

The Coming Home Network

JUNE 2005

MEMBER NEWSLETTER

Journeys Home

A Healing Reign *by Todd von Kampen*

Such a sunny Easter Saturday. Another lovely Nebraska spring was here. So was another soccer season for my son Joshua's fifth-grade team from his Catholic school.

We arrived at the field after an errand at one of Omaha's Catholic bookstores. That store was bustling that day, with conversations here and there about the nightwatch of the Church going on in Rome. Nothing apparently had changed overseas when we got out of the minivan. But the person so many were thinking about soon became the subject of conversation among parents in the stands—how he was doing, what he meant to us, how much had changed because God had put him there.

The game was over by 2:35 PM (9:35 PM at the Vatican.) One more errand to run. Then, as we turned to the Catholic radio station, the tone of the commentary was different. It sounded like the past tense. As we pulled into the Wal-Mart parking lot, we heard it. The bell. Tolling slowly.

Our Lord had called the pope home.

My hand reached over to my wife's; they gripped tightly. Memories flooded back from 12 years before, when we and the son in our van—then microscopic inside Joan's womb—had been close to John Paul II. The stadium. The mountains beyond. The rain. Ninety thousand people, mostly teens and young adults like ourselves, being lifted beyond ourselves by Dana's marvelous song:

*We are one body, one body in Christ,
And we do not stand alone.
We are one body, one body in Christ,
And He came that we might have life ...*

The roar. Such a roar as the pope circled the stadium in that glass "popemobile." Flags of so many nations flying. And those words, the words this native Lutheran had never expected to hear:



*The von Kampen family, from left to right:
Jonathan, Joshua, Annetta, Joan, Benjamin, and Todd.*

"Most of you are members of the Catholic Church; but others are from other Christian churches and communities, and I greet each one with sincere friendship. In spite of divisions among Christians, 'all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ... brothers and sisters in the Lord.'"

When John Paul II, opening World Youth Day in Denver, quoted those words from the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism of 1964—the year of my birth—I could no longer be neutral, let alone hostile, toward this pope. He had spoken as Joan had when she came unexpectedly into my life, as the priest who confirmed her and married us had when I challenged him on how salvation is obtained. "Faith

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John Paul II and Conversion

compiled by Marcus Grodi

Pope John Paul II always encouraged true and authentic conversion, both to Jesus Christ and to His Church. We could fill the newsletter with his quotes, but here are just a few to remind us how he made the water so much more welcome as he called us to “move out into the deep.”

Conversion is directed to holiness, since conversion “is not an end in itself but a journey towards God who is holy. To be holy is to be like God and to glorify his name in the works which we accomplish in our lives (cf. Mt 5:16)”. On the path of holiness, Jesus Christ is the point of reference and the model to be imitated: he is “the Holy One of God”, and was recognized as such (cf. Mk 1:24).

—*Ecclesia in America, 30*

All this needs to be said, since not a few people, precisely in those areas involved in the mission ad gentes, tend to separate conversion to Christ from Baptism, regarding Baptism as unnecessary. It is true that in some places sociological considerations associated with Baptism obscure its genuine meaning as an act of faith...It is also true that many profess an interior commitment to Christ and his message yet do not wish to be committed sacramentally, since, owing to prejudice or because of the failings of Christians, they find it difficult to grasp the true nature of the Church as a mystery of faith and love. I wish to encourage such people to be fully open to Christ, and to remind them that, if they feel drawn to Christ, it was he himself who desired that the Church should be the “place” where they would in fact find him.

—*Redemptoris Missio, 47*

Nowadays the call to conversion which missionaries address to non-Christians is put into question or passed over in silence. It is seen as an act of “proselytizing”; it is claimed that it is enough to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, that it is enough to build communities capable of working for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. What is overlooked is that every person has the right to hear the “Good News” of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling.

—*Redemptoris Missio, 46*

In our ecumenical age, marked by the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the Bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ’s disciples...The Bishop of Rome himself must fervently make his own Christ’s prayer for that conver-

sion which is indispensable for “Peter” to be able to serve his brethren. I earnestly invite the faithful of the Catholic Church and all Christians to share in this prayer. May all join me in praying for this conversion!

—*Ut unum sint, 4*

Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ’s mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his agape.

In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy Spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of people as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion. ...For the Catholic Church, then, the communion of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of the grace by which God makes them sharers in his own communion, which is his eternal life. Christ’s words “that they may be one” are thus his prayer to the Father that the Father’s plan may be fully accomplished, in such a way that everyone may clearly see “what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph 3:9). To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father’s plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ’s prayer: “Ut unum sint”.

