



June 2020 CHNewsletter

"Church Hopper Finds Her True Home"	1
By Kira Ciupek	
"Finding Your Place in the Pew, Part I"	3
By Mary Clare Miller	
"Thank You" By Marcus Grodi	4
Joyful Journeys	7
Prayer Requests	8

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Church Hopper Finds Her True Home

By Kira Ciupek

If Jules Verne, the author of *Around the World in 80 Days* had written the story of my life, the title might have been, *Around the Protestant World in 48 Years*. I wasn't a globe-trotter, but I was a church-hopper. For most of my life, I floated through the various denominations, admiring their beauty and puzzling over their differences. I joined church after church, moving from Texas to Tennessee, then to California and back to Texas, trying non-denominational, Presbyterian, Evangelical Free, American Baptist, and Southern Baptist denominations. Finally, at the age of 49, I found what I had been looking for my whole life: the Catholic Church. Strangely enough, it was the Bible that led me there.

I was born in 1961 in Topeka, Kansas, to young parents who, for unknown reasons, were unable to keep me. In July of 1962, I was adopted by an Evangelical United Brethren pastor, Charles, and his schoolteacher wife, Doris, who brought me home to their country parsonage in Camp Creek, Kansas. When I was two, my father took a senior pastorate at the Methodist church in Manhattan, Kansas. This is where I experienced my earliest joyous memories of family and church life. I remember going to church, sitting with my mother in the balcony loft as she directed the choir, and marveling at my dad in his vestments, preaching from the pulpit. We would go home afterward to the fragrant aroma of pot roast, cooking all morning in the oven. As we sat at the kitchen table for Sunday dinner, my father would read aloud from the Bible while I sat in his lap. In my child-like

heart, I grasped that this big book was about God, and He loved me, like my father.

In 1969, my father became the Methodist campus minister at Ohio University in Athens. As a family of four (my little sister was adopted in 1964), we moved to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, living happily in a beautiful two-story, Colonial-style parsonage and attending the Methodist church downtown for almost ten years. As I grew up, from a child to a shy teenager, my parents, who had both left behind their Nazarene upbringings, were now questioning their traditional Methodist views. I began hearing phrases for the first time, like "self-esteem," "feminism," and "secular humanism." My dad taught me how to question the religious worldview that he called "Christian Fundamentalism." He explained that this was the literal interpretation of the Bible, and something

Journeys Home

Continued on page 2

...Journeys Home Continued...

to be avoided. Oddly, while my parents were questioning their Christian faith, I was discovering mine.

Every other Christmas we visited my maternal grandparents in Dallas, Texas, gathering with aunts, uncles, and cousins, who were all Nazarene. My grandfather was a well-respected Nazarene minister, who pastored a thriving congregation in Dallas. None of my mother's family questioned the Bible. In fact, it seemed that the Bible was the source of their peace. Theirs was a warm, inviting faith. In contrast, I felt uncertain and insecure about my beliefs. I also felt the ennui of adolescence, which soon turned into constant feelings of depression.

When I was 13, I experienced, for the first time, a supernatural joy that confirmed the presence of a real and living God. I had just finished reading *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. She believed in the Bible, and at the heart of her Christian faith was this man, Jesus Christ, who was also God. Printed at the end of the book was the "Sinner's Prayer," which was an invitation to accept Jesus as your "personal Lord and Savior." I wanted the joy that Corrie had, so I prayed the prayer; immediately, I felt light-hearted and happy. I shared the good news with my grandparents, who said that I had been "born again." The following Christmas, my grandfather baptized me and all of my cousins with a flask of water taken from the Jordan River during his trip to Israel.

My parents quietly tolerated my sudden inspiration, as if I would outgrow it one day. They were right — I did. Without anything except my paperback Bible, and no one to help me interpret it, I became overwhelmed by my struggle to be "good." By the age of 14, I had given up prayer and Bible reading. I decided

to experiment with other philosophies. I read pop psychology books and tried Transcendental Meditation. Yet, I could never recapture the joy I had felt after reading Corrie Ten Boom's book, or the sweet feeling of forgiveness that had swept over me when my grandfather had sprinkled my head with water from the Jordan River.

In 1978, we made our final geographic move as a family. My father took a position as a campus minister at Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas. My sister and I joined a small Methodist church, where we were welcomed by a young, magnetic pastor. I had already learned to question the Bible, so I didn't care much for the sermons or Sunday school. The youth group became the center of our lives. After our youth meetings, we would go out for pizza, movies, and parties. That's where I fell in love with Dennis. While I still had many doubts, Dennis had a strong faith in Jesus. After I graduated from high school, we began dating. The summer I was 19, we volunteered together to be camp counselors for "troubled kids" at a Methodist campsite in the "hill country" of Texas.

