



## October 2013 Newsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## More Than Enough

By Kathy McDonald

Our third son was 10 days old on "Reformation Sunday" 1998. The preacher that Sunday at the local Lutheran church we attended was a retired Lutheran school principal, a man in his 70s with a great shock of white hair. He ascended the pulpit and held up a book, a book he proclaimed "the work of the devil!" The book was by a Catholic author on justification. The preacher offered this book as evidence that "the Reformation must go on!" To me, he came across as so angry and fearful, so unreasonably opposed to the Catholic author, that I leaned over and whispered to my husband, Joe, and said "Sounds like a book we ought to read."

Though we were Lutheran, my husband was on the faculty of a Catholic college in a small town to which we had moved just two months before our son was born. Joe found the book in the college library and brought it home for me to read. That was the beginning of the end of my life as a Lutheran.

### Sound beginnings

I was born and raised in a conservative German Lutheran family (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod or LCMS), the third of five children; I was baptized as an infant, as were all my siblings. We attended church and Sunday School every Sunday without fail even when traveling. My happiest childhood memories are from church, particularly Christmas and Easter. I always had a lively faith and took to heart everything I could grasp at church. The messages of Advent and Lent, delivered through the Wednesday night services our

family faithfully attended, left deep impressions on my heart. One year, I was quite surprised to wake up one Christmas morning to find Jesus had not returned yet, because so vividly and urgently had our pastor proclaimed His Second Coming that Advent! I loved singing the beautiful, strong hymns of our church and participating in the liturgy even though I couldn't understand why we told God we were "hardly" [heartily] sorry for our sins in the Confession of Sins each Sunday. I regularly and devoutly read my treasured book of Bible stories, the only religious book in our home, which I had won for perfect Sunday School attendance.

By the time of my Lutheran confirmation when I was in the eighth grade, I was concerned I didn't have "real faith." I had questions about the Bible: "How do I know someone didn't just make this up?" and "How can anyone know the truth?" Typical adolescent questioning, but I was tortured by these threats to my faith. I was afraid I was an atheist when I was confirmed and prayed God would just "zap" me with unwavering faith at the moment of confirmation. It didn't happen. I wasn't zapped. But I did get a wonderful gift of a prayer book for the event and settled on a "Prayer for Faith" that has sustained me since that day. "Lord, I believe," the prayer goes, "Help Thou mine unbelief. Strengthen Thou this weak and flickering faith."

I prayed that prayer often through high school as I struggled with doubts. Truly I sought God but didn't know where to find Him.

"Journeys Home" is continued on page 2 ►

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I got involved in Young Life (a Christian ministry for middle school through college age students) for a while, which was an eye-opening experience. It was there I first experienced extemporaneous prayer. I had wanted just to “talk to God” but had never been shown how. I was introduced to Christian books (I had never known Christian bookstores existed until then) and read exciting stories of courageous men and women of faith, like David Wilkerson (*The Cross and the Switchblade*) and Brother Andrew (*God’s Smuggler*). I wanted to be like them, giving my life for God. Finally, I had found something I had been searching for — people who boldly lived the faith they professed.

My parents had not been happy with my foray into Young Life, not understanding why I didn’t want to go to our Lutheran youth group. After three years with Young Life, however, I did not sense the depth of the faith I was seeking. I couldn’t define it at the time, but it seemed to me “just not enough.” By my senior year, as I prepared to attend a Lutheran college, I felt compelled to return to our Lutheran church youth group (the “bloom where you’re planted” idea). I had one goal for my life now: to find God, to know Him and love Him, and to give my life to Him. I wanted to be a missionary, but it appeared the only way for a woman in the LCMS to do that was to marry one.

To a Lutheran, the Word of God is of primary importance. It is one of the two “means of grace” (the means by which God creates and increases faith in us); the other being the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion. I reasoned if I wanted the heroic faith I yearned for, I must com-

mit to studying God’s Word. In Lutheran colleges, though, that track was found in “theology,” not Bible study. The only reasonable course to follow, in my mind then, was to study theology. The only career option for women at that time which called for a theology major was deaconess.

