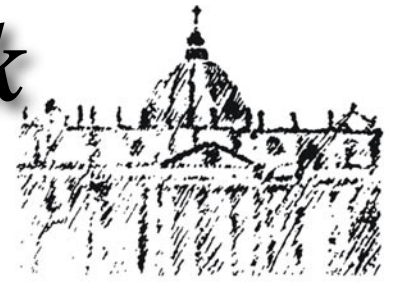


The Coming Home Network NEWSLETTER



The Coming Home Network International
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November 2004

Journeys Home

Agnostic to Priest

by Fr. Ed Fride

It all began simply enough. During my senior year in high school, I was hitchhiking home from school when a driver stopped and offered a ride. I got in. After a few minutes of small talk, the driver turned to me and said, "Jesus loves you." "Oh great," I thought to myself, "I've been picked up by one of those Jesus freaks!" So I gave him one of my typical agnostic replies, "Fine. I'll believe it when I hear it from Him. Now stop the car, and let me out." As I got out of the car, I congratulated myself on another narrow-escape from some Jesus freak. I had survived many such close calls. Though raised in a church background, I had given up any practice or belief in Christianity. In my good moods I was an agnostic; in my bad moods, an atheist. I had decided that either God didn't exist, or He was hiding from me, in either event, the result was the same. A few weeks after the hitchhiking encounter, a new Christian group started at my high school. My twin sister wanted to go to one of their meetings, and my mother asked me to take her. Normally I wouldn't have considered such a thing,

but I made Mom a deal. If I took my sister, I could have the car for the weekend. She went for it. My sister and I arrived a few minutes late, and the meeting had already started. It was being led by none other than the driver who had picked me up hitchhiking! His was not a face I wanted to see. The driver was speaking about a friend of his. As I listened, I was moved by how he described his friend—caring, supportive, always there for him, always calling him on to be the best he could be. At one point I couldn't contain my curiosity any longer. I was lonely; and could have used a good friend like that, so I just blurted out, "What's your friend's name, anyway?" "Jesus," he replied. I couldn't believe it, but I was still curious, so after the meeting ended, I asked him how he could be so sure about Jesus. The man told me that I just had to give my life to Jesus, then I could be sure, too. "Just



give my life to someone I don't even believe exists?" I questioned. That started the first of many arguments. Actually, they were arguments from my side, but not from his. He always responded to my attacks with patience and love, and usually concluded saying, "Ed, you may be able to argue better than I can, but there are two things, I know—I love you, and Jesus loves you." He also gave me a copy of *The Cross and the Switchblade*. At first the book struck me as fiction—every time the preacher prayed, God seemed to be doing miracles, something I thought had to be pure fiction! But

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as I read on, it stirred something in my heart and filling me with a great longing. I finished the book in one evening, and then went back to my friend. He gave me other books to read, including Run, Baby, Run; Face Up to a Miracle; They Speak with Other Tongues; and a few others. I read them all within a few days. Then my friend suggested that I start reading the Bible. He told me to read the Gospel of John, and when I got to John 3:16, to take out the word 'world' and put in my own name. I had

no idea what he was talking about, since I didn't know John from Jeremiah at that time. But I started reading, and when I got to John 3:16, I did what he suggested, reading: "For God so loved Ed that he gave his only begotten Son..." That was the first time I ever realized that Jesus didn't simply love humanity, but that He loved me as an individual person.

Holy Week began a few days later, and the minister at the Protestant church where I grew up asked me to help with the Maundy Thursday service. When the service was over, I decided to pray. I hadn't ever prayed before, except for the kind of prayers common to many high school kids of my age: "O God, let me pass this test; O God, let my parents be asleep when I get home," etc. But I had never prayed any kind of commitment prayer. I knew it was time now. I knelt in the little chapel and started: "Lord, if You're up there...." Then I stopped, thinking to myself that that was a pretty anemic way to begin my first prayer. So I simply said, "Lord, You can't make anymore of a mess out of my life than I have, so it's Yours. Forgive my sins, and be my Lord. Amen."

