



## June 2013 Newsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Led by the Good Shepherd to the Catholic Church

By Ed Hopkins

I was raised in a small-town, Southern Baptist church in Virginia where I, along with my sister, my two brothers, and our parents, attended Sunday School and church nearly every Sunday that I can remember. In my early teen years, I responded to a preacher's invitation to accept Christ as my Lord and Savior and was baptized. The experience of the waters of baptism seemed to be one of re-birth. I felt as though my sins were washed away and there was a new beginning and opportunity for me ahead. However, I did not experience much growth in grace during my later high school years and I went away to college in 1970 very disappointed with my hometown and the Christians that I knew.

### College ministry

I was a religiously interested skeptic at that time, but a period of soul-searching and contacts with evangelical friends at college led me back to faith. I began to seriously pray and study Scripture. Within a couple of years I began to consider theological seminary and preparation for ministry.

During these college years, I was involved with a campus ministry group, the Navigators, that sought to make disciples of the Lord Jesus through a process of discipleship they saw outlined in 2 Timothy 2:2, “...and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust

to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” This campus ministry taught me a deep respect for the Scriptures (but now I think during that time, I learned some rather dubious interpretations of Scripture). Surely, Paul's words to Timothy are in the context of establishing apostolic leadership for the Church. Timothy was a bishop, ordained by Paul to have oversight over the Christians in Ephesus and perhaps other cities. Timothy was to ordain elders and deacons, root out heresy, and preserve the Faith. The context was nothing like what we were attempting to do with young men and women in college.

We tended to miss the corporate dimension of the New Testament faith — discipleship for us was a very personal, individual thing. During the last year or two of college, some of us began to see the inadequacy of the model we had been taught, and our campus fellowship began to have more the atmosphere of a house church, including celebration of the Lord's Supper.

I had come to see that the New Testament had much to say about the Body of Christ, the Church: a divinely appointed organization with structure, discipline, and offices. I finally joined a small Presbyterian church, though I was not yet fully “Reformed” or Presbyterian in my theology. The doctrine of the Church,

*“Journeys Home” is continued on page 2* ►

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

along with the issues of worship and sacraments, would become major areas of interest in my future studies.

### Searching for a church home

Following graduation, I married my wife, Debi, and a year later, we were blessed with a child. Then in the summer of 1976 we moved to Jackson, Mississippi, where I began studies at Reformed Theological Seminary. Moving several hundred miles away from family was a significant step of faith, but the Lord provided for our needs.

We lived in an apartment a few miles from campus in downtown Jackson, just a few blocks from the State Capitol building. Also downtown was a Catholic church. One Saturday I rode out on my bike for a time of prayer, and passed this church. I stopped, went in, and noticed the inscription over the doorway, taken from John 10:16: “There shall be one flock, one shepherd.” I entered the sanctuary — impressed with its beauty — and prayed. Something stirred within me. I went away with a small glimmer of Catholicism traced on my consciousness.

In the first year of seminary, we studied church history, one of my favorite fields of study. I went beyond the required readings and explored the writings of the early Church Fathers. In their writings, I found a world very different from that of the Evangelical and Reformed Christianity of my experience.

Around this time, our family began to worship with a house church that was called New Covenant Catholic Church. This was a group of young people, mostly in their 20s and 30s, who were led by a group of men formerly in leadership positions with the evangelical ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Mildly charismatic, much of the teaching of this group was concerned with recovering the teaching of the

early Church. There was also a heavy emphasis on “shepherding,” which was found in many, new house churches in that era. We left this fellowship, mostly because of this “shepherding” approach that we thought to be heavy handed and suspicious. A few years later, this group became part of the Evangelical Orthodox church, which was later received by the Antiochian Orthodox church.

I was seeking a more ancient, catholic expression of the faith, which these folks also were seeking, though, at the time we were there, they had not yet quite figured out where they were going. The rest of our years in Jackson we worshiped with a non-denominational church that was heavily involved in social outreach and community development. I never really felt at home theologically, but I admired and supported the mission work of this community and it was a place of good fellowship and support. This was a church that transcended racial and cultural lines — something not often seen in the Deep South in those days. It seemed as though this was the way the Kingdom of God should be. I later found this concern for racial inclusiveness and social justice very effectively realized in the Catholic Church.

### “Reformed” way of thinking

My seminary experience was an enjoyable one. I studied hard, made good grades, and this experience was intellectually fulfilling. I grew more Calvinistic, but was slow to embrace a consistently “Reformed” way of thinking. To my shame, however, it seems I absorbed an anti-Catholic bias during my time there — or perhaps the bias was already there and the seminary only reinforced it. The reality was that I knew hardly any Catholics and never seriously studied what the Catholic Church taught. *“Journeys Home” is continued on page 4* ▶

## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television and radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET  
*The Best of the Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET  
*The Best of the Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

**June 3**

Maria Romine\*  
Former Presbyterian

**June 10**

Lou Everett\*  
Former Jehovah's Witness

**June 17**

*The Journey Home International*

**June 24**

Deacon Scott Jablonski\*  
Former Protestant

\*Schedule is subject to change.