### The long search

Theological studies were a huge disappointment. None of it was about the personal relationship with God I sought, only intellectual talk about God, and much of it called into question the foundational Christian truths I had been taught. Despite its noble-sounding motto — “Faith and Service in Christ” — the deaconess preparation program was my first encounter with feminism; serving the feminist cause, not Christ. I sought immersion in life with God, but was being groomed toward breaking open the male-only ministry in the LCMS to include women. The LCMS fractured while I was in college. The conservative faction, which retained the name LCMS, still has only male pastors today. The “liberal” faction later merged with other Lutheran groups to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), which ordains women as pastors and bishops. Upon graduation from a Lutheran university with degrees in theology and Greek, I hadn’t come any closer to finding God but, rather, was left very discouraged and confused about what to do.

My search for God continued for several years through a series of church occupations: a deaconess internship (after which I abandoned the whole deaconess track), director of Christian education in a “*Journeys Home*” is continued on page 5 ➡

“My search for God continued for several years through a series of church occupations...”

## EWTVN’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

#### October 7

Fr. Carter Griffin\*  
Former Presbyterian

#### October 14

Jeff Barefoot\*  
Former Unitarian, Grace Brethren,  
Methodist, and Lutheran

#### October 21

*The Journey Home International*

#### October 28

Billie Mobley\*  
Revert

\*Schedule is subject to change.

# From *Sola Fide* to *Plena Fides*

## "Justification and the Catholic Faith"

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell



In this issue, Kathy McDonald shares her journey from traditional Lutheranism to the Catholic Church. Kathy's story resonated with mine on many levels but one was her background in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. When I converted to Catholicism in 1996, my wife could not in good conscience follow me. She became a Missouri Synod Lutheran. Both our new affiliations were a change from our Presbyterian heritage but at least the Presbyterians and Lutherans hold the doctrine of justification by faith alone in common. For fourteen years, Sharon attended Mass with me and I attended her Missouri Synod congregation until in October 2010 she became a Catholic. Sharon and I had many conversations over the years about the doctrine of justification. Still today there remains much confusion among Catholics and Protestants over this question.

Martin Luther said that justification was the one doctrine on which the church stands or falls. If the church got this doctrine wrong, nothing else could be right. The purity of the gospel of Jesus Christ was at stake. Convinced Lutherans still hold this standpoint today. To understand why, we need to review the history.

The protest of the sixteenth century that became known as the Reformation was a complex historical movement with many facets but, from the point of view of doctrine, one of Martin Luther's most famous declarations stands out above all. Sinners are justified by faith alone as they trust in Jesus Christ. As a Presbyterian minister, I preached many sermons in which I gloried in the righteousness of Christ as our only hope of salvation.

For a knowledgeable Protestant, salvation can only come through Christ alone (*solus christus*) by the grace of God alone (*sola gratia*) and only through the instrumentality of faith (*sola fide*). This excluded any help from human resources, be they the living or the dead (saints). It excluded any work on our part. Works are important in the Protestant faith but they make no contribution to our salvation; they only give evidence that we have been justified. It is God's favor alone that saves (*sola gratia*). Most important of all, it must be only by faith because to add anything else to faith would cause our salvation to revert back to human effort. Protestant Christians loathe the idea that human power could save us. Trusting in human effort was the pernicious error of Romanism. Rome compromises God's grace by making works a part of salvation. Or, so I thought.

### The Reality of the Incarnation

The true differences between the Reformation and Catholic view become clear through patient and deliberate study. The

Catholic view of justification is rooted, like everything else in Catholicism, in the reality of the Incarnation. When the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary in her womb and brought the Eternal Logos to her, God became flesh (Jn 1:14). The purpose of the Incarnation was to unite divinity with humanity forever. As St. Athanasius would put it, "the Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become the sons of God" (cf. Jn 1:12). Both Protestants and Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is, after the Incarnation, forever the God-Man but it is only in Catholicism that the Incarnation fits into the plan of salvation in the fullest way. The Reformation doctrine of justification does not include, or at least does not emphasize, the union of human beings with God. Its doctrine is one of imputation, a legal declaration in which human beings are declared righteous before God's presence. In this view, it would have been sufficient for the Eternal Logos to become man, to suffer, to die on the cross, and to rise from the dead so that the merits of His death could be imputed to the sinner's account. There does

not seem to be any further need for Christ to remain a man in heaven. He could have simply shed His humanity and returned to heaven in His divinity. In fact, I recall hearing Protestant Christians say occasionally that Jesus was no longer a man in heaven. I don't think this was just a matter of bad catechesis. Their system of thinking doesn't seem to require His continuing humanity.



"Martin Luther said that justification was the one doctrine on which the church stands or falls. If the church got this doctrine wrong, nothing else could be right."