—*Ut unum sint, 9*

This authentically evangelical process is not just a spiritual transformation realized once and for all: it is a whole lifestyle, an essential and continuous characteristic of the Christian vocation. It consists in the constant discovery and persevering practice of love as a unifying and also elevating power despite all difficulties of a psychological or social nature: it is a question, in fact, of a merciful love which, by its essence, is a creative love. In reciprocal relationships between persons merciful love is never a unilateral act or process. Even in the cases in which everything would seem to indicate that only one party is giving and offering, and the other only receiving and

In this life, conversion is a goal which is never fully attained: on the path which the disciple is called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, conversion is a lifelong task. While we are in this world, our intention to repent is always exposed to temptations. Since “no one can serve two masters” (Mt 6:24), the change of mentality (metanoia) means striving to assimilate the values of the Gospel, which contradict the dominant tendencies of the world. Hence there is a need to renew constantly “the encounter with the living Jesus Christ”, since this, as the Synod Fathers pointed out, is the way “which leads us to continuing conversion”.

taking (for example, in the case of a physician giving treatment, a teacher teaching, parents supporting and bringing up their children, a benefactor helping the needy), in reality the one who gives is always also a beneficiary. In any case, he too can easily find himself in the position of the one who receives, who obtains a benefit, who experiences merciful love; he too can find himself the object of mercy.

—Dives in misericordia, 14

Conversion (metanoia), to which every person is called, leads to an acceptance and appropriation of the new vision, which the Gospel proposes. This requires leaving behind our worldly way of thinking and acting, which so often heavily conditions our behavior. As Sacred Scripture reminds us, the old man must die and the new man must be born, that is, the whole person must be renewed “in full knowledge after

the image of the Creator” (Col 3:10). Strongly recommended on this path of conversion and quest for holiness are “the ascetical practices which have always been part of the Church’s life and which culminate in the Sacrament of forgiveness, received and celebrated with the right dispositions”. Only those reconciled with God can be prime agents of true reconciliation with and among their brothers and sisters.

—Ecclesia in America, 32

Conversion leads to fraternal communion, because it enables us to understand that Christ is the head of the Church, his Mystical Body; it

urges solidarity, because it makes us aware that whatever we do for others, especially for the poorest, we do for Christ himself. Conversion, therefore, fosters a new life, in which there is no separation between faith and works in our daily response to the universal call to holiness. In order to speak of conversion, the gap between faith and life must be bridged. Where this gap exists, Christians are such only in name. To be true disciples of the Lord, believers must bear witness to their faith, and “witnesses testify not only with words, but also with their lives”. We must keep in mind the words of Jesus: “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21). Openness to the Father’s will supposes a total self-giving, including even the gift of one’s life: “The greatest witness is martyrdom”... Yet

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conversion is incomplete if we are not aware of the demands of the Christian life and if we do not strive to meet them. In this regard, the Synod Fathers noted that unfortunately “at both the personal and communal level there are great shortcomings in relation to a more profound conversion and with regard to relationships between sectors, institutions and groups within the Church”. “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

—Ecclesia in America, 27



Marcus Grodi
is Founder and
President of
CHNetwork.



Quo Vadis

Where are You Going? by Jon Marc Grodi

It has been an interesting month for our *QV Youth Network*! Our numbers have continued to grow, sometimes slowly and sometimes in leaps and bounds. After not receiving any new inquirers into Catholicism for a long while, I received 4 new contacts, in a single week! (And all from different Protestant denominations.) Often I wonder whether I will receive enough Helpers to accommodate these sudden influxes of curious youth. God provides however; help comes at the most opportune moments, and somehow everything gets done.

The fruits that Jesus has produced through the network are a constant source of joy and inspiration in my life, and hopefully yours also. For instance, recently a number of youth have begun setting their plans in motion for attending RCIA classes and joining the Church. It is so awesome to see these teens not only searching out the truth for themselves but also being aids to each other's journeys. The joy and relief these teens feel when encountering others on a similar journey is regularly expressed to me by new inquirers. Many now associate regularly apart from *Quo Vadis* functions through MSN Instant Messenger and email. God is truly at work in their lives!

I obviously can find joy in this because it represents progress for the *QV Network* and more souls brought closer to Christ. However, my involvement in the lives of these youth has affected me at a deeper level in that most have become very dear friends. As I watch them study Catho-

lic doctrine, help each other discover it's truth, bravely face their peers, teachers, and family members, and strive to help all those around them understand the "leap-of-faith" they plan to make, I feel so proud of them in all that they have accomplished. I know for sure that God will use them to touch the lives of many people, Catholic and otherwise; they have already touched mine!

