 while he was on the staff of Franciscan University of Steubenville, and has served as its full-time President / Executive director since 1995. Besides overseeing and setting the direction for all aspects of our work, Marcus spends many hours on the road each week hosting his live television program *The Journey Home* on EWTN in Birmingham, Alabama, as well as speaking around the country on our work. With Jim Anderson he hosts a weekly live radio program called *Deep In Scripture*. He is the author of the novel *How Firm a Foundation* and the editor/author of *Journeys Home*. He and his family live on a small farm in central Ohio with a cadre of critters amidst overgrown briars.



Laura Nicholson

Laura was homeschooled through high school and then graduated from Franciscan University of Steubenville before she joined us full-time last year as a Resource Specialist. Her responsibilities includes a wide assortment of tasks from fulfilling orders to duplicating audiovisual resources to assisting all other CHNetwork staff members. She enjoys reading, music, spending time with loved ones, and living out in the country.



Robert Rodgers



Rob, a Canadian by birth, is a convert to the Catholic Church from Anglicanism (12/5/00). In 2002, he was hired to coordinate our Helpers Network, which requires many hours each day on the phone, email, and mail supporting those on the journey as well as defending our Catholic Faith. His former training and experience in hotel and conference management quickly proved an added bonus as he took the reigns of coordinating our conferences, regional retreats, and other events. Rob and his wife Bernadette have two children, Josephina and Ambrose.

Jim Anderson

Jim was raised United Methodist, became Lutheran at the age of 19, and was received into the Catholic Church in 1981 while attending Ashland Theological Seminary. Jim has worked with the CHNetwork since May 2001. As our Assistant Director, he is responsible ministering to the needs of all Primary Members and their families. This includes many hours a day on the phone and email. Jim is also our resident librarian, cataloging and tracking our excellent lending library of new and old books. He also schedules the guests for *The Journey Home* program, and recently has been assisting



Marcus in hosting the *Deep In Scripture* radio Program. While in seminary he met Lynn McKown, also a seminarian, and they were married in August 1983. Lynn teaches religion at Fisher Catholic High School, in Lancaster, Ohio. They are the parents of four children.

Steve Smeltzer



Steve, a life-long Catholic, has served as our IT manager and Webmaster since 2000. He essentially manages all things electric for the CHN Network, producing the *Deep in Scripture* radio program and working with Bill to finalize our radio and television studio. He keeps our website running and up-to-date and manages all of our discussion groups and our on-line catalogue. He with his wife Vicky have two children, Dalton and Isabel, and a variety of pets. Hobbies include producing pyrotechnic shows, reading books, and building electronic gadgets. No item is safe from his hands because of his obsessive need to reverse engineer anything that he doesn't know how it works.

Ann Moore

Ann began working with CHN in 2002 as a part-time Resource Specialist.

Currently she serves as the Financial Assistant, responsible for all aspects of our financial accounting and reporting. She also assists in the planning for our annual fall conferences where she takes responsibility for the CHN Booth. Ann is a cradle Catholic and lives with her husband Kenny and daughter Alicia. One of their many hobbies is raising Alapaha Blue Blood Bulldogs.



Our Newest Staff Members ...

Bill Bateson



Confirmed in the Catholic Church in 2003, Bill brings many years of experience in construction and industry to his job as Distribution/Property Coordinator. His responsibilities include managing our CHResources inventory and coordinating all property maintenance and new projects, including the completion of our new storage facility and television/radio studio. His hobbies include studying in Martial Arts and working on his house. He and his wife Laura have 4 children: Mathew (13), Alyson (11), Karlie (10), and Beau (22 months).

Carlos Caso-Rosendi



Born in Southern Argentina, he and his family became Jehovah's Witnesses while he was yet a young boy. Their family life changed drastically because of the destructive doctrines of the cult. Once he was free from the family influence, Carlos left the cult and lost interest in religion eventually becoming an agnostic. At age 35 a divorce painfully reminded Carlos of his total lack of a spiritual life. Not really knowing what to do, he started reading the Bible again. At that time a friend gave him a volume of selected works by C. S. Lewis. That initiated a time of reading and reflection that ended when he read "*Catholicism and Fundamentalism*" by Karl Keating and "*Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic*" by David Currie. The doctrines and history of the Catholic Church emerged in Carlos' mind as a marvelous gift from God that he had been invited to explore. He was received into the Church on Assumption Day, 2001 in London's Catholic Cathedral where Fr. Juan C. Sack of the Institute of the Incarnate Word gave him the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Carlos joined the CHN Network in September of 2006 as Coordinator of the Spanish Network, developing our apostolate to serve the Spanish-speaking world. Besides spending many hours discussing apologetics with Spanish speakers, he is translating several of our books into Spanish.