### Infused with Grace

The Catholic view of justification is infusion, a process in which God fills the human soul with His presence and therefore with His mercy, grace, and power. The permanence of the Incarnation makes more sense because the goal of God's redemptive plan is not just legal imputation but the uniting of Himself with human beings forever. A union took place first in Jesus Christ and it is that union which He shares with human sinners so they can grow into the fullness of their humanity by being made increasingly divine. In this view, the sacraments acquire a more direct relation to salvation. Beginning with baptism, the sacraments infuse God's grace into the human soul and make it conformed to the image of Christ. Christ's merits are not accounted to the sinner's account but poured into the soul of the sinner.

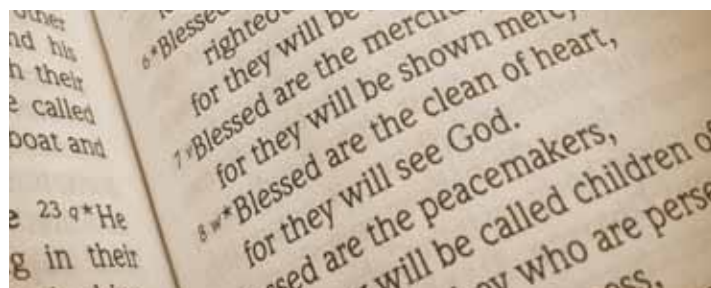
Infusion implies a process, not a one-time act. In the Protestant creeds, justification is defined as an act of God's grace since it is an imputation of righteousness. In the Catholic view, God's grace is gradually poured into the soul of the believing Christian. The Angelus, a standard Catholic prayer, expresses it well, "Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was



made known by the message of an angel, may through His passion and cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection.” So, salvation is a process of growing in God’s grace over a lifetime. One can be more or less justified whereas in Protestantism, one is either justified or not justified. In Protestant theology, sanctification is a process of growing in holiness but that process does not affect the state of one’s justification. In Catholic theology, justification and sanctification are two biblical words describing the same process.

The process of sanctification or justification is, in the Catholic view, one of constant purgation, illumination, and union. Purgation is the removal of sin and the inclinations to sin known as concupiscence. As the Christian receives more and more grace, he grows less inclined to sin and more inclined to obey God. If this purgative process is not complete at death, there remains a final purgation after death for those who die in a state of grace and are destined for heaven. Purgatory makes perfect sense from the Catholic view but absolutely no sense from the Protestant view. The removal of sin and the accompanying propensities to sin are not enough; a person on the spiritual journey needs illumination, an infusion of the knowledge of God. As a person becomes holier through purgation, their vision of God, the world, and themselves becomes clearer through illumination. Paul used such language in praying for the Ephesians, namely, “that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened” (Eph 1:18; see also Col 1:9-11). The final end of this process is complete union with God known by the medieval theologians as the Beatific Vision. It is what Jesus spoke of when He said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God” (Mt 5:8).

En route to the Beatific Vision, the ordinary Christian en-



gages in works of grace, that is, works motivated by grace. And here is where Protestants are likely to misunderstand the Catholic view. In Protestantism, works are evidence of genuine faith. They are necessary because without works one cannot know whether one is saved. Works are motivated by grace but they do not contribute to one’s justification since that act has already been completed by God. Works only show us whether that act has occurred or not. In the Catholic view, good works are motivated by grace and open up our hearts to receive more grace being poured into our souls. Grace does not come from us; it comes from the merits of Christ. Christ alone can merit heaven and our final union with God but He must communicate those merits for us to have any hope of the Beatific Vision. Good works are the ongoing means of Christ communicating His merits; works can include prayer, obedience, sacrifice, sufferings, and acts of charity. They help us cooperate with God by expanding our hearts to receive more of God.

## The Eucharist

This all explains the importance of the Eucharist in the Catholic view of justification. If justification is a process of becoming more and more just through the infusion of grace, there has to be a means by which that grace is continually infused into our souls. The answer lay in the sacraments and preeminently in the greatest of the sacraments, the Eucharist. All the sacraments give grace but only the Eucharist gives the Author of grace. The Eucharist gives grace not only in a generic sense; it gives Christ Himself in the fullness of His humanity and divinity. As is often said in Catholic life, it gives the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. Here too is the reason for Jesus being forever the God-Man. In the Incarnation, divinity was united with humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ. The union of divinity and humanity is communicated to the Christian through the holy Eucharist.