And of course we can't forget the *QV Helpers Network*! The helpers do so much to keep *Quo Vadis* up and running. Kat from New Mexico makes the weekly saint pages for the website, Benjamin from Ohio helps with the editing of the articles for the journals, and various other helpers like Sean (also from Ohio) take part in writing them! These teens have all volunteered their time to help out their fellow youth on the journey; Thank you Jesus for them!

For those of my fellow youth who may be reading this, I encourage you to check out

the website (www.chnquovadis.org) and see what we are about; we love hearing from new people! I also encourage you to consider attending the annual *CHN Deep in History Conference* held in November in Columbus, Ohio. In years past we have had a strong teen presence volunteering at the conference, and most teens are in *Quo Vadis*. We always get a lot out of the conference and I'm sure you would also.

I am grateful for all for the support you provide to the *Coming Home Network* in whatever form. You will remain in my prayers and in the prayers of all the youth in *Quo Vadis*. May God bless and keep you!



Jon Marc Grodi is Coordinator of *Quo Vadis* and has worked at *CHN* for almost 1 year.

Clergy on the Journey

Home at Last *by Jim Anderson*

Easter came early this year. That was just as well for the many, many candidates and catechumens aching to be received into full communion with the holy Catholic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each year, in the United States, between 150,000 and 160,000 adults are received into the Catholic Church and this year was no exception! Among the number of these new Catholic Christians, about 30 are members of the *Coming Home Network* and were formerly Protestant clergymen.

Below you will find the reflections of Monte Waddill, who pastored as a minister in the Southern Baptist Convention until very recently. He has been a member of *CHN* since January, 2002, and is just one of the many brothers and sisters in Christ who were recently received into full communion with the Church He founded.

"I am so happy now, I finally made it and was received in the arms of our Holy Mother Church on Saturday night at the Easter Vigil. Thanks to the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Heavenly Father. Thanks to Fr. Ed McDevitt and Fr. Joseph Pearce of the Congregation of the Oratory in Rock Hill, SC, as well as Bro. John Kummer, my RCIA leader.

I have also learned to thank Mary, our mother in the faith.

I was a Southern Baptist pastor for 18 years. Strangely, (well not really that strange) the ground for understanding the truth of the Catholic faith was laid in college and seminary while preparing for this Baptist ministry. I began early to wonder why we accepted that the church councils and leaders established the correct doctrine for Christians, but only up to a certain point. From there, Baptists and others pick and choose.

Other strong factors in this move were seeing the need for something

more than the purely symbolic meaning for the Lord's Supper. Baptists want to be Bible believers, but can't accept what Jesus said plainly in John 6 about his flesh and blood and the bread of life. But I did, especially when I stood and held the bread and the cup and spoke Jesus' own words, and knew by God's Spirit that it was literal. I preached that Jesus wanted to give us "real food," and soon I knew what that meant.

Now I have crossed over into the place Jesus intended when He prayed for us to be one. Who left, and where are we supposed to gather and return to be one? The answer was the Roman Catholic Church, lead by the successor to Peter. This goes against Baptist tradition and teaching, but it is the truth nonetheless.

I have had to leave behind good friends, even family members who think I am crazy. We worship in separate places now, and it is a pain deep in my heart. But once I knew the truth, I could not do less.

Certainly, every convert is a gift to the Church and represents a serious responsibility for her, not only because converts have to be prepared for Baptism through the catechumenate and then be guided by religious instruction, but also because—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

Besides, God called me to do this. The Lord asked, 'Wouldn't I go to any place on earth He directed? Then go into the Roman Catholic Church.' Hard words for a Baptist with a long lineage of Baptists and more than a few years invested in working to plant Baptist churches.

The Lord has given me new friends, and many that are not visible, but close in spirit. Many of you in the Coming Home Network are in that group, thank you."

As Monte asks, please pray for him, his wife and family, as well as for the many other new Catholics who are discovering the fullness of the faith given to God's people as a pure gift of grace by our Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God our Father.



Jim Anderson is Coordinator of Primaries and has worked at CHN for almost 4 years.

Helping 'em Home

“And the number of the disciples multiplied greatly...” (Acts 6:7).

