



## July 2023 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

## From Asbury, to Anglo-Wesleyan Pastor, to Catholic Convert

By Dr. Brook Thelander

I grew up in a small town in southern Nebraska. My parents divorced when I was very young, and my mother remarried when I was six. My family was a fairly normal one as far as blended families go, but we had no church involvement. Shortly before I began high school, my older brother experienced a profound conversion to Christ at the Nazarene church in our community. I was curious about what had caused the change in my brother. I soon met the young pastor of the church, a Vietnam veteran and Black Belt martial artist. He quickly shattered my view of ministers as persons who were weak. A few weeks later, I found myself kneeling at the front of the church, praying to Christ and asking him to become the Lord of my life.



When I was a junior in high school, I began to sense a call to a ministerial vocation. I wasn't sure what that would look like, but it led me to MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe, a suburb of Kansas City. Two years later, I married my wife, Connie, and continued my studies, graduating with a degree in Biblical Literature and Practical Theology. I developed a passion for preaching and wanted to continue my studies at a seminary. I enrolled at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, in 1985.

It was at Asbury that God started me on my journey to the Catholic Church, though I did not know it at the time. By accident, I read Robert Webber's little book, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*. The book tells the story of Webber's journey from a fundamentalist heritage into the Anglican Church and the beauty of its liturgy. Reading Webber's story and the stories of others who had migrated to Anglicanism resonated deeply with me. My Nazarene heritage exposed me to the biblical call to holiness of heart and life and to a deep reverence for Scripture, but it lacked an emphasis on the sacraments and the liturgy as

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

important means of grace. While at Asbury, I began to discover the importance of the Anglican liturgy and the Eucharist to John and Charles Wesley, leaders in the Wesleyan tradition, of which the Church of the Nazarene is a part. That led me on a further search to discover why this liturgical and Eucharistic emphasis had largely been abandoned in churches where I had served.

After graduating in 1989, I began doctoral studies at the Toronto School of Theology (TST) in the University of Toronto. The TST is a federation of seven theological schools that share resources and faculty. Three of the schools are Catholic, two are Anglican, and two are affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada. This was a diverse theological community in the heart of a cosmopolitan city, giving me the opportunity to place my Wesleyan theological commitments into conversation not merely with other Protestant traditions, but also with Catholics.

I had developed a pretty strong anti-Catholic bias by this time, much of it largely inherited from my environment and unquestioned. Most of my experience with Catholics involved persons who, at least by my impression, were not serious about their faith. However, during my first semester, I found myself in a seminar with several Catholic students. Many of my stereotypes and assumptions about Catholicism were challenged by real-life Catholics living their faith.

### Transcendent Beauty, Prayerful Liturgy

I put all those experiences on the back burner, because I was committed to teaching at a Nazarene university. A couple of

years later, two experiences became foundational in my ongoing journey. My apartment in midtown Toronto was a few blocks away from St. Paul's Anglican Church, a beautiful structure that often opened its doors at noon so that people could pray or simply sit in silence to enjoy the wonderful stained-glass windows and architecture. I had walked past this church hundreds of times during our years in Toronto but had never gone inside. One day, however, something compelled me to enter. I sat near the back of the large sanctuary, where I could gaze at the massive stained-glass windows behind the altar. As I sat there in the silence, without warning, I began to weep. I was overcome with emotion and did not know why. I believe now that this was my first experience of architecture as a means of grace, of beauty as a vehicle of the transcendent that is an important part of the Catholic faith.

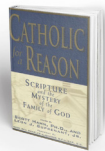
A second experience occurred while I was writing my doctoral dissertation at Emmanuel College, the United Church of Canada's theological school at TST. My daily routine involved walking from my apartment each morning to the college, where I would study and write at a small desk on the college's third floor. Each morning, just before 10, a student would walk the halls and ring a bell, signaling that Morning Prayer was about to begin in the chapel. After experiencing this for several weeks, my curiosity prevailed. I walked to the chapel and found a seat. In the short span of 20 minutes, the Morning Prayer liturgy became an epiphany to me. The structured way the liturgy was designed to foster [an] encounter with God spoke deeply to my

