



## May 2020 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## A Meandering Journey from Atheism to Catholicism

By Gregory Graham

**Childhood** I was born in 1962 in Abilene, Texas. My father was a Nike missile radar operator in the Army, raised in the Baptist tradition, and my mother was raised Methodist. My dad got out of the Army, and we moved to Dallas when I was a year old. My dad entered the new field of computer programming and stayed with it until he retired. My mother worked for the phone company for a few years, until my little brother came along.

We did not go to church much until I was ten years old, when neighbors invited us to their Presbyterian church, where my parents remain members until this day. My earliest memory related to faith was a conversation I had with my Methodist maternal grandmother when I was five or six. She told me about how Jesus was the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins. If I believed in Him, I would be saved from hell and would go to heaven when I died. I certainly wanted to go to heaven, so I wanted to believe in Jesus. But I wondered if my belief was good enough and real enough. I had been given a book of Bible stories, which I tried to read sometimes, thinking it was a good thing to do. I found some of the stories difficult to believe, and I had trouble staying interested.

My real interest in childhood was science and technology, especially airplanes, rockets, and robots. I had a poster showing all of the planets on my bedroom wall, and I remember watching the Apollo missions on TV with great interest and ex-

citement. My favorite cartoon as a little boy was Jonny Quest, which was about the adventures of the son of a scientist. I wanted to be an astronaut or scientist when I grew up.

### Atheist Teenager

When I was twelve, I entered the communicant's class at my church. I faithfully attended and tried to learn what was taught. Since I hadn't been baptized yet, I was baptized at that time and became a full, communicant member of the church. However, my commitment to science seemed to be at odds with my minimal Christian faith, and any enthusiasm I had at my baptism soon faded. I continued to be involved at church, as was expected of me, and I tried to learn what was taught in Sunday school, to please my teachers, but my heart was not in it.

Instead of religion, I subscribed to a kind of technological optimism, as was preached by Gene Roddenberry, the creator of my favorite TV show, *Star Trek*. Roddenberry envisioned a future where

Journeys Home

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

science and technology had solved the major problems of human existence. On the earth of *Star Trek*, there was no more war, poverty, disease, or hunger. The conflict of the show came from interaction with strange or hostile beings in other parts of the galaxy.

Although my interest in science and science fiction had led me to a vague atheism, there were two things I encountered that opened the door for later faith in God. The first was an essay by my favorite author, Isaac Asimov. Although I first came to Asimov through his science fiction stories, he was very prolific and wrote on a wide range of topics. One essay, called “The Judo Argument,” looked at attempts to prove the existence of God by appealing to science. Asimov examined these arguments and showed that they didn’t work, but he surprised me at the end of the article. Although he believed that science could not prove the existence of God, he said that science could not disprove it, either. From the scientific point of view, the existence of God was an open question. This surprising conclusion was something I never forgot. The second influence was the movie *Star Wars*. It had the look of science fiction, but it also had a mystical aspect with the presence of the Force. It appeared to challenge the idea that science, technology, and space travel were incompatible with religion and the supernatural.

I remember, in high school, considering the possibility that there were some things in the world that were beyond the reach of the scientific method, and that religion might know something that science did not. Therefore, I thought that I should someday do research on all of the major religions of the world, to see if they might have something worth knowing.

### Conversion

In my junior year of high school, some Christian classmates of mine — Mike, Chad, and Doug — would talk to me about their faith. I respected them because they were smart, especially in science and computers. In the minutes before physics class one day, Chad showed me how there were Old Testament prophecies that predicted Jesus Christ, yet they were written centuries before He lived. I had an epiphany right then that the Bible had to be a supernatural book. It was written by multiple authors over the course of many centuries, but it had a coherent message that could only be possible because of divine inspiration.

From then on, I wanted to learn everything I could about the Bible. I started reading the Bible, watching Christian TV programs, reading Christian books, and listening to Christian music. I reasoned that if the Bible was from God, there was nothing more important I could know about. All of this soon led me to faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord, and was the beginning of my journey as a Christian believer.

My favorite Christian TV program was *Zola Levitt Live*. Mr. Levitt was a Jewish convert to Christianity, and I liked his program because he talked about the Jewish roots of the Christian Faith, and how Jesus was a fulfillment of the Old Testament, which was the very thing that began my conversion. This was the subject of a book he co-wrote called *The Bible Jesus Read is Exciting*. I read this book and have loved the Old Testament ever since then.

*Continued on page 9* ➤

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Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.

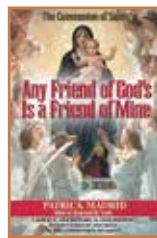


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In this classic Deep in Scripture episode, Marcus Grodi and Jim Anderson discuss the communion and intercession of the saints.