# Conversions: Twenty Years and Counting

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell



The Coming Home Network International is twenty years old this year. Who would ever have dreamed when Marcus Grodi began it as a small newsletter in 1993 that it would grow into a major Catholic apostolate? As one bishop told Marcus, “We are glad you’re here. There’s no one doing what you do in the Church today.” The CHNetwork has been a privileged vantage point from which to view God’s children finding their way home to the Catholic Church.

In Catholic circles you often hear the question, “Are you a convert?” addressed to those who did not grow up in the Church. A new term has gained currency in the last twenty years: revert. Reverts are those who have “turned back” (from the Latin *revertere*) to the Church, often after being involved in Protestant churches for some years. It seems that their Baptism never ceases to draw these cradle Catholics back to Holy Mother Church. And the Trinitarian Baptisms of non-Catholics operate the same way. They too are being pulled in, as by a tractor beam, into the fullness of the Faith.

As I have been writing my own conversion story over the last months, two things have struck me between the eyes: 1) my joy and gratitude to God for allowing me to see and to embrace the Church in all her fullness, and 2) my realization that membership in the Catholic Church is not a destination but a definitive beginning of lifelong conversion.

Whether we were brought up in the Church or outside it, one thing is certain. Conversion is an ongoing process extending over our whole lifetime. The Church’s official teaching, as expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, makes this clear, “Christ’s call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, ‘clasping sinners to her bosom, (is) at once holy and always in need of purification, (and) follows constantly the path of penance and renewal’” (CCC 1428). Our first conversion is our Baptism when we receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38) but this must be followed by a second conversion, as St. Ambrose reminds us, “there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance” (CCC 1429). Our life of love and sacrifice is our way of expressing “our tears of repentance.”

Lest we think that this process is all on us, the Church places before us St. Peter the Apostle as an example of ongoing conversion. Even after his stunning profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:13-20), and his bold affirmation of never denying Jesus (Mt 26:33), his human frailty over-

whelmed him, showing how fickle and capricious he could be. And there is a lot of Peter in all of us. Even St. Paul lamented his own moral failures (see Rom 7:14-20) as a believer. It was only after Jesus’s restoring love that Peter could resume his ministry of feeding the sheep (Jn 21:1-19). The *Catechism* reminds us that conversion is God’s work in us, “This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a contrite heart, drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first” (CCC 1428).

The theological foundation of the Church’s call to repeated conversion lies in the understanding that salvation is an inward renewal effected by the Holy Spirit (cf. Tit 3:5). This infusional view of grace and justification grows out of the Incarnation, the truth that God came in the flesh. It might have been theoretically possible for God to forgive our sins from a distance by a mere declaration but He chose to send us His Son, the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity. This fact determines the nature of salvation. God works in and through physical reality to bring us supernatural grace. This is why the Church views Baptism as an actual conduit of grace and forgiveness. And it also explains why the Church offers us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As we continue to receive more and more grace, we grow in holiness over time. And as we grow more “pure in heart,” we move ever closer to our ultimate goal of the Beatific Vision, i.e. of seeing God.

The Church’s doctrine gives us an explanation of *why* we need constant conversion but it is the Church’s great saints that guide us in the *how* of conversion. Their collective teaching shows us that we must all pass through the three stages of the spiritual life: purification, illumination, and union. Conversion begins in, and never seems to leave, the process of cleansing (purification) which strips our souls of sin and self-orientation in order to grow in the love of God. As God purges us, He also enlightens us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and shows us both how to love God more and to live a life of love and service to our neighbor. Conversion leads through the door of purification into the chamber of illumination. In that room we find another door on the other side which leads to our final resting place in the heart of God.

Even the most mature Christian feels an unsettledness about his life because he knows how much he needs conversion. St. Augustine seems to have captured it well: “You made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in You” (*Confessions* 1:1). ■

“ [Conversion] is the movement of a contrite heart...by grace to respond to the merciful love of God...”

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

I did come to embrace, however, a deep respect for the ancient creeds, and therefore for the teaching of the early Church. It was my understanding that the Reformers also wanted to go back to the early Church Fathers and thus reform the church to what it was before the “corruption of the Middle Ages.” I have since learned that Reformation era scholarship knew comparatively little of the writings of the earliest centuries beyond the New Testament. While Lutherans retained much of Catholic tradition and liturgy, the Reformed movement, and especially the Presbyterians, generally threw out anything that could not be found in the Bible.

The principle of *sola Scriptura* was the touchstone of orthodoxy at my seminary. It was a given, an axiom, and certainly not debatable. To question this principle was practically to question the faith itself. One might as well object to the deity of Christ as to question whether or not the Bible alone is the final authority for faith and practice. I don’t think I ever asked, “But does the Bible itself teach that the Bible is the only authority?” Now I have come to see that the Bible does not teach that the Bible is the only authority. I see that the Bible *does* teach, however, that Christians are to observe the traditions and the teachings, as well as the writings of the Apostles.