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### CATHOLIC FOR A REASON

BY SCOTT HAHN

Catholic for a Reason will help readers develop a better understanding of the Catholic Church, through the personal study and reflection of 12 well-known Catholics. In this book, the teachings on Mary, the Eucharist, Baptism, and Purgatory are explained in light of the relationship of God the Father to us. #3012 • \$13.27



Kenneth Howell's pursuit of truth, goodness, and love gradually led him into a world he had only vaguely glimpsed from afar. It was a world filled with things he had always longed for. It was the fullness of truth, the Catholic Church. #3190 • \$9.95



### YOU HAVE RECEIVED GOLD, SO PASS IT ON

BY DR. PAUL THIGPEN

From CHNetwork's 2011 Deep In History Conference: Stand Firm on Tradition. Choose CD or DVD. #N/A • \$5.00 - \$15.00



### HELPING THEM HOME

BY MARCUS GRODI

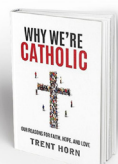
From CHNetwork's 2003 Conference Deep In History Conference: Journey In History. Choose CD or DVD. #N/A • \$5.00 - \$15.00



### WHY WE'RE CATHOLIC

BY TRENT HORN

This is a book you can hand to anyone as a starting point for helping them find their way into, or back to, the practice of the Catholic Faith. #3223 • \$12.95



soul. I found myself returning frequently during those months while completing my dissertation.

Finishing my studies in 1995, Connie, our two children, who were born in Toronto, and I moved back to the United States, where I began a ministry assignment in a Nazarene church in Potomac, Illinois.

Both my educational and personal experiences piqued my curiosity about the ancient Church. From the time I was a new Christian, I had always had a desire to connect to the taproot of the Church and discover how the earliest Christians lived and worshiped. However, Catholicism was not yet on my radar, because of several unquestioned assumptions that were still part of my theological outlook. One of those assumptions was the belief that the Catholic Church had fallen into error and corrupted the Gospel, thereby requiring the Reformation that Martin Luther set in motion in the early 16th century. While not ready to embrace Catholicism, my search for the ancient Church led me to explore more deeply my own heritage in the Wesleyan and Anglican traditions.

At about this time, I learned of a new church that was starting up in Boise, Idaho. The people who were starting the church were interested, as I was, in recapturing the liturgical and sacramental dimensions that were important features of the holy life of our founders, John and Charles Wesley.

### **Greener Pastures on the Green?**

In the mercy of God's providence, the church—Epworth Chapel on the Green—called me to be its first full-time pastor in the spring of 2000. From the beginning, we tried to wed the Wesleyan emphasis on the holy life with the beauty of the Anglican liturgy and sacraments as key components to nurturing the life of virtue. Many people came to our church who had been raised Catholic but had left. In some cases, they had been deeply hurt or wounded by persons in the Church, but still hungered for the sacraments and the transformative power of the liturgy.

In time, several of these former Catholics informed me that, while they loved our little congregation and were very happy in it, God had used me to help them to see that they needed to return home to their Catholic faith. At this point, my journey to Rome began in earnest, although it was now largely out of frustration. I couldn't understand why God would use me to help these people return to their Catholic faith!

Through the years, I had read and appreciated Catholic writers like Henri Nouwen and G.K. Chesterton. I remembered Chesterton's words that the first step toward conversion to the Catholic Church involves giving the Church a fair hearing. I realized I had never been willing to do that. Over coffee one morning, a former parishioner who had become Catholic gave me a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and encouraged me to reach out to the Coming Home Network to learn the stories of other Protestant ministers who had come into full communion with the Church.

From that day onward, I began to read voraciously and became interested in the stories of others who had crossed the

Tiber: Scott Hahn, John Bergsma, James Papandrea, David Anders, Peter Kreeft, St. John Henry Newman, and many others. I began watching episodes of *The Journey Home* on EWTN, captivated by the stories of those who had been led, sometimes against all odds, to embrace Catholicism. I discovered a website called "Called to Communion" ([calledtocommunion.com](http://calledtocommunion.com)) that featured scholarly dialogue between persons from the Reformed tradition and Catholics, many of whom had converted from a Reformed background. The writings of Dr. Bryan Cross were especially compelling to me in that forum. Through the influence of these sources, I was well on my way to Rome in my mind. But the Lord knew I needed to make the journey in my heart, as well.

