

The Coming Home Network NEWSLETTER



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April 2005

Journeys Home

St. Paul's Vocational Conversion

In every issue of the CHNewsletter, we include a conversion story, usually, if possible, of an up-coming guest on the Journey Home program. This month, since we are celebrating the reception of new catechumens at Easter vigil, I invite you to reconsider maybe the most celebrated conversion story of all, that of St. Paul the Apostle, but from a unique perspective. You are all familiar with the details of his conversion on the road to Damascus, but have you ever considered his vocational conversion, from Saul the Pharisee and persecutor of the Church to St. Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles? How and when did he discover this new vocation?



New clergy converts to the Church often feel they must relinquish their vocational calling, accepting reluctantly St. Paul's own admission in Philippians 3.13-14: "...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." But the context of this passage does not refer to St. Paul's vocational change: only that the prerogatives and privileges he had as a Pharisaic Jew, which he previously considered so important, were in fact useless for attaining salvation and righteousness before God. So how was St. Paul's vocation after his conversion connected with his pre-conversion vocation? Let's examine his testimony, distributed throughout his letters...

First, what was his spiritual and vocational background?

I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cili'cia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gama'li-el, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day ... My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee ... I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. (Acts 22:3; 26:4-5; Gal 1:13)

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Therefore, St. Paul was more than just a very religious, observant Jew. He must have discerned a religious vocation to spiritual leadership as a Pharisee, and then obeyed this calling by receiving the best training. Essentially he went to seminary!

But things were changing in his world: “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The new “heretical” sect, called the Way, was not going away but growing. The Way was ordaining its own hierarchy of leadership, and, worst of all, Jewish priests were even converting! Something had to be done!

Then they cast [Stephen] out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul...And Saul was consenting to his death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem. (Acts 7: 58, 8:1,3)

Though this isn’t stated directly, it seems fair to conclude that in this incident, Saul heard a more specific calling from God. First let us hear of this in St. Luke’s words and then in St. Paul’s:

But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison...But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1,2)

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. (Acts 26:9-12)



In the process of carrying out this vocation, God called Saul home, through his conversion to Jesus Christ, with which we are all familiar (cf, Acts 9:3-6, 8, 18-19; 26:16-18).

Saul’s conversion also meant a redirection of his vocation, from persecutor to proclaimer. This, however, was not immediately appreciated by his new brothers and sisters whom he previously persecuted or by his old Jewish friends:

For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed, and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests.” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed,

the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesare'a, and sent him off to Tarsus. (Acts 9:19-30)

Eventually, through the intercession of St. Barnabas (since the CHNetwork did not yet exist), Saul was retrieved from obscurity and encouraged to continue in his religious vocation:

So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people ... Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger ... and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 11:25-30; 13:1-3)

In time, after St. Paul had been confirmed as the Apostle to the Gentiles and was serving as a bishop, he writes of his new vocation:

[H]e who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles... But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry, which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Acts 20:24; Gal 1:15-17; Eph 3:7-8)

In essence, St. Paul, the convert, became a *Helper* to others on the journey, in this case St. Timothy, encouraging and empowering him to use his apostolic gifts:

I thank Him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful by appointing me to His service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted Him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.... You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (1 Tim 1:12-14; 2 Tim 2:1-2)

Every one of us has a calling from God to use our gifts for the spread of the kingdom. St. Paul's previous religious training and vocational experiences prepared him for what God was calling him to do after his conversion (i.e., as a Pharisee he already believed in the resurrection, which prepared him to become a great proclaimer of the fullness of the resurrection in Jesus Christ). The work of the CHNetwork does not end once a convert enters the Church. Like St. Barnabas and St. Paul, we want to help all converts (as well as Catholic laity) discover how to best utilize their gifts, training, and experiences for announcing the good news of Jesus Christ and His Church.

If you haven't done so already, you **MUST** read John Paul II's important encyclical on "The Lay Member's of Christ's Faithful People (Christifideles Laici)." In it, you will hear our Holy Father explain clearly — like St. Barnabas probably did to St. Paul and then St. Paul to St. Timothy and then on and on down to us — how we each, clergy and laity, "have an essential and irreplaceable role in this announcement and in this testimony; through [you and me!] the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world as a sign and source of hope and of love" (CF, 7).