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— By Patrick Madrid

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# Count It All Joy

By Marcus Grodi

Have you ever received a gift, that wasn't, well, what you were expecting? Maybe it was a bit of a disappointment. Maybe you had your heart set on something else, or you had in your mind something a bit more appealing? Your taste buds were all set for something sweet, only to discover it was sour or bland, spicy or hot! You said, "Thanks! I really ... ah ... appreciate it!" but your heart was saying, "Really? Seriously?"



And then the giver, noticing the deer-in-the-head-lights look in your eyes or your awkward smile, said sheepishly, "Well, it's the intention that matters." Well, yes, as true as this may be, it doesn't always lead to the joy that the giver had intended.

Which is why I find it interesting that, in what may be the earliest epistle written in the New Testament, the author begins, "count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials" (Jas 1:2). The more you think about it, this comes across as a bit of an oxymoron. It makes more sense to say, given the day-to-day struggles of life, "count it all joy when you *don't* meet various trials," or "when you've put those various trials behind you," or maybe even, "count it all joy whenever you've been able to hide from those various trials!" And today when the Church and our culture seem to be overflowing with "various trials," especially the recent COVID-19 virus and all the suffering it has brought our world, how do we possibly "count it all joy"?

The Epistle of James was not merely trying to raise their hearts in the midst of a bad situation, but seriously hoping these early Christians would recognize the absolute importance of accepting trials as the normal process of growing in joy.

When St. James wrote this, he may have assumed that his early Jewish-Christian congregation remembered the words of Jesus when Jesus told His Apostles that the reason He was insisting that they abide in Him, abide in His Love, keep His commandments to love one another, and bear much fruit, was so that Our Lord's "joy may be in [them] and that [their] joy may be full" (Jn 15:11) — in other words, that by grace, faith, and obedience they might experience "all joy."

But what about "various trials"? Jesus did promise His Apostles that if they decided to follow and abide in Him, they should expect that the world would hate them, even persecute them, because the world had first hated and persecuted him (Jn 15:18f). But Jesus doesn't tell them to be happy about this, or that "various trials" would somehow be the primary pathway to joy.

Yet, St. James went on to remind them: "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas 1:3-4). Scholars often battle over the interpretation of the Epistle of James, and how St. James' theology of "faith and works" fits with St. Paul's supposed "faith *alone*," but I think the real issue is expressed in this verse, for whether our faith is demonstrated in our works or not, the bottom line is that you and I need to be steadfast to the end, responding to grace, so that we can be found "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

One of the reasons I think the Epistle of James was basically an early sermon on our Lord's Sermon on the Mount was that Jesus had warned His audience that "unless [their] righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (i.e., their religious leaders), [they] will never enter the kingdom of heaven .... You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:20,48). Many argue that St. Paul was all about "faith *alone*," and "once saved-always saved," with no emphasis on growing in perfection, but St. Paul recognized this very need when he gave one of his most personal confessions:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

**Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own,** because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:8-14; emphasis mine).

The righteousness that you and I need, when one day we stand before God, we receive by grace through faith, but also by sharing in His sufferings, by pressing on to become perfect, to become like Him, letting go of our past failures, straining forward toward our Savior.

This is the joy of our everyday walk with Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord said, "[D]o not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Matt 6:34). The "various trials" that come our way each day are the means by which He is testing our faith, to help us grow, so that, as St. Paul said, "If possible [we] may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Later in the Epistle, St. James wrote, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. **Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.** Do not grumble, brethren,



against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors" (5:7-9; emphasis mine).

Our Lord and all of the New Testament writers warned that the coming of the Lord was near, and since here we are 2000 years later, many biblical scholars claim, "See, Jesus and His Apostles were obviously wrong!" But they miss the point of what this warning was all about, for every single time we recite the Creed in Mass we say we believe that the Lord will come again, "like a thief in the night" (1 Thess 5:2) or as in "the days of Noah" (Mt 24:37). We just make the mistake of presuming, like those people "eating and drinking" as if the flood will certainly never come, that the "coming of the Lord" is something only future generations may need to worry about! But Our Lord, His Apostles, and St. James were right: we need to patiently seek this day — not tomorrow — but today, to face with joy the various trials placed in our path, knowing that this is precisely how He is preparing us to face Him when He comes, and of course it may be soon.

Earlier this year, Kobe Bryant, the highly acclaimed basketball star, began his day as usual by attending Mass with his daughter.

As they left, blessing themselves with the sign of the cross, and then soon after, stepping onto a helicopter, they had no idea that they would so soon both be standing face-to-face with Jesus.

About two thousand years ago, St. James was trying to encourage his struggling, dispersed congregation, to have courage and hope and patience in the midst of great trial. For this reason, I believe his message is the exact message we need to hear today, in this time of scandal, confusion, moral craziness, even apostasy. Our Lord may be nearer than we think, but regardless, our calling is to face whatever trials He sends our way with joy.