So goes the continual work of the Holy Spirit, from the beginning on through this past Easter vigil, changing minds and hearts, calling people home. As mentioned in Jim’s article, an astounding number of adults, youth, and children entered the Church this year, and some of those were the direct result of your prayers and assistance. Sixteen men and women, who were once anti-Catholic or at least outside the Church, found their way home through the encouragement of letters, emails, the Forum, and phone calls from *CHNetwork Helpers*. Constantly I hear from lay inquirers and converts who thank us (and you!) for the assurance they receive that they are not facing the daunting hurdles alone but as a part of a loving family. My thanks again to each one of you who volunteers as a *Helper!* By answering this call to stand beside a sister or brother on the journey, you play an essential part in God’s plan for the New Evangelization.

The following are a sampling of the many letters of joy and thanksgiving we received immediately after Easter. If you know of anyone searching, please encourage them to contact us so we can link them up with a *Helper*. Or if you yourself would like to help someone on the journey, please contact me by the email.

So here I am about to be confirmed at the Easter Vigil. My heart is racing to what lies ahead; thanks to CHN it has been a wonderful experience.

—Former Anglican

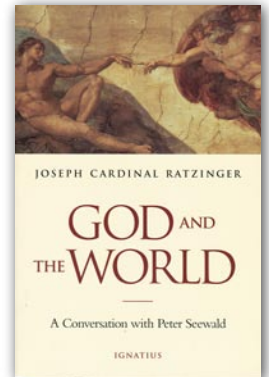
I was completely blown away by the liturgy over the Tridium. The Holy Mass was something I looked forward to with great anticipation, but what I experienced over this weekend is beyond my words.

—Former non-denominationalist

Featured Resource

GOD AND THE WORLD

A Conversation with Peter Seewald



During his years as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, well-known Vatican prelate **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger** has given three in-depth interviews. The first two interviews have become best selling books: *The Ratzinger Report* and *Salt of the Earth*. Because of the tremendous reception those books received, the Cardinal agreed to do another interview with journalist Peter Seewald, who had done the very popular *Salt of the Earth* interview. This third in-depth interview addresses deep questions of faith and the living of that faith in the modern world

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I came over with mixed emotions, wondering if what I had read about really existed. Yes, I did find some problems, but all that matters is the Eucharist. I am home!

—Former Lutheran Missouri Synod

If it were not for the CHN Forum and the aid of others at the CHNetwork, I doubt if I ever would have let go of the presuppositions and beliefs I held to. Thanks!

—Former Methodist

WWOOOWWW! The Vigil Mass was the most amazing experience of my life! I am Home.

—Former Presbyterian



Upcoming guests on the Journey-Home Program on EWTN, Mondays live at 8 PM EST

June 6
Rod Bennett
former Southern Baptist

June 13
Michael Coren
Revert

June 20
Walter Hooper
former secretary of
C. S. Lewis

June 27
Caroline Schermerhorn
Revert

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Tuesdays 1 AM & 10 AM
Wednesday 1 PM
Saturday 11 PM

Or listen on the Internet at
www.ewtn.com.

Upcoming Events

CHN Mixer & Luncheon

If you are attending the 2005 *Defending the Faith* Conference at Franciscan University and would like to attend the CHN Mixer on Friday night, or the Sunday Luncheon please contact Sharon by phone @ 740.450.1175 or by email, sharon@chnetwork.org.

Registration deadline is Friday, July 22!

June 11, 2005

Marcus Grodi
National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon
North Jackson, OH

July 22-24, 2005

Marcus Grodi
National Catholic Family Conference
Anaheim, CA

July 29-31, 2005

Marcus Grodi
Defending the Faith
Steubenville, OH

In celebration please pray for our Holy Father...

First Homily
Sistine Chapel, April 20, 2005

Theological dialogue is necessary. A profound examination of the historical reasons behind past choices is also indispensable. But even more urgent is that 'purification of memory,' which was so often evoked by John Paul II, and which alone can dispose souls to welcome the full truth of Christ. It is before Him, supreme Judge of all living things, that each of us must stand, in the awareness that one day we must explain to Him what we did and what we did not do for the great good that is the full and visible unity of all His disciples.



Pope Benedict XVI

The current Successor of Peter feels himself to be personally implicated in this question and is disposed to do all in his power to promote the fundamental cause of ecumenism. In the wake of his predecessors, he is fully determined to cultivate any initiative that may seem appropriate to promote contact and agreement with representatives from the various Churches and ecclesial communities. Indeed, on this occasion too, he sends them his most cordial greetings in Christ, the one Lord of all.

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in Jesus Christ, which is totally unmerited by us,” he had said.

The seed that God had planted through the cradle Catholic I married had been watered. The adult Christian journey that had begun April 2, 1978, the day of my confirmation in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), had taken yet another turn. Less than five years after Denver, I became a Catholic.