We never made it to the camp. On the way, we were involved in a tragic car accident on a winding, rural road in the darkness of the night. Sadly, Dennis was killed instantly. Besides cuts and bruises, the greatest injury that I received was a bisected quadricep in my left leg, which required major surgery. While recovering from surgery and grieving the loss of Dennis, I decided to apply to Mid-America Nazarene College in Olathe, Kansas, where all of my Nazarene cousins were going. In the midst of my pain, I longed for the familiar comforts of my childhood, and the faith of my grandfather.

Continued on page 9 ➤

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

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.



Roots of the Reformation CD

In this *Deep in History* talk, Marcus Grodi looks at the series of events and ideas that made the 16th century ripe for a massive split in European Christianity. From disillusionment with Church authority, to the boom of literacy in the Renaissance era, to the rise of individualism, Marcus explores the fundamental shift in the way Europe looked at what it meant to be Christian during the days leading up to the Reformation.



Roots of the Reformation

— By Karl Adam

Karl Adam gives a historically sensitive and accurate analysis of the causes of the Reformation that stands as a valid and sometimes unsettling challenge to the presuppositions of Protestants and Catholics alike. *Roots of the Reformation* is a powerful summary of the issues that led to the Reformation and their implications today.

\$35

Receive *Roots of the Reformation* CD for a donation of \$35.

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Receive *Roots of the Reformation* CD and *Roots of the Reformation* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain resources by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/respond.



Finding Your Place in the Pew, Part I: FEELING AT HOME IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

By Mary Clare Miller

For anyone who has become Catholic as an adult, you know that conversion doesn't stop when you make your Profession of Faith at the Easter Vigil and receive the sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist for the first time. For many, the time after the Easter Vigil can bring a lot of mixed emotions: periods when you don't feel close to God or your faith, not knowing how or where to serve in the Church, and struggles fitting into Catholic parish life and ministry.

Emotions don't equal devotion



One common struggle for new converts is figuring out what is “wrong” when you don't have the same strong, passionate emotions and excitement that you experienced on your journey towards the Church or soon after conversion. It's important to remember that emotions don't equal devotion, anymore than feelings equal love. We all know that we can choose to love someone even when we don't feel like it, and often that love is much more sacrificial, even meaningful, when we don't have lots of warm, fuzzy feelings. So, too, in our faith life. We might feel dryness when we pray; we might not feel a connection to God, Mary, or the saints; we might not feel holy. But that doesn't really matter in the end. Many saints (such as St. Mother Teresa and St. Therese of Lisieux) experienced highs and lows in their experience of faith. Some went through years of spiritual aridity and didn't feel close to God or feel His presence in their lives. And that is okay. What matters is how we decide to live our faith and nurture it through the means God gives us. Not feeling holy doesn't mean you are a bad Christian. God can allow us to go through periods of “desolation” to purify our faith and remind us that our faith isn't meant to be dependent on feelings. If spiritual dryness or lack of consolations are troubling you, take heart and know that this is a typical experience in the spiritual life. You can always seek out the counsel of a priest for advice about your individual situation too.

Using your gifts

Converts, especially those coming from a background in ministry, offer the Church a wealth of experience and gifts. While it can be a beautiful thing to serve the Church, whether in paid or volunteer ministries, don't be afraid to take some time to settle into just “being Catholic.” Savor the feeling of sitting back and soaking in the richness of the Catholic Faith. Becoming Catholic is a lot like moving to another country — a new language, new laws,

and new customs. It can take a while to settle in and feel at home. Feel free to be more of a Mary than a Martha (Lk 10:38-42). Then, when you feel ready, prayerfully consider how your parish or local Catholic community could benefit from your efforts.

Connecting

Finding community once you are Catholic can be another challenge that converts didn't expect. Catholic parishes often aren't as overtly welcoming as many of the Protestant churches converts are used to. Catholics don't always socialize after Mass or make a point to reach out to someone they haven't seen before. This can be frustrating and disappointing for a new convert who desires a good community in their new faith life. One important thing to remember is that Mass is an encounter with God, where we gather to worship Him and give Him praise. Thus, rightly, our focus should be on Him and on entering into a prayerful state before and after Mass. So don't be concerned if Catholics aren't as chatty or even seem as welcoming as Protestant churches on Sunday mornings. That's not to say, though, that there aren't opportunities to have fellowship within a Catholic context; it just might be different than what you've previously experienced. Lenten fish fries, the parish picnic or festival, small groups, Bible studies, and various volunteer opportunities are all great ways to get to know your fellow parishioners. And if your parish doesn't offer many extra ways to get involved, there is nothing stopping you from asking your pastor if you can start something. You can always look into activities at other parishes in the area or within your diocese too. And give it time. Friendships and connections can happen organically but don't need to be rushed.

