



July 2010 Newsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Preacher's Kid & Catholic *by Denise Bossert*

The Christian tradition that emerged from John Wesley's eighteenth-century Methodist movement has developed several branches. One of them is called the Wesleyan Church, and I was born into a family in that denomination. My parents met at a Bible college in Oskaloosa, Iowa. My father was studying to be a minister, and my mother was there to pick a husband out of the pool of future preachers.

Dad's family was predominately Wesleyan. As Wesleyans, we believed in being born again. We boiled it down to the ABCs.

A: Accept Jesus as Savior.

B: Believe He died for you, personally, on the cross in atonement for your sins.

C: Confess your sins (privately) to Him and ask for forgiveness.

Wesleyan practice had many wonderful aspects. My earliest memories are of prayer meetings, personal testimonies of grace, and adults on their knees in prayer. We firmly believed that God was personally involved in our lives and actively working with us for our sanctification.

My mother's family was United Methodist, one of the other denominations in the broader Wesleyan tradition. Sunday worship seemed a bit more formal there than in my father's church, but my maternal grandparents had a personal faith. They paused after breakfast every morning to read from some spiritual book and contemplate a

passage of Sacred Scripture. I remember how my maternal grandfather used to lead us in prayer, how the whole family knelt on the linoleum floor and propped their elbows up on kitchen chairs and folded hands as Grandpa prayed.

This praying grandfather was a farmer, but his two brothers were United Methodist preachers. One was a well-known traveling evangelist who held tent meetings, preaching revivals and giving altar calls in which all were invited to come forward and invite Jesus into their hearts as Lord and Savior.

My maternal grandmother actually had a Quaker background. In fact, her own grandmother had been a Quaker minister. Quakers weren't like the Wesleyans and United Methodists I knew. They were actively involved in social justice issues, and they were contemplatives. They believed in the prayer of quiet, a kind of prayer that actually has parallels in Catholic tradition, in Carmelite spirituality in particular.

Quakers would be reticent to admit this connection. In fact they rail at most things Catholic. No formal prayer. No structured worship. And no sacraments or holy rituals.

When my parents met their freshman year in college, they brought to their marriage a rich mix of inherited faith traditions. *...continued on page 2*

Journeys Home

FEATURED RESOURCES

My Journey to the Land of MORE

By Leona Choy



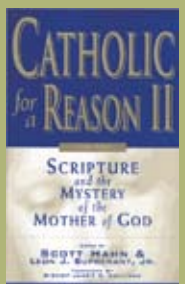
As an evangelical Protestant leader, Leona Choy had spent a lifetime of missionary work in China and on university campuses, as well as writing, publishing, and broadcasting. So she never dreamed she would one day write a book

chronicling her surprise journey into the Catholic Church — what she calls “The Land of MORE.”

At the age of 80, and after four years of biblical and historical research, Leona became convinced that she had to become Catholic. She faced daunting obstacles: giving up a lifelong reputation as an evangelical leader; the potential misunderstanding of family, friends and coworkers; the loss of readership for her books. But Leona took the risks rather than reject the truth God showed her. This is her story.

Catholic for a Reason II: Scripture and the Mystery of the Mother of God

Edited by Scott Hahn and Leon Suprenant Jr.



This second volume in the *Catholic for a Reason* series explores the mystery of Mary, the Mother of God, through the personal study and reflection of nine well-known Catholics such as Scott Hahn, Jeff Cavins, and

Tim Gray. The result is a moving tribute and convincing testimony that demolishes common misconceptions about Catholic teaching about the Virgin Mary.

In this book, you'll find a clear presentation of the truth about our Lady: Catholics *do not* worship Mary. Catholic teaching about Mary *is* scriptural. And the rosary and other Marian prayers *are not* vain repetitions. Most importantly, you'll discover what it means to be a child of Mary in the Church.

...Journeys Home Continued...

In Love With Jesus Christ

My father's second pastorate in the Wesleyan denomination was in Cedar Falls, Iowa. It was during this pastorate that my mother implemented a program at the church called the Good News Club. One afternoon each week, the neighborhood children met in the basement of the church.

We sang peppy songs, and my mom told a Bible story. We earned little trinkets for memorizing Scripture, with door prizes to encourage the kids to come back the next week. One week, at the end of the program, my mother shared with us the evangelical Protestant understanding of the plan of salvation.

I don't remember much about that afternoon. I just remember wanting to be forgiven. And I remember falling head over heels in love with Jesus Christ.

Shortly after that first conversion, I asked my mom if I could be baptized. We were attending family church camp, and I remember the dozens of campers and tents lined up in a row and a big tent for evening camp meetings. I distinctly remember the people in white tunics, down at the river — how they walked into the water with the Wesleyan pastors and one by one were immersed in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

My soul cried out for that: *Me, too!* But mom said I was not old enough truly to understand.

