

The Coming Home Network International

P.O.Box 8290 Zanesville, OH 43702 www.chnetwork.org 800-664-5110 Inside: *A Banner Year* Conversion Story New Resources More...

November 2002

# Membership Newsletter

# A Banner Year for the Coming Home Network!

By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Coming Home Network is experiencing a wonderful year in its outreach to non-Catholic clergy and lay people. As of the last week of October, in this year alone, over 110 Protestant ministers have contacted us asking for assistance and guidance in their journey toward full communion with the Catholic Church. This represents an average of one clergyman contacting us every two to three days. These ministers come to the Coming Home Network from over thirty-seven denominations, including the Assemblies of God, Old Catholic, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Mennonite Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, Grace Brethren, Episcopal, United Methodist, the Salvation Army, the Evanfrom a couple of Mormons and S e v - enth-Day Adventists.

# I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN

The following are samples of the comments and situations we have been receiving from our new CHN clergy members:

#### A Southern Baptist minister says:

I am a seeker of truth. I feel the Lord's calling to the Catholic Church, which seems an anathema to me. However, the call is sure. I just need to walk it slowly. I intend to start going to Mass somewhere on Saturday's. This gentleman will be received into the Catholic Church around December.

#### A Presbyterian pastor writes:

I am currently seeking God's will and direction towards converting to the Catholic faith. My wife is at a place where she is trying to understand my journey. Another new member:

I'm a deacon in an independent Baptist church. My Dad is also a Pastor in a Baptist church. I can't explain it, but I feel drawn to the Catholic Church. I came across your TV program about 9 months ago and it blew my mind (to put it mildly) that evangelical believers would convert to the Roman Catholic Church. I had always been taught that the Catholic Church was spiritually corrupt. Well, since that fateful night some months ago, much has changed. I have started on my own journey and while I'm not ready to convert just yet, I believe the day is coming when this Baptist comes home.

#### An Episcopal pastor says:

I have been contemplating becoming a Roman Catholic for over ten years. Currently, I serve in the Episcopal Church and it is becoming more difficult by the minute. My faith has always been Catholic and there is less room than ever before for those in the Episcopal Church who desire to remain faithful Catholics.

One of our members wrote to the online discussion group:

I am presently a Southern Baptist minister. I have found myself rather surprised and now pleased to be here on the doorstep of Rome. Soon I will have to resign my pastorate in all good conscience. Please pray for the enlightenment to come to my wife.

A Lutheran minister shared the follow-ing:

My wife and I have not even begun to talk about my interest in the Catholic faith, I foresee my conversion, if God leads, to be quite far into the future. But, then one never knows! The ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) will be voting on the very divisive issue of the ordination of practicing homosexuals in the year 2005 (a move that I would be opposed to).

#### Another new member writes:

I am an ordained Southern Baptist Pastor. I find myself drawn to the Roman Catholic Church, and yet, it is not an easy path. My wife is not hostile to the idea, but questions my 'waffling'. I am pastor to a small mission congregation in a small town where soon, everybody knows your business. Some of my questions regarding the Lord's Supper began when serving communion to people as a chaplain. I knew there had to be more than a symbolic observance.

A professor employed at a denominational college contacted us. He was reared Jehovah's Witness. In the mid-'90's he and his wife left the JW's when they became Christians. Recently they have become very interested in the Catholic faith. The prospect of becoming a Catholic Christian could greatly disrupt their family. He may soon lose his teaching position at a Protestant university because of its policy of only employing members of its own denomination on the faculty.