Next month we will look at more ways that converts and even lifelong Catholics can go deeper in their faith. Conversion is an ongoing process and we are blessed to have so many opportunities to grow in our relationship with Jesus and His Church. Stay tuned! ■

Thank You

By Marcus Grodi | President/Founder of the Coming Home Network

As you receive this newsletter, it's impossible to predict what our world will be like. I'm sitting here at my computer writing this article, isolated from the rest of my staff, from most of my family and friends, and the rest of the world, wondering what life will be like when you read this. I'm praying that by the time you receive this, our world and nation will have turned the corner on this coronavirus pandemic, but the question is, even after the danger has passed, to what extent will our world have returned to what it was before this crisis?



Right now, none of the experts have any clarity on what our world will be like in two weeks let alone in June when you receive this newsletter. Will we be in an economic recession, or worse, a depression? Will our businesses be back up and running and the unemployed back to work? Will the COVID-19 infections and deaths have long since flattened the curve approaching zero, or will we still be in grave danger just to go shopping or be close to anyone in public? Will our world have so changed due to fear of infection that our lives and culture will never return to what we knew before?

There are more than enough articles and podcasts out there reflecting on all this, hopefully feeding our hope rather than just our fears and anxiety. So, I thought I'd take this opportunity just to thank you and let you know that you are in our prayers.

Toward the end of St. Paul's life, after many years of missionary journeys, proclaiming the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, he found himself in chains, in prison, unsure of his future. We know with hindsight that within just a few years he would suffer martyrdom. Yet, in chains, separated from all his many Christians converts and friends, with little hope of escape, he had the attitude that we, in our present crisis, are called to emulate. He wrote to his Christian friends at Philippi:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God ... I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble (Phil 4:6,10-14).

St. Paul reminds us to have no anxiety, to pray, to rejoice in the Lord, to not complain of want, to be content in all things, and to remember that we "can do all things in him who strengthens."

But there is something he says at the beginning of his letter that I really want to focus on. After his usual greetings, St. Paul writes:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:3-6).

What St. Paul writes about his friends in Philippi is exactly how my staff and I feel about you. Especially during this difficult time, but actually all the time, every day in our morning staff

meetings, you are in our prayers. We are eternally grateful for your prayers, your generosity, and your partnership in our work as together we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Church. For twenty-seven years, since 1993, we have had the privilege of doing this work together, and we could not have done it without you. Thank you.

And even if this present world-wide crisis may still seem bleak, even if it doesn't look like our world will ever return to the world we knew just months ago, yet, as St. Paul says, "I am sure that he



who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." As St. Paul reminds us elsewhere, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). The fact that your hearts and minds have been opened to Him, through the sacraments, the reading and hearing of His Word, and the many ways He has touched your lives by His grace, is proof positive that you have been "called according to his purpose." And I know you love Him, at least because of your prayers and generosity and partnership in our work. Thank you.

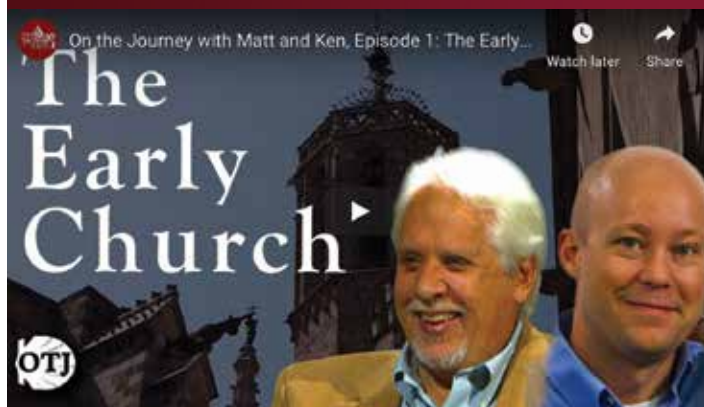
St. Paul does emphasize, of course, that the victorious completion of the work that Christ has begun in our lives will not occur until sometime in the future, a day of which no one can predict. But one thing that Christ and St. Paul and all the New Testament writers emphasize is that we are to live every day in readiness, waiting, anxious to meet our Lord, and we're to do this with oil ready for our lamps, growing in holiness and living for others.

I do believe we will get through this, by the grace of God, and that even if everything around us falls, even if the world ahead seems so hopeless, He never changes, and as He promised, He will never leave or forsake us.