When we returned to the parsonage (pastor's home), I began to ask if I could receive communion, which was usually offered four times a year. Again I was told that I wasn't ready yet.

I remember telling my mom that the bread stood for Jesus' body, because He died on the cross for our sins. And the grape juice (which is what Wesleyans used for communion) represented His blood, which Christ shed on the cross for our sins. And then I looked at her as if to say, isn't that it?

“Yes, that's right,” she told me. But I still wasn't permitted to receive.

A Divided Christian World

It was the summer of my ninth birthday, and my sister was headed into fifth grade. I remember hearing my parents talk about her assigned teacher, and how rumor had it that he had taught students about the occult during the previous year. So they considered sending my sister and me to the Catholic school across the street from our public school.

I don't know why my parents went ahead and sent us to the public school. Maybe they realized that gossip isn't always true, or maybe they didn't think they could afford Catholic school. But one thing stuck with me, and I thought about it that next year every time I was on the Lincoln Elementary playground.

I would look across the street at all those children dressed in their Catholic school uniforms. I would see the sisters who monitored the recesses. And I would wonder why my parents, who had provided my sister and me with every Christian experience (worship, Christian records, Christian books, Bible camp, Good News Club) had stopped short here.

I suppose that was my first experience with a divided Christian world. It wasn't outright anti-Catholicism, but a concrete sign of division and separation.

During that school year my paternal grandfather passed away in a farming accident. Dad left pastoral ministry, and we moved to the family farm to help Grandma. I had known what it was like to have a pastor as a father, and now I was given the chance to have a farmer for a father. Both experiences were

wonderful. We all expected that Dad would continue on as a farmer, but God opened a different door.

During our time on the farm, a local Presbyterian church called my dad. They needed someone to fill the pulpit until they could find a replacement for their previous pastor. My dad became the favorite stand-in, and eventually the nominating committee asked him if he would consider becoming their new pastor.

He accepted the position. So he spent the next three years traveling back and forth to the nearest seminary (in Dubuque, Iowa) to complete a Master of Divinity degree, reserving the weekends for sermons and visits to parishioners.

I soon noticed a number of differences between Wesleyans and Presbyterians. We didn't kneel to pray in church anymore — ever. We didn't talk very much about holiness or sanctification.

Once we were Presbyterian, we stopped going to camp meetings in the summer. Believers weren't baptized down by the river. They were baptized at the font, usually when they were babies.

Many of the hymns changed. We learned a new prayer they called "the Lord's Prayer." The teenagers went to Confirmation class and had to learn the Apostle's Creed.

One important difference I noticed was that the Presbyterians didn't talk dramatically about the need to be "born again." It seemed as if they believed that being "right with Christ" was more of a lifelong pursuit and not a single-moment-in-time prayer.

That's when I first realized that Protestants had many interpretations of Scripture. Even though they might all agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, I discovered, not all Protestant Christians believe the same things.

This was a new and confusing thought. If truth isn't just a matter of opinion, why did some of the denominations have totally different ideas about when we should be baptized, how we are sanctified and justified before God, and whether we can ever lose the gift of grace and mercy once we have it?

The questions weren't simply whether Eve ate an apple or a pomegranate. These two denominations had differing opinions on key issues of life, death, and salvation.

Mixed Messages

During seminary, Dad studied Greek and began to rethink his position on baptism. As a Wesleyan, he had dedicated infants and held to a believer's baptism at the age of accountability. But his seminary studies uncovered a troubling problem with that theological position.

He now pointed out New Testament passages to my mother in which entire households presented themselves for baptism. He showed her the Greek word for household, which included every member, slave and free, young and old — infants included.

Soon my sister and I were baptized. A few short years before, my mother had said I was too young, that I needed to wait until I understood the deeper theological implications. But now, because the denomination required it, I was slated to be baptized — at the direction of my parents. I certainly was receiving mixed messages. ...continued on page 4

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

Wednesday LIVE at 2:00 PM ET

Encores: Wednesdays @ 9:00 PM ET

Sundays @ 7:00 AM ET

For more information and a link to watch the program LIVE online go to www.deepinscripture.com

Deep in Scripture Guests for July:

July 7

Richard Ballard*

July 21

Dr. Brennan Pursell*

July 14

TBD*

July 28

TBD*

**This schedule is subject to change*

CHNI ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER!

The Coming Home Network International now has a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Get up-to-the-minute updates on CHNI and our work to help those on the journey to the Catholic Church. Search for us on these two social networking sites — we look forward to connecting with you!

UNSOLICITED MAIL

The Coming Home Network International would like to remind our members that we are unable to send unsolicited mail. Since our ministry exclusively responds to non-Catholic clergy and laity who initiate contact with us, we cannot add anyone to our mailing list or send materials unless they themselves first make a request. However, if you would like to have CHNI send materials with a gift card in your name, or if you have any questions about this policy, please contact our office at 740-450-1175.



EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

on television and radio, hosted by
Marcus Grodi, president of CHNI

TELEVISION

Monday **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET

Encores: Tuesdays 1:00 & 9:00 AM ET

Thursdays 2:00 PM ET

Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

RADIO

Monday **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET

Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET

July 5

John Nahrgang*

Convert from Secularism

July 12

Open-line with Kevin Lents*

Revert from the Methodist faith

July 19

*The Journey Home in Scandinavia**

July 26

Fr. John Markham*

Former Southern Baptist

**This schedule is subject to change*



...Journeys Home Continued...

That same year, a friend invited me to a weekend sleepover, and I went with her family to Sunday Mass. I didn't pay much attention until the Liturgy of the Eucharist. At that point, I realized that it was what my family would have called "Communion Sunday." (I didn't realize that it's "Communion Sunday" every Sunday for Catholics.)

Lori leaned over and asked me if I knew about Communion. Mom had recently given me permission to receive Presbyterian communion, so I whispered back to Lori, "I know all about communion." But then everyone started standing up and going forward, and I turned in a bit of a panic and said, "Lori, we don't do it like this. What do I do?"

My friend was not equipped to handle this sudden crisis. She just said, "Hold your hands like this, say amen, and cross yourself when it's over." (A somewhat incomplete catechesis, to be sure.)

And that's how I received Our Lord that day, completely unaware of the precious Eucharistic treasure I had been given.

It doesn't take a brilliant theologian to know that this was a missed opportunity for Catholic apologetics. An open communion table, which many Protestant denominations offer, doesn't help bring unity, even though it seems like it should. Here's the ironic thing: A *closed* communion actually facilitates unity because it facilitates questions that demand answers.

As it was, the teachable moment was lost to me — and would not come again for thirty years.

My junior year of high school brought another interesting "Catholic" moment. My sister and I had ended up in a very small debate class along with five Catholic boys. While other students in the class avoided the Catholic-Protestant dialogue, Bob Johanns and I never missed an opportunity to engage one another in a theological debate. Bob had a natural gift for personal apologetics and wasn't intimidated in the least by the offspring of Protestant clergy.

For a novice debater, he made some irrefutable points.

His first argument was based on the undeniable legacy found in the history of the Catholic Church. He spoke of the unbroken line of apostolic succession and the *terra firma* of Catholic teaching. I remember wishing I had the legacy argument on my side of the debate because it was such an effective point.

To refute the point, I argued that his Church legacy didn't always merit acclaim. He pointed out that I didn't have any legacy, but rather a fractured system of Protestant denominations, loosely united by one word: Christian. It was hardly the unity Jesus intended when He asked the Father to make us one as He and the Father are one (see Jn 17:21).

His second argument for the Catholic Church rested on the saints. I dismissed this point because they were *Catholic* saints, not my saints. Why did I need to know about them?

In the end, his points failed to win me over. But they gave me a great deal to think about.

Changes and Challenges

My father took another pastorate after my junior year, which required our family to move to another town. I was angry and lonely. I met a boy that year, a Presbyterian. We became serious very quickly, and we married just one month after my eighteenth birthday.



We had three children within five years. The marriage was tumultuous from the start.

When I was pregnant with our third child, my husband was “led to Christ” in the evangelical Protestant sense and was “born again.” My husband announced that he felt a call to ministry, and we moved our family of five to Dubuque. There he enrolled in the same seminary my father had attended years before.

Dubuque was one of the first towns to add EWTN to its cable line-up. So, in between my own undergraduate classes, I would catch episodes of *Mother Angelica Live* while my husband worked on his Master of Divinity. I was fascinated by the spunky nun in the brown habit.

I took a position teaching Spanish in a local Catholic high school. I didn’t convert, but I asked questions. One day in the faculty lunch room, I asked Brother Roger Betzold what everybody was doing in the Mass right before the Gospel reading.

He told me they made the sign of the cross on their head, lips, and heart as a reminder and a promise that the words from Holy Scripture would remain in their minds, on their lips, and in their hearts. I was amazed by the beauty and meaning behind the simple act. I had asked the question thinking that Catholics practiced meaningless rituals — only to realize that the rituals did indeed have profound meaning.

My husband eventually had second thoughts about pastoral ministry and switched degrees to a Master of Religion, which is an academic rather than a professional degree. After his graduation, we moved to Atlanta so he could return to the field of business. In our search for a church home, we visited a United Methodist church.

When the pastor visited us to “court us for membership,” he was surprised to learn of my husband’s seminary degree. Within months, my husband was on staff of the church as the program director. He enrolled in Emory University so that he could finish the Master of Divinity degree he’d started at Dubuque.

The parishioners thought their program director and his little family were absolutely wonderful. But I can tell you, things were not all wonderful. Two months before my husband was slated to be ordained, the marriage crumbled.