The fundamental mistake of justification by faith alone is that it transfers the once-for-all-ness of Jesus’s death — the objective part of redemption — to God’s act of forgiveness in response to our faith, the subjective part of redemption. If you believe that all sins — past, present, and future — are forgiven in one act of declaration made by God at the moment of faith, then there is little reason to ask for forgiveness in the future. Why ask forgiveness for sins already forgiven? Yet Protestant Christians do ask forgiveness for their daily sins. Something is wrong in either their theory or their practice. I think their practice is right but their theory is wrong.

In the end, the Protestant view of salvation is insufficient, lacking the fullness of the Christian Faith. While not everything in the Protestant view needs to be rejected, the Catholic understanding represents better the teaching of the whole New Testament (*plena fides*). If the Catholic view had been what most Protestants thought it was — salvation by works or faith plus works — I would have rejected it and still be a Protestant today. The Catholic view is truer to the New Testament and agrees with the Church Fathers better than the imputation view.

To relinquish justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) and embrace the fullness of the faith (*plena fides*) is not to reject everything in one’s Protestant past. It is to find a fuller and richer context in which to put that past into practice. This all has an important practical application. The doctrine of salvation and heaven does make a difference. I never saw in the Protestant Christians the yearning for holiness I have observed in some Catholics. I didn’t have yearnings to such a degree nor do I think I saw it in others. I have seen a life of prayer and holiness in some Catholics that borders on the phenomenal. I now think I know why. If you view yourself as already saved, then there may be less reason to pursue a life of prayer and holiness. Since Catholics view their salvation as an ongoing project of conversion, consisting of justification and sanctification, they are motivated to pursue holiness to a much greater degree. ■

## Go Deeper!

Read paragraphs 1987-2029 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to learn more about the Catholic doctrine of justification.

## Letting Go

By Marcus Grodi



Possibly the most misunderstood yet important aspect of following Jesus involves letting go. For each of us, the past, present, and future offers layers upon layers of anxieties, regrets, hopes, and dreams. In each case, Jesus beckons us to trust Him and let go. And maybe the hardest to abandon are our dreams.

The Bible gives multiple examples of people, called by God into service, yet who, in obedience, had to let go of longed for dreams. Instead, these dreams were passed on and completed by others.

Moses, for example, in his final days “went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo ... and the Lord showed him all the land ... [and] said to him, ‘This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, “I will give it to your descendants.” **I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.**’ ... Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of Wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Deut 34: 1-12; NKJV).

Later, King David admitted to his people, “I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord ... but God said to me, ‘**You shall not build a house for My name**, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood’ ... He said to me, ‘It is your son Solomon who shall build My house ...’ (1 Chron 28:1-6; NKJV).

Both men had to let go.

The reasons Moses and David were prevented from fulfilling their dreams were due to personal failures of character: out of anxiety or passion, they had failed at particular moments in their lives to humbly obey what they knew to be God’s will. God in His mercy forgave them and continued to bless and use them for the good of His People, yet there were consequences of their failures, and for both this meant letting go of the fulfillment of their dreams.

Saint Paul admitted a similar loss of dreams: “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6; NKJV); “...of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:5,6; NKVJ).

Paul certainly must have had a great vision for what he believed God was calling him to do with his future! A great career was set before him, following in the path of his forefathers, and he bravely had stepped forward in zealous obedience to what he believed God was calling him to do.

But then God changed his future, and in discovering the fullness of truth in Christ and His Church, he also discovered that, “what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:7,8; NKJV).

Continual conversion always requires that we let go of the past, hold lightly to the future, and focus humbly on following the lead of God in the present. Our Lord said, “do not worry about tomorrow ... Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Mt 6:34; NKJV).

As we seek to discern and follow God’s will for our lives and our ministries, I believe we must trust that—even though there are lots of things that may not make sense right now, or seem fair or just — God in His love for each of us knows precisely what we are going through. He has us precisely, right now, where He wants us to be. Where we will be tomorrow is a mystery, though we can trust that God’s plans are always good for our spiritual growth and maturity (Rom 8:28). We must be patient and not jump the gun or do something foolish out of anxiety or fear. Saint Paul called this a present pressing or “straining forward ... toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” while at the same time “hold[ing] true to what we have attained” (Phil 3:12-16; RSV).

The prophet Jeremiah offers us a challenging word of encouragement. “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon ... seek the peace [shalom] of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace” (Jer 29:4-7; NKJV).