Please be diligent in praying for our Holy Father, the bishops, our priests, our deacons, and all in Church leadership positions, that they may have wisdom and courage to stand as faithful witnesses to Christ. And remember to be generous to the Church — because during the time of closed churches, it was far too easy for many parishioners to forget their tithes. And if you feel so led, please consider further support of our work. Especially during this difficult time, we are here to help non-Catholic Christians and fallen-away Catholics to understand how important the Church and her sacraments are. ■

CHECK OUT ON THE JOURNEY, A BRAND NEW WEB SERIES FROM CHNETWORK!

Former Baptist pastor Ken Hensley and former Wesleyan Matt Swaim came from two very different theological backgrounds, but they both ended up finding a home in the Catholic Church. Each week, they take a look at a major issue or question they faced along the way, and share the series of events and discoveries that led them to embrace the Catholic Faith.



CHNetwork.org/OnTheJourney



SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

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/ 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 if you have any questions or concerns.

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SHARE THE NEWSLETTER!

The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends to encourage them to join our mailing list. They may also request to receive our mailings by using the response card included with this newsletter. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are copyright © 2020 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.

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.

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.

CHNETWORK RETREAT

Please consider joining us!

OCTOBER 12-15, 2020

CHNetwork retreat in Houston, Texas

Go to chnetwork.org, call 740-450-1175, or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org to learn more.

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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

June 1

Zubair Simonson*
(Muslim)

June 8

Sr. Miriam James
Heidland, S.O.L.T.*
(revert) (re-air from 11/6/17)

June 15

Michael Vanderburgh*
(revert)

June 22

Lorelei Savaryn* (former Baptist,
Assemblies of God, Nazarene, &
Lutheran) (re-air from 12/18/17)

June 29

Phally Budock*
(revert & former
agnostic)

July 6

Matt D'Antuono* (former
Evangelical Protestant)
(re-air from 1/15/18)

*Schedule is subject to change.

To access the full archive of past *Journey Home* programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home.

Joyful Journey Updates

From Elizabeth, on the journey "My journey is going well. I have been reading books related to Church history. I'm amazed at how much the Church has changed. From discreetly meeting in houses to break bread and read Scripture and letters all the way to elaborate liturgy and cathedrals. The history is a lot to take in. I've been trying to make a connection between transubstantiation and the early Church's experience with breaking bread in homes. I believe in the Real Presence but am interested in tracking how the Church came to define it. I'm happy to report that my husband is still supportive and has been praying about this experience I'm going through for himself. I truly appreciate you reaching out."

From Brett, on the journey "I just wanted to give you an update on my journey . . . I am really enjoying RCIA — the program here is educational and informative and everyone is very friendly and helpful. I really appreciate your help in getting me this far along on my journey . . . Thank you so much and please let everyone at the CHNetwork know how much your work is appreciated!"

From Pete, a recent convert "Yes, I was finally received into the Church . . . It was a wonderful day! . . . After the service I enjoyed meeting several of the seminarians from Oscott college and the whole congregation made me feel very welcome! A lady from the Legion of Mary gave me a lovely rosary and Ronald gave me the new St Gregory Ordinate prayer book! I am going to my favourite place in the west country on Saturday for a sort of retreat. I had to read lots of apologetics to sort out issues in order to become a Catholic but now that I am one I want to catch up with my devotional reading so am taking St Augustine's *Confessions*, Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, and other great books to read! . . . A big thank you to you and the CHN for supporting me in my journey! I hope someday to get over to the States to meet you all and the good folk at EWTN to whom I owe so much!"

From an Evangelical on the journey "Ten days ago, I was going about my life as a serious Evangelical Christian of 30 years. No deep identity crisis. Listened to a talk on the

Catholic Church by a local priest. My curiosity was piqued by going over my son's religion textbook, who is a 9th grader at a local Catholic high school, and I asked his teacher about information for adults. End of story. In less than a week, I was in crisis by what I found (what I had been missing out on). I am now drowning in books and podcasts and videos. I've been going to Mass (not partaking) at every opportunity, sitting and praying for hours when the church is open, etc. I'm playing catch-up with the local parish's RCIA course (and all the wonders built into it), but all I can think about is being confirmed. It's the first time since my conversion through Inter-Varsity at college so long ago that I have felt love for the Church. Although the folks have been wonderful, the draw of the Eucharist seems to override everything else. I know I've always wanted to belong to a solid church (and I thought I did), but WOW, the claims and authority of the Catholic Church are astounding and profound. It's overwhelming and I can't stop weeping for joy at finding it and sorrow for missing out on it for so long." ■

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 to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

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Prayer List

Clergy

■ **For Will, an Anglican priest** who desperately needs to find a way to support his family as he seeks to become Catholic, that the Lord will show him the way and provide something for him.