I must credit my seminary professors for clarifying how the New Testament canon was shaped. I learned that it was the Church that determined the canon. I don’t think the implications of this reality were drawn out for me then, as I see them now, of course. Nevertheless, the historical reality is that the authority of the Church did form a canon. It was not left up to the interpretation of individuals.

By the time of my seminary graduation, I had come to embrace most of the Reformed faith as taught in the Westminster Standards (the doctrinal standards of historic Presbyterianism), though I could not see the teaching of a “limited atonement” in Scripture. This made me what we called a “four-point” as opposed to a “five-point” Calvinist. I also struggled with the doctrine of infant Baptism until my senior year. Writing a research paper attempting to prove the opposite, I became convinced that infant Baptism was proper.

### **Ordained ministry introduced me to Catholics**

After graduation, I was called to a small Presbyterian church near Chattanooga, Tennessee, where I was ordained and served as a pastor. A few years later my family, now with two daughters and two sons, moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, where I was pastor of another Presbyterian church for several years. In Shreveport, I first had the opportunity to come to know many Catholics, both clergy and laity. In knowing these dear Christians, many of my prejudices against Catholicism were demolished.

I was active in the Right to Life movement, eventually heading up and helping reestablish the local chapter of the National Right to Life committee. Of course, many of the most dedicated advocates for the life of the unborn were Catholic. As I got to know them, I found them to be devout and sincere men and women who loved Christ. I was able to spend time with several priests and once had a visit with the local Catholic bishop. I was always warmly received and my position as a Protestant pastor acknowledged with respect. During this time, my wife taught at the local Catholic high school, which gave us both more opportunity to see the world of Catholic life and faith. One of our Catholic friends from Shreveport prayed for me over the years and gently urged me towards considering the Catholic Church with occasional gifts of tapes and books. I now believe her faithfulness in prayer and gifts she shared were divinely instrumental in our coming into communion with the Catholic Church.

### **“There is one body and one spirit...”**

I returned to Virginia a few years later, as pastor of another Presbyterian church, but I had become increasingly restless in pastoral ministry and resigned from the pastorate to open a bookshop in downtown Lynchburg. At this same time, my wife and I became involved in the work of a classical, Christian school, associated with the Reformed Episcopal Church. The small parish affiliated with the school was without a minister and I was asked to preach for them on a few occasions. This became a regular, part-time job and, as I learned the prayer book for liturgy and studied the Episcopal tradition, I found it increasingly appealing. In January of 1997, I was received into that denomination and became rector of that parish.

Over nearly fifteen years of using the prayer book and studying Anglicanism, I moved farther away from my Calvinistic perspective, though for most of my time in that church I would have thought of myself as an “evangelical catholic.” That is, I had a high regard for the ancient church, particularly the creeds, and the liturgy (in a fairly low-church expression). Yet, I came to believe in a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the sacramental efficacy of Baptism. I once would have seen these as primarily symbolic, now I regarded these as vehicles of grace and among the ordinary appointed means for salvation. I came to believe that “outside the church there is no salvation,” that the Church is the Ark of God, but I still thought of that “one, holy, Catholic church” as the “invisible” church, as it was obviously broken into too many pieces to think of it as having a visible unity.

Even so, if the Church is one, as Paul declares, “there is one body and one spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:4-5), how is that unity to be known today? If our Lord prays for the unity of the Church, what is our responsibility to seek and affect that unity? *“Journeys Home” is continued on page 5* ►

## A Happy Anniversary

By Kevin Lowry



For our anniversary issue this month, Marcus asked me to share some of the things we've been discovering as a staff over the past twenty years – although I can only personally attest to the past eighteen!

I was first introduced to Marcus Grodi back in the mid-1990s. We hit it off immediately, and found that we had much in common. We had both come into full communion with the Catholic Church in 1992 along with our wives. Marcus and my father were both former Presbyterian ministers and our families shared a friendship with Fr. Ray and Ruth Ryland.

As a young CPA, the Coming Home Network International became my first client, and introduced me to the world of non-profit organizations. I recall assisting Marcus in the transition of CHNetwork from being a supporting organization of Franciscan University to an independent non-profit.

A couple years later, I was honored to join the Board of Directors as Treasurer. It was a great experience serving alongside other committed Catholics such as Fr. Ryland Dr. Paul Thigpen, and Dr. Ken Howell. I always admired the wholehearted dedication Marcus brought to the organization, and his sincere leadership through good times and bad.

My secular career brought my family to Columbus, Ohio, where I continued to work with a large CPA firm. Soon, we reached a turning point with the birth of our seventh child, who had profound medical challenges. Imagine our gratitude when our son David was spiritually taken under the wing of Fr. Ryland and the rest of the CHNetwork. As it turned out, David's prognosis is good (despite some ongoing concerns) and the child we feared might not survive his birth recently turned 10!