In Philippians, St. Paul made another confession: "Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" ... for ... "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:11,13). The purpose of the Coming Home Network is to stand beside people on the journey, so that we can encourage and strengthen each other, to "count it all joy" whenever we "meet various trials." And if you are at any stage of the journey of faith, and need help, please, never hesitate to ask. ■

## What Evangelicals Don't Know About the Rosary

By K. Albert Little

For many good Evangelicals, myself included, Mary can be the ultimate stumbling block on a journey into full communion with the Catholic Church. This wasn't so for the first 1,500 years of Church history.

Martin Luther, one of the earliest Protestant Reformers, held strong and fast to Marian doctrines — even doctrines like her perpetual virginity, which couldn't be strongly backed up by his *sola scriptura* theology. As an Evangelical convert to the Catholic Church, I didn't have such a hard time with Mary. Thankfully.

I was introduced, early on in my journey, to Dr. Scott Hahn's *Hail, Holy Queen*, an academic treatise on Mary as revealed by the Old Testament. It was fascinating — Hahn is a masterful biblical theologian — and with the help of the Holy Spirit, a lot of those tough theological barriers that most Protestants come up against with Marian theology crumbled like the walls of Jericho.

So, as an Evangelical taking baby steps towards Catholicism, I thought Mary was alright and most of what Catholics said about her sounded right too. For me, Mary was OK, but Marian devotions and rituals like the Rosary were wholly foreign and frightening. The Rosary felt so *European*, like something Italian grandmothers would cling to in the back pews of dusty churches. The Rosary felt complicated, inaccessible, and unnecessary; I didn't speak the language, I didn't know all the rules — I had no idea where to begin.

I knew about the Rosary largely from bits and pieces of things I'd picked up over the previous year or so of seriously reading my way into the Catholic Church. But I didn't know a lot. I knew enough to know that the "Hail Mary" was a biblically-based prayer that asked for Mary to pray for us and acknowledged her incredible position as the bearer of the Christ Child. The Rosary is a powerful prayer and after studying and understanding its origins (and the theology of the Communion of the Saints), it made sense to me.

I knew that the Hail Mary made up a large part of the Rosary and I knew that somewhere in there faithful Catholics also meditated on certain "mysteries" from the life of Jesus. I didn't know or understand what those were, or what that meant, and that was the inaccessible and complicated bit. Catholics I knew just seemed to *know* them and have memorized all this difficult stuff.

So, I dug deeper. I picked up a book, a rather pedestrian text compared to Dr. Hahn's biblical treatment, but there, tucked away in the last chapter, was a detailed explanation of the Rosary. It turns out that the practice of the Rosary is like a complete Bible study on beads. When I learned this, it blew my mind.

At the heart of the Rosary are meditations on particular scenes from the Scriptures. This is what makes the Rosary a mini Bible study. This is what made the Rosary so popular for catechesis in the Middle Ages. There are four different *sets* of mysteries and the Church recommends that they're prayed on different days of the week. Each set of mysteries — the Joyful Mysteries, the Luminous Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Glorious Mysteries — contains five *scenes* within them for meditation.

The scenes from the Luminous Mysteries, for example, are:

- The Baptism of Jesus
- The Wedding Feast at Cana
- The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
- The Transfiguration
- The Establishment of the Lord's Supper

The goal of the Rosary is to meditate, prayerfully, on these scenes. As a participant in the Rosary, you become a prayerful participant in these biblical scenes. There are lots of ways this is done but here's an example as far as I understand.

The Rosary begins with the Sign of the Cross, an ancient prayer which has traditionally begun prayers for thousands of years, followed by the Apostles' Creed, one of the oldest Christian creeds in existence, the Lord's Prayer which Jesus taught in the New Testament, and then three "Hail Marys." In the Hail Mary, we call Mary blessed, like she prophesied we would in Luke 1:48, and acknowledge that what's more blessed is the *fruit of her womb*, Jesus Christ. Then we ask Mary to pray for us.

Next, we pray the Glory Be prayer, a beautiful, ancient doxology proclaiming the power of the Trinity. And then the Bible study begins in earnest. If I'm praying the Luminous Mysteries, I begin with the first mystery, the Baptism of Jesus. I announce this mystery and then pray a decade, that is ten, Hail Marys. What I am doing is joining my spirit, my mind, and my physical being with the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River two thousand years ago. My goal with the Rosary is to meditate on that scene, while I pray, while I move the beads, and while I aspire to be like Jesus, and His mother, who said "yes" to God and thereby changed the world. I've tried, and it works, and it blew my mind.