That was the first time I ever deeply experienced Jesus' love. It was as if He had walked into that room, picked me up in His arms, and poured His love and mercy and forgiveness through me. It was beyond description. After a few moments, still conscious of Jesus' presence, I said to him, "Lord, I've been reading about the Holy Spirit, and I'd be glad to take anything You wanted to give." I was instantly aware that we were



joined by another Presence, the Holy Spirit. I suddenly experienced a sense of power flowing through my whole body, as if I were being struck by a friendly lightning bolt. After a few minutes that experience subsided. I was somewhat overwhelmed. I had now prayed twice in my life, and two thirds of the Trinity had shown up like gangbusters! I decided that I would conclude by simply praying the Our Father, as a way to say thanks. I got as far as saying "Our Father" when suddenly I began praying in tongues. I knew about tongues because all the books I had read had talked about it, but I had not at all anticipated praying in tongues like this myself. It was great! The next morning, Good Friday, I described my experience to the minister of the church, who was also a professor

at our denominational seminary. "Well Ed," he replied, "Your experience, well, it's Biblical, but it would not be welcome in this particular church or this denomination." I thanked him and went home. The next morning I said to Jesus, "Lord, I seem to have found You and lost my church. If a church is something You want me to have, please find me one. Amen." As soon as I prayed that amen, my phone rang. It was a high school friend asking if I'd

like to go to church with him that night. I was amazed. He knew nothing about my recent religious reading or about my giving my life to Jesus. As far as he knew, I was still the class agnostic. He just called 'out of the blue' and asked me to go to his church with him. Well, 'church' that night turned out to be the Easter Vigil Mass at the Cathedral of the Most Holy Rosary in Duluth, Minnesota, my hometown.

That Easter Vigil Mass was celebrated by Bishop Paul Anderson, a bishop who was actively involved in the charismatic renewal. In the homily he spoke of the need for each of us to personally experience the love and mercy of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit if we are to be truly affective Christians. He then proceeded to describe exactly what had just happened to me! It was very reassuring. That vigil Mass was my first experience of a Roman Catholic liturgy, and it was somewhat confusing for me to follow. At one point I thought that it was over, since everyone in my pew was leaving, so I got up and left with them. Suddenly I realized that we were heading up toward the altar, not out toward the doors. Then I realized

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Four Significant Events

Four significant events are occurring within a span of three days this fall. One is the election of a U.S. president (November 2), while the other three are religious events: for Catholics, All Saints' and All Souls' Days (November 1 and 2), and for Protestants, Reformation Sunday (October 31). Some parallels between the political event and the religious events are instructive.

In the days leading up to the election, the two parties and their respective campaign propaganda machines presented drastically contradicting caricatures of the opposing candidates. Mind you, I am being carefully creative in my writing to avoid being partisan, but often during the past few months I have been lividly outraged by the ways the party opposing the candidate I supported purposely misrepresented him. I'd hear a campaign speech or a radio ad that proclaimed twisted information that I figured anyone in their right mind would know was false, yet friends and family who are lifelong members of the opposing party thought the exact opposite: They accepted without question their party's line and were equally appalled by everything my party proclaimed. Barring a repeat of the manufactured confusion of the 2000 election, we probably now know the result of these conflicting, countercurrents of spin.

A similar conflicting spin forms the basis for the conjunction of the three religious events.

As a Presbyterian pastor, I led many celebrations of Reformation Sunday, the last being the most vivid. Contrary to most Reformed iconoclastic idealism, my church sanctuary contained six large stone relief portraits of the Protestant reformers. As I gazed out from my pulpit, I was buttressed by the faces of Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and Huss.