Yet another Southern Baptist minister writes:

A Southern Baptist (shhhhhhh don't tell) is on the way. I have read the Apostolic Fathers and Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History; have listened to Scott Hahn, Tim Staples, Karl Keating, and yes the 'Journey Home' program on EWTN. I am Catholic at heart. I am now facing the need to resign my current pastorate. The next step is to begin a biblical defense for my beliefs. My wife is still in a state of shock from when I told her that it was no longer 'if' but 'when' I would enter the Catholic Church. Thank you for

When Only One Converts and Rome Sweet Home. I finished the former and gave it to my wife. She is past the angry stage. She is now in the "limbo" stage, asking, 'What will this mean for us?' Mike, an Evangelical pastor, had been given CHN's telephone number at a Catholic bookstore. He was reared Christian Science, but later became an evangelical Christian. He is currently pasturing an independent Evangelical church. His concern is that, if the Catholic Church truly is what she claims to be, he is obliged as a pastor to teach and guide as many of his congregants as possible to the fullness of the Truth. Please pray for this brave man.

How Firm a Foundation, Marcus Grodi's novel, has also had a profound influence

### Thank you, thank you, thank you, for all of your prayers and kindness you have shown me...

on many of our members. After reading the book one minister told us:

I have just finished reading How Firm a Foundation. As I told the story to my wife, she said, 'Why are you reading that? You're already living it!' I know that it is only a matter of time until I have to resign my pulpit.

Rob Rodgers, coordinator of the Helpers Network says that the Helpers and Helpees are being blest as they explore the truths of the Catholic Church:

Lisa, a Helpee, says:

Peter and Jo Anna are wonderful! Peter made me a beautiful Rosary and loaned me some great books. I'm also in touch with a friend of theirs named Lee Anne, she is nice too.

Fran, a Helper, writes:

I wanted to send you a quick note of thanks for getting me together with Marcia who had questions about the Catholic Church. We have been sharing e-mails and finally got together for lunch last week. She is a delightful lady who has her hands full raising three children. She loves the Lord and has become involved with RCIA. We will continue to keep in touch and get together monthly for lunch. Thanks again and God bless you and all the staff at Coming Home Network.

#### Christy, a Helpee, e-mailed Rob saying:

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for all of your prayers and kindness you have shown me. I am sill in awe of all that you have done for me since the first time we spoke on the phone. The Lord is really working through you and the Helpers Network.

B.C., another Helpee, states:

Thank you for your kind words of compassion and encouragement this morning and also yesterday on the phone. I appreciate your willingness to extend the gifts of your time, your story, and your aid.

As 2002 draws to a close and you become busy with the coming Christmas season, please remember these wonderful brothers and sisters, and the scores of others like them, in your prayers. As they seek for "more Christianity" may they discover the truth of the fullness of Christ's one, holy catholic and apostolic Church.

> Jim Anderson Assistant Director, Primarys jim@chnetwork.org

Rob Rodgers Helpers Network Coordinator rob@chnetwork.org



# From one Worldwide Church...to the *True* One By Dan Severino

I was born, baptized, and catechized Catholic. When my parents married, my father was nominally Catholic and my mother consequently converted, taking on the sole responsibility for the religious formation of us children. I don't remember how faithfully we attended Mass, but I do remember going to Sunday school regularly. Though I wasn't a devoutly religious child, I was always inclined toward God. I wanted to please Him, so I made a conscious effort to obey my parents and tell the truth. I tried to read the Bible but didn't understand it, so my interest waned. I remember being inspired for a time by my first Holy Communion and Confirmation to participate regularly in the sacraments and daily devotions.

During those childhood years, my mother became a captive audience to radio and television evangelists. Then shortly after my confirmation, she decided to become a member of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). I was content being Catholic, and if my dad had been more devout, I probably would have stayed, but I wasn't strong enough or equipped to go against my mother's direction.

Since the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) isn't a well-known denomination, it's likely that few readers have met a member or convert from this sect. We should begin by giving a little of the background history of this group.

The WCG today is a much different organization than it was in the mid-sixties when I began attending with my mother. Herbert W. Armstrong founded it after he, believed that he had been called by God to restore the gospel that had been lost since the first century. Under his leadership, the WCG espoused an eclectic mix of doctrines. The central definitive doctrine was the observance of Saturday as the seventh day Sabbath. The members of the WCG also held to the sacred calendar of the Jewish peoples, celebrating the Days of Unleavened Bread by removing all leavened products from their homes. Christmas and Easter were not observed because they were not biblically ordained festivals. Members also followed the dietary restrictions of the Jewish people and did not eat pork

products. We would diligently read the ingredients of items such as bread and crackers to make sure they were made with vegetable shortening and not animal fats.