In the spring of 2015, as I was asking the Lord what He wanted me to pursue for my Lenten observance, I heard an inner voice that said: "I want you to go to Mass." I immediately rejected this impulse, saying, "What is the next option?" Again, I heard the inner voice: "I want you to go to Mass." Again, I balked. After more than a week of this inner dialogue, I relented. I had no idea where I would go or what I would do. I felt somewhat ignorant of Catholic protocol and what I would need to know in order to participate meaningfully in the Mass.

Despite this, I found myself downtown in the day chapel at Boise's St. John's Cathedral early one weekday for the 8:30 a.m. Mass. I arrived early enough that I could sit near the back in a single seat next to a pillar, where I hoped no one would notice me. Then the spiritual warfare began. The enemy did not want me in that chapel. I was worried about what others would think of my presence there. However, as I looked around it became apparent that people were there to worship and were not concerned about the stranger in their midst. I drove home thinking to myself that I had done what God had asked of me and that was the end of it.

But the next morning I found myself inexplicably in that chapel again, preparing for Mass. In those days, Father Camilo Garcia was a frequent celebrant. That day, as Father Camilo recited the words that would consecrate the bread and wine into the Eucharist, and elevated the consecrated host, the hair on the back of my neck stood at attention and I found myself whispering, "That is truly Jesus Christ."

I had long ago learned the Church's teaching about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, but, on this morning, God used Father Camilo to bring the truth of the Church's teaching home to me with full force. I knew in a different way why the Church teaches that the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life."

Each day, I would return home thinking that my attendance at Mass was finished, and very soon I would find myself at Mass again, unable to explain what was happening in my life.

### **Pastor Comes Clean**

After several weeks of this inexplicable activity, I confided to a woman who regularly attended Mass that I was a Protestant minister who was struggling to discern whether God might

## A Note from the Author

I hope in some small way the letter that follows, which I wrote to over 200 friends and family about my decision to join the Catholic Church is of encouragement to you and perhaps offers some guidance if you are considering writing one yourself.

Before reading my letter, by way of further context, I was on Young Life staff in the late 90s. Having earned some seminary credits while on staff, I decided to complete a seminary degree at Denver Seminary. Founded as conservative Baptist seminary, Denver Seminary is now a non-denominational Protestant evangelical seminary.

I became an ordained Anglican priest in 2004, canonically resident in the Anglican Mission in America then later in the Anglican Church of North America until I came into the Catholic Church in 2018 at which time I resigned as an Anglican priest. During those 14 years, I was active as a fulltime Anglican parish priest for five years—in Florida and Arkansas—before I was able to move back to Washington, DC to chiefly pursue my long-time passion and calling to work in the intersection of proclaiming the gospel among policy leaders and advance international relief and development policy in service of the common good. While I was pursuing that career, I offered pulpit supply and spiritual direction across our Anglican diocese as I had time.

### A Few Tips for Sharing Your Story

When I was ready to come into full communion with the Catholic Church, I knew it would be a good exercise to put on paper what I was doing and why—a letter to send to friends, family, former parishioners, and a few others.

I would only hope and presume you are journaling at length about your spiritual journey. But for most of us, certainly me, few will be interested in reading a novel length conversion story. Even those who love me most, if I am honest, will probably not read more than a few pages! Furthermore, you will frequently

be asked conversationally “why did you convert?” The vast majority of the time, this is asked in cocktail/coffee hour type settings where the person asking the question is not prepared or interested in a four-hour life story retelling.

It was a long and excruciating exercise to get my letter down to this length. I had so much to say! But it was a good exercise. As you can read in my letter, I finally boiled my answer to “why” I became Catholic down to three themes: (1) the beauty of the Sacraments, (2) the goodness of Catholic spirituality, and (3) the truth of Catholic Social Teaching. And I have since even gotten it down to one sentence: “Because the Catholic Church is true.” G.K. Chesterton said he became Catholic because “I wanted my sins to be forgiven.” What is your reason?

I chose to avoid getting into polemics which you will see I qualified in my letter. I submit such a letter is likely not the best place to critique Protestantism or your former faith tradition. I believe a winsome account of your journey along with the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Church can speak for itself and will draw others to your story over making a polemical argument. I go into polemics and apologetics “offline” for those who are interested.