Through this difficult situation, I re-evaluated my career priorities and left my CPA firm, joining a large corporation. Several years later, still mindful of my family commitments (and now with eight children), the Lord provided a path to come on board full-time with the CHNetwork. It has been a privilege serving our members along with such a dedicated and talented staff.

As Chief Operating Officer, the essence of my role is facilitating the success of others. I happily serve as a sounding board for Marcus, oversee the business and administrative aspects of the apostolate, and work with numerous clergy members who are seeking employ-

ment or experiencing financial difficulties.

Over the past twenty years, we have often reflected on the steady stream of non-Catholic clergy who have expressed interest in the Church at one point or another. There are now well over 2,000 such individuals, and we continue to be contacted by two to five in a typical week. Around half are Catholic, while the other half are not. We pray for them all.

Yet there's even more to the story. Over its twenty year history, CHNetwork has been privileged to reach a diverse audience all around the globe. Did you know we have distributed over two million monthly newsletters? In addition, we have delivered over three hundred thousand CHResources – including books, CDs, DVDs, booklets, and other items. *The Journey Home* show, thanks to EWTN, has been on the air for over fifteen years and reaches literally millions of people each week.

The internet has provided an extraordinary opportunity (unforeseen in 1993) to spread the good news in unprecedented ways. *The Journey Home* YouTube videos and *Deep in Scripture* radio show archives continue to touch lives around the world. Our website, blog, forum, and social media presence are all ways we seek to build relationships and encourage individuals along the path of conversion – by pointing every soul to Jesus Christ and His Church.

Our work at CHNetwork is fueled by prayer and gratitude. We are overwhelmed with the generosity of our donors. Through your faithful support, we are able to be here – whether in person or by phone, email, social media, etc. – to serve those the Lord sends our way. Those impacted by our apostolate are many and varied. We pray for all those who contact us, even those who contact us only once, never to be heard from again. We pray for laypeople experiencing difficulties in their conversions. We even pray for those who sometimes call to harass us, knowing the Holy Spirit can use difficulties to bring souls closer to Christ (including our own!)

As we move forward into our third decade of existence as an organization, we see our task as not only assisting non-Catholic clergy, but all those on the path of conversion.

... continued on page B



Member's Section

Member's Section

We are constantly amazed at the stories we hear regularly, stories of lives changing and conversions progressing. After all, if conversion changes us, we have a story to tell.

You might imagine that not all the stories are easy, and that is certainly true. Yet even when we are rendered helpless in a worldly sense, we focus our efforts on prayer. One friend comes to mind – a former Protestant clergyman, he recently confided that he owes the IRS over \$100,000. He is a genuinely good-hearted man, although his present circumstances, along with some health problems, have contributed to his battle with depression. It's touching that his communications with us are unceasingly gracious. Please join us in prayer for him!

In a sense, this is among the most important aspects of our apostolate. We are ever mindful that “He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity” (*Lumen Gentium* 14). This call to charity spurs us on every day. We recognize the struggle of conversion, we seek to stand beside those who have the courage to engage, and we pray for us all. Through the joys, and the tears, God has poured out His grace on this organization and its mission. For this we are eternally grateful.

It's truly a happy anniversary for CHNetwork. Thank you for being partners in our mission through your prayers, encouragement, and financial gifts. We truly ap-

preciate it. We hope to continue walking alongside those on the path of conversion for many years to come! ■

KEVIN LOWRY is the Chief Operating Officer of the Coming Home Network International. He is a husband, father, author of *Faith at Work: Finding Purpose Beyond the Paycheck*, and blogs at [gratefulconvert.com](http://gratefulconvert.com).

## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**July 13, 2013**

**A Catholic Vision of History**

Christendom College, Front Royal, VA  
[christendom.edu/news/conference.php](http://christendom.edu/news/conference.php)

**August 10-17, 2013**

**Alaskan Cruise**

Sponsored by Franciscan University of Steubenville  
[www.franciscancruise.com](http://www.franciscancruise.com)

**August 17-18, 2013**

**EWTN Family Celebration**

Birmingham, AL  
[www.ewtn.com/familycelebration](http://www.ewtn.com/familycelebration) 1-205-271-2989

## FEATURED RESOURCES

**The Fathers Know Best: A Look at the Relationship Between Scripture and Tradition in the Early Church** — Patrick Madrid



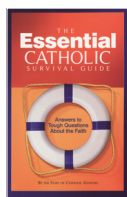
CD from the 2010 *Deep in History* conference.

How did the earliest Christians interpret Scripture? How did these Christians distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy? With amusing anecdotes and scholarly depths, Patrick Madrid delves into the writings of the early Church Fathers to answer the question: did the first Christians believe in *sola Scriptura*?