I wasn’t teaching at the time. I had no job and no money, and the only place to go was back home to my parents. After a ten-month separation, the marriage ended.

Nearly a decade later, I would go through the healing process of laying the whole thing before Mother Church. At that time I would come to a realization: What happened after our wedding day wasn’t disordered so much as the events leading up to the wedding day. The Church was the only one with the authority to sort through the mess and declare that this attempted marriage had not been valid.

All that would come in time; for now, I was dealing with the aftermath of a marital hurricane. My parents helped me pick up the pieces of my life. I filled my days with substitute teaching positions and took a stab at freelance writing. I wrote an article tracing the trends in Protestant fiction and sold my first article to two papers. ...continued on page 6

2010 DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCE

Marcus Grodi and *The Coming Home Network International* invite you to join us next fall in Columbus Ohio for our 8th annual *Deep in History* conference.



How Firm A Foundation: Authority Through the Scriptures Oct 22-24, 2010

With the *Deep in History* conferences standing on the Pillar and Bulwark of truth, in October, 2010, we will turn the focus to the Authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures as we look to the authority and history of the Sacred Writ.

Join us this fall as we bring together another exciting group of speakers to discuss the authority of the Scriptures. We will look at the Scriptures from the penning of its books to its binding into the Bible we hold today, so that as Catholics, we might better profess our faith through His inspired Word.

The Sacred Writ is inerrant; however, because of individual human interpretations of the inspired Word, the Christian world is divided. As we look to discern how firm is our foundation, we will respond to the errors of today and yesterday as we continue our journey into the teachings of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

We invite you to come and be a part of another inspiring weekend, with an aim to end ignorance and enlighten the heart, mind, and soul as we dive into the history of the Sacred Scriptures. The result, we trust, will be a new confidence in the firmness of our foundation.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Marcus Grodi
- Dr. Paul Thigpen
- Dr. Scott Hahn
- Richard Lane
- Patrick Madrid
- Kimberly Hahn
- Dr. Kenneth Howell
- Bruce Sullivan
- Fr. Mitch Pacwa
- Msgr. Frank Lane

For more information go to www.hfaf2010.com or to register call 740-450-1175.



MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

July 30–August 1, 2010

Defending the Faith Conference

“Be Transformed By the Renewal of Your Mind”

Franciscan University of Steubenville

Steubenville, Ohio

800-437-8368

September 18, 2010

Why Be Catholic Series

St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church

11441 Hubbard RD

Livonia, MI 48150

www.livoniastmichael.org

734-261-1455 ext 207

November 5-6, 2010

YB Catholic Conference

St. Luke The Evangelist Parish

8 Atkinson Depot RD

Plaistow, NH 03865

603-382-8324

NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNI encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to friends, and family, church groups. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. CHNI and the authors reserve all rights and permissions.

SHARE YOUR STORY!

The Coming Home Network International always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story please feel free to e-mail a written conversion story of either around 1700 or 4000 words, along with your name and contact information to:

Mary Clare Pieczynski

marycp@chnetwork.org

...Journeys Home Continued...

In Love With the Saints

During this time, my father was diagnosed with a debilitating neurological disorder. He would eventually be forced to go on disability and leave pastoral ministry permanently.

In October 2003, my father's health began to decline rapidly. On December 28, 2003, he passed away. In that moment, everything changed.

When I saw his body lying motionless on the hospital bed, I realized there was something almost holy in that room. Something sacred. Something that surpassed the world of human senses. And I realized that I hadn't noticed the holy or sacred in anything for a long time.

I had never experienced such consuming grief. I was surprised that grief could also be holy — and a moment of incredible and unexpected grace.

When my father died, I inherited his personal library. I perused those theology books in a quest for answers to my nagging questions about suffering. I didn't really know what I was searching for. Maybe something my father had written in a margin, something that might help me through the pain.

In the bottom of one of those boxes, I found a book by St. Augustine called *The Confessions*. When I read the book, something this man wrote hundreds and hundreds of years ago caught my attention: “The man who knows [all things] is unhappy, and happy is the man who knows [the Lord].”

Over and over, St. Augustine said the happy man is the man who seeks the Lord. As I read, it seemed that Dad was nodding his head, affirming that this would be my journey through the pain to the other side.

Many years earlier, when I was working on the article I noted, a religion reviewer at *Publisher's Weekly* had recommended that I read a series by Susan Howatch. I had recently completed the series and I needed another book. I decided to try something by a woman named Evelyn Underhill, a woman mentioned in a couple of Howatch's books.

I discovered almost immediately that Evelyn Underhill had great respect for the Quakers. And then there was the intriguing fact that Underhill wanted to be Catholic, but had remained Anglican at the request of her husband. *Catholic*. How odd, I thought.