Every year I would take this Sunday to remind my congregation of the Protestant understanding of church history to reinforce why our church existed and why we were different from the other churches that surround us. The following is an

example of this kind of Protestant explanation of the Reformation event that I downloaded from a Lutheran Internet site. Listen carefully to the loaded language and the spin. How many phrases can you underline that betray a slanted, incomplete, even bigoted understanding of history?

The Reformation in church history designates the movement in the 16th century which aimed to restore the Church founded by Jesus Christ, deformed in the course of centuries, chiefly by the Papacy, to its early normal condition...The history of the many church Councils shows that the Papacy and hierarchy were opposed to reform... Into this era came Dr. Martin Luther, a monk, priest, and professor who struggled with the basic root problem of that day in the church - the doctrine of the meritoriousness of good works being the way to salvation. The Church could not provide Dr. Luther with an answer to "How do I obtain a gracious God?". The final blow probably came when the church began selling indulgences as a false way of salvation in order to raise more money for the building of more structures in Rome. On October 31, 1517, the Holy Eve of All Saints Day, Dr. Luther protested the corruption in the church by nailing to the community bulletin board, located on the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, a paper with 95 Theses (reasons) he wanted to debate on how the church should be reformed. Dr. Luther did not want a new church but only to reform the present church. Action against Dr. Luther by papal authorities was swift, he was excluded from the Roman Church and declared an outlaw. (From www.historictrinity.org/reformation.html, The Rev. Dr. David Eberhard, Historic Trinity Lutheran Church, Detroit, MI)

Space does not allow me to dissect this entire statement, but here's just a sampling of how I could respond: (1) The Papacy and magisterium were never against authentic reform. (2) The Church never taught that good works were the way to salvation. (3) The Church never encouraged the sale of indulgences as a means



of salvation. (4) There was a whole other side to how the Church responded to Luther's attack than merely a swift declaration that he was an outlaw.

The danger of these kinds of simplified, slanted summaries of history is that they are easily passed along from professor to pastor to parent to child without examination. How many of us can testify to this process from personal experience? I can. From year to year, I dished out the Reformed campaign slogans without taking the time to check whether what I was saying was true.

Then, like John Henry Cardinal Newman, I discovered that "to become deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant." In this, I discovered many truths that corrected my inadequate understanding of the Church and Her history, but I also became starkly aware of the differences between those we celebrate and emulate on our two feast days and those that Protestants celebrate on theirs.

This is a season, then, that sharpens the edges of the ideologies that divide us, both religiously and politically, even as it calls us to prepare our hearts for the Advent of our Savior. As we enter this season, let us each express three mea culpas for whatever part we might have played in these divisions. And may we commit ourselves anew to being charitable agents of authentic Church renewal and genuine unity with our separated brethren.

Sincerely In Christ,
 Marcus Grodi

Clergy on the Journey

Do not sell the Holy Spirit short!

Many times we pray year after year that a friend or loved would come into full communion with the Church. Sometime after years of petitioning the Throne of Grace we are tempted to loose heart. Even so, we must never give up! God hears and acts but often not in the timing that we would wish. On the average, it takes two to three years, from the time a new clergy member first contacts us at the office of the Coming Home Network until they are received into full communion with the Catholic Church. Sometimes it can take longer. Scott has been a member of the Coming Home Network since 1994! His heart has been with the Church for many years. He was held back because he felt that if he entered the Church he would not be able to support his family. In August, after over 10 years, we received the following e-mail: "I write this brief note to share with you that I have

spoken with the Catholic bishop of my diocese and have begun the process of converting to Mother Church... I am not coming in seeking to remain in holy orders, though presently I do not have a job. Regards, Scott...formerly [a] bishop." Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ. Now and forever!