And now, 27 years to the day after my Lutheran confirmation, the era of John Paul II was over...in the eyes of the secular world. Never in ours. And never in the Kingdom of God.

A cry for truth, a cry for love

“Be not afraid,” the man born Karol Wojtyla said upon his installation as pope and many, many times thereafter. His Polish countrymen heard it and found the strength and courage that crumbled an Iron Curtain and a Berlin Wall as surely as God flattened the walls of Jericho. The world, believers and nonbelievers alike, will remember him always for that.

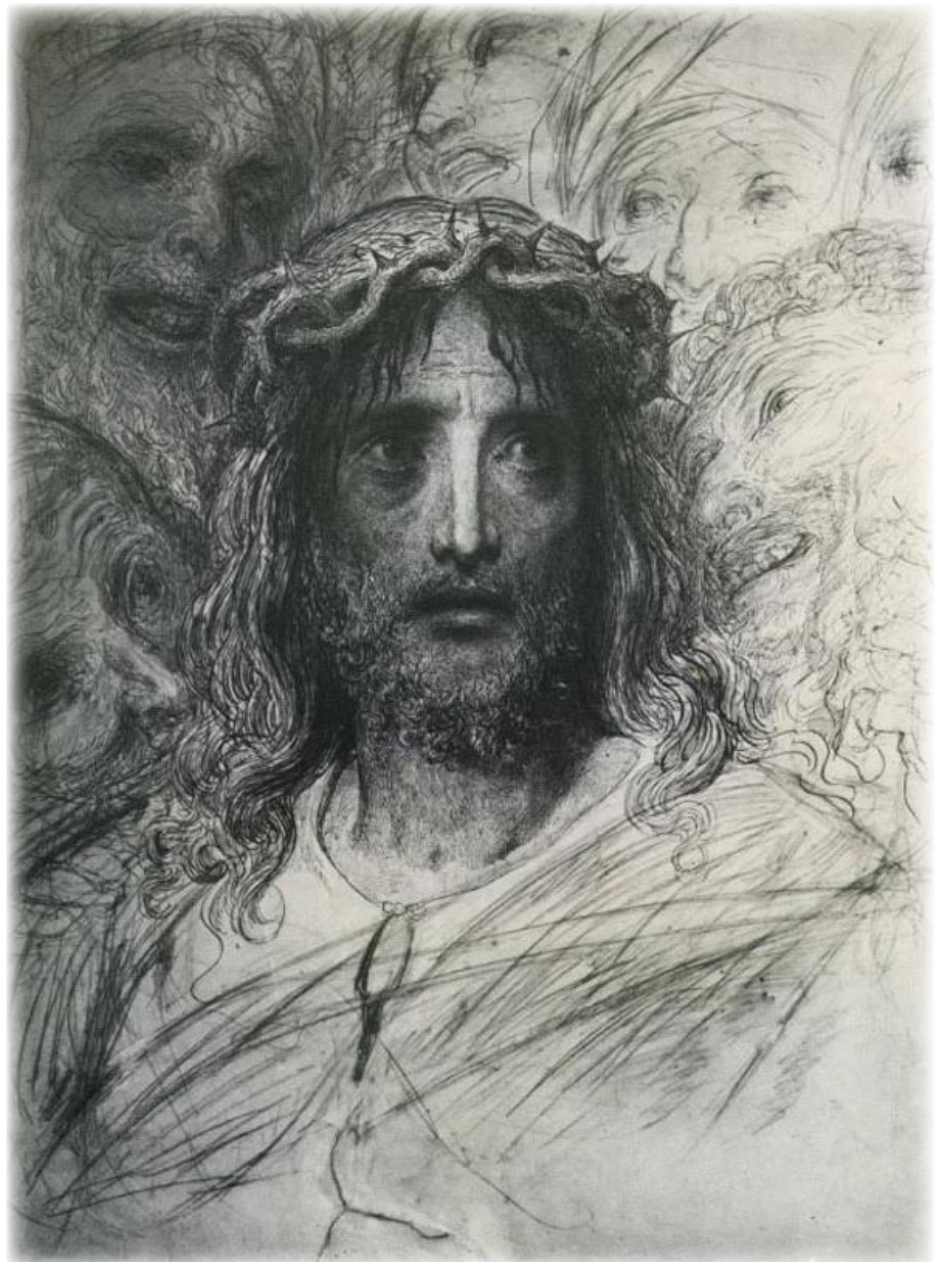
But even then, John Paul II was speaking primarily to all who believe and are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. Don’t be afraid, he said, to proclaim the gospel, to speak the truth in love. He challenged Catholics to speak their timeless, God-given truth in modern ways, just as Vatican II, which he attended from first to last, had desired. And he challenged not only Catholics but also their Christian “separated brethren,” long separated from Rome, to not be afraid to forgive each other, to listen to each other, to seek and live the fullness of God’s truth as so many generations have believed it to be preserved in the Catholic Church.