Sincerely in Christ,



Marcus Grodi
President

Certainly, every convert is a gift to the Church and represents a serious responsibility for Her ... especially in the case of adults, such converts bring with them a kind of new energy, an enthusiasm for the faith, and a desire to see the Gospel lived out in the Church. They would be greatly disappointed if, having entered the ecclesial community, they were to find a life lacking fervor and without signs of renewal! We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day.

— John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 47

Quo Vadis

Greetings Friends of the Coming Home Network,

Remember the *CHN youth network* I mentioned a while back? You know, the one called “Quo Vadis” whose members are dedicated to standing beside their fellow youth on the journey? Well, we are still here, and I’d like to tell you about how our fledgling network is progressing

Our current overall membership lies around 25 youths, the majority of which fall into the two main categories of active membership. First off, five of our members are inquirers who have contacted us because of their interest in converting to the Catholic Church. Most are late high school or college students that are on the journey home by themselves, but we also receive younger inquirers who are converting with their families. David, an eighteen year old Baptist college student from Canada, has been studying the Catholic faith for more than two years. He stumbled across our internet chat room long before he even joined the network. Since then he has been a regular in our bi-weekly chat room discussions and has informed us that he is not only leaving his Baptist parish but that he plans to begin RCIA as soon as possible.

When I came to Quo Vadis, I didn't know what to expect. Coming with a good knowledge of Roman Catholic doctrine and lot's more questions to ask, I was excited to learn that there are more people out there just like me. Through my fellowship with Jon-Marc and the others I met in the network, I was able to get answers to my questions...and now I'm on cruise control down the Road to Rome and I don't see any pit-stops along the way!

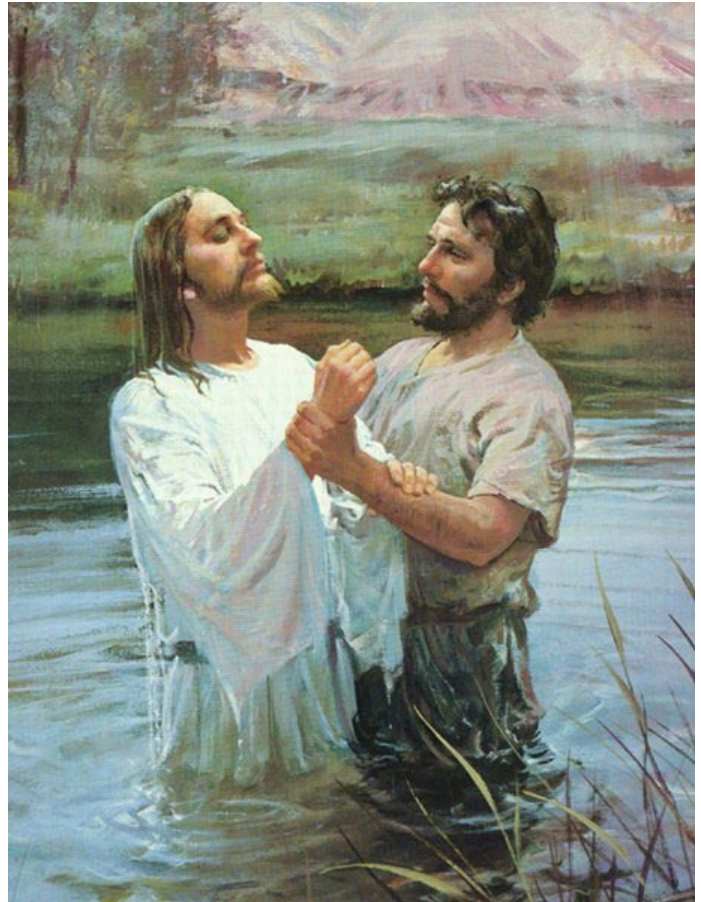
—David, 18, Former Baptist

It is truly amazing to see other youth at the same stages in life as myself, experience such a yearning for the fullness of truth in our Catholic Faith. However, equally exciting are those who have made the commitment to stand beside our inquirers on their road to Rome! Five of our members currently constitute *Quo Vadis' Helpers Network*. The commitment of a Helper is twofold: They remain in direct contact with another youth who is on the journey, and they contribute various types of aid to the maintenance of *Quo Vadis*, ranging from articles to web design. One helper, a seventeen year old high school student from New Mexico, provides fellowship to her assigned inquirer through email and instant messaging. She also aids in the design and publishing of our journals.