Then I read a chapter in Underhill's book entitled “Dark Night of the Soul.” The answers to my questions about suffering were beginning to lead to answers, and I wanted to know more about the book upon which Ms. Underhill had based her chapter. I found an English translation of her source, a book of the same title by St. John of the Cross.

I was so taken by that book that I wanted to know whatever I could about the man who wrote it. When I learned that his spiritual companion was a Carmelite by the name of St. Teresa of Avila, I went in search of her books next.

I was beginning to fall in love with Catholic saints. I should have known then that my days as a Protestant were numbered.

Real Presence?

A couple of years before Dad died, he had mentioned the name of a priest who served with him on a ministerial board. I remembered Dad saying that he really liked this priest. In July of 2004, I called the priest and told him that I was feeling an inexplicable tug toward the Catholic Church.

He told me that everything comes down to what I believe about Holy Communion. He said that if I could accept Jesus Christ at His word, I would continue this faith journey. If I could not believe in the Real Presence, the journey would come to an end right there.

Then the priest suggested a little book called *The Lamb's Supper* by a former Presbyterian minister, Dr. Scott Hahn. I remember being very surprised. Protestant clergy becoming Catholic? Really! I didn't know that such a thing ever happened.

I considered the priest's words. Could I truly believe that Jesus Christ was really present in the Eucharist?

I picked up my Bible and turned to the Gospel of John, chapter six, where Jesus tells His disciples: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ... For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (vv. 53, 55). Then I read the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, when Jesus says, "This is my body ... this is my blood" (Mt 26:26, 28 and parallel passages). In both accounts, the faithful disciples take Him at His word.

Soon after that, I made a trip to the nearest Catholic Church. I told the secretary that I thought I was supposed to become Catholic, and I needed to know what to do next. They signed me up for RCIA classes.

RCIA was wonderful — until December. That's when I faced my greatest obstacle. In December 2004, our RCIA leader introduced the class to the Church's teaching on the Immaculate Conception.

Home to Mother Church

I announced to the entire class that I couldn't accept that Mary was conceived without sin. I was willing to admit that Protestants had let the pendulum swing too far in the opposite direction, relegating Mary to a minor role in the Christmas story. But I thought that such a development was in response to excessive Catholic Mariology.

After many attempts to help me understand, the instructor mentioned that I had the option of placing a petition before the Blessed Mother. I could always ask Mary *herself* to show me the truth.

As an Evangelical, I had placed many petitions before the Lord. That was not a new concept. And I didn't have a problem with asking Mary to answer my petition. I just didn't think she would do it.

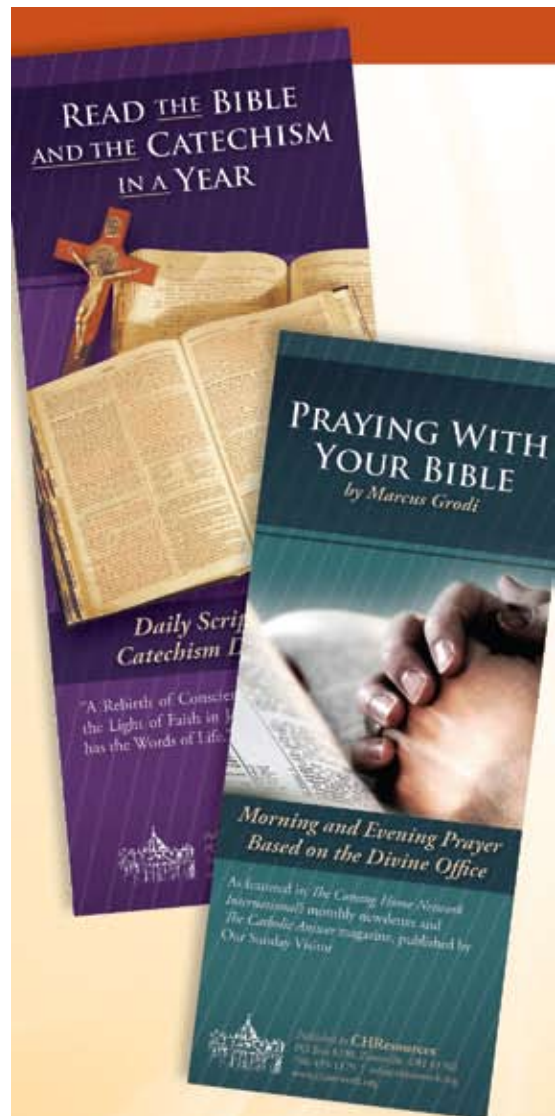
The dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in fact, was the one obstacle that had stood between my father and the Catholic Church. I had vivid memories of discussions between my parents about this strange Catholic teaching. Could I accept it?

Not yet. I needed more evidence. So I prayed — hard.

"Lord," I said, "I will follow You wherever You lead, even if it is down a road my father could not take. I just want to get this right. And so, I beg You *not* to answer the petition I place before Your mother if this teaching shouldn't be embraced."