David Griffey

After years as an agnostic, then an evangelical Christian turned Southern Baptist pastor and graduate student, Dave was received into the Catholic Faith at Easter Vigil, 2006. When he joined the CHN Network staff in March as Coordinator of CHResources, he took on a heavy load of editing, layout and design, and content editing. In addition to managing and promoting our current list of CHResources, he edits the CHNewsletter and presently is overseeing the future publication of five new books. He also spends a fair amount of time answering questions about the Catholic Church, particularly if they are from backgrounds similar to his. He is eager to talk about the countless reasons that brought him and his family back home to Catholicism. He and his wife Dee Dee have three Boys: Charlie (11), Davey (8), and Phillip (6). In addition to his Faith and his family, Dave enjoys reading, Ohio State football, outdoor activities, cooking, gardening, music, and politics.



Please pray for each staff member and their family, and for us as a team as we seek to serve faithfully our Lord and His Church.



THE COMING HOME NETWORK
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November 6: Open Line 1st Monday
To Be Announced
November 13: **Leona Choy**
Former Evangelical Missionary
November 20: *International Pre-Tape*
November 27: **Steve Smith**
Former Non-Denominational Evangelical

on **EWTN** television and radio
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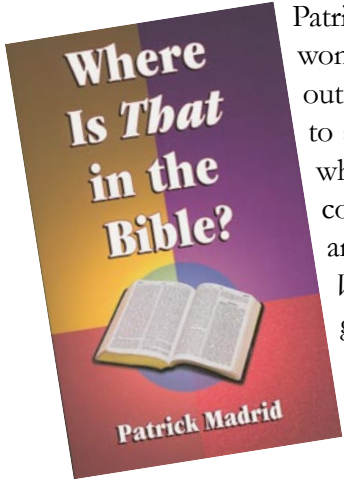
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TENTATIVE SCHEDULE



Novemeber 1: To Be Announced Text: TBA
Novemeber 8: JIM ANDERSON..Asking & entering the Kingdom . . . Text: Matt 7:7-14
November 15: JIM ANDERSON. False prophets & false professions . Text: Matt 7:15-23
November 22:Happy Thanksgiving Text: Phil 4
November 29: JIM ANDERSON. . Rock, sand, & the sermon's finale . Text: Matt 7:24 - 8:1

Featured Resources

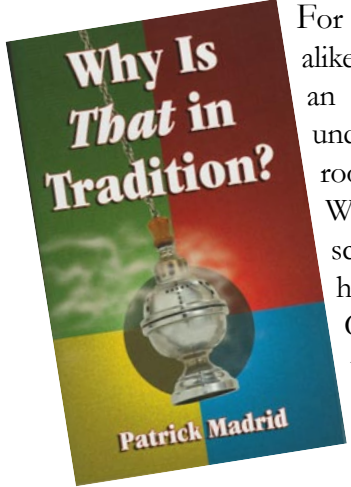
Where Is That in the Bible?
by Patrick Madrid



Patrick Madrid presents a wonderful tool for helping those outside of the Catholic Church to see that the many doctrines which we enjoy do not run contrary to Scripture. Using an easy to read formula, *Where is That in the Bible?* is a great resource to help show that Catholicism and Holy Scriptures are not mutually exclusive.

RECEIVE EITHER RESOURCE WITH ANY DONATION OF
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Why Is That in Tradition?
by Patrick Madrid



For Catholics and non-Catholics alike, *Why is That in Tradition?* is an indispensable resource for understanding the rich, historical roots of the Church's teachings. With a plain format and strong scholarship, Patrick Madrid helps the reader see that the Catholic Church is able to trace an historic paper trail back to the very ground upon which the Savior trod.

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rationalizing my decision to leave the Church would continue for quite some time to come.