Just about all my letter recipients were non-Catholics and I received a lot of responses. Interestingly, not one of them was upset with my decision. And even more interestingly, many of those whom I thought would display objection or consternation with my decision said variations of, “This is interesting Lucas. I myself have questions about the Catholic Church. Could we talk sometime?” Those conversations continue to this day.

I hope you enjoy the read.

Blessings to you on the journey,  
Lucas Koach  
Arlington, VA

### Dear friends and family,

I am writing to share with you the news that I will be received into the Roman Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil, March 31, 2018 (8:30 p.m.) at St. Charles Catholic Church here in Arlington.

I made this final decision to be received into the Catholic church on November 10, 2017 after more than ten years of prayer and discernment.

In preface, I have never been more joyous about my faith in Jesus Christ marked by a sense of deeper commitment to His truth and His gospel. By the same token, I have never been more aware that I am a sinner—fallen, broken—in need of His grace.

I am also pleased to say I made this decision with Chrissy's blessing. We are confident this will not hinder our children's formation, but rather offer them richer frameworks for growing in the faith. Chrissy and the kids are happy at Restoration Anglican at this time, a community we know and love, and I will continue to join and support them there as they will join me at the Catholic church from time to time.

My purpose in this letter is not to give an argument for Catholicism over Anglicanism or some other Christian denomination. While that is certainly a critical conversation, my purpose is rather to offer you, my closest friends and family, and indeed for myself, a few words on my personal story that has led

me to this decision.

As many of you know, I came to faith as a teenager through the ministry of Young Life and was blessed with many friends and mentors from that era who helped me see the winsome and penetrating reality of the person of Jesus Christ. Later, from professors at Denver Seminary, to fellow Anglican clergy, and other friends, I received discipleship and training that has formed my life and ministry. I am forever indebted to the knowledge, wisdom, holiness, and friendship of these Godly men and women.

### Beauty of the Sacraments

In early adulthood, lacking a church tradition of my own, friends invited me to attend (then) Falls Church Episcopal in Falls Church, VA. At first, the liturgy and sacraments seemed foreign and rote. But before long, I learned and experienced how these visible signs of invisible truths beautifully make the transcendent physically present.

These liturgical and sacramental treasures were magnified when I became an Anglican priest. My first assignment as a priest was to an Anglo-Catholic parish in Tampa, FL. There I grew in a deeper appreciation of high church sacramental theology and practice, which helped me further appreciate the catholic nature of our Anglican tradition.

### Goodness of Catholic Spirituality

Having studied pastoral counseling in seminary, I was increasingly interested in spiritual theology and formation - the discipline of how we grow in the faith (in contrast to just believing the right things about the faith). From 2005-2008, under Fr. Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp. and Dr. Susan Muto of the Epiphany Academy, I studied their comprehensive work of "the science, anthropology, and theology of formation." While their work is presented in an ecumenical fashion, they themselves are Catholic working under the authority of the Catholic Church.

I began to plumb the depths of Christian spirituality from the indispensable doctors and saints of the Catholic Church. Even the professors Chrissy and I had at Denver Seminary (founded as a Baptist seminary in the 1950s) would regularly draw upon this treasury of the Catholic Church as many emerging spiritual formation programs at evangelical seminaries are now doing.

### Truth of Catholic Social Teaching

Working in the area of public policy for a global Christian humanitarian organization, I regularly contend with the question of how a faith-based organization ought to partner with the government. In a culture of subjective relativism, how do we articulate universal principles for the greater good of humanity before the US government, before the UN? From where are those principles derived? Important questions, as our faith not only makes particular religious dogmatic assertions, but indeed our faith deeply informs a wider understanding of the dignity of mankind and the essence of human freedom— notions a just government is obliged to uphold.

Unfortunately, in today's world, we are all too familiar with the contentious nature of public discourse and outright perpetration of evil. Catholic social teaching provides a comprehensive, coherent, and consistent foundation to be able

to articulate the just and the good in service of humanity. This treasury has given me a growing appreciation for the church's voice on issues of justice besetting our broken world that all people of good will can ascertain and support.