And the incredible thing about *Catholic* prayer, which I'd never heard of in my Protestant circles, is that I can pray with certain intentions. The Rosary is meant to work this way, too. As I begin to pray a later Luminous Mystery, maybe the fourth mystery, the Transfiguration, I can begin that decade of the Rosary with *those prayers* for the intention of, say, my life to be transfigured to reflect, more clearly, that of Jesus Christ. As I then go about praying ten Hail Marys, reflecting on the scene of Jesus' glorious Transfiguration, the words I'm saying, the position of my prayerful spirit, is towards the *intention* of praying for transfiguration in my own life.

Each decade of the Rosary ends with the Glory Be. Each mystery begins again with the Lord's Prayer. I said it was a bit complicated, right? Well it is. But what surprised me was how quickly I could memorize all twenty mysteries and the rotation of the prayers.

Dr. William Marshner, a Catholic convert from Lutheranism and a professor of theology, remarked in an interview that it's easy

to be overwhelmed, to be blown away, by Catholic prayer traditions. There are lots of them, from thousands of years of tradition. That's a good thing, to be sure, but it's overwhelming too. For the Rosary alone there are likely thousands of ways to pray and reflect on the mysteries. The way I've described is one just way I've learned, and when I learned it I thought, "I need to share this!" Because it's amazing.

Yes, there is Marian theology in the Rosary and, yes, it's something to be overcome and, God willing, fully understood, but at its core I've learned that the Rosary is a wholly Christ-centered practice in so much as Mary, the Mother of God, always points directly to Jesus. The bulk of the Rosary, the point of its meditations, is like an incredible living Bible study. While it's certainly true that many Catholics don't know their Bible as well as evangelical Protestants do, there's deep Bible study in the Rosary.

We ask Mary, in her special role, to pray for us. As we meditate on the seminal events in the life of Christ and His Church and slip the beads through our fingers and find that quiet, contemplative rhythm, we orient our whole selves and our whole lives towards the will of God and prayerful life in Jesus Christ. That sounds good to me — that sounds *incredible* to me — and, like learning about the Eucharist, when I learned the real deal about the Rosary, it blew my mind. ■



*K. ALBERT LITTLE is a non-denominational Evangelical convert to the Catholic Faith. He writes at [thecordialcatholic.com](http://thecordialcatholic.com) and hosts The Cordial Catholic podcast. He lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada with his wife, two young children, a cat, and a dog. This article was originally published on Keith's personal blog and also at [thecordialcatholic.com](http://thecordialcatholic.com). Republished with permission. K. Albert's Journey Home program and written conversion story are online at [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org)*

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**Could you give \$25 a month or more to help support the CHNetwork as we help men and women come home to the Catholic Church?**

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

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## CHNETWORK EVENTS

Please consider joining us for one of our upcoming CHNetwork events!

**June 13, 2020**

Day of Reflection in Emmitsburg, Maryland

**OCTOBER 12-15, 2020**

CHNetwork retreat in Houston, Texas

Go to [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org), call 740-450-1175, or contact Ken Hensley at [kenh@chnetwork.org](mailto:kenh@chnetwork.org) to learn more.

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## NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE



Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters. We do ask for a \$35 yearly donation to help cover the production costs of the newsletter.

## ONLINE COMMUNITY



We have a great way for converts and journeyers to connect online! CHN's Online Community is the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We invite you to connect at [community.chnetwork.org](http://community.chnetwork.org).

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



### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 2 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

*The Best of The Journey Home*: Sunday 7 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET

*The Best of The Journey Home*: Monday-Friday 1 AM ET

**May 4**

David Mills\*  
(former Episcopalian)

**May 11**

Melissa Zelniker-Presser\* (convert from Judaism &  
former nondenominational Christian)  
(re-air from 8/14/2017)

**May 18**

Zubair Simonson\*  
(former Muslim)

**May 25**

Dr. Bryan Cross\* (former Pentecostal,  
Reformed Presbyterian, & Anglican)  
(re-air from 8/28/17)

**June 1**

Michael Vanderburgh\*  
(revert)

\*Schedule is subject to change.

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home).

# Joyful Journey Updates

**From Paul, a revert** “Wanted to say thank you to all of you at the Coming Home Network and EWTN. 3 days after I met my wife we knelt down and gave our lives to Christ ... That was almost 24 years ago. For about 10 years after that we were Protestant Christians. After a church break up we drifted for a few years ... I started watching *The Journey Home* ... I watched hundreds of episodes and followed many of the guest's ministries. God knew that I would only listen to old Protestant pastors. Last Sunday something I never ever thought would have happened. My wife, son, daughter, and I went to our first Catholic Mass ... It never would have happened if I wasn't watching *The Journey Home*.”