As you pray for hearts to be turned, do not forget to pray for the relatives of our clergy members. Recently a Pentecostal minister, who is very open to the truth of the Catholic faith, asked for prayer for his mother-in-law. She is convinced that the Catholic Church is completely compromised by pagan beliefs and practices. She is even convinced that the date of Easter, as well as its English name, is totally pagan. Consequently, she is scandalized to think that her Pentecostal minister son-in-law is seriously considering coming into what

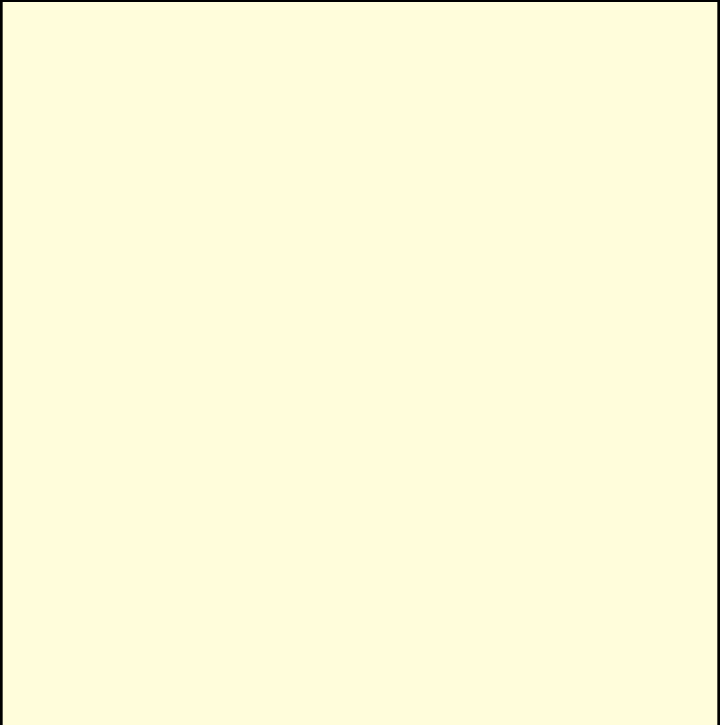
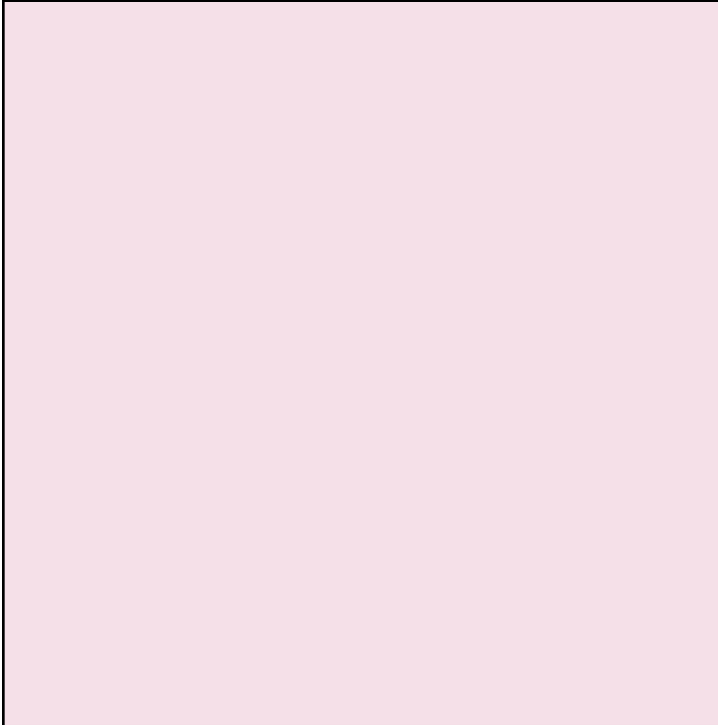
she considers a pagan institution. Pray that the Holy Spirit would soften her heart.

These are only two of the clergy members of the Coming Home Network who need your prayers. All of the 93 clergy men and women who have contacted us so far this year, as well as the hundreds of others who have been members for years, all need your constant prayers. While you are at it, do not forget to pray for the staff of CHN. We would very much appreciate it!