### A Question of Authority

Over the past ten years particularly of active discernment, I have done a good bit of homework working through my own difficulties with the Catholic Church, which is all necessary and appropriate for one to do. But I have also come to realize, in our day and age we easily choose and fashion our faith according to that which we agree with. If I am not cautious, I design a faith or an understanding of the faith to my personal sensibilities alone. The problem is I can remain the sole arbiter of my faith expression. While faith fully invites and indeed demands engagement of one's intellect and the will, in the end faith requires us to yield our will to something that is, if we are honest, vastly mysterious. Surety must always be characterized by humility. We must give up our own authority and place it not merely in our understanding of God, but in God Himself.

In the end, one must decide not whether or not they believe in Catholicism but, rather, is the Catholic Church true? Historically, I naturally focused on the former question, but in recent years I have striven to focus on the latter. As such, the answer I arrived at is the same as that of the Protestant convert Richard John Neuhus as he writes in the forward to Thomas Howard's *Lead, Kindly Light* (paraphrasing) "When after many years of wresting with it and I could no longer answer 'no' to that question in a manner convincing to myself, I became Catholic. Becoming a Catholic is not a matter of preference but of duty freely embraced."

My disagreements on doctrine and discipline grew thinner and thinner over the years while its beauty, goodness and truth became more and more vivid. At the same time, I have no disillusion about any human shortcomings of this divine institution or any institution.

While my decision is marked by joy and surety, it is also marked by timidity if not humility. Many aspects of Catholic dogma and practices I enthusiastically resound with, others I will have to further study and live into to fully appreciate. But in all of them I am now prepared to submit myself by faith and humility. Beyond agreeing with the Catholic Church, I am hereby submitting myself to the authority of the Catholic Church.

### A Thinning Divide and My Future?

Today, at the 500-year anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, theological divides between Catholics and Protestants have arguably never been thinner. Relations among Anglicans and the Catholic Church have also become more generous. Many Anglicans, who are among the closest to Catholicism in form, practice, and tradition, have joined the Roman Catholic Church in recent years. In 1980 and later in 2009, both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI passed extraordinary provisions (called the Pastoral Provision and the personal ordinariate respectively) allowing Anglican clergy and parishes to become Roman Catholic. While the Catholic Church

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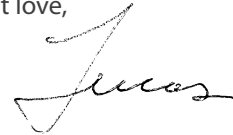
does not acknowledge the validity of Anglican ordination, these provisions do make married former Anglican priests eligible for Catholic priesthood. Many have naturally asked me about this possibility. My greatest aspiration will be to become a humble disciple and strive to become a good Catholic. This alone can and will easily consume the remainder of my life here on this earth. While I wish to continue to actively serve Christ in my career-vocation, I don't foresee ordination as an imminent consideration. Though, for me—and for us all—may we have the grace to pray the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila, "Lord, dispose of my life however you see fit."

In closing, I wish to quote John Henry Newman, the 19th century Anglican clergyman who converted to the Catholic Church. He has been a guide for me these recent years. His words embody my prayer for my friends and family. I hope they will capture the spirit of your prayers for me:

Year passes after year silently; Christ's coming is ever nearer than it was. O that, as He comes nearer earth, we may approach nearer heaven! O, my brethren,

pray Him to give you the heart to seek Him in sincerity. Pray Him to give you what Scripture calls "an honest and good heart," or "a perfect heart," and, without waiting, begin at once to obey Him with the best heart you have. To do what He bids is to obey Him, and to obey Him is to approach Him. Every act of obedience is an approach—an approach to Him who is not far off, though He seems so, but close behind this visible screen of things which hides Him from us. He is behind this material framework; earth and sky are but a veil going between Him and us; the day will come when He will rend that veil, and show Himself to us. May this be the portion of every one of us! It is hard to attain it; but it is woeful to fail. Life is short; death is certain; and the world to come is everlasting!

With great love,




**From Stephanie C., who entered the Church Easter 2022**

"I came home to Catholicism because the power of Christ compelled me! I came from a background of extreme abuse by a Protestant cult (the OPC) and the Catholic Church became my safe haven and my true shepherds. I have found lasting peace, and unending joy and community in the Catholic Church along with grace that I never knew existed. Praise be to God for His mercy, there is no place like home!"

**From C. R.**

My walk with Christ has been amazing since RCIA in 2015...I became a Reader and Extraordinary Minister at my local parish, (and) the next year, I became a Cursillista in the same Diocese and have made two pilgrimages as a Catholic; Rome 2018 and Jerusalem 2022! My walk with Him in the Catholic tradition has made me a better person and more charitable.