The ears of many—too many—remain closed. But hundreds of thousands in this country alone have heard and heeded the message every year as they reconciled with Rome. Over my 20 years as an adult member of the Mis-

souri Synod, the message came to me. And the pope was a decisive influence in that. When he quoted Vatican II in Denver, he seemed to be aiming those words right at me. Were it not for John Paul’s ministry and his uncompromising witness, I would not be a Catholic today.

To be honest, that was a miracle in itself. Space doesn’t permit me to detail all the twists and turns in my adult faith journey, of which I have written previously. (See the note at the end of this article.) But openness to the Catholic message doesn’t come easily to “confessional Lutherans,” such as those in the LCMS, who zealously

guard the doctrinal stances developed at “ground zero” of the Reformation. Their prime beliefs are summarized easy enough for this discussion. We are totally incapable of earning our way to salvation. We are saved by grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), because of Christ alone (*solus Christus*). The Scriptures are, as stated in Article II of the Missouri Synod’s constitution, “the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice.” The Lutheran Confessions—the Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and the key writings of Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon and other early Reform-



ers—are “a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.”

What about the Catholics? In the synod’s view, they unjustly interpose the priesthood, good works and empty rituals between us and God. They wrongly pray to, even worship, Mary and the saints. They define seven sacraments when Christ, as they see it, only instituted two (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper). Above all, the papacy—if not necessarily individual popes—arrogates to itself the power that belongs only to God. Indeed, the LCMS “Brief Statement” of 1932 declared, “the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures concerning the Antichrist have been fulfilled in the Pope of Rome and his dominion.”

It takes a miracle indeed to overcome such hostility, built up between both sides over five centuries and institutionalized by the Missouri Synod at its founding in 1847. Yet that miracle already was brewing at the time when I was born, when Bishop Karol Wojtyla was among those Catholic leaders recasting the Church’s modern witness at Vatican II. It’s that miracle that I wish to focus on at this time.

It was in the Decree on Ecumenism that the Council Fathers codified Pope John XXIII’s desire to recover Christian unity. It included not only the words that John Paul II repeated in Denver but also a declaration that “men of both sides were to blame” for the lack of unity and that those outside Catholicism who have been baptized and believe in Christ are in “a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.” That means we’re all in this together—we all have a duty to seek unity, as Jesus prayed so fervently in the Gospel of John.

It was a blessing to me that this call was embraced by at least a portion of the major U.S. Lutheran church bodies of my childhood—even in the Missouri Synod, where the cause of dialogue was championed by Arthur Carl Piepkorn, a longtime theology

professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

Though he retained doubts about Rome, Piepkorn also believed and taught his students that the Reformation never was intended to split the Church—indeed, that if Rome ever perceived justification as Lutherans did and the other points of difference could be properly resolved, the reason for a separate Lutheran Church would disappear. He embraced Vatican II’s call for dialogue in a sermon in 1965:

Our separation is bad not only because it presents the constant temptation to perpetuate divisions because of some vested interest in the status quo, no matter how laudably we manage to disguise it. Our separation is bad not only because it tends to focus attention on peripheral issues rather than on the central issue of forgiveness of sins by God’s grace for Christ’s sake through faith and on the central task of being the body of Christ in the world. Our

...openness to the Catholic message doesn’t come easily to “confessional Lutherans,”

separation is bad chiefly because it keeps the body of Christ from functioning as it should. ...Let us see in this the real tragedy of our separation and use the opportunities that are now opening to us to fulfill our ministry to one another according to our individual vocations and opportunities.

Through 10 rounds of U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogues—in which Piepkorn was a major player before his 1973 death—that search for common ground has continued and found surprising levels of agreement. Sadly, the Missouri Synod’s openness toward ecumenism was, by and large, a collateral casualty of a bitter 1970s struggle over Scriptural interpretation and synodical authority that has flared anew in this decade. However, it never fully died out, as witnessed in the very renewal of that LCMS civil war—a renewal touched off by a district

president who prayed at an interfaith service after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In any event, the ecumenical seed was planted and watered. I came of age in the LCMS without such a strong tug of anti-Catholicism—and with a healthy measure of openness to God’s will and a burning desire to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission.