Whether or not they can fill the role of Helper or inquirer, I encourage and welcome any interested youth to join our network of fellowship, and meet some of the incredible people therein!

The Chat room is the highlight of my week, being able to talk to everyone and learn so much about the faith. I am so glad to be a part of Quo Vadis, and to be able to help whenever I can!

—Katherine “Kat”, 17, Catholic



I'm just so glad I found you guys... I've actually never met a Protestant that was considering converting so it's awesome just to know that I'm not alone!

—Sara, 19, Southern Baptist

As is everyone here at the office of the *Coming Home Network*, I am grateful for all the support, monetary and otherwise, that you provide. As for the youth network, the only support I ask for is that of your prayers and that you would pass on this article to youth in your family or parish.

May God bless and keep you all!

JonMarc Grodi

Jonathan M. Grodi

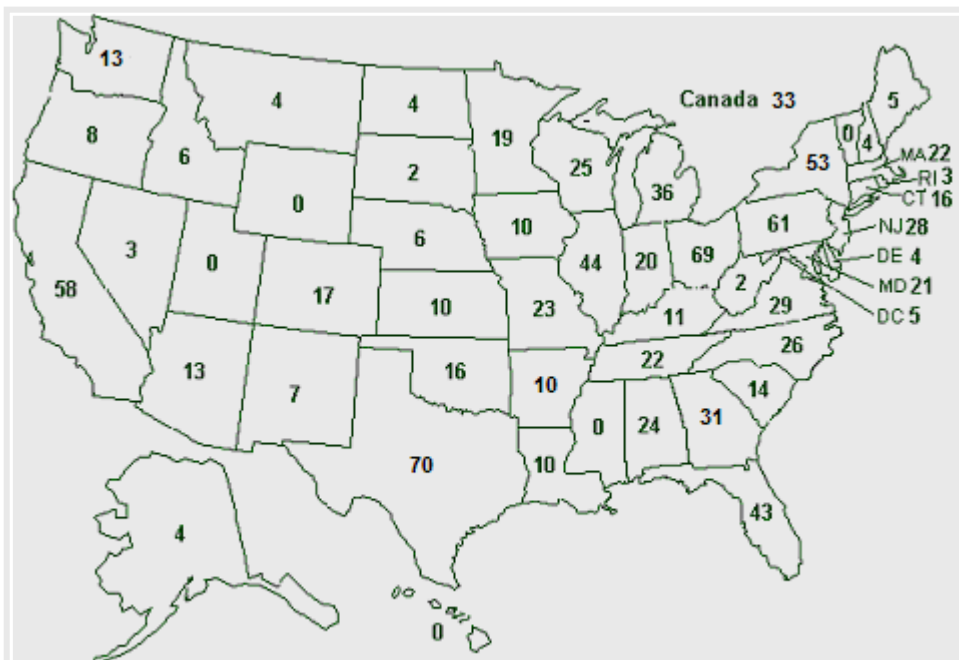
jonmarc@chnetwork.org
www.chnquovadis.org

Clergy on the Journey

Be Not Afraid, You Are Not Alone

Often when a non-catholic member of the clergy first contacts the *Coming Home Network* they confess that they had believed that they must be the only Protestant minister on the planet who felt the call to come into full communion with the Catholic Church. Their friends and family — to whom they have had the courage to confide how they believed God was leading them — many times have tried to convince them that they must be crazy or even deluded by Satan. We quickly reassure them that they are not alone, nor crazy, or deceived. Far from being alone, across the United States and around the world, hundreds of other men and women are experiencing similar leadings of the Holy Spirit. Currently, *CHN* has 1015 clergy members, 932 of whom are in the USA. Of these members about 44% are still on the journey toward full communion with the Church. As of this month that number will change as about 30 of our members will be received as new Catholics at the Easter Vigil.

Here is a map to illustrate how close some of your fellow clergy members may be to you. Keep in mind that one of the major works of *CHN* is to network people. If anyone would like to contact a Catholic in your area who was once a Protestant minister, we will be happy to connect new friends. You might also want to take a state a day and pray for the clergy state by state, that our Lord Jesus would continue to guide them by His grace and mercy.