■ **For Robert, a former Baptist minister**, as he moves toward receiving the sacraments and being brought into full communion with the Church, that he can be an example of Christ-like love to his family.

■ **For a non-denominational pastor** who wants to become Catholic and whose wife loves the Lord but "hates" Catholicism, that the Lord will work a miracle that will allow him to move forward.

■ **For a former Protestant minister** who is struggling with loneliness as a Catholic and tempted at times to return to his former life.

■ **For Chris, an Anglican priest** on the journey, that he will be able to become ordained as a Catholic priest through the Ordinariate.

■ **For Jacob, a Baptist pastor** convinced of the truth of Catholicism but strongly opposed by his entire family, that the Lord will give him wisdom and fortitude as he attempts to follow the Lord and love his family at the same time.

■ **For Eduardo**, who has resigned his ministry as a Protestant pastor and is looking for employment, that he might find a way to support his family.

■ **For John, a Pentecostal pastor** who is learning about the Church and is asking a number of questions, that he might gain more clarity and be drawn ever more toward the fullness of truth.

■ **For a Vineyard pastor**, that he may not draw back from his desire to enter the Church but be given the courage to continue forward.

■ **For Chris, who is Eastern Orthodox** and wants to come home to the Catholic Church but is struggling with how to do this.

■ **For William, a non-denominational pastor** who is struggling with how to become Catholic and financially support his wife and kids at the same time.

■ **For a former pastor** who resigned her position and entered the Church last fall and is struggling very much with the unorthodox environment she finds in the German Catholic Church.

■ **For a Baptist pastor** on the journey toward the Catholic Church, that he will find a way to convince a family member that the Church is not the "whore of Babylon" and that he isn't going to hell by becoming Catholic.

■ **For an Anglican minister** who is convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith but is unable to see how he can possibly resign his position and continue to support his family, that he will be given the wisdom and courage he needs.

Laity

■ **For David, an Evangelical**, that he may find answers to the many obstacles that prevent him from moving forward in his journey toward the Catholic Church.

■ **For Jacob, a member of the Church of Christ**, who is seeking to understand the Scriptures as seen through Catholic eyes, that the Holy Spirit may guide him to the fullness of God's revelation.

■ **For Michael, a Southern Baptist in Texas**, that his prayers and research may bear fruit when he receives our Lord Jesus at His holy altar.

■ **For John, an Eastern Orthodox brother**, that the many roadblocks may be cleared away that prevent him from coming into full communion with the successor of St. Peter.

■ **For a Lutheran in North Dakota**, that, in his studies of Catholic theology, he may not become overwhelmed by the many new things he is learning.



■ **For Bruce, a Methodist**, that his long desired wish to be in full communion with Christ's Catholic Church may soon be realized.

■ **For Howard**, that as he reads the conversion stories of those who have traveled a path similar to his own, he will inspired to follow them home to the fullness of the Faith.

■ **For a Methodist** who struggles believing that what appears to be bread and wine are truly Jesus, that Our Lord may reveal Himself to him.

■ **For Jake, a non-denominational Christian**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him home to the Catholic Faith of his youth.

■ **For a man in Hungary**, that he may find grace and truth in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Lorraine, a revert** who is going through a difficult time with her personal and faith life.

■ **For Bonnie** who is very drawn to the Church and is learning more about Catholicism but her husband isn't quite at the same place with his journey.

■ **For Erica, a new convert**, as she discerns how to best nourish her continuing faith journey.

■ **For Cathy**, that the Holy Spirit will guide her heart and mind as she moves toward full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ **For a family in Nebraska**, that they will all be united in one faith soon.

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...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

In the fall of 1981, with a full leg cast and crutches, I went to Olathe. I was immediately attracted to the joy of the students and faculty. Yet my heart was still rebellious. I skipped mandatory chapel services and argued with other students about the Bible.

It was during one of those cantankerous conversations that I was shaken from my arrogance. After class, I happened to overhear two students discussing the topic of “sin.” I jumped in with my defiant, anti-Christian bias. They quoted Scriptures to back up their arguments, and I ripped apart each one. Finally, the young man asked me, “Do you believe in the Bible?” I said, “No.” Then he said in a gentle voice, “We really don’t have a common foundation for this discussion. We believe the Bible is the Word of God, and you don’t.” With that, they turned and walked away. I was shocked! Never had anyone disengaged like that from an argument with me.