Enter John Paul II, though I didn’t perceive the difference he was making until years later in my faith journey. God had other things to teach me first as He steered my life in most unexpected directions. He first gave me a secular vocation—newspaper journalism—instead of an LCMS music-teaching career. Then He gave me a cradle Catholic—a Catholic!—to share my life, that secular vocation and a memorable odyssey that taught us to trust totally in Him.

Then God gave me—or, rather, revealed—His chief earthly shepherd by sending me to cover World

Youth Day while my wife participated with a group from her parish. At that point, I admired John Paul only as a world statesman. I still was strongly convinced that the Missouri Synod best preserved the faith Christ had bequeathed to us. There was no reason for me to believe a pope could, or would, affect that judgment.

And yet he did.

“We all bear the guilt”

I had received clues already from sitting in Catholic pews with Joan and debating doctrine with her. There was this hint that the Church was re-evaluating Luther, that his teachings might not be quite as un-Catholic as once thought. Now there was what the pope had said about justification at World Youth Day—and the fire for the Lord that the Holy Spirit lit through John Paul at the event’s Saturday night

vigil in Cherry Creek State Park, near Denver.

In three impassioned talks, John Paul implored many thousands of young people to spread their faith and promote a culture of life. “I ask you to have the courage to commit yourselves to the truth,” he said. “Have the courage to believe the good news about life which Jesus teaches in the gospel. Open your minds and hearts to the beauty of all that God has made and to His special, personal love for each one of you. Young people of the world, hear His voice! Hear His voice and follow Him!”

This fire that the Holy Spirit lit through the Holy Father in Denver—and every time the pope encountered young people all over the world—is still burning and purifying His Church. So is the Catechism of the Catholic Church, released in English the year after Denver. It has done so much to bring order to the chaos that followed Vatican II as some sought to appropriate the Church’s quest to speak to a new age for their own ends.

Both of these steps helped purge in me the skepticism about Catholicism that Lutherans are taught to engage from birth. So did *Ut Unum Sint*, John Paul’s great 1995 encyclical on ecumenism and one of many examples in which the pope sought reconciliation with non-Catholic Christians and implored them to leave the past behind, possibly under a reconfigured papacy. Their “memory is marked by certain painful recollections,” he wrote. “To the extent that we are responsible for these, I join my Predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness.”

And so did the pope’s 1996 trip to Paderborn, Germany, the last of three trips he made to the nation where Lutheranism was born. As on those previous occasions, John Paul confronted the Reformation legacy head-on:

Luther’s thinking was characterized by considerable emphasis on the individual, which meant that the awareness of the requirements of society became

weaker. Luther’s original intention in his call for reform in the Church was a call to repentance and renewal to begin in the life of every individual.

There are many reasons why these beginnings nevertheless led to division. One is the failure of the Catholic Church...and the intrusion of political and economic interest, as well as Luther’s own passion, which drove him far beyond what he originally intended into radical criticism of the Catholic

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Church, of its way of teaching.

We all bear the guilt. That is why we are called upon to repent and must all allow the Lord to cleanse us over and over.

Finally, there was the most astounding gesture of all toward Luther’s spiritual heirs: the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, the fruit of all those years of Lutheran-Catholic dialogues in America and Europe. Built on the concept that both sides on certain issues might be saying the same thing in different ways—a concept expressed both by the early U.S. dialogues and in *Ut Unum Sint*—this document, concluded on Reformation Day 1999 between the Vatican and the church bodies of the Lutheran World Federation, included such statements as these:

Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works....

Justification takes place “by grace alone,” by faith alone, the person is justified “apart from works” (Romans 3:28). “Grace creates faith not only when faith begins in a person but as long as faith lasts” (Thomas Aquinas,

Summa theologiae). The working of God’s grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive (cf. Philippians 2:12 ff.). “As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit...” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 65).

By that time, I had been a Catholic for nearly a year. For God had intervened directly once more. Through Scott and Kimberly Hahn’s moving joint conversion story, *Rome Sweet Home*, I began to find the Scriptural proofs for Catholic teachings I long had sought. One by one, the bricks of my mighty Lutheran fortress turned to dust.

Lutherans did believe, I had held and now confirmed, that although one indeed cannot be saved without faith in Christ, one also must live out one’s faith—do good works—lest that faith be lost. And Catholics did believe that this living of the faith was impossible without God’s grace. It all begins and ends with God—a “circle of eternal life,” if you will.