Pray, and pray without ceasing! "Will not God then secure the right of his chosen ones who call out to him day and nigh? Will he be slow to answer them?" Luke 18:7.

Jim Anderson

Featured Coming Home Resources



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Helping 'em Home

May the blessings from Christ, our Eucharistic King, ever pour from your hearts to others. My greetings to you once again my sisters and brothers, as we begin to prepare our lives, for our Christian season of preparation of the birth of Christ our Lord as Savior.

Our Advent season is just that, a time to ready ourselves, to celebrate the birth our King. Today I would like us to look at it another way, our preparation to witness His love, His truth, His Church to all those in our life.

Instead of the usual Helper quotes I offer I have compiled a collection of common questions posed to me through the CHNetwork. It is Helpers Network 101. For those of you who find joy upon your hearts in answering these questions, please contact me about volunteering your time as a *Network Helper*. For those who feel the drive to research and find these answers to deepen your own knowledge of the faith, please, contact me about being a *Network Helper*.

My prayers are to each of you as we move towards the Advent Season. That every one of you, offers to the world around you, a witness true to God our Father and His earthly Church.

I am Anglican AND Cathoic. Your guest must know that this is possible.

How big of an obstacle is my husband's 10-year-old vasectomy to both his conversion and mine? My husband is very worried about this. Should we just go to the priest up front before we even begin the classes? Or...should we go ahead with the classes and deal with this old and pretty much

"unfixable" sin in confession at a later time? '

Why aren't all Christians allowed to take Eucharist in the Catholic Church? Sometimes this feels like a rejection to those like myself who love Jesus.

Need info on Dutch reform church.

Do you have to believe that the Eucharist is the actual body and blood of Christ to be a Catholic Christian?

....and that Jesus' first miracle was at the wedding at Cana, and he turned water into wine. My husband told me that it says in his Bible (NIV) that it was "unfermented wine".

I returned to the Catholic Church after 30 years of involvement in the error of SEDEVACANTISM

The bible says that it's different church services but the same Christ we serve so why are you doing this? I am a Pentecostal if you want to give me a denominational name, my family is Catholic

I have family that are Catholic, but go to protestant church, they reject the Catholic Church, is this a mortal sin, what should I say to them?

Questions sent to the Helper Network sometimes seem endless. However, so is the pool of truth that



as we drive into, as we search the truth held in the Catholic Church. Please, should you know of someone needing assistance, recommend to them that they contact the Helpers Network. Moreover, should you feel called to offer your witness of truth to another, please contact me by the means listed.

My prayers are ever to all of you, calling to mind especially those who aid in the evangelistic commission this Network sets forth to fulfill. Might this Advent Season, you open the door to your heart that much more, that your life is better prepared to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us be as John the Baptist, ready to proclaim "behold the Lamb of God.." Let us prepare the way for our Lord, through our witness of the Catholic truth, to all we encounter this season.

In Christ, His servant and yours

Robert Rodgers
 Coordinator, The Helpers Network
Rob@chnetwork.org

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

— John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 47

CHN Bulletin Board

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Bruce Sullivan

October 11

Fr. Edward Fride

October 18

pre-tape

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Colleen Hammond

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with shock that I was in a Communion line. The communion service that I had grown up with was a simple memorial service that we did four times a year. I had little basic understanding of what Communion was. But from the time I realized that I was in a Communion line until the point I got to the front of the church, Jesus moved in my heart and gave me the certainty that this was His real Presence. Every step I took toward that Altar, Jesus made it more and more clear to me that this was actually Him, not a symbol, not a mere memorial, but actually the living Presence of the Lord Jesus Himself. I received the Host and went back to my seat, my heart flaming with the love and power of Jesus. As I knelt there, I said to Jesus, "This is pretty nice. What do You think?" Jesus responded in a crystal clear voice: "You're home!" A few days later I began taking instruction, and within a few months I became a Roman Catholic.