**\$35**

For a donation of \$35, receive *The Fathers Know Best CD*.

**The Essential Catholic Survival Guide** — Catholic Answers



*The Essential Catholic Survival Guide* is the essence of Catholic apologetics - all rolled up into one attractive, easy-to-use manual that is destined to become the most effective tool of its kind. *The Essential Catholic Survival Guide* is a wonderful resource to answer your questions about the Catholic Church or to give away to someone who is inquiring about the Catholic Faith. It covers the questions and misconceptions

people have about the Catholic Faith on a variety of topics, including:

- The Church and the papacy
- Scripture and Tradition
- Mary and the saints
- The sacraments
- Salvation
- Last things
- Morality and science
- Anti-Catholicism
- Non-Catholic churches and movements
- Practical apologetics

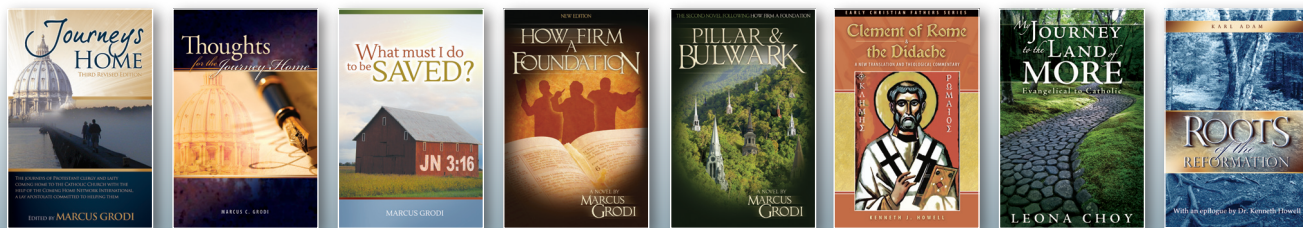
**\$50**

For a donation of \$50, receive *The Essential Catholic Survival Guide*.

**\$75**

For a donation of \$75, receive *The Fathers Know Best CD* and *The Essential Catholic Survival Guide*.

**— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —**



Visit [www.chresources.com](http://www.chresources.com) or call 740-450-1175 for these and other great resources to learn more about the Catholic Faith.

## SUPPORT CHNETWORK

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to [chnetwork.org/donate/](http://chnetwork.org/donate/) or complete the form below and mail to:

**CHNetwork**  
 Attention: Ann Moore  
 PO Box 8290  
 Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) if you have any questions or concerns.

### Your information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address line 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Address line 2 \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ on auto-payment from my:

Checking account or  Savings account

Bank routing number (9-digit number) \_\_\_\_\_

Account number \_\_\_\_\_

Credit card

Card number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration date \_\_\_\_\_

Visa  MasterCard

Discover  AmericanExpress

## NEWSLETTER COPIES

CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute to family, friends, and church groups. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are Copyright © 2013 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved. Back issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at [www.chnetwork.org/newsletter-archive](http://www.chnetwork.org/newsletter-archive).

## CHNETWORK MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Coming Home Network International (CHNetwork) is to help inquiring clergy as well as laity of other traditions to return home and then be at home in the Catholic Church. To learn more about our work, please go to [www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org).

## RECENT CONVERT?

If you have been recently received into the Catholic Church please notify us so we can update our records. Please e-mail Jim at [jim@chnetwork.org](mailto:jim@chnetwork.org) if you are a former Protestant minister or Mary Clare at [maryp@chnetwork.org](mailto:maryp@chnetwork.org) if you are a lay person who has become Catholic.

We look forward to hearing from you!

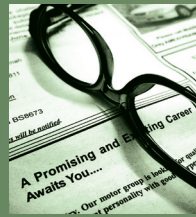
## DEFENDING THE FAITH CONFERENCE

The Coming Home Network International invites our members to join us for a social Friday evening, July 26, at the Defending the Faith conference in Steubenville, OH. For more information on the conference, held July 26-28, 2013, or to register please go to [www.franciscanconferences.com](http://www.franciscanconferences.com) or call 800-437-8368.

## UNSOLICITED MAIL

The CHNetwork 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 CHNetwork 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.

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Please go to [www.chnetwork.org/resources](http://www.chnetwork.org/resources) to see current job listings. Or, if you know of an employment opportunity that you would like posted for the CHNetwork membership, please e-mail the job description to [maryp@chnetwork.org](mailto:maryp@chnetwork.org).

# Prayer List

## Clergy

- For Tim, a Presbyterian lay minister in Illinois, that, through the truth and beauty of Catholic theology, the Holy Spirit will show him that he is not being seduced or led astray.
- For a Church of Christ minister in Texas, that he may come to know that the Catholic Church is the one universal, holy, apostolic church of Christ for which he is longing.
- For two former United Pentecostal ministers in Missouri, that having discovered the truth of the Holy Trinity they may be led into the fullness of the faith in the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For a minister of the Church of God in Illinois, that his prayer, study and reading would enable him to overcome the obstacles he now sees in his journey to the Catholic Church.