**From Vivian, a recent convert** “Just wanted you to know that I was confirmed and fully initiated into the Church last night. I'm officially Catholic now. Thanks for your helpful suggestions and just being a sounding board. I'm still ‘unpacking’ things and still reading and learning. I think I've got a grip of Catholic apologetics and will continue to

explore that more. I've been on accelerated learning and reading these past few months, that now I feel drawn to just rest in it and read about the saints and how they lived out their lives for Jesus ... I'm at peace and know that the His Holy Spirit of the Living God has graced me by turning the light on in my head. Thank you and the Coming Home Network for being there, you've made the painful and difficult journey bearable by your suggestions and attentiveness to me (a stranger). Your website's guidance and countless testimonies, and articles kept me on track in search for truth, reason, and logic. You've had a great impact on helping me connect the dots and most importantly assured me that I wasn't leaving Jesus to join a cult. I was running to Jesus or better yet, He has been pulling me into a fuller faith.”

**From a woman on the journey** “Thank you so much for this email. I am sorry it has taken me a while to get back to you! Your email meant so much to me, as has joining the CHN online community. It has been such a blessing

to not only have people welcoming me on this journey (instead of deterring it or thinking I'm nuts or both) but also a place where I can share what's going on in my head and my heart and ask questions. What an incredible blessing ... I am so incredibly touched by the work of the CHN and please know that I pray for you all regularly. I will also send a donation when I am able to support this beautiful ministry/apostolate. I can't put into words what *The Journey Home* program has meant to me; for so long it was the only place that I heard others saying the same things I was thinking and feeling the same things I was feeling.”

**From Karen, a convert** “I am so blessed to have you as my guide on this journey. It hasn't been easy, but you and the Coming Home Network help keep me afloat when the seas get choppy! We are also so blessed and grateful for your wonderful prayers that sustain us.” ■

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## SHARE 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 [chnetwork.org/converts](http://chnetwork.org/converts) to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.



# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Pierre, a Baptist seminarian, that his journey may bring him home to the Eucharistic altar of our Lord Jesus.
- For a Methodist minister who wants to enter the Church and has come to CHN seeking vocational guidance.
- For a Presbyterian pastor who recently resigned his pastoral role and is now attempting to rethink God's calling in his life, that the Lord will lead him to suitable employment and a new sense of vocation as a Catholic layman.
- For Andrew, a minister in the south, that the Holy Spirit would draw him and his family to full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For Scott, a former Southern Baptist minister, that our Lord Jesus would answer all his questions and clear the path before him.
- For David, a minister in California, that he and his wife might find their true home in the Catholic Church.
- For Aaron, a minister in North Carolina, that God would answer the vocational questions that concern him about becoming a Catholic.
- For Jonathan, a Pentecostal minister who is seeking more truth, that the Holy Spirit will guide his search.
- For a Baptist pastor who is convinced that he must become Catholic but is strongly opposed by his wife and entire family, that the Lord will give him wisdom and courage as he tries to respond to them.
- For a non-denominational pastor and music minister who is struggling with how to support his family and become Catholic at the same time.
- For Marcy, a non-denominational minister, that her dissatisfaction with Protestantism may lead her to the altar of her Lord.
- For an Evangelical minister in Maryland, that both his doctrinal and employment concerns about becoming Catholic may be answered.
- For Paul, a minister in England, that he may find clarification for his vocational concerns about being a Catholic Christian.
- For David, an Episcopal priest, that he may find all the guidance he needs to make the transition to full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For a Presbyterian pastor who wants to become Catholic but has become paralyzed by fear of all that will happen if and when he does.
- For an Episcopal priest, that he will find employment so that he can step down from his position to enter the Church.
- For a convert who is tempted to return to his previous denomination because he misses the life and friendships he left to become Catholic, that he might stand strong and move forward in his Catholic life.
- For an Anglican priest on the journey, that he might be able to become ordained as a Catholic priest through the Ordinariate.
- For a Pentecostal pastor who is attracted to the Catholic Church, that he might gain more clarity and be drawn ever more toward the Church.