*Do you have an update on your journey to share with us? Send it to [info@chnetwork.org](mailto:info@chnetwork.org).*

**EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME** on television & radio, hosted by JonMarc Grodi, CHNetwork Executive Director



**TELEVISION**

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Monday, July 3

**Mac & Katherine Barron**

*Former Evangelical Protestants  
 (Re-air from 12/30/19)*

Monday, July 10

**Jeffrey Shott**

*Former Atheist*

Monday, July 17

**Kailash & Lily Duraiswami**

*Former Hindu, Atheist, and Agnostic*

Monday, July 24

**Chris Moellering**

*Former Anglican Military Chaplain*

Monday, July 31

**Jonathan Spaid**

*Former Evangelical Protestant*

*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)

# COMPASS

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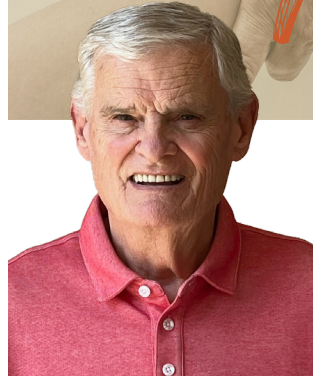


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The Coming Home  
Network International

*The Coming Home Network was established to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, to discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and to make the journey home.*



By Michael Grady  
Donor since 2016—7 years

I grew up in a devout Irish Catholic family (my mother's name was Loyola!). My six siblings and I all attended Catholic schools and our parish was the heart of our family's life. We fully embraced the values of our faith, even defending it passionately when necessary. I even remember getting into a bit of a "tussle" with another child about my faith at one point (did I mention we are Irish Catholics?).

In college, I attended John Carroll University, my late father's alma mater. Despite academic struggles and leaving school at the time of my father's death, I received a second chance to complete my studies with the help of a faithful priest and the support of my loved ones. Following graduation, I enlisted in the Army, went through officer candidate school, and served during the Vietnam War.

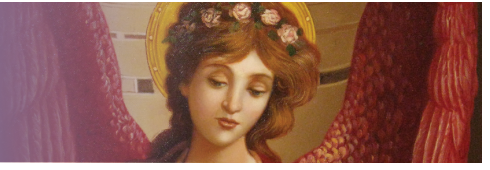
My late wife, Mary, and I met when we were in 3rd grade. We grew up together, married in the Church, raised our children in the faith, and often sought spiritual guidance through retreats. One significant moment occurred when I read about the suffering Jesus endured on the cross, which deepened my commitment to my faith and my role as a faithful Catholic husband and father.

During a season of spiritual growth, I discovered EWTN and The Journey Home, where stories of ministers leaving Protestantism and vocational ministry deeply impacted me. The show not only inspired me but also provided answers for Catholic parents whose children had strayed from the faith. It brings me joy to see Marcus Grodi's work continue through the leadership of his son, JonMarc.

Recognizing the impact of The Coming Home Network on my own faith journey, I became a supporter in 2016. After my wife's passing five years ago, I felt compelled to join COMPASS and make a monthly commitment. The familiar faces on television and the personal encounters I've had with some of the staff have contributed greatly to my faith. Contributing to their transformative work is a privilege, as we partner in the mission to share the truth and beauty of the Catholic faith. If the CHNetwork is a blessing to you, I hope you will find a way to join me in supporting their important work. ■

*Mike Grady has been a devoted donor and partner in our mission since 2016. To join him in sharing a one-time or monthly gift, visit us at [chnetwork.org/compass](http://chnetwork.org/compass)*