- For Scott, a Baptist minister in North Carolina, that our Lord Jesus would fill, through the fullness of the Catholic Faith, what he has felt missing in his tradition.
- For Phil, a Non-denominational minister in Ohio, that God would grant him the grace to hunger for the Holy Eucharist.
- For a Lutheran missionary in Japan, that he may find a good Catholic mentor to assist him as he journeys to full-communication with the successor of St. Peter.
- For an Independent Baptist minister in Virginia, that the Holy Spirit would grant him the grace to knock on the door of the Catholic Church and that he be received with joy to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

## Laity

- For Elizabeth, that Our Lady intercede on her behalf and make smooth her path so

she is able to pursue her desire to be in full communion with the See of St. Peter.

- For Deb, that the Holy Spirit give her peace so that she is able to know God's will and deepen her relationship with Jesus.
- For Stephen, that our merciful Lord Jesus grant him the grace to persevere in the Faith and give him insights into the depth of His love.
- For Charlotte, that she finds the support and encouragement she needs on her faith journey.

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 CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702. Or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org).

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

**Please also pray for the Coming Home Network International's staff and Board of Directors.**

**President/Founder**, Marcus Grodi (former Presbyterian pastor)

**Chaplain**, Fr. Ray Ryland (former Anglican priest)

**Chief Operating Officer**, Kevin Lowry (former Presbyterian)

**Director of Pastoral Care and Resident Theologian**, Dr. Kenneth Howell (former Presbyterian pastor)

**Senior Advisor: History & Theology**, Jim Anderson (former Lutheran)

**Director of Studio/Media**, Scott Scholten (former Presbyterian)

**Financial Coordinator**, Ann Moore

**IT/Facilities Coordinator**, Bill Bateson (former Mormon)

**Publications and Laity Coordinator**, Mary Clare Pieczynski

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► “Journeys Home” continued from page 4

Protestants seem to love the hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers,” but how can we sing this line in good conscience: “We are not divided, all one body we, one in hope and doctrine, one in charity”? I am not aware of anything in current hymnody that seems so profoundly false as this statement. The disunity of the church is a dreadful scandal and it seems to me that any serious Christian should do all in his or her power to remedy the disunity of the Church. It now seems to be highly ironic that biblical literalists interpret a concept such as the “Body of Christ” in primarily spiritual terms. Isn’t a “body” a material thing? Shouldn’t we be able to see a body? Yet over and over, Protestants interpret the *Body* of Christ — the Church — as primarily an invisible, spiritual entity.

When I was still a Presbyterian, the many divisions among the heirs of Calvin often distressed me. In the Anglican world, it is no better, or perhaps, it is worse. Dozens of small “Anglican” groups can be found on the Internet. Apparently, it is fairly easy to find a bishop who is willing to lay hands of “consecration” on another, making yet another bishop and another Anglican jurisdiction.

### By what authority?

Throughout the Protestant world, it is the same. For any reason, a person may start a Christian church, and a new denomination — a new schism — is born. This seems to be the inevitable result of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and the lack of a teaching authority or Magisterium. In the Protestant world, the final arbiter of doctrine is not the Bible, nor the tradition, nor a council, but the sovereign individual. It is one man’s interpretation of the Bible against another’s. When a man says, “the Bible alone is my authority,” what he really means is “only my interpretation of the Bible is my authority,” or else he cedes that role to some pastor or teacher that he, for whatever reason, has come to trust. Protestants complain that Catholics have a pope, yet they don’t see that Protestants also have popes; indeed, there may be as many popes as there are Protestants.

Of course, my Reformed friends would see the problem and deny that it is this bad. For this reason we have the confessions, they would say — the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, etc. They seem to think that Calvinism, as articulated by the Westminster standards, is the full-flowering of Christianity. But why should anyone regard the assembly of pastors and theologians at Westminster as more likely to have the right interpretation of Scripture than the councils that produced the Lutheran statements of faith, or, for that matter, the Council of Trent? Even when we have confessions of faith, we must still *interpret* those confessions. Whose interpretation shall be regarded as most accurate and reliable? We go from disputes about the meaning of Scrip-

ture, to disputes about the meaning of the confessions. In recent years we have seen the sad phenomenon of pastors of one Presbyterian denomination pronouncing anathemas upon ministers of other Presbyterian denominations for not holding the same interpretation of the Westminster standards on the doctrine of justification as held by themselves.