Prophecy and the return of Christ were always on the forefront of the church's teaching and evangelization. Mr. Armstrong and his son, Garner Ted, spoke daily on radio calling their program – "The World Tomorrow". The program got its name from the expected 1000-year reign of Christ, the World Tomorrow, that included a worldwide secular utopia. Many sermons on prophecy were preached. The Catholic Church was looked upon with great suspicion. Part of the prophetic package included the belief that the United States and Britain were the descendants of Israel and therefore the Old Testament prophecies that mentioned Israel were thought to be speaking to our nations.

There was no belief in the Trinity. God the Father and God the Son were separate beings, with the Holy Spirit being only the power of God. The WCG held to sola scriptura, but not to sola fide. A Christian was required to keep the 10 Commandments for salvation—if one didn't keep the seventh day Sabbath one couldn't be saved. Members of the WCG were discouraged from reading materials from other religious organizations, for fear one might become victim to the devil's clever arguments. The WCG also believed in divine healing and preached that reliance on the medical profession was a sure sign of a lack of faith.

When I graduated from high school, I was accepted into the WCG's own Ambassador College. This beautiful campus in Pasadena, California, was a combination of restored millionaire mansions and elegant new structures. My four years at Ambassador College provided many great memories. Culturally, it was a very rich experience. Many world leaders and other influential people were invited to speak before the student body. Upon graduation, many students went into the WCG ministry. My talents, however, were musical, and though the Dean of Faculty encouraged me to remain as a part of the music faculty, I chose to return home to Pennsylvania where I continued my musical studies. There, I became involved in the local WCG congregation and even did some preaching.

After Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, his handpicked successor began a series of changes that rocked the WCG causing it to split into different factions (though schisms had been regular during my 30 plus years in the WCG). These changes included a gradual openness to more traditional Christian doctrines such as the Trinity as well as a relaxation of its strict Sabbath rules. I was always one to support the leadership of the WCG, so when the church changed its attitude toward doctors, I had no difficulty following along. Hadn't St. Luke been referred to as the beloved physician? When WCG changed its views on the nature of God, softening its literal interpretation of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God and becoming more Trinitarian, I again found no problem in this.

In the spring of 1995, the WCG split into two separate groups. Those holding to the traditions of Mr. Armstrong called themselves the United Church of God (UCG); those who agreed with the changes instituted by Mr. Armstrong's successor stuck with the WCG. My wife and I stayed with the WCG; my mother went with the UCG. It was a difficult time. Everyone had long time friends who were now separated because of differing understandings. Every faction claimed loyalty to Mr. Armstrong. Many members became bewildered over what to believe; many quit religion all together.

Those who stayed with the WCG, however, felt a tremendous excitement. They felt they were relieved of the burdens of the Old Covenant. The WCG took to a traditional Protestant view of justification by faith. The WCG didn't go so far as to say faith alone, and this is where a new round of debating began. The range of belief available in Protestantism in regards to justification, or almost any issue, is quite large. Various church leaders leaned toward Calvinistic theology while others were more Arminian. Some took up the motto "No creed but Christ." Some believed that the bible was totally without error; others leaned toward the position that only the principles in regards to salvation were without error. I mention this for two reasons. First, the very liquid nature of the WCG at this time, and second I could finally study theological issues on my own in good conscience. Since the WCG shared a range of beliefs on most all issues, I felt free to study and come to my own conclusions. So, I began reading various schools of thought.

Yet something else I must mention, another big change in the WCG was in the introduction of the worship leader. This was done to follow the pattern of successful contemporary Protestant churches. Success was defined as those with strong growth in membership numbers. It was a large responsibility and one that couldn't be taken lightly. The success of the service was determined by the success of the worship leader. In time I was in charge of our congregation's worship activities and all our worship leaders. The WCG provided an Internet discussion group, where all worship leaders in our worldwide congregations could share and debate ideas.