## Laitie

- For Elizabeth who is very drawn to the Catholic Church but doesn't know how to proceed.
- For Steve, who is struggling with the idea of bread and wine becoming Jesus, that our Lord may reveal Himself to him.
- For Michael, that the Holy Spirit may guide him to the fullness of all Jesus wishes to grant him in the Catholic Faith.
- For Ellen in this time of transition, that she will continue to find ways to grow in her faith.
- For a family in the Midwest as they juggle going to Catholic and Protestant services each Sunday, that the husband will be at peace with raising his family Catholic.
- For Jake, that his reading of G. K. Chesterton may bear fruit and bring him home to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- For Anne, that her heart and mind will be opened to the authority of the Church and she will find answers to her doctrinal struggles.
- For a former Baptist and his family who are struggling with lackluster Catholicism in their area and are very frustrated.
- For Angie who is wondering about practical aspects to her journey, that she will be able to move forward with her interest in Catholicism.
- For an Episcopalian in Canada to be able to move beyond casual interest in Catholicism to a true conviction.
- For a Lutheran in Ohio who very much wants to become Catholic but her husband is adamantly against it.
- For Valerie and her husband who recently returned to the Church, that they will grow in their faith life and draw closer to Jesus..
- For Cindy's loved ones who are expressing more interest in Catholicism.
- For a Baptist who is having a hard time discerning how to move forward with her deep desire to become Catholic while being part of a Protestant family and raising her children Protestant.
- For Nick as he finds ways to give back to others and grow in his own faith life, that he will be able to come into full communion with Christ's Church.
- For Sandy who is reading and learning a lot about the Catholic Church, that she will be drawn to the fullness of the truth.

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. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.



► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

## College and Controversy

I went to college at Texas A&M University, to study engineering. Although in high school I continued going to the Presbyterian church with my family, in college I started going to a Bible church, because that was the kind of church my high school friends attended. I got involved in the college group at that church, and I joined a Bible study in my dorm.

Towards the end of my freshman year, two of my friends from the Bible church got into an argument over the teaching of the college minister, whom I will call Bob. He taught that once you received Christ as your Savior, you were going to heaven no matter what you did after that or how sinful your life was. Going to church and avoiding sin were good things to do, but they had no effect on whether or not you went to heaven. One friend sided with Bob, but another friend said that you must receive Jesus as Savior *and* Lord in order to go to heaven, and if Jesus was your Lord, you would live your life differently. I was surprised to see that two people who believed the Bible could disagree on such a fundamental issue.

The next year I decided to take Bob's discipleship class, especially when I found out he would be going through the Book of James. I knew the verse about faith without works being dead (see Jas 2:17), so I wanted to see how Bob handled that passage. However, I didn't make it half-way through chapter one. We came to the verse that says, “Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him” (Jas 1:12). Bob said that the “crown of life” was a special reward given to those Christians who endure trial, but not everyone who goes to heaven successfully endures trial, so they won't get that crown.

It seemed to me that the “crown of life” referred to eternal life. I pointed out to Bob that this crown is promised to *all* who love God. He replied that not all Christians love God, which seemed very wrong to me, and I worried that this kind of teaching could lead to people thinking they were going to heaven when they really weren't. I decided to leave the Bible church college ministry and got involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. It was an inter-denominational ministry, and our group had Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, and even one Catholic. I felt that they all loved Jesus, and so I began to accept the idea that I could find followers of Christ in all of these different churches. I spoke with an InterVarsity staff worker about this controversy over Bob's teaching, and he recommended a local church that was in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a smaller, more conservative Presbyterian denomination than the church I grew up in. I started attending there, and I was impressed with their solid moral teaching, a strong sense of pastoral authority, and rootedness in history.

In the spring semester of my sophomore year, Toni, the older sister of a high school friend of mine, transferred to Texas A&M. Since she was new on campus, my roommate and I wanted to make sure she felt welcome, so we would eat with her at the din-

ing hall. She did not have a car, so when I went back home to Dallas, I would offer her a ride. I knew her family did not go to church, so I wanted to share the Gospel with her, even though I had been unsuccessful witnessing to her sister.

There was an occasion when it was just Toni and me driving from Dallas to A&M. I was trying to work up the courage to say something to Toni, and after an hour or two, I finally said something like, “Are you interested in spiritual things?” She replied that she was and had wanted to talk to me about it, but was waiting for me to bring it up. We got so engrossed in conversation about the Gospel that I missed my exit and didn't notice it for another 30 miles. Toni later came to believe, and she started going to church and InterVarsity meetings with me. While she was in Dallas during breaks and after graduation, I recommended she go to the same Bible church that my high school friends had gone to, and there I had the honor of seeing her baptized.

## Calvinist After College

I graduated from A&M in 1985 and started working in Fort Worth, Texas. I found a new PCA mission church and attended their fourth worship service. The pastor took me under his wing and taught me Calvinist theology. We had an adult Sunday school teacher who was very knowledgeable about Church history, so I picked up a lot from him, as well. As that church transitioned from mission status to being a self-sustaining church, I became one of the initial deacons, receiving training in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

Toni and I got married at the Bible church she belonged to, but I had come to believe in the superiority of Calvinism and the Reformed tradition over the Dispensationalism professed at the Bible church. When I soon got a new job in the Dallas area, Toni and I joined a nearby PCA church. However, we found that we were having trouble fitting in, and after trying to make it work for two years, we had the occasion to visit the Bible church where we got married. The reception we received there was so warm, and they had such concern for Toni's welfare, that we decided to join that church, which meant that I had to reexamine my position on the doctrinal differences between Dispensationalism and Calvinism. I was frustrated that both sides had their own set of Bible passages supporting their beliefs, and I couldn't find a reliable way to choose one over the other. I decided that the biblical basis for my Calvinist beliefs was not strong enough to prevent me from going back to the Bible church. As a result, I began to doubt the usefulness of theology, thinking it only caused division.