After two semesters, I left Mid-America. The summer after I returned to Texas to live with my parents, I still felt the familiar sorrow and emptiness that had driven me to Olathe. I kept remembering the joy I had seen on the faces of the students at Mid-America, and their faith, which was so certain. I knew they believed in Jesus and the literal interpretation of the Bible. Was it their faith that made them happy? One night, while alone in the house, I cried out to God:

God ... you know that I don’t believe in the Bible. Well, maybe parts of the New Testament, but definitely not the Old Testament! Anyway, God ... if Jesus is real ... if He’s really real ... please help me!

Strangely, in my moment of complete honesty and helplessness, the despair lifted. I went to bed feeling happy for the first time since Dennis had died. When I awakened, I was still happy. I must really be a Christian, I thought. What do I do next, I wondered? A Scripture verse came to mind:

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (NRSV Matthew 6:6).

I found a Bible on a bookshelf in the den and sat down on the floor of my bedroom closet. This time, I had the stamina and fortitude to keep reading. I lived with my parents for the next two years and worked at a local radio station. I was a clandestine “Fundamentalist Christian,” reading the Bible in my closet and watching Christian television programming late at night after they went to bed. Sadly, my newfound faith caused tension and many arguments between me and my dad.

Finally, I left Kingsville for the University of Texas in Austin and pursued a degree in Broadcast Journalism. To pay my bills, I got a job at a Christian radio station. There, I met a young man named Paul, who was a Christian rock musician with a quirky sense of humor and a strong faith. He believed that worship music ushered us into the presence of God, causing the Holy Spirit to “fall” upon us. I was curious about these strange new ideas, and started attending his non-denominational church. The worship service was different from anything I had ever experienced.

People raised their hands and closed their eyes, swaying to the sound of electric guitars and drums. I felt an emotional connection with Jesus that I had never had before. I kept going back to the non-denominational church with Paul, eager for what they called, “the move of the Holy Spirit.”

During the spring, Paul and I began seriously dating one another, and by mid-summer, he had asked me to marry him. We were wed at the non-denominational church we attended on November 30, 1985, with my grandfather and father officiating. In 1987, our daughter, Evangeline, was born. When my husband was offered a brief tour with a Christian band in 1990, we took a “step of faith” and moved to Nashville, Tennessee.

There, we found a growing non-denominational congregation of 500 people, tucked away among pine forests in the rolling hills of the Tennessee Valley. The music was similar, but more professional, with Nashville musicians and singers performing to perfection; however, the focus was the sermon. The pastor delved methodically into the Scripture, interpreting it line by line, precept by precept. He explained the connections between the Old and New Testaments, weaving the Scripture into a seamless garment of faith and beauty that made sense. The four years we spent at that church were marvelous. I joined several women’s Bible studies, purchased a *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* and the *Strong’s Concordance*, and plunged into exegesis of the Greek and Hebrew. Through an intellectual pursuit of Scripture knowledge, my faith in Christ grew.

Shortly after our son, Clyde, was born in 1992, we experienced our first church split. I still don’t know what the issues were that caused deacons and elders to disagree, but in the end, almost 200 people left the non-denominational church in the Tennessee Valley, including us. We fled to a tiny non-denominational congregation of about 50 people, meeting in a storefront. This was a church that emphasized physical and emotional healing. Every Sunday there were “healing lines” where people came to the altar for the pastor or others to pray for them with a “laying on of hands.”

Then, in 1995, our daughter, Joy, was born. She was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis, a genetic and fatal disease. We followed the doctor’s instructions, with medications and hospitalizations. The prognosis was good, but she would require constant medical care. Even though I believed that God would one day heal our daughter, I did not agree with the pastor’s teachings about healing. He taught that if we had enough faith, she would be healed instantly. This didn’t square with my understanding of Scripture, nor did it comport with our reality. That’s when we started visiting a nearby non-denominational church that was 3,000 members strong. I was relieved to be able to “blend in” with the crowd. My husband served on the worship team. I didn’t attend any Bible studies because I was too busy as a stay-at-home mom, raising three beautiful children.

Two years later, we were shocked when this church went through a split. Friends began to leave in droves. By this point, we were tired of church upheavals, so we followed a few of our

...Journeys Home Continued...

closest friends to a quiet Reformed Presbyterian church nearby. I was hoping for something more traditional, like the Methodist church I had grown up in. I wasn't disappointed. The 30 minute sermons were intelligent and biblically sound. We sang from hymnals and followed the roadmap printed in the bulletin. In one hour, we were home, eating dinner.

A few months later, my husband was offered a position as worship pastor at an American Baptist congregation in California, and we moved from Tennessee to the North Bay. My husband led worship at three separate American Baptist congregations. These were happy years of living near Paul's parents and family, of being a homemaker and homeschool mom. I continued to read the Bible during my morning "quiet times" and grew in my understanding of Scripture through the sermons and Bible studies of the American Baptist congregations.