We may feel like we have been “carried away captive,” particularly as we look anxiously toward the future, but I believe whatever future doors God might open are dependent upon how we accept with joy the doors of the present moment. As Jean-Pierre de Caussade warned, “It is only right that if we are discontented with what God offers us every moment, we should be punished by finding nothing else that will content us” (*Abandonment to Divine Providence*, 1:7).

This is what we in the Coming Home Network International consider the key to our work: standing beside those on the journey, helping them patiently trust that their lives, past, present, and future, are in the loving hands of God. Please pray for those who are presently struggling with discouragement. ■

# FEATURED RESOURCES

## Luther —By Dr. Paul Thipgen



Dr. Paul Thipgen, author, Church historian, and former Evangelical minister, describes the monumental reformer Martin Luther as "a figure of great complexity and contradiction." In this 2005 Deep in History talk, Dr. Thipgen reveals points about Martin Luther's life and ideology that he struggled with as a Protestant, including Luther's early life, attitudes toward the Catholic Church, and his views on the human person.

## There We Stood, Here We Stand: Eleven Lutherans Rediscover Their Catholic Roots

— By Timothy Drake



These thought-provoking testimonies by eleven former Lutherans reveal how far the Lutheran Church has strayed from Luther. They include moving stories from four former female pastors, three former pastors, and others. Their intensely personal stories address the differences between Lutheranism and Catholicism — differences so profound that they have led many into the Catholic Church.

\$35

For a donation of \$35, receive the Luther CD.

\$50

For a donation of \$50, receive *There We Stood, Here We Stand: Eleven Lutherans Rediscover Their Catholic Roots*.

\$75

For a donation of \$75, receive the Luther CD and *There We Stood, Here We Stand: Eleven Lutherans Rediscover Their Catholic Roots*.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

### October 18, 2013

Catholic Chapter House  
Toronto Canada  
[catholicchapterhouse.com](http://catholicchapterhouse.com)

### November 16, 2013

Great Lakes Catholic Men's Conference  
DeKalb, Illinois  
[mensconf@thetalk.org](mailto:mensconf@thetalk.org)  
1-888-849-2282

## 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).

## NEWSLETTER DONATION

Our monthly CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication. We request a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter and remain a supporting member of the CHNetwork. These donations support all aspects of our small non-profit apostolate, making it possible for our staff to be available to help others on the journey, manage our studio and internet outreach, as well as the production and distribution of the CHNewsletter. Thank you for your support!



## 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!



## 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/** 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) \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ 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).



## 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.

## FORUM!

Check out CHNetwork's online forum. The forum is a wonderful place to connect with other CHNetwork members, ask questions about the Catholic Faith, and browse through archived discussions on a wide variety of topics related to the Catholic Church. Go to <http://forum.chnetwork.org>.

## 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).

## SHARE YOUR STORY

The CHNetwork always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to <http://chnetwork.org/converts> to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Thomas, a convert, may he be given wisdom and fortitude as he continues the ordination process for the Catholic priesthood through the Pastoral Provision.
- For Nadia, a convert, may she continue to grow in her love for Christ and His Church and may her many spiritual and temporal gifts be used to build up the Kingdom.
- For Douglas, may he come to know the Lord's love and return to Christ and His Church.
- For Pete in Florida, that he have patience and wisdom in moving toward the Church.
- For Nate and his wife as they try to discern God's timing for their entry into the Catholic Church.
- For all Catholics and Catholic converts who are discerning a vocation to some form consecrated life.
- For Simon, a former Presbyterian minister, who recently obtained employment and who will soon be received into the Church.
- For Brian in Wisconsin, that through the trials and struggles he is encountering he be brought ever closer to the crucified Lord.
- For Jerry, a former Presbyterian minister, who will meet with his Archdiocese to begin discussions about the permanent diaconate or the priesthood.

■ For Scott, a convert, may he find gainful employment.

## Laity

- For Brandon, who comes from an Eastern Orthodox faith background and feels drawn to become Catholic.
- For Jim, who is having a number of health problems and is uncertain as to where he is in his faith journey.
- For Christian, a recent convert, who feels called to serve the Church and isn't sure exactly what form that will take.
- For Laney who is ready to become Catholic but can't due to circumstances with her family.
- For Mallory and her husband as they deal with opposition from family after their conversion.
- For Brent who is torn in different directions in his faith journey, feeling both drawn to the Catholic Church and worried that it might not be true and he is being led astray.
- For Kelley, as she begins RCIA.
- For Marion, who would like to become Catholic but doesn't want to jeopardize his family's faith by converting.
- For Carolyn, a recent convert, who is having some health problems.