Besides clergy members in the United States, the Coming Home Network also has members of the clergy scattered around the world. Here is where they can be found:

<i>Canada</i>	33
<i>United Kingdom</i>	13
<i>Nigeria</i>	6
<i>Australia</i>	5
<i>Israel</i>	4
<i>Puerto Rico</i>	4
<i>Germany</i>	3
<i>Italy</i>	2
<i>The Netherlands</i>	2
<i>Norway</i>	2
<i>Bosnia-Herzegovina</i>	2
<i>Benin</i>	1
<i>Bulgaria</i>	1
<i>Croatia</i>	1
<i>Ireland</i>	1
<i>Jamaica</i>	1
<i>Malta</i>	1

Sincerely In Christ,
Jim Anderson

Jim Anderson
jim@chnetwork.org

Helping 'em Home

As it is on Earth, may it be in our Faith, a Springtime of Spiritual rebirth. My greetings and thanks to each of you who offer time in the assistance of those looking to climb the seemingly impassable hurdles of doctrine as they venture to His Catholic Church. With our Spiritual fasting of Lent but a memory, may the fruits of this Church Season flourish through the grace we shall receive.

To all those who were welcomed into the Church during the Easter Season—a belated and joy-filled “Welcome Home!” is extended to each and everyone of you. I would ask you to pray about offering your time as a Network Helper that you might give to another the same shoulder that was once offered to you.

As a convert to the Church, you bring a great and almost immeasurable gift to the Faith; once again you become as a child receiving something unknown

for the first time. It is this absence of knowledge, the absence of knowing Him so intimately through the Holy Eucharist, that will continue to stoke your fire of Faith. Lack of knowing becomes the fuel to fire our Faith, and I pray that not a day passes, that we converts or life-long Catholics take for granted the gift of Holy Communion.

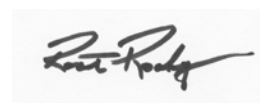
It is this fire that we need to spread, to burn up the ignorance of the world, and reveal to blinded eyes the truth of His One, Holy, Catholic Church. To each of you I send an invitation to offer your time as a Helper to the Coming Home Network, convert or cradle Catholic, your time and love of our Lord is needed by another.

Maybe you made this offer sometime ago, or filled out the survey, and nothing was heard; or in the passing of years your email changed and was never passed to the Network. Please,

contact me by email, so I can activate your file, and request your assistance in aiding another home to Rome.

I ask your prayers for all those newly received into the Church, that they continue to strive, and not lose heart, should they find the Church not as they once read. For all those still searching; as they fight to let go of their preconceived notions of Christian truth, that they find surrender upon their hearts in this year ahead. For Julie and Terry, that they both find profound understanding in God's will and His love for us. For Jeff and his family, that they always see His hand, and continue to be lights to the love of Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,
Rob Rodgers

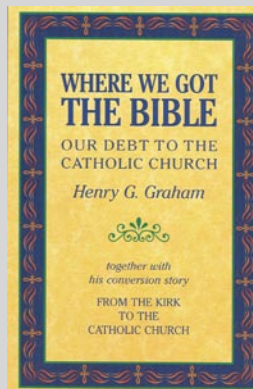


Featured Resources

In this Exhortation on the vocation and the mission of the Lay Faithful and in the World, Pope John Paul II intends to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church. The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Through them, the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world as a sign and source of hope and of love.

Where We Got the Bible by Henry G. Graham

The Bible is Catholic. In *Where We Got the Bible*, Henry G. Graham explains how the Catholic Church compiled the sacred text, how medieval monks preserved it, and how Catholic scholars—not Protestant Reformers—first gave Christians the Bible in their own languages. Along the way, Graham destroys myths about Catholic opposition to Scripture.



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Ann Moore@ 740-450-1175

Attention Members!

If you have joined the Church, or will be doing so soon,
please notify us so we can update our records.

Call us at 740-450-1175 or e-mail info@chnetwork.org.

Thank you.



*Upcoming guests on the
Journey Home Program
on EWTN, Mondays live at
8 P.M. EST*

April 4

Pat Madrid

Life-Long Catholic

April 11

English Pre-Tape

Paul Williams

Former Buddhist

April 18

Dr. August D. Accetta

Revert from Secularism

April 25

Dr. Paul Schenck

Jewish Convert

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