In 2004, our lives came full circle. We returned to Texas, where my parents and sister's family still lived. My husband had been offered a worship pastor position at an Assemblies of God church in Austin. Unlike the previous five years of stable church situations, the next six years would be a whirlwind of church hopping. Shortly after we arrived at the Assemblies of God, there was a painful church split. We had unwittingly walked into a contentious situation. As the church crumbled around us and people left, my husband began seeking a new position elsewhere. We were grateful when he was offered a job by a non-denominational church in southeast Texas, which had a dynamic and growing congregation. What we didn't know until we got there was that the pastor, who was considered an "Apostle," steered the church based on his personal visions which he believed were from God. This was a new form of church leadership for us, and we were uncomfortable. After a few months, Paul was offered a part-time worship pastor position for an Evangelical Free church, and we moved back to the Central Texas area. In 2007, he secured a full-time position as worship pastor for a very large Southern Baptist congregation in Killeen. We bought our first home in a nearby community, thirty miles away.

In all of the churches we had attended, I found godly people and formed loving friendships. Yet, by the time we began attending the Baptist church in Killeen, I had begun to seriously ponder the discrepancies between Protestant groups. My knowledge of Scripture was my reference for analyzing the differences. What surprised me most was that we all had the same Bible, yet, we couldn't agree on fundamental issues of doctrine. Was baptism by sprinkling or immersion? Was church government by monarchy or democracy or elder-councils or something else? Were there still Apostles today, or not? Were we, "once saved, always saved," or could sin affect our salvation?

I began a methodical review of all the churches we had been part of, asking, "How could the Holy Spirit give different interpretations of Scripture to different groups, when Jesus wanted us to be 'one'?" (Jn 17:11). There wasn't any authority to whom we could turn to interpret Scripture, except for ourselves. Occasionally, we would find a pastor or church that reflected our views,

but as soon as we differed, there was a split. My review brought me to this stunning revelation: without agreement on truth — and a recognized authority to interpret it — there would never be the unity that Jesus promised.

Finally, one day, while washing dishes at the kitchen sink, I prayed the most drastic and dangerous prayer of my entire life.

"Lord," I said, "I cannot find a church that displays the unity you promised in the Bible. Perhaps that church exists somewhere — maybe in the distant past; maybe in another country, far away; or in the unseen future. Regardless, I can't find it here and now."

Then, with fear and trepidation and tears, I whispered these words, "*Lord, I am removing my membership from today's church. I belong to none of them; I only belong to Jesus Christ.*"

At my moment of deepest desperation, God began to move in miraculous ways. It was almost as if He had been waiting for me to say those words. Within weeks, Paul and I had reconnected with our dear friends, Phillip and Caroline, meeting with them at their farm, sharing food, fellowship, music, and laughter. Our children enjoyed being with theirs, running through the tall grass and wildflowers, catching fireflies and playing tag. Interestingly, Phillip and Caroline, who had worshipped with us in our younger years in Austin, had recently converted to the Catholic Church. Although they rarely spoke of their conversion when we were with them, their quiet and peaceful manner impressed me. One day, I asked Phillip, "What do Catholics think about us Protestants?" He answered, "We love our Protestant brothers and sisters. We're sad because we wish that they could experience the fullness in the Catholic Church." His answer troubled me. What was this "fullness" that I didn't already have?

In the fall of that year, our daughter, Joy, underwent a lengthy hospitalization. Caroline came to see us, and while her daughter visited with mine in the room, Caroline and I took walks in the gardens outside. Finally, I mustered the courage to ask questions about the Catholic Church. I wanted to know about the "fullness," which Phillip had alluded to. Caroline said that this was the Eucharist, which she explained as the "Real Presence" — the bread and wine actually becoming the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. This excited me. I asked her about other Catholic doctrines concerning healing, vocations, and discerning the will of God. Her answers mirrored many of my own beliefs, drawn from years of reading Scripture. My heart brimmed with hope. I blurted out to her, "I think I must have always had a Catholic-shaped heart!"

After she left, I returned to the hospital room, and while Joy took a shower, I turned on the TV. Earlier, I had seen the face of a nun on one of the channels. The program had seemed boring at the time, but after my conversation with Caroline, I wanted to hear what this nun had to say. I found the channel — EWTN. But instead of the nun, there was a program called *The Journey Home*, with a host who was a former Protestant pastor, Marcus Grodi. I don't remember who he was interviewing; I only remember feeling incredulous joy as I heard the guest tell his story

...Journeys Home Continued...

about coming home to the Catholic Church. I quickly turned off the channel when Joy entered the room, not wanting to concern her with my personal spiritual struggles. But when I lay down on the cot beside her hospital bed that night, I prayed silently, “Lord, are you calling me to the Catholic Church?” I didn’t hear an audible voice, but I felt a sudden surge of electric energy coursing through my body, as if the Holy Spirit could hardly contain Himself with the joy of confirming my prayer with, “Yes!”