Not being satisfied with contemporary Christian worship I began looking at other alternatives. Liturgy soon became a major part of our Internet discussions. Since the Protestant world accepted Advent, I began to develop an Advent program for our local WCG congregation. Some WCG members still didn't feel comfortable with Christmas; so we just called it Incarnation Day.

I became more and more interested in liturgy. Since I was classically trained in music and not inclined toward contemporary Christian music, I developed a strong interest in religious music of the past. At first it was the hymnody of the church in its Protestant tradition. This led to the Masses of Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert. Finally, I became exposed to the wonderful liturgical works of the Renaissance, Gothic and Medieval styles of music. My wife and I loved a CD of the chants of St. Hildegard von Bingen. As you can see, my musical exploration brought me in closer and closer contact with Catholic culture.

At this same time, we were talking on our Internet forums about how often we should participate in the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist). Our old WCG tradition was to take it only once a year. Most thought we shouldn't celebrate it too often because we would begin to take it for granted. My theological research at this time was making me aware that even the Protestant Reformers (Luther and Calvin) believed that the Lord's Supper should be taken weekly. My religious sentiments naturally inclined me to awe and great reverence for God. Contemporary Christian music and contemporary Christian Churches were missing something. The awe and reverence was represented with a shallow emotionalism that just didn't ring true. Something was missing but I didn't know what it was. I thought if I would just go back far enough in time, I would find out where and why things got off track. I was becoming more and more dissatisfied with the WCG. My studies were taking me farther back in history and the WCG was bringing me current Protestant thought that I just couldn't accept. My local WCG pastor recommended that I should just keep my mind on Christ and not let these things bother me. That answer wasn't satisfactory. There was a hunger for more. I wanted the Truth.

One evening while driving home from work pondering my quest for the truth, knowing I would eventually leave the WCG, the thought came to me, "Before you die you're going to become Catholic again." I didn't reject the thought, but I thought I would first become some type of conservative Protestant.

This was the light bulb moment for me. This was the moment that I needed to finally consider what the Catholic Church had to say in defense of her theological positions. The doctrine of justification by faith alone wasn't a return to the theology of the early church as I had always assumed. It was a theological idea formed to assuage a guilty conscience of a talented but troubled Augustinian monk. Upon further study I found that what Luther taught wasn't a return to the ancient belief of the Church, but actually a new doctrine.

Shortly before this time I finally found a book that might answer my questions on the worship of the early Church. It was *The Lamb's Supper – The Mass as Heaven* on Earth by Dr. Scott Hahn. I remember listening a couple months before on our local Christian radio station to an interview with Dr. Hahn and his conversion to the Catholic Church. I don't remember the details of the conversation, but I remember his enthusiasm. I thought – I didn't know that Protestants ever converted to the Catholic faith. I thought it was always Catholics becoming Protestant. This was a "hmmm" moment. The Lamb's Supper was a captivating read. I read it in one day. Dr. Hahn's book convinced me of the importance of the Eucharist in the early church, and therefore of it's necessity today. His enthusiasm expressed in his writing is infectious and it gave me a strong shove in the direction of Catholicism. But then I thought of the complexities that this drastic of a change would bring to my personal life so I backtracked a bit. Even so, I held on to the central importance of the Eucharist. Since I was in charge of our worship leading I thought of ways of bringing the Eucharist weekly to our local WCG. Our pastor told me that the people were not ready for such a drastic change. It wasn't the direction of the WCG and I should just forget about it.

Learning to think Catholic takes time. On this God allowed me to struggle. One day while studying I came to the conclusion that the Catholic Church was the most biblical of all churches. Unfortunately, this made me try for a while to become a Bible-alone Catholic. This works well for the Real Presence in the Eucharist, Baptismal Regeneration, or the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In my mind the Catholic scriptural position on these doctrines was far more persuasive than any Protestant position. To understand the Marian doctrines one must think Catholic. One must accept the scriptural approach of St. Augustine that the New Testament is concealed in the Old and the Old Testament in revealed in the New. To do this one must accept Tradition and to do this one must give up being a Bible-alone Catholic. This requires a real paradigm shift and this takes a while to accomplish.