■ For Brandon, a teenager who wants to become Catholic.

■ For George, that his wife be open and receptive to his interest in the Catholic Faith.

■ For Dennis and his wife, that they soon receive word on their annulment petitions and be able to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For Paul, a convert, that his wife come to understand his decision to become Catholic and for his family to continue to grow in their faith.

■ For Carol, that she and her husband will find a priest who is able to assist them in completing their faith journey.

■ For Joseph, that he finds the answers to his questions about the Catholic Faith and connects with dedicated Catholics who can support his journey.

■ For Ruth, that she be able to move forward with her desire to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church with the blessing and support of her husband.

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)

**Resident Theologian**, Dr. Kenneth Howell (former Presbyterian pastor)

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

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

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Lutheran church, and then a Lutheran schoolteacher. I looked for God in Israel pursuing graduate studies and later as an elementary school teacher in Jerusalem. I was impressed by many of the Catholic shrines in the Holy Land, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem which encloses the traditional sites of our Lord’s Crucifixion, burial, and Resurrection. The beauty of it all left a deep impression on me, but I didn’t yet have a context for appreciating Catholic history or worship.

Back in the U.S., I worked for the LCMS in mission education, traveling around the country promoting LCMS missions. This work took me around the country and even to Nigeria. The beauty and simplicity of the Nigerian people and their worship touched me deeply. Here, I sensed I was getting a little closer to God.

### Paving the road

During these years of searching for God, I had several encounters with “real Catholics.” I had not thought Catholics were “real Christians;” I thought they just went to church because they “had to” but did not have “saving faith.” During that time, though, I met some Catholics who made me question this presumption. One was a woman whom I had known as a child in our Lutheran church. She had converted to Catholicism and told me about her devotion to Mary (I was *not* ready for that!). Her story was the first I had heard in which someone converted to Catholicism out of conviction, not just for marriage.

Another was a Catholic fellow I dated for a while who took me to my first Mass. Something struck me at that Mass, although I didn’t know what. I wanted to go back, again and again, and even attended a few classes with the priest who gave me my first book on Catholicism, *Believing in Jesus*. I was dumbfounded reading through that book — there was so much in there that I believed! But there was also much I couldn’t touch yet and so I set it aside. Looking back, I can see how the Holy Spirit was paving the road for my own conversion through these encounters with faithful Catholics.

### First light

So I continued in the Lutheran Church, married, and had children. I was content enough with the Lutheran church where we lived, which was certainly on the “orthodox” end of the Lutheran spectrum and with a solid liturgy. I was occupied with family matters that my burning quest for the deeper things of God was tempered.

But then, shortly before our third son’s birth, we moved to the town where my testimony began. My husband, Joe, and I were very uncomfortable with the local LCMS church from the beginning. The Baptist-style services and preaching tended in the opposite direction of the orthodox Lutheranism we knew, but we weren’t in the position to go looking elsewhere at that point. However, our experience on “Reformation Sunday,” not only catapulted us out of that church, it eventually landed us in

the arms of the Roman Catholic Church. More on that journey later, but now I’d like to address some of the difficult theological issues that had to be overcome before I could embrace Catholicism.

### Luther and his doctrines

The Catholic book Joe checked out of the library dealt with the cornerstone of Lutheranism. To have the doctrine *sola fide* (“faith alone”) fall, meant Luther’s foundation was fatally fractured. What I had learned and held as a Lutheran came crashing down when I squarely faced what the Bible said about faith and works. I had blindly accepted what I had been taught, memorizing “proof texts” for Lutheran doctrines from childhood, never questioning whether or not they actually proved the truths of Lutheran teaching.

Occasionally, it seemed there were inconsistencies between the Bible and Lutheran doctrines; for instance, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* (“Bible alone”) came in conflict with New Testament passages. I had trouble reconciling the doctrine of “faith alone” with James’ passages on the importance of works (but we had learned that Luther had called the Book of James “an epistle of straw,” so we didn’t hold it very highly either). However, there was another inconsistency: who was Luther to say what should and should not be in the Bible? That thought was pretty close to blasphemy, I was sure, so I dismissed it.