# Prayer List



## Clergy

- **For Grant, a non-denominational minister** who after some struggle was welcomed into the Catholic Church at the end of May, that the Lord will lead as he seeks to lead and care for his family.
- **For Sergio, a Christian Reformed preacher** who is now attending Mass with his wife and working through many issues, doctrinal, personal, and vocational.
- **For Gary, a Baptist pastor** who with his wife was welcomed into full communion with the Catholic Church this Easter Vigil, that the Lord may bless them as he takes on a position developing a program of evangelism at his parish.
- **For Ken, a Baptist pastor** who is drawn to the Church and seeking wisdom and guidance on how best to proceed in an environment where very few of those who know him will understand what he is coming to believe.
- **For Drew, an Anglican priest** who finds himself, once again, feeling drawn to the Catholic Church, that he will find answers to the questions that remain for him.
- **For Hunter, a Protestant seminary student** who is quickly becoming convinced that Catholicism is true, that the Lord will help him to navigate his next steps.
- **For Walter, a former Assemblies of God pastor** who with his wife was welcomed into full communion with the Church last Easter Vigil and who is developing a parish ministry to serve families who have dependents with intellectual disabilities.
- **For Jay, a non-denominational pastor** with a wife and four children, who was raised Catholic, feels drawn back to the Church and is meeting regularly with a Catholic priest, that the Lord will lead him home.

- **For Steve, a pastor in the Reformed Church in America** who feels strongly drawn toward the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will open his wife's heart to the things he has tried, unsuccessfully so far, to share.
- **For Keith, a former Pentecostal pastor and church planter** who finds himself on a journey back to the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him success in bringing his family along with him.
- **For Greg, a Methodist minister** who feels strongly drawn to the Catholic Church and yet also feels strongly drawn to be a pastor.

## Laity

- **For Yasmin, Evangelical Charismatic now Catholic**, to find community within the Parish. For strong faithful Priests to shepherd her on her continued journey of faith. For friends to be supportive of her faith journey.
- **For Faye, a new Catholic**, For people in her parish to be led to join the Bible Study she and her husband have been asked to lead. That those who come will grow in their faith through Scripture.
- **For Morgan, a Wesleyan**, for her husband's job interview, for a possible move to a new community and for good preparation to begin RCIA.
- **For Janis, an Anglican**, that she can find a spiritual director as she continues this journey into the Church.
- **For Susanne, a Lutheran**, for courage to complete her journey into the Church. For consolation as she grieves the loss of her beloved pet.
- **For Robby, an Anglican**, for a beloved priest who is retiring and for the parishioners he has served. Prayers that they will receive a faithful priest to continue to shepherd them as this priest has done for so many years.
- **For Lona, Baptist**, for her dad Lonnie and her cousin Tammy who have both been diagnosed with cancer.
- **For Val, a Buddhist**, for perseverance and wisdom on her journey into the Church. For family members to accept the news with charity.
- **For Harry in Nebraska**, that the Holy Spirit may guide him Home to the altar of our Lord Jesus.
- **For Thomas, an Inter-denominational Christian in Belgium**, that our Lord would guide his path back to the Catholic Church.
- **For Roger, an American Baptist in Tennessee**, that, as he prays and studies, God would grant him a hunger for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For Aiborlang, a Presbyterian in India**, that all obstacles to his journey Home would be cleared away.
- **For Aladin, a Non-denomination Evangelical in Illinois**, that his doctrinal questions about Catholic teaching may be answered.
- **For Roald, a Lutheran in Norway**, that the Holy Spirit would open his wife's heart to the fullness of the truth in the Catholic faith.
- **For John, a Baptist in Georgia**, that our Lord Jesus may bless him with his loving healing grace.
- **For Joe, an Evangelical in North Carolina**, that the grace of our Lord Jesus would open his heart to accept all the truths of the Catholic Church.
- **For Michael, a Southern Baptist in Mississippi**, that he may receive the guidance he is searching for in his journey to the Church.
- **For Jason, a Jewish brother in Florida**, that Messiah Jesus would draw him to the heart of the Catholic faith.
- **For Dean, an Episcopalian in Florida**, that our Lord would rectify all marital obstacles blocking him and his wife from the holy sacraments.



A Month of

# CONVERT SAINTS

*As with so many months on the calendar, July has some incredible feasts to celebrate for those of us who love to hear the conversion stories of the holy men and women in the communion of saints! Here are a few of the ones we'll encounter through the course of this month.*



**JULY 9**  
**ST. AUGUSTINE ZHAO RONG**

In the late 1700s, China was very much closed off to the West. So when French missionary Gabriel Taurin-Dufresse went to preach there, he ended up being arrested and detained. One of the soldiers assigned to his guard was Augustine Zhao Rong, who was moved by the witness of Msgr. Dufresse, and asked to become a Christian.