Then I turned my heart to Mary and laid it on the line:

"Mary, if you are immaculately conceived as the Catholic Church says, and if you love me, please answer this petition. I want someone to communicate with me by your inspiration. I need the communication to encourage me in the faith, and I don't want it to be from Catholic friends at the school where I used to teach. ...continued on page 8



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...Journeys Home Continued...

"I don't want it to be from anyone in my parish. I have shared this struggle with some of them, and they may know through earthly tongues that I need to be propped up. Mary, I want the message to come from you to the ears of one who could know no other way.

"Please choose someone who, for me, would represent the universal Catholic Church. Then I will know I am right where I'm supposed to be and that the Church's teachings are *all* correct, *terra firma*, especially the teachings about you. Please answer my petition before the end of the year — I know, that's just two weeks away."

In the mailbox *the next day* was a letter from a woman who had appeared on *The Journey Home* the previous July. She had written me once in August 2004. In December, she decided to write me a second time to encourage me in the faith and let me know she was praying for me.

Her letter was dated December 8, 2004. Above the date, she had handwritten "The Feast of the Immaculate Conception." With tears streaming down my face, I read her two-page, single-spaced letter.

Mary Beth Kremiski's letter had been dated four days before I made the petition, arriving less than twenty-four hours after my request for help. Our Lady had proved herself to be the Immaculate Conception and a mother with impeccable timing.

On August 14, 2005, in the Year of the Eucharist, I received Our Lord — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity — in Holy Communion. Finally, I was home.

I had begun a journal back when my father had been sick. When I was sure that I was ready to enter Mother Church, I took a section of the journal and worked it into an eight-hundred-word article. I attached it to an email and sent it to the editor at my local diocesan paper, the *St. Louis Review*.

He ran it ... and the *Review* is still running my articles. In the last five years, 37 diocesan papers have run pieces of my conversion story.

I'm married now to John Bossert. On Christmas Eve of 2007, John (who had vowed he would never become Catholic) told me he had been secretly studying with our parish RCIA leader. He was ready to join me in Mother Church.

On the Easter Vigil of 2008, we received the Eucharist for the first time as a family. ■



Denise Bossert entered the Catholic Church on August 14, 2005. Her journey began 18 months earlier with the death of her father, a Presbyterian minister. She inherited her father's personal library and discovered a book by St. Augustine in the bottom of one box. That book broke through her bias against Catholic saints and changed her life. Denise has an M.A. in literature. Once she discovered St. Augustine, Denise didn't stop there. She went on to read St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. Her life as a Protestant was over at that point. She had fallen in love with Catholic saints, and she wanted to belong to the Church the saints called home. Denise's husband entered the Church on Easter Vigil 2008. John and Denise are members of Immaculate Heart of Mary in New Melle, Missouri. Ms. Bossert began writing for The St. Louis Review three months before entering the Church. She continues to work as a Catholic freelance writer and has been published in 37 diocesan papers.

Prayer List



Clergy

- For Harry, a Baptist minister in Pennsylvania, that God in His providence would open a way to allow him to fulfill his decades-long dream of becoming a Catholic.
- For Sarah, a United Methodist youth minister in North Carolina, that as she approaches her reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, new opportunities would open up to her so she can use her gifts and training for ministry to God's people.
- For an Anglican minister in Arkansas, that he may be granted the grace to cross over the Tiber and find a way to use his gifts to build up the Catholic Church.
- For Doug, a Baptist minister in Texas, that the Lord would guide him to new employment and quiet his wife's heart, since she is anxious about what his converting will mean for their family.
- For a Disciples of Christ minister in Washington state, not only that the Holy Spirit would open doors for her return to the Church, but also that her heart would become completely open to the Catholic faith.
- For the wife of a Baptist minister in Nova Scotia, that not only may she be able to enter full communion with the Catholic Church, but also that her husband may be given the grace of conversion.
- For Jeff, a Pentecostal minister in Texas, that God would answer his questions and open his heart and mind to all the truths of the Catholic faith.
- For an Orthodox Presbyterian minister in Pennsylvania, that he may be given a deep peace that will dispel every fear and concern he has about how his conversion may affect his family and congregation.

■ For Patricia, a Presbyterian minister, that the Father would help her rest in His love, and that she would come to abide in the peace of Christ in the Church He founded.

■ For Randy, a cradle Catholic who is now a Church of God minister, that he may return to the Church of his youth, and that his wife and son may open themselves to the truths of the Church and come home to the fullness of the faith.