Ever since I was in the fifth grade, I had wanted to become a theoretical nuclear physicist. My whole future was oriented in that direction. At least, until I met Jesus. Then I suddenly had no more desire to study physics. Nevertheless, I went to the University of Minnesota, tentatively pursuing a major in physics, since I had no clear alternative yet. I joined some Christian groups on campus, attended the Life in the Spirit Seminars, and started going to daily Mass. I met a young woman who also came to know Jesus in a deep way, and we fell in love and began to seriously plan what we hoped would be a long future together. Then one day during my prayer time, I was reading the Gospel of Matthew, and came across the verse in chapter 19 that speaks of living single for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. The verse seemed to jump out at me, and I knew the Lord was beginning to say something to me—something I thing I didn't want to hear! I slammed the Bible shut, saying "No, no, no, no!" I was planning to marry my girlfriend, and I was not even remotely open to

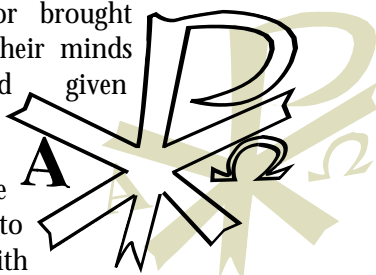
considering being celibate. But Jesus has a way of making His will more clearly known to us. During the next two weeks, five different friends of mine, from five different Christian groups, came to me at different times. Each of them had the same basic message: as they had been in prayer, Jesus had put me on their hearts or brought me to their minds and had given them a specific Scripture verse to share with me. Guess which one it was? In all five cases it was the same—St. Matthew 19:12: "Some are eunuchs because they are born that way; others are made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." Since it was clear the Lord Jesus was not going to let this go, I decided to go on a retreat and give the matter some more serious prayer.

While I was on that retreat, I prayed and reflected about what the Lord Jesus had been doing in my life: He brought me into His Church; He had given me a deep love for the Sacraments; He'd given me a significant desire to serve Him in some sort of full-time Christian ministry. If He was also calling me to be celibate, maybe He was calling me to the priesthood. I hadn't even considered the idea of the priesthood because of my plans to get married. But if He were calling me to live single in addition to what I had already experienced Him doing in my heart, perhaps the priesthood was what He had in mind. I decided to give it a test. I decided to ask God to speak to me through the Scriptures. I sat down with the Bible in front of me, and asked Jesus to show me if He were calling me to the priesthood. I told Him I would open the Bible randomly and stab my finger down. If it landed on the word 'priest,' then I'd consider the priesthood. So I opened

my Bible, stabbed down my finger, and landed squarely in the heart of Psalm 110, verse four: "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, you are a priest forever."

That shook me up, but I was still reluctant, so I said to Jesus, "Well, accidents will happen. If I do it again, and it happens again, then I will consider it." So I closed the Bible and then opened it again, very careful to avoid the entire book of Psalms. I stabbed my finger down, and landed on Hebrews 7:21, which just happens to be the place where the author of Hebrews directly quotes Psalm 110:4 "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, you are a priest forever...." I could not resist it anymore, He had made it clear, so I said to Him: "When I gave You my life, I gave you the authority to show me what You want for me; if priesthood is what You want, then I accept it, as Your will for me." That began a journey which was to culminate in my being ordained to the priesthood, November 29th, 1986.

I have just celebrated the 17th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. I am currently serving as the pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church in Ann Arbor Michigan. Christ the King is a charismatic personal parish of our diocese—especially designated by our bishop to serve people actively involved in the charismatic renewal. These seventeen years have been a wondrous experience of the love and fidelity of the Lord Jesus, the amazing power of the Holy Spirit, and the mercy and presence of the Father. I love being a priest, and serving the Lord and His people in this way has been a great joy. I have learned the truth of the verse, "Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Ps. 37:4). But He 'cheats'—first He changes the desires of your heart to match what He has in mind for you, and then He gives you those! But, being our sovereign Lord, He has that right!



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