### Those who came before us

Another largely unexamined presupposition of the whole Protestant project, as it stands today, is this: using the tools of modern Biblical exegesis, we can discern the true meaning of Scripture. I don’t know why I never saw this before, but I began to realize the absurdity of believing that a modern exegete can jump back over 2,000 years and have a better understanding of the New Testament and the teaching of the Apostles than those men we call the early Church Fathers. If a modern scholar interprets the New Testament in a way not in accord with the *Didache*, Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus, or Cyprian, who is more likely to be right? Until recently, I tended to read the Fathers and look for affirmation of what I already believed. If they contradicted my confessional stance (first Westminster, then The Thirty-Nine articles) I would set the early Church teaching aside, intending to “come back to it later.” However, some of the questions raised by the Fathers concern the very core of the Christian Faith. One may put off deciding for a time, but one can’t do that forever. One must eventually take a stand. If I must decide, who, then, is more likely to have the correct interpretation? I think the safer bet, or the more logical, reasonable decision, would be to side with the early Church Fathers.

Another significant change in my perception of spiritual reality has to do with the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. In the creed, I confessed to believe in the Communion of the Saints, but what does that really mean? A few years ago I discovered the Charles Wesley hymn, “Let saints on earth in concert sing, with those whose work is done; for all the servants of our king in heaven and earth are one...E’en now we join our hands with those who went before, and greet the ever-living bands, on the eternal shore.” Hearing this for the first time moved me deeply and the vision it unfolds is a wonderful one. Those who have crossed the stream of death are still living; they sing with us. If they may sing with us, why may they not pray for us? If we are in communion with them, why may we not seek their intercession for us?

As I was drawn to the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, I happened to watch a video on the life of Edith Stein. She was a remarkable woman. A Jewish, university teacher of philosophy in Germany between the wars; as a young adult, she became an atheist, then later was converted to Christ and became a Carmelite nun. She died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. “Journeys Home” is continued on page 6 ►

She was later canonized as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. I was moved by her story and found myself invoking her prayers for my son.

I no longer found it a strange thing to think of asking for the prayers of the Blessed Virgin or other saints. There is a Christian inscription from around 250 A.D. that says, "Pray for your parents Matronata Matrona. She lived one year, fifty-two days." What a beautiful vision this brings to mind: an infant alive in the presence of God and the holy angels, interceding for her parents.

### Authority in the Kingdom

I have always been intrigued by the parables of the Kingdom. The theme of the Kingdom of God is so crucial to understanding the teaching of our Lord. How closely related are the Church and the Kingdom? Are they the same? Is the Church the gate of the Kingdom, or something like the visible expression in time of the timeless, transcendent Kingdom? That they are very closely related seems clear in such passages as Matthew 16:18-20. Jesus speaks of the building of the Church on the Rock (*Petros*) and the keys of the Kingdom are given to Peter.

Surely the Kingdom of God is not a democracy. A flock of sheep is not a democracy. Families are not democracies. Kingdoms have a top-down government. Several of the Kingdom parables speak of a ruler or landowner, going away and leaving a trusted servant in charge. Peter and the Apostles are the trusted servants. The New Testament clearly puts Peter in a position of some prestige or respect above the rest of the twelve. It would seem reasonable, even necessary, that upon Peter's death, another would take his place. A precedent for filling the place of a departed apostle is set in Acts 1, with the appointment of Matthias to take the place of Judas.

Therefore, it is surely not unreasonable to expect that the rule of the Church, or Kingdom of God on earth, should be under a visible head or regent in place of the Lord and King, Jesus. If anyone filled that role in the Church between 30 and 60 A.D., then it was surely Peter. It would then seem most reasonable that upon his demise, someone would have been recognized to take his place. Of course, the records from the second century on indicate that this was indeed what happened — the Fathers are careful to trace the succession of the bishops of Rome back to Peter (see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, chapters 2-4).

Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* seems especially appropriate for modern times when heresy and schism abound. Irenaeus counsels: "What if there should be a dispute about some matter of moderate importance? Should we not run to the oldest churches, where the apostles themselves were known, and find from them the clear and certain answer to the problem now being raised?" (Book 3, Chapter 4.1). Irenaeus counsels

that to settle disputes we need both Scripture and Tradition. For this Tradition we look *ad fontes*, to the source in the oldest churches.

Cardinal Newman famously observed: "to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant." I found this to be true in my case. As I read more Church history, especially the early Church Fathers, and Reformation history from Catholic writers, my Protestant viewpoint was slowly eroded. It became clear to me that if there is one Church, which Jesus established, the Catholic Church under the bishop of Rome has the most clear and convincing claim to be that Church.

### A matter of conscience

After this realization, it then became to me a matter of conscience. I was convinced that the denominations to which I had belonged were in schism from the one Church that our Lord established and I came to believe that to continue in separation from that Church would be to sin against my conscience and my Lord. My wife and I enrolled in our local parish's RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) program and after several months of study, we were received into the Catholic Church on June 24, 2012.