Lay

- For Michelle and Brien, that they may experience the fullness of a good Catholic marriage; that Michelle may receive the necessary courage to make the correct decisions about their marriage; and that Brien may fulfill the duties of a loving husband.
- For David and his wife, Pentecostals, that he would return to the Catholic Church, and that she would end her resistance to the Church, opening her heart and mind to receive new inspirations from the Holy Spirit that will guide her into the fullness of truth as a Catholic.
- For Patrick and his wife, each baptized in the Catholic Church, that they may have the gift of faith restored to them and become fully invigorated Catholics, capable of raising their children in the Church.
- For Stephen, who claims he is somewhere between atheism and agnosticism and resistant to the Catholic church, that he may tire of his separation from the truths of the Church so that he can find fulfillment through a successful reversion.
- For Ruth, an evangelical Christian in her nineties, that she may be open fully to the Holy Spirit and go beyond just being interested in the Church to full communion as a member in it.

■ For Cora, a cradle Catholic who received insufficient catechesis in her life, that she may yet learn and embrace the teachings of the Church, bringing her non-Catholic husband into the faith and encouraging their children, who are baptized Catholics, to come home to the Church.

■ For Jonathan and Leslie, that their love of Jesus Christ would bring them into an ever-deepening relationship with Christ's Church.

■ For Jim and his family, as they grieve the loss of a loved one.

■ For Edward, as he seeks understanding into the mysteries of the Catholic faith, that his heart and mind may be enlightened by God's grace.

■ For Mary, that her struggles with Marian devotion be put to rest as she discovers the wonderful gift Christ gave to us in His mother.

■ For a young man who was recently killed in a car accident. May Michael's soul rest in peace and his family find comfort.

■ For Louise's family to return to the sacraments.

■ For Clara's health and healing.

■ For Edward and his intentions.

■ For Raleigh to discern God's will for his life.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members, and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHN Prayer List, P. O. Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702. Or e-mail prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org.

We use only first names to preserve anonymity.

Turning Toward God Through the Rosary

With the encouragement of many great Catholic spiritual writers, I've come to understand prayer as a positioning of myself directly before God, no matter where I happen to be.

In the traditional sense, conversion means turning willfully into God's direction in response to the gift of faith and aided by the power of grace. Sin, on the other hand, involves turning away from God. Distractions, even good ones, can turn our attention away from God, and this is why Jesus encouraged us to lock ourselves away from distractions: "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matthew 6:6).

Growing in perfection and union with Christ involves turning fully and perfectly in his direction. Like so many others, I've discovered that the Rosary is a wonderful means to help us turn into God's direction through the intercession of Mary.

The Apostles' Creed

The Fathers of the Church taught that "as we pray, so we believe." They observed that our prayers spring forth from our beliefs. Prayer is a fruit and a sign of our faith.

It's no accident, then, that the Rosary begins with a statement of faith. By professing the Creed, we turn ourselves firmly in the direction of Jesus and the fullness of His Church, and we turn away from the myriad competing beliefs that would contradict our faith. We face Our Lord's direction mentally, so that our prayers can freely be said within this rule of faith.

Having entered in the correct "door" of the Creed, we are ready to pray next the Our Father.

The Our Father

Other than in Sunday worship, funerals, and weddings, I rarely "recited" the Lord's Prayer as a Protestant. I even have evangelical friends who insist we should never pray this prayer because they believe that Jesus never intended it as anything but a model. "Repeating it," they claim, "would be failing to heed His accompanying warning of mindless repetition!" (See Matthew 6:7-8.)

Of course, this isn't true. Millions of Christians throughout Church history, both Catholic and non-Catholic, would testify that this prayer need not be mindlessly repeated, but instead can serve as a profound conversation with God when recited in faith. Nevertheless, it's possible to get so lost in our distractions that once

we've refocused on the words of our prayer, we may not be certain that we said all the phrases, let alone prayed them.

Books on the Our Father by such authors as Dr. Scott Hahn, Fr. Thomas Dubay, and Fr. Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange help greatly, especially when we have time to meditate fully on the multiple meanings of each phrase. But more often than not, I pray the Our Father with the congregation gathered at Mass, when I pray the Liturgy of the Hours, or when I'm saying the Rosary while driving or walking. Especially when I'm driving or walking, it's hard to focus on the underlying meaning of each phrase, let alone keep my mind from wandering off into all the other stresses of my day.

The following approach, though, has helped me.

The great spiritual writers have generally divided the Our Father into seven "stanzas," and they have offered many good reasons for doing so. Nevertheless, encouraged by St. Paul's personal confession of surrender—"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20)—I have found it helpful to think of the Our Father as divided into five stanzas, each one helping me in a particular way to surrender myself to the Lord at that unique moment.

It seems to me that this intimate family prayer is first and foremost a prayer of conversion and re-commitment. Jesus gave it to us in the midst of His Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew chapters 5-7), and this context emphasizes surrender and detachment:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit... be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect... do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... you cannot serve God and mammon... do not be anxious about your life... about tomorrow... seek ye first the kingdom of God."

With that in mind, here's one way you can approach this prayer.