## Starting Down the Road

A few events worked together to ignite in me an interest in the ancient Church. The first was a conversation I had with my high school friend, Mike. He had finished college, where he got a degree in Classics, and was now married. He had read the Church Fathers and studied the Arian controversy. He was struck with how the Arian sect believed in *sola Scriptura* but not in the Trinity, while the Trinitarian side appealed to tradition as well as the Bible. He also told me about a friend of his who had a conversa-

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

tion with Orthodox Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas, who declared to him that the difference between the Orthodox and Protestants is that Protestants worship only with their minds, but the Orthodox also worship with their bodies. This critique resonated with me because of my love of the Old Testament. The worship of the Tabernacle and the Temple was rich with symbolic actions and images, but our Protestant worship was not much different from listening to a classroom lecture, except that we sang some songs at the beginning.

At work, I had a manager who was Catholic. In a meeting with me and two Christian coworkers, he mentioned an upcoming debate between a Catholic apologist and a Protestant apologist. I was intrigued by the idea of a Catholic apologist; I didn't know such a thing existed. Then one of the coworkers said they should also have someone representing Orthodoxy. I asked him about that, and he said he was in the process of converting from the Episcopal Church to the Orthodox Church. My Catholic manager also loaned me tapes of lectures on the Gospel of John by Scott Hahn. I was impressed to hear a Catholic treat the Bible so well.

Meanwhile, Toni had been enjoying some tapes by a British preacher named Malcolm Smith. We decided to go to a nearby retreat that he was giving, and when we arrived, we were surprised to see him wearing a Roman collar. We found out that he was a bishop in the Charismatic Episcopal Church (CEC). He explained that the CEC was "Catholic, but not Roman." During the retreat, he told the story about how the Daily Office in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer brought stability to his prayer life. He also celebrated the Eucharist at the retreat, explaining the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. All of this caught my interest, so when I got home, I started investigating the CEC on the Internet.

### Orthodoxy

I could not find a nearby CEC parish, but I did find out that CEC theology was similar to Eastern Orthodoxy, and this reminded me about my coworker who was converting. I had often driven by a beautiful Greek Orthodox church in North Dallas, so I called and spoke to a priest there. He invited my wife and me to come and get a tour of the church. He explained some things, and even gave me a book to read. I attended my first Orthodox Divine Liturgy on January 1, 1999, the feast of St. Basil. I was struck by the beauty of the Byzantine liturgy and felt like I was connecting with the worship in heaven.

An important book that I read at this time was *Evangelical Is Not Enough* by Thomas Howard. He spoke about the human

need for ceremony and ritual around things we consider important, making liturgy essential for the most important thing in a Christian's life, which is the worship of God.

When I got back to work after the Christmas holidays, I told my coworker about my experience, and he said I should go to the Wednesday night Bible study led by Archbishop Dmitri at the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) cathedral. The study was going through the Book of Romans, which is probably the most important book in the Bible for Calvinist theology. In this study, I saw another way of understanding Romans that was different from Calvinism, but still very biblical.

I spent several months attending Orthodox services and reading multiple books about Orthodox theology and Protestants who had converted to Orthodoxy. I learned about the early Church Fathers, and how the Eucharist was central to their worship. I was getting ready to begin the process of joining the Orthodox Church, but my wife was not ready because the culture of Orthodoxy was very foreign to her. As we talked about it, we decided that since Malcolm Smith had been such an influence on her, we should give the CEC another try before committing to Orthodoxy. We started going to the CEC cathedral for the south-central United States, located in Sherman, Texas, 45 miles away. Even though it was far away, it seemed to be the perfect mix of the Evangelical tradition we were used to combined with liturgy rooted in early Christianity. It also had a Charismatic element that we were not used to, but I was willing to give it a try.

### The Charismatic Episcopal Church

In the CEC, I learned a lot about what we called "the Catholic tradition," which we said included Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Anglicanism. In this context, I learned the meaning of many Catholic beliefs and practices that I had been told were unscriptural. In some cases, I learned that I had been taught a distortion of Catholic belief, such as "Catholics worship Mary as a goddess." In other cases, I learned the scriptural foundations for beliefs such as the Communion of Saints and asking for the intercession of the saints. I was invited to enroll in their seminary program, which met one weekend a month. Clergy and seminarians from around the diocese came to Sherman for that weekend. I got to know these men and take classes with them, where I learned many things that became important for my journey of faith.