We had never been taught any church history between the time of the apostles and Luther. I first heard of the “Church Fathers” in a Greek class in college. As I translated Irenaeus’ writings from the Greek, the truth of what he had written amazed me. I wondered why I had never been told of him before. None of my theology courses in college ever mentioned the Church Fathers. We were never given any devotional readings beyond what Luther wrote. I did begin to read some of Luther’s larger works in college and was indeed troubled by his anti-Semitism and hatred of the papacy and Catholic Church. However, that was explained away by saying, “that’s how people wrote and spoke in that time” and “he was German” (and having been raised in a very German family, Luther’s “German” personality made sense to me).

Now, after “Reformation Day,” I faced a book that challenged the most fundamental of all Lutheran doctrines. I shut the book hard several times, afraid of what I was reading. “If this is true,” I surmised, “everything I have believed in my whole life as a Lutheran is in question. If this is true, what else have I wrongly believed?” I did finish the book and I was scared. I was embarking upon the greatest adventure of learning of my life.

I happened upon an online Catholic forum, which became my greatest help for understanding Catholic doctrine in the context of my Lutheran understanding. In these early days of probing Catholicism, I first thought we, as Lutherans and Catholics, were all talking about the same thing, just in a different way. We all believe in justification by faith, but emphasize different aspects.

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

The biggest shock for me came when I learned that the Catholic Church does not teach, as Lutherans do, that man is totally corrupted through Original Sin, totally incapable of cooperating with God in any way, that God only covers our sins, or that when God looks at us, He does not see us but only Christ.

I was also confronted by something that has taken me years to grasp, and still I am afraid I cannot explain the Catholic doctrine of justification well. It is not simple or single-stranded, but involves the doctrines of sin (original and actual, mortal and venial), grace (actual and sanctifying), the sacraments (all *seven*), and runs so deep it can never be fully grasped. What confronted me was a completely new, non-linear way of thinking. I would have to empty myself of everything Lutheran and learn the Catholic Faith on its own, not in comparison or in relation to anything I had known as a Lutheran.

I was beginning to see Catholicism not as a set of doctrines, as I had understood the Lutheran faith, but more like a tapestry where every thread of truth is bound up with all the others: pull out one thread and the whole thing unravels; held together, you have a magnificent picture. I had begun with thinking I just needed to translate my Lutheran understanding into Catholic language, but I was looking for cognates in a language where there were none. This was going to be much more like learning Hebrew than Greek.

If I admitted that the Catholic Church was right on justification, which would be borne out in its consistency in all other doctrines, I believed I was compelled to become Catholic. The scandal of Christian disunity deeply troubled me. The least, and best, I could do would be to join the Church Christ Himself founded. But how to get from here to there was nowhere clear to me.

### More light on the path

The next book my husband brought home from the college library was *Rome Sweet Home* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn. I could not believe what I was reading! Here were real people, devout and educated Protestants, who chose to become Catholic. They addressed many of the common Protestant obstacles to the Catholic Church in ways that made sense. I was starting to get an inkling of the process of conversion.

I couldn't talk to any non-Catholics (which included all my family and friends at the time) about my Catholic musings, because I could not yet explain it. I had no words, no defenses, no context for any of it. I wouldn't know how to answer their objections, but just knew in my heart I had come upon the Truth. The most I could say was what I had told a Lutheran pastor who asked before we joined his church, "What are you looking for in a church?" I replied, "I am looking for a church that will help me live as a Christian and die as a Christian." All I could say to my horrified Protestant family and friends was, "I have found the Church I've been seeking."

I continued reading and asking questions of my online Catholic friends. I devoured convert stories and somehow

got connected with the Coming Home Network International, probably through the online Catholic forum I had found. CHNetwork provided me with a wonderful mentor, a woman who was formerly a Lutheran pastor. I will be forever thankful to her and CHNetwork for the help I received on my journey to the Catholic Church.

My husband did not yet share my enthusiasm for the Catholic Church and I had to learn that while we were one in marriage, God has His plans for us as individuals. He calls us and works with us according to our individual natures and only God knows the time and manner that is best for that call. It was certainly a challenging time for our marriage, but I know even these struggles were part of God's way of preparing us both to enter the Catholic Church.

### The Last Frontier

A couple years later, we moved again, this time to Alaska, now with four children, having added a daughter eight months earlier. I had continued my Catholic reading and correspondence and was growing more restless about continuing in the Lutheran church. My restlessness came to a head when I began planning for the new school year.

We had begun homeschooling two years earlier when our eldest child was in the third grade. Raising our children in the Christian faith was the central tenet of our home school and choosing the right religion curriculum was the first thing on my teacher's to-do list each year. I looked over the Lutheran books in front of me and compared them with some Catholic curriculum a Catholic friend from our former homeschool group had shared with me. I was a convinced Catholic by this point and could not in good conscience teach our children what I did not believe. I chose the Catholic curriculum.