Though I am deeply sorry for the schism of Protestantism and my part in perpetuating that schism, I rejoice in the ministry I have received from the churches and teachers of my former denominations. In my childhood church, I became aware of the reality of God, was first awakened to faith, and was baptized. In the college ministry of the Navigators, I was taught to be zealous for Scripture and learned a concern for evangelism and mission. In seminary, I was instructed by good and godly men who taught me to think and write. In my sojourn among Presbyterians, I saw a zeal for social concern and, among the Anglicans, I learned to love beautiful liturgy. Along the way, many Catholic ministries such as Catholic Answers, as well as local parishes and friends have been very helpful. Finally, through the Coming Home Network International's ministry, especially through the *Deep in History* conference, we were able to see the intellectual integrity, spiritual depth, and amazing beauty of Catholic Faith. Along the way, our gracious good Shepherd has patiently led us, and we now rejoice to be at home in His flock. Thanks be to God. ■



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## CHNETWORK CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

This year, 2013, marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Coming Home Network International. To commemorate this event, we are featuring material from some of our earliest newsletters in an effort to give our membership a glimpse into our past.



# Call No One On Earth Your Father

By Fr. Ray Ryland

**FROM THE ARCHIVES** This article was originally published in the August 2000 newsletter.



A common objection we receive from non-Catholics is that we call our priests “father,” because doesn’t Jesus stress in Matt 23:9, “You must call no one on earth your father...”?

Initially a Catholic might respond, “How do you refer to your mother’s husband? What do you call him?” If a Catholic is wrong in calling his priest “father,” then everyone who refers to his natural father as “father” is also in the wrong. Both usages would be prohibited by a literal interpretation of Jesus’ words. The Catholic might also remind his inquirer that both Old and New Testaments associate priesthood with fatherhood (Judg 17:10 and 18:19 and 1 Cor 4:15).

A further response by the Catholic would be to point out that Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill the law of the old covenant (Matt 5:17). If in Matt 23:9 He literally forbids us even to acknowledge our natural fathers as our fathers, how can we keep the fifth commandment (“honor your father and your mother”)? Taken literally, Jesus words in Matt 23:9 contradict His claim in Matt 5:17. The Son of God never contradicts Himself.

Take a closer look at the whole passage in which Jesus says we must call no one our father (Matt 23:1-12). In contrast to the attitudes of the Pharisees and others, Jesus is specifying the qualities Christian leaders must exhibit.

The Pharisees aspired to being called “rabbi” or “master” or “teacher,” leaders of particular schools of thought. Among the schools headed by teachers called “rabbi,” there were many divergences of belief, some of them actual contradictions.

A similar situation prevailed with regard to the term “father” (in Aramaic, *iabbai*, a title of honor). The title was given to well-known Jewish religious authorities of the past. As with “rabbi,” so with “father”: the term designated a particular interpretation of the Jewish faith.

Why did Jesus declare that no Christian leader is to be called “rabbi” or “father”? He was telling us that no leader, no one, may set up his own interpretation of the Catholic Faith and seek followers for his opinions. The role of leaders in Christ’s Church is faithfully to hand on Christ’s teaching

received through the apostles (Matt 28:19). The words of the apostle St. Paul epitomize the essential attitude of the Christian teacher: “... this what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you...” (1 Cor 11:23).

It all comes down to this. Jesus forbade His followers to call their leaders “father” or “rabbi” (in the first-century sense of these terms) *in order to protect the integrity of the faith*.

In Matt 23:1-12, Jesus is condemning the formation of contradictory schools of thought in His Church. This is exactly what the apostle St. Paul condemns in the Church in Corinth: “...these slogans that you have, like ‘I am for Paul,’ ‘I am for Apollos,’ ‘I am for Cephas’...” (1 Cor 1:12).

The history of Protestantism is essentially the story of this very process: the unending proliferation of sectarian groups saying “I am for Martin Luther” or “I am for John Calvin” or “I am for John Wesley.”

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* (David B. Barrett, editor; Oxford University Press, 1982) reported that in 1980 there were 20,780 distinguishable Christian denominations in the world. Moreover, at the time the encyclopedia was published, and for some years previously, an average of 270 new denominations were springing up each year; more than five every week.

Every one of these thousands of competing, contradicting denominations was formed by some person who said, in effect, “Call *me* ‘Master,’ call *me* ‘Teacher’: I will tell you what the Christian truth is!” And every dissenting Catholic theologian or priest or teacher is saying the same thing.

Jesus foresaw this problem and provided the means for avoiding it. In the passage under discussion He tells us, “... you have only one Teacher, the Christ.” And how are we to be taught by our one Teacher? By the means He provided. He founded the Church on the apostles and their successors, with a special role for Peter, the Rock, earthly head of the Church. A Catholic knows that when the Church Christ established speaks officially, Christ Himself is speaking through her to each member.

Every follower of Jesus Christ wants to know the truth: “the truth [and ONLY the truth] will make you free” (Jn 8:32). For acquiring the truth in its fullness, the Catholic Church, established by Jesus Christ, offers the only alternative to the chaos of ever-expanding denominationalism. ■

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2013 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Coming Home Network International. Please keep our work in your prayers for we believe that our apostolate to help Protestant clergy and laity come home to the Catholic Church is more needed than ever.