To start, in your mind's eye see yourself standing directly before Jesus, with five mental "locations" that represent five aspects of your life:

First, in front of you is the One to whom you are committed, God Himself.

Second, the spot where you stand is the "now" of your spiritual journey.

Third, to your left lies the past you are to leave behind.

Fourth, to your right is the future you must trust to God.

Fifth, behind you lie all those things on which you must turn your back.

Next consider how, if you divide the Our Father into five stanzas as noted below, they will correspond to these five “locations” in prayer.

Stanza One: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

This stanza calls you to adoration of the God who stands before you, with complete surrender to His will.

Stanza Two: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

This stanza reminds you that where you are standing now, in the present, you must detach yourself from everything unnecessary and ask only for what you truly need from God’s hand.

Stanza Three: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

This stanza directs your attention to the past (your “left”) to forget and forgive what has happened, wiping the record clean.

Stanza Four: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

This stanza turns your attention to the future (your “right”), calling you to relinquish into God’s hands all anxiety about what is to come.

Stanza Five: “Amen.”

This final stanza refers to all those things on which you must turn your back, because they take you away from Jesus. When you say, “Amen,” you are saying to those things behind you, “I am done with you.”

Thinking about these acts of commitment helps me grow closer to Jesus every time I pray the Our Father. And because my mind is always being led at least a little astray by distracting and sinful thoughts between each recitation of an Our Father, I can never recommit myself too often.

The Hail Mary

As a convert to the Catholic faith after forty years of an active Protestant faith walk, I struggled with my prayers to Mary and other saints, primarily because I had become centrally loyal to praying to Jesus. Other than in worship or public religious ceremonies, I rarely prayed to the Father or the Holy Spirit. My prayers were formally “to the Father through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.” But in private, it was always Jesus and me. Praying to Mary and other saints seemed disloyal—at least that’s what that nagging, accusatory inner voice kept saying.

I learned, of course, that asking Mary and the saints for intercessory help is valid and extremely efficacious. But this didn’t prevent me from becoming at times hopelessly distracted while repeating decades of the Hail Mary.



In time, however, I learned to pray the Hail Mary with a mental focus similar to the one I had developed in praying the Our Father. This approach helps me grow spiritually as I pray the Hail Mary, even when it’s repeated over and over during the recitation of the Rosary. I think of the Hail Mary as divided into three parts: one of veneration, one of petition, and one of adoration.

Part One is the veneration of Jesus’ mother, who is also my mother by adoption: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus; Holy Mary, Mother of God . . .”

Having positioned myself directly before God in the Lord’s Prayer—with the past, present, and future surrendered into His care—in my mind’s eye I first envision Mary standing affectionately beside Jesus, pointing to Him. The first part of the Hail Mary has three “stanzas,” and as I’m praying them, I recognize that each one draws my attention to Jesus with a key word: *Lord* (“the Lord is with thee”); *Jesus* (“the fruit of thy womb, Jesus”); and *God* (“Mother of God”).

Part Two is my humble petition for her intercession with her Son: “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” Continuing a longstanding tradition, I strike my breast as a sign of my sinfulness and need for God’s grace, which flows mightily through her.

Part Three is a traditional prayer of adoration, the Glory Be (in some traditions known as the *Gloria Patri*). This Trinitarian prayer ties our veneration and petition all together, leading us to re-confess in praise our love for God. Following an ancient tradition, I like to cross myself and bow slightly every time I address each person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I hope these hints from a prayer novice are at least a little helpful as you seek to turn fully and perfectly in God’s direction. But most importantly, as brothers and sisters in Christ, let’s pray without ceasing for one another and for the whole Church: laity, priests, deacons, bishops, religious, and especially our Holy Father.

— Sincerely In Christ, Marcus Grodi ■

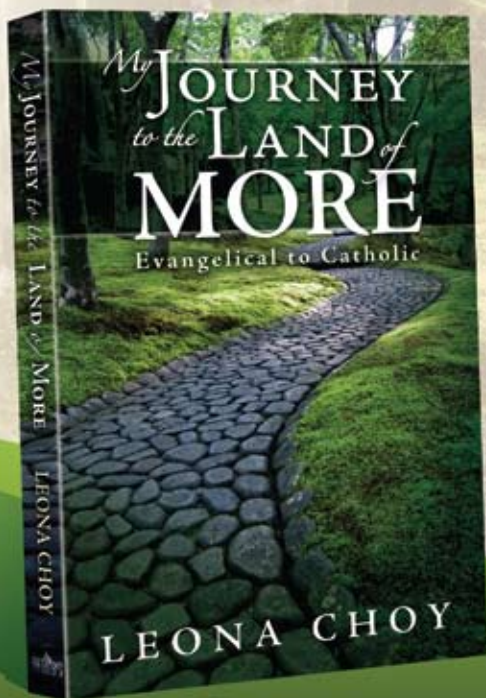
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— *Marcus C. Grodi*

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