Moreover, Catholics didn’t worship Mary and the saints; they asked them to pray for them as fellow members of one timeless Body of Christ. The seven sacraments did have a Biblical basis. The Eucharist was a sacrifice—the one, single sacrifice on Calvary, re-presented in the liturgy. And, in trying to uphold Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist while rejecting the Catholic view of exactly what happened (transubstantiation), Luther had taken a position that was Scripturally unjustified.

Most critically, I found that the authority Luther sought to claim, and that the Missouri Synod upheld, was fatally flawed as well. For sola Scriptura is in effect a mere slogan. Both Rome and Missouri have their own versions of a threefold authority structure – not only Scripture, but a Great Tradition that sums up their church’s teachings and guides their interpretation of Scripture (in Missouri’s case, the Lutheran Confessions) and a teaching authority

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(what Catholics call the magisterium) that protects and transmits that interpretation.

Catholics cite the Scriptures in defending the teaching authority of pope and bishops and the transmission of that teaching authority over time via apostolic succession. I finally asked: Where in Scripture could Luther, and Lutherans, find their authority to cast aside teachings they disagreed with?

Nowhere

I had come to fully perceive the tragedy of the Reformation—a tragedy caused by the very human failings of the Church’s members. In the fullness of God’s time, that message had come to me. And it has come to so many ex-Protestants who now are spreading that message—the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus (one of those former Missouri Synod students of Arthur Carl Piepkorn), Scott and Kimberly Hahn, Marcus Grodi, Jeff Cavins and many, many more.

And God saw fit to use this pope, this man born Karol Wojtyla, to help bring all of us across the Tiber to embrace the fullness of the spiritual treasure Christ left in His Church’s care.

Grant us peace

John Paul II begged all separated brethren—Oriental and Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, other Protestants—for forgiveness on behalf of the Church. Alas, most have yet to grant it...and the Missouri Synod and its even more conservative cousins have yet to even officially acknowledge the plea.

But the plea lives on, for it comes from God Himself. And whether a church

body ever says it’s listening, the plea comes to each of us. It pleads for our conversion from our pride, to let Christ take us, as He took Peter and the apostles, where we do not intend to go. He wishes all who confess His name to enjoy the fullness of His grace, to follow the entirety of His teachings, to benefit from all the many ways He touches us through His Word, His sacraments, His creatures, His world.

Through the horrors of World War II, the oppression of communism, the struggle for freedom and the siren song of the culture of death, John Paul II brought that message to the world as perhaps no pope has since St. Peter himself. He saw himself as “the first servant of unity,” as he wrote in *Ut Unum Sint*, and he pursued that unity to his last breath. “How can I not recall so many non-Catholic Christian brothers!” he wrote during the Great Jubilee of 2000 in his will and spiritual testament, revealed upon his death.

Catholics have no doubt that he prays even more fervently in our Lord’s presence for the unity of the people of God he loved so much. And so pray Joan and I and the four children God has given us.

The morning after the Holy Father died, we were preparing for 8 AM

Mass. I would accompany on the piano as usual. Our two oldest sons, Jonathan and Joshua, would be servers. Our family was more Catholic than either of us could have imagined when God brought us together...and even as we heard those amazing words in Denver.

I knew what my instrumental prelude would be: “We Are One Body,” done reflectively instead of exuberantly, with a melodic quote at the end from one of our favorite songs by Michael W. Smith: “Just leave it to Me...I’ll lead you home.”

Then the radio played a different song by Smith. Suddenly I was compelled to replay it on our stereo. The words burned into my heart. The tears welled up. It seemed God had sent it to forever tie the weekend of the pope’s passing to that rainy day in Denver and the incredible years of John Paul II:

*Healing rain, it comes with fire
So let it fall and take us higher
Healing rain, I’m not afraid
To be washed in Heaven’s rain.
Healing rain is falling down,
Healing rain is falling down,
I’m not afraid,
I’m not afraid ...*

Todd von Kampen, 41, is a journalist based in Omaha, Neb. He became a Catholic on March 29, 1998, after a lifetime in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He and his wife, Joan, attend Church of the Blessed Sacrament in Omaha with their children, Jonathan, 14; Joshua, 11; Benjamin, 4; and Annetta, 2.

Todd’s full conversion story, “We Do Not Stand Alone,” may be found on the CHNetwork Web site (www.chnetwork.org) as well as in Timothy Drake’s *There We Stood, Here We Stand: 11 Lutherans Rediscover Their Catholic Roots*, published by 1stBooks Library and available through the *CHNetwork*.



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