I spent the next year studying the Catholic Church. I discovered that she had the truth contained in the Bible (73 books recognized as the canon of the Catholic Church as compared to the Protestants’ 66) and in Tradition (other writings and practices of early Christians). She also had a recognized authority called the Magisterium, vested in the Pope and bishops, who were charged to protect the truth from heresy, and to interpret it through doctrines, dogmas, and teachings. Because of the truth and authority of the Catholic Church, there was a true unity — all Catholics, worldwide, celebrated Mass together in the same way, and read from the same *Catechism* (a compendium of Church teachings).

I decided to begin the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) at a nearby Catholic parish. My husband was still leading worship at the Southern Baptist church where I played the piano for the worship team. Wednesday nights I went to RCIA and Saturday nights I attended Mass, but did not receive the Eucharist. Sunday mornings, I played the piano at the Baptist church. I was a clandestine Catholic-seeker, and we kept it a secret. We faced the real possibility that if I became Catholic, my husband would lose his job. As we got closer to Easter, I became frightened by the great sacrifice that becoming Catholic might require. I begged God to let me just be a “closet Catholic.” After all, couldn’t I just read the Scripture and the Catholic *Catechism*? Couldn’t I pray the Rosary on my own? What more did I need? Then, I thought about the Eucharist. Only through the Eucharist could I fulfill John 6:56-59. Would I risk it all for that?

I was thinking these thoughts one day while driving alone on the highway. There was a flatbed truck in front of me, carrying a hodge-podge of furniture strapped to the back. All of a sudden, a large table flew off the back of the truck, landing upside down. I slowed my car quickly as it slid towards me, thinking I would hit it. I watched incredulously as it suddenly veered to the right side of the road, coming to land in the gravel. As I passed the upside-down table, I was amazed. I realized that this was God’s sign to me. It was as if He were bringing the “table” to me. In my heart, I knew that Jesus Himself was truly there under the appearance of bread and wine. How could I walk away from Him? If for no other reason than the Eucharist, “the source and summit of our faith,” I would make the decision to risk it all to become Catholic.

Easter of 2010 I was joyously confirmed in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and received the Eucharist. The Baptists still thought that I was a Baptist, but I was really Catholic! I continued living a double lifestyle, hoping and praying that my husband would join me in the leap of faith. But he did not. In 2011 he asked for a divorce.

I lost my husband, home, and many friends to become Catholic. Yet, I’ve chosen to remain Catholic, and to be faithful to my marriage vows in hope of my husband’s return one day. I wear my wedding ring as an example to our children of the faithfulness of Christ, who never abandons us. I continue to grow in my faith through the sacraments, attending a nearby parish. Thankfully, my parents accepted my Catholic conversion, and my father actually credited the Catholic Church for helping me and our children through my painful divorce. The argumentative relationship my father and I had for many years was healed after I became Catholic, and in the last eight years of his life, we counted one another as the best of friends.

I am thankful for the years of church hopping, because it was those pastors and teachers in various denominations who opened my mind to the Scripture. They gave me a solid Christian foundation. And I still have a few Protestant friends. Yet, it was my deep study of the Bible that finally led me to the “fullness” that Phillip had described. I discovered the Catholic Church, and the Eucharist, the pearl of great price that I had been seeking my entire life. ■



Growing up in the 60’s and 70’s, KIRA CIUPEK remembers a happy childhood spent in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in southeastern Ohio. She credits her parents for providing her with a grace-filled Christian upbringing in the Methodist Church, where she was baptized and confirmed. The family moved to Texas in 1978, and after graduating from high school, Kira got her first job as news director at a country music radio station in South Texas. Her radio career led her to pursue a degree in broadcast journalism at the University of Texas in Austin. It was there that she fell in love with a handsome young man, a co-worker, who would later become her husband. In 1985, they were married. Over the next ten years, their family expanded to include three children. Kira has worked from home as a freelance writer and stay-at-home mom. Kira’s journey towards the Catholic Church began in 2009, after years of Protestant church-hopping with her family, which included cross-country moves from Texas to Tennessee, then to California and back to Texas. Kira was confirmed in the Catholic Church in 2010, and today she is the mother of three grown-ups, and spends her time tutoring college students and writing stories under the pen name of Kira Marie McCullough. You can find out more here: www.kira-marie-mccullough.com/

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