Another dilemma presented itself: I would be teaching the Catholic faith to our children while we still worshipped in the Lutheran Church. I talked with my husband and said I could not have one foot in the Lutheran Church and the other in the Catholic Church. Our children needed to have a consistent message. We agreed that day to begin attending the Catholic Church with the view toward becoming Catholic.

### Learning to be Catholic

Deciding to become Catholic was one thing; learning how to be Catholic would be something quite different. Actually realizing what we sought — that is to enter the Catholic Church fully and completely — proved a very difficult journey, fraught with many obstacles. Perhaps ironically, this is one thing I appreciated about the Catholic Church: that it's so hard to get in! It seemed the devil was very interested in keeping us out, so we must be on the right track, I surmised. Looking back over my journey to the Catholic Church, I can see God's love and providence in allowing every obstacle, every challenge, along the way. How true it is that the harder we work for something, the more we appreciate it!



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.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

The first thing I did to learn “how to be Catholic” was to begin a Catholic prayer life. I purchased *Manual of Prayers* and began an early morning routine of prayer and reading, rising before my family was up. I believe this was the single most important step I took on my journey to Catholicism. After I found a pamphlet on praying the rosary in our church’s “tract rack,” I started taking it with me on my daily “prayer walks,” forcing myself to memorize the prayers and mysteries. It was hard to warm up to this devotion, I admit, but convinced of its importance to the Catholic life, I persevered. By the time I had memorized all the mysteries, I found I was looking forward to my daily rosary. I have received so much consolation and help through praying the rosary that now I can’t imagine a day without it.

In the fall of 2001, my husband and I enrolled in RCIA to begin the process of formal reception into the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, RCIA proved to be a trial rather than an aid on the way; not at all what I envisioned the Catholic Church to be. We endured it, went to Mass faithfully, and began preparing our 10-year-old son, Gabe, for his First Holy Communion. Our priest gave us permission to prepare Gabe at home using the materials I had purchased for our homeschool. This turned out to be a great way for me to learn about the Catholic Faith as we studied together. Gabe became the first “official” Catholic in our family when he received the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion the following spring.

Though my husband and I had completed RCIA, we had another obstacle to overcome before we could enter the Church; we needed to have our marriage blessed and for that we would both need to seek annulments of prior unions. The annulment process took two and a half years. Many criticize the Catholic Church’s annulment process. I am not one of them. It is a gift the Church gave us that provided tremendous healing. It required great patience to endure incomprehensible delays with no guarantee of a positive outcome. It afforded a great opportunity for growing through prayer and study, learning what it means to be Catholic. In the end, our annulments were granted and our marriage was blessed at a beautiful ceremony with our children and Catholic friends around us. The following Sunday, my husband (who chose “Augustine” as his Confirmation saint) and I (“Mary, Queen of All Saints” — why not go for the gold?) received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Communion.

I am amazed at how God works! I am thankful for my solid Lutheran upbringing that first brought me to faith and taught me the Scriptures. Growing up Lutheran, I gained a great foundation in and appreciation for sacred music, something I probably would have missed in the Catholic Church during that time (I was raised in a conservative Christian church at the time the Catholic Church was undergoing its “identity crisis” following Vatican II). Now our family is assisting our Catholic parish with its sacred music ministry.

I join so many others God has called out of strong Protestant churches and into the Catholic Church who are now realizing the fullness of the Faith. When I first met with our priest telling him of my desire to become Catholic, I told him I believed I would be bringing many more with me. That remains my hope and I pray daily for my extended family, that they, too, will realize the fullness of the Faith.

My search is over. I have enough — more than enough to last my lifetime!

### Advice for those on the way to becoming Catholic

Begin a Catholic prayer life as soon as you are convinced you are on the way to the Catholic Church. Get a “lifetime” prayer book like *Manual of Prayers* and make this a habit for the rest of your life.

If you are married to a non-Catholic spouse, recognize that although you are one flesh in marriage, you remain individuals spiritually. God does not call couples; He calls individuals. Your call is not your spouse’s call. Be patient with yourself and with your spouse. Pray, pray, pray! Let God do the work of conversion in you both. ■



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### BLOG

Please visit [www.chnetwork.org/blog](http://www.chnetwork.org/blog) to comment on and discuss this story!



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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.