I was finally ready to seek out a priest. I thought we should call the local priest and talk to him *in the privacy of <u>our</u> home.* My wife called. She said we wanted to return to the Catholic Church. He said, "Mass is tomorrow at 9:00 A.M. See me after Mass" Whoa! I didn't feel *that* ready. But the next morning we arrived at St. Matthias Parish in the little town of Evans City, PA. We entered the church, made the sign of the cross (for the first time in about 35 years) and sat *way* in the back. I was very nervous and mentally uncomfortable. At the first sight of the huge cross in this little rural church I was repelled. It was too personal, too vivid, and too real.

As the Mass progressed I became more and more uncomfortable. I didn't know what to make of these feelings. I was confused. After the Mass the priest invited us to his rectory to talk, my wife and I were so nervous we could barely make an intelligent conversation. After leaving, we shared our experiences, and discovered that we felt the same way. After meditating on the experience I knew I wasn't ready immediately but I also knew that according to all my study the Catholic Church was the Church established by Jesus. I had to follow my head in spite of my conflicted feelings.

My wife and I decided not to tell anyone in our WCG church about our visit with the Catholic priest and attending Mass. One of the unusual things about being in the WCG at this time was that a good percentage of the people would visit other Protestant churches and tell of their positive experiences. However, no one talked of going to a Catholic Church. Membership in our local WCG congregation, which was about 85 after the major split in 1995, fell to about 40 a year later and was only in the mid-20's in the summer of 2000. Since WCG members believed that Christians could be found in any Christian church there was no compelling reason for many to stay. Loyalty to the WCG wasn't high. Some resented the WCG for the whiplash caused by first believing they were the only true church and then being told there were Christians everywhere where people believed in Christ as their personal savior.

I finally came to the conclusion that perhaps God wanted me to really *want* to come back to the Catholic Church. It was like God was saying to me – "You left Me for 35 years and you want to just hop in a pew like nothing happened! Not so easy, Dan."

In my studies I became more

convinced on the doctrinal truth of the Catholic Church. But, the fear of repeating the experience of our first Mass was haunting. What if it would happen again? I didn't know much about limbo - but I felt as if I was living in it. One evening during this time we were having a Bible Study at our home. I was absent due to my work, but my wife was there. The minister made it a point to talk about the *imputation* of righteousness and not infusion. My wife just sat there and let the minister talk. After this we knew we were reaching critical mass. A decision needed to be made. We did the only thing we knew to do. We prayed. We decided we had to face our fear and go to a Mass. After this Mass I was much more comfortable and so was my wife. My wife and I made our plan to let the people know we were going to return to our Catholic roots.

We met with Father Ritzert and he made all the arrangements to have our marriage sacramentalized. On Saturday, August 26, 2000 we were married and received the sacraments after almost a thirty-five year absence. We drove to our honeymoon destination and the first question we asked the motel owner was "Where's the nearest Catholic Church where we can attend Mass." We've been living happily ever after.



### Do you have a Job Opening?

Please remember our members when you have a job opening. Often, clergy converts are looking for positions within the church as well as the private sector. Please email job openings to shala@chnetwork.org so they can be posted on our web-site.

Or you can post them yourself on our CHNForum, just visit www. chnetwork.org for more information.

### Attention Members!

If you have joined the Church please notify us, so we can update our records. Call us at (740) 450-1175 or e-mail jim@chnetwork.org. Thank you.

Please notify us of any changes to your address. If you tell us it costs us nothing; if the post office notifies us, it costs \$.60, Please help us be better stewards of your donations. Call 800-664-5110 or e-mail us at info@chnetwork.org. Thank You

# Have You Seen Us Lately?

The *Coming Home Network* web-site is changing daily. With new features, including new CH*Journals* available only online. Also, a community based web forum to help answer some of the toughest questions concerning current members, and potential converts to the Catholic Faith.