Still, things were not the same after this. I began reading, even devouring, the writings of the early Church Fathers. John Wesley was an avid reader of Patristic literature, and held that proper belief must always be maintained in light of Sacred Tradition. Furthermore, Wesley taught that Sacred Tradition must be adhered to in order to rightly understand Scriptures. It was the result of studying Wesley that took me down the path toward reading the writings of the early Church. As a “former-Catholic” it was very challenging because all the Catholic teaching that I had rejected as “error” quickly “made sense” and was not only sound theologically, but was solid in its biblical foundations. Yet I waited and continued to rationalize that it was okay for me to remain in the Methodist Church.

In another class we were required to go on retreat to Gethsemane Abbey near Bardstown, Kentucky. With other fellow students, we sat listening to the Mass, and the Liturgy of the Hours, the worship and adoration filled my heart. I remember sitting and praying during one of the Hours when a “still small voice” spoke to me, “Gary, return to the Catholic Church.” All these years I had rejected the faith that the Apostles had taught. The seeds that had been planted inside of me in my Baptism and Confirmation began to germinate. I found the Catholic Church, the only problem was – I was now a Protestant. I began to rationalize, “Yes, I’m a Protestant, but really I’m a Catholic – We’re all really part of one church – does it really matter?” It does matter.

Following seminary in 1988 I was ordained in the United Methodist Church. While my title was “Methodist”, inside my heart, I was a Catholic. While serving the church for eighteen years in four parish appointments, my wife also was feeling the need for something deeper. We were connected to a church, but didn’t feel a part of it. My wife, a life-long evangelical Protestant, later confessed to me, “Gary, I would sit in church and listen to you lead worship and preach. While listening, I would have thoughts pop into my head that would say, ‘Gary would be much happier in the Catholic Church . . . he really isn’t part of this.’” We would attend Catholic music concerts, listen to Catholic worship music, read Catholic books and devotionals. I displayed Icons on my walls and burned incense in prayer. We had a rosary in our car hanging from the mirror. Every Christmas we would rush home from our Methodist Church midnight Christmas Eve Service to watch the Pope celebrate Christmas Mass on television! We were swimming in a Protestant sea, seeing ourselves as “Catholic” but were afraid to come into the waters of the Church.

From 1995 on I began to contemplate leaving the United Methodist Church. I had three teenage children to support and I couldn’t leave my “profession”. “Besides,” I thought to myself, “I can still be ‘catholic’ with a small ‘c.’” A close friend from seminary left the United Methodist Church to join an Old Catholic – Charismatic denomination and invited me to come along with him. I seriously considered making the move, but something inside of me restrained me, what I now realize was the Holy Spirit. I remember talking with my wife about the possibility of “jumping ship” to this new denomination. God used her and spoke to me, “Gary, If you’re going to be a Catholic – then become a Catholic!” Her words struck a strong chord in me. I knew she was right.

In June 2005 I decided to make a move of faith and left the local church I served as pastor. Like so many pastors who make a decision to leave their churches, many haunting questions arise. “Am I out of God’s will? Am I doing the right thing? How do I know that God is in all this and that He is leading me?” I did not want to create a scandal for the parishioners of the Methodist Church, so I did not make any announcements as to my plans to leave the denomination. I thought that taking the transition process slowly would be helpful. I began by “sneaking” into local Catholic Churches to pray alone. Twice I encountered priests who asked me, “Aren’t you the Methodist Minister?” The first time I choked, coughed, and said, “Yes, I just want to pray.” The second occasion I broke out in tears, “Yes, I’m the Methodist Minister, but I’m a former-Catholic . . . I want to come home.” Father said, “Welcome home!”

We began the process of becoming Catholic by enrolling in the RCIA program. We enjoyed – to the point of almost devouring the teaching – the fellowship and love that the group had to offer. I began to attend Mass daily as well as every Sunday. During communion I longed for the Body and Blood of Christ. I sat, head low, and prayed the words of the Liturgy taken from Scripture, “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” I had denied him through my leaving the Church. I wanted to come home. I would say to myself, “I’ve been away too long.”

On August 20, 2005 Connie and I were welcomed into the Catholic faith at St. Paul’s Church in Valparaiso, Indiana. Tears in our eyes, we stood with the people of faith and joined in with the Nicene Creed. It has been a long time that I have been away. To stand there in the midst of all the people, smiling, shaking our hands and congratulating us. It’s so good to be home again!

The Coming Home Network
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