Augustine went on to discern a vocation to the priesthood, and in 1815, became the first native-born Chinese priest to suffer martyrdom. His witness of conversion and perseverance under persecution reminds us of the many Chinese Catholics through the centuries whose sufferings remain hidden under the oppressive tactics and policies of the Chinese government. ●



**JULY 14**  
**ST. KATERI TEKAKWITHA**

Kateri was born in what would become Upstate New York, and her Mohawk community was devastated by an epidemic of smallpox that would leave Kateri herself nearly blind. She converted to Catholicism through the witness of Jesuit missionaries, but this led to her being rejected and abused by her family, so she fled some 200 miles through the wilderness to

find a Christian community to call home. Her heroic commitment to conversion despite resistance from her family is an encouragement to all of us whose desire to become Catholic has caused conflict among our loved ones. ●



**JULY 18**  
**ST. CAMILLUS DE LELLIS**

The life of St. Camillus reads like a novel! At 6'6" and physically impressive, he found early work fighting as a mercenary for various armies in Italy. However, he was also a gambling addict, and found himself destitute despite his success as a soldier for hire. Looking for work, he found a construction job at a Capuchin monastery, and was converted by the witness of the

friars he met. Too old to join them, he decided to found his own religious order, devoted to caring for the sick. Today, that order continues to carry out the vision of St. Camillus throughout the world. ●



**JULY 22**  
**ST. MARY MAGDALENE**

Mary Magdalene may be one of the most famous converts in the history of the Church! Scripture gives us very little information about her life before meeting Jesus, other than telling us that He cast seven demons out of her. What we do know is that after she left everything to follow Christ, she was there for some of the most important moments in salvation history:

not merely the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, but also, as John's Gospel tells us, Mary was there at the empty tomb on Easter morning, as one of the first witnesses of the glorious news that the Lord had truly risen from the dead. ●



**JULY 31**  
**ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA**

Vain, selfish, and with no thought of God, Ignatius was an accomplished soldier in 16th century Spain until he was wounded in the leg by a cannonball in 1521, an injury that would remain with him for the rest of his life. While recovering, he began to read about Christ and the lives of the saints, and his heart began to change. He

had a radical conversion, and the fruits of that would later lead him to form what we now know as the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. The ripple effects of the conversion of St. Ignatius would reverberate through the centuries, and he is considered one of the greatest saints of the Counter-Reformation, who built up the life of the Church during the very time when the Reformation was fracturing Christianity. ●

be leading me into the Church. She suggested that I meet with Father Gerald Funke, then the rector of the Cathedral. Father Funke listened to my story with empathy and concern. At one of our meetings, he suggested that I consider joining him and others who prayed the Liturgy of the Hours each morning before Mass.

Within a week or two, I was standing with Bill Molitor and a small group of folks who prayed the Morning Office. From the beginning, this group welcomed me. A few weeks after I had joined them, I was overwhelmed when they gifted me with the four-volume set of the Liturgy of the Hours. Their generous gift allowed me to enter more fully into Morning Prayer. I found myself praying the Morning Office even when I was unable to attend Mass.

This small prayer community, together with others who regularly attended morning Mass, adopted me into their circle of friendship. Through the next few months and years, they prayed for me and helped me in my ongoing discernment. Their friendship continues to be a great blessing in my life.

### **A Question of Authority**

Like many who have entered the Church before me, perhaps the biggest disconnect for me became the issue of authority.

My Protestant model of Scripture as the sole authority for faith and practice had weakened and ultimately collapsed through the years, under the weight of historical study and pastoral practice. One problem with establishing written revelation as the sole authority is that written texts presuppose some form of human interpretation. The question is: whose interpretation? To whom do the Sacred Scriptures belong, and who has the authority to interpret them so that the Deposit of Faith remains intact and perpetuated through the centuries? If Scripture alone is the sole authority, and one's conscience can be bound only by Scripture, ultimately the individual Christian becomes the interpretive authority with respect to doctrine and practice. However, an authority is only as good as its ability to resolve a conflict. Without a visible, living Magisterium, disputes regarding the interpretation of Scripture can be ongoing and unresolvable. This partly explains the proliferation of hundreds of denominations and independent groups in Protestantism subsequent to the Reformation. Their model of authority is one that is inherently divisive, in my view, and it played out as such for me in almost three decades of pastoral work.

These and other problems with sola Scriptura led me to investigate the Catholic claim that Christ founded