We studied the letters of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who wrote at the end of the first century. Not only did he write that the Eucharist is central to Christian worship, but he also wrote

...the human need for ceremony and ritual around things we consider important, making liturgy essential for the most important thing in a Christian's life, which is the worship of God.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

that the bishop was the point of unity for the local church. We talked about how *sola Scriptura*, doctrinal statements and confessions, or congregational votes do not achieve Christian unity. Instead, there must be one man who has the authority to settle disagreements. Jesus gave this authority to His Apostles, and they have passed it on to the bishops through apostolic succession. This made a lot of sense to me, especially given the history of Protestantism, with its split upon split. However, there was a problem in the Anglican world. There were multiple groups of Anglican bishops that disagreed on significant issues, such as the ordination of women and the immorality of homosexual acts. A bishop might provide unity at the local level, but there was nothing in place to provide unity among the bishops. I realized that this principle of unity at the global level only existed in the Roman Catholic Church in the successor of Peter. If the Apostles were the foundation of authority in the Church, then Peter, as leader of the Apostles, appeared to be the foundation of unity among the Apostles and their successors. It was only the Catholic Church that had a credible claim to the successor of St. Peter in the Pope.

In another class, I read *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, by Louis Bouyer. From that book, I learned that the Protestant Reformation was preceded by the rise of a philosophy known as Nominalism, which denied the reality of substances and the philosophical basis of transubstantiation. I began to see that many of the theological disagreements between Catholics and Protestants were because of unexamined philosophical differences.

I felt a call to the Catholic Church for the sake of unity, but I did not tell anyone except my bishop and my seminary mentor. They both tried to talk me out of it with different arguments, but neither of them was convincing to me. The following seminary weekend, I was very conflicted. We had our Chrism Mass that weekend, and the clergy all reaffirmed their relationship with the bishop. As I watched my friends kneel before the bishop, I believed that God had put me with these people, and I needed to remain for at least a while. During the next two years, I put concerns about Catholicism behind me and immersed myself in seminary and ministry.

### Into the Catholic Church

Two years later, I was assisting a CEC priest in the establishment of a mission parish and was scheduled to be ordained a deacon in a couple of months, when an incident occurred that led me to the belief that I could not continue working with that mission parish. That whole day I was bewildered, because we had moved in order to be near this parish, and I didn't know what we were going to do. That night, as I lay awake, it came to me that now was the time for us to go to the Catholic Church. I was filled with peace. The next morning I talked to Toni about it, and she was ready to follow me if I believed that was where God was leading us.

We did not know any Catholics in the area. My high school friend, Mike, had become Catholic a couple of years earlier, but

he and his wife now lived in South Carolina, so they could only provide prayer and encouragement from a distance. I went to the nearest parish, and they said that I was two months too late for RCIA that year, but I could start the process the next year. I told my former seminary mentor about that, and he told me about St. Mary the Virgin parish in Arlington, Texas, which had previously been an Episcopalian parish, but had come into the Catholic Church under the Pastoral Provision of Pope John Paul II. The pastor there agreed to give us private instruction, and we came into full communion at the Easter Vigil, 2006.

We lived an hour away from St. Mary's, so after a while we transferred to a closer parish. I struggled with the fact that I had been planning to become a priest, but that was no longer possible. I decided to get a Master's degree in Theology at the University of Dallas. Soon after I started my first class, I found employment as Director of Technology at Cistercian Preparatory School, across the street from the University. I have settled into that job at Cistercian, where I also teach computer science and theology. I especially enjoy working with the Cistercian monks who work at the school. I came to terms with the fact that I will not be a priest, but God still has a unique purpose for me.

Recently, we have returned to St. Mary the Virgin parish, which is now a part of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter, established by Pope Benedict as a home for former Anglicans who have come into the Catholic Church. We were attracted back there because of their traditional and reverent liturgy, and it appears to fit us well. As I look back on my journey, I see God guiding us along what seems to be a meandering path, from a human point of view, but I see each phase of the journey contributing to who I am today. I thank God for His wise plan, and I trust that He will continue to lead us until we reach our heavenly home. ■



Gregory Graham and his wife, Toni, have been married for 29 years. They live in Irving, Texas. Greg is the Director of Technology at Cistercian Preparatory School, where he also teaches computer science and theology. Greg and Toni are members of Saint Mary the Virgin in Arlington, Texas, a parish of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Peter, a home for Anglicans entering the Catholic Church. Greg enjoys reading philosophy, theology, and science fiction, as well as playing complicated card games. Greg was a guest on *The Journey Home* in 2018 and his program can be viewed at [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org).

### Continue the JOURNEY

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