A few user comments:

"... the fellowship and support I've received from this forum has kept me feeling connected to and hopeful about the Catholic Church, especially when everything else around me was telling me to give up."

"I live in an area where dissent is rampant as is poor catechist and laxity in practice of the Faith. When I read the entries here I get a big boost in spiritual morale!"

"I appreciate the fact that this forum is moderated...But, mainly, I enjoy the fellowship and kindred spirits found here."

An online catalog is coming into shape, with online ordering via a Pay-Pal shopping cart system. Online donations, as well as automatic monthly donations can be set up using Pay-Pal. The *CHN* web-site has won many awards, and ranks in the top of many search engines, October hits exceeded the one million mark! This will continue to be a major outlet for *CHN*. Please come join us online at www.chnetwork.org , you will be glad you did!



Upcoming guests on the Journey Home Program on EWTN, Mondays live at 8 p.m. EST

> November 4 Stephen K. Ray

November 11 Lord David Alton

November 18 Dwight Longenecker

> November 25 Lisa Militello

December 2 Ken Hensley

Can't catch the show when it's broadcast live?

*Tune in for re-airs: (EST) Tuesdays 1 a.m. Tuesdays 10 a.m. Saturdays 11 p.m.* 

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





CH*Resources* has made great leaps in our publication division since the first printing of *How Firm A Foundation*. This was a learning process and we are proud to announce the newly-released, revised edition of *How Firm A Foundation*. Though the content remains basically the same; new editing corrections have been made; the font size has been increased (adding 64 pages), more endnotes have been added, and the cover was slightly revised.

In the upcoming months CH*Resources* is looking at potential publications that will benefit the members and work of the *Coming Home Network*. Some of these publications are: *Catholic Doctrine in Scripture* by Greg Oatis, and reprint of the Desktop Rosary Card.

CH*Resources* would also like to invite readers to submit brief book reviews for the CH*Network* Newsletter's new *Reader's Corner*. This will contain your comments or reviews on the previous newsletter's "Feature" book(s). We hope this will benefit those who might have missed the book or were not sure if they would like the it. Please submit materials for the *Reader's Corner* to Shala @ 740-450-1179 or by email shala@chnetwork.org.



"I just finished your wonderful, wonderful book How Firm A Foundation. I received it a week ago and couldn't put it down until I read the whole thing. Beautiful, intriguing, and heart rendering story. Thank you very much. It's a great teachable tool and I'm going to order more copies to pass them on."

-Bishop Paul Dudley, Minnesota

"I just finished *How Firm A Foundation* last night. Although I am not a clergy covert, I am a convert from evangelicalism. Many thanks for this engaging novel which mirrored in so many ways my own journey into the Church."

- Sonja, Michigan

"I think it will be a very effective and inrefutable argument to our non-Catholic brethren. I find a beautiful style and easy reading in *How Firm A Foundation...*"

- Fr. Fitzgerald, Illinois

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# Why Do We Need More Christianity?

...Because it fills our plates with the fullness of the Christian Faith found only in the Catholic Church. Lest someone think Longenecker is presuming to piggyback or cash in on Lewis's work, or to set himself up as Lewis's successor, that's not the case. What he does – and does brilliantly – is present the doctrine of the Church with succinct explanations of topics that arise in Catholic/Protestant discussion: the Marian dogmas, the papacy, the Mass, purgatory, the communion of saints, the rosary, and more.

In Longenecker's skilled hands, More Christianity rounds out the meal so deliciously served up by Lewis in Mere Christianity. Yours free with a donation of \$35 or more.





## GRAB BAG BONUS!

<u>SMALL GRAB BAG</u> – Includes a Reading Guide, Catechism tabs, Bible tabs, Desktop Rosary Card and more! All this for a \$25 donation.

LARGE GRAB BAG – Includes all contents of the small grab bag, a Catechism, and much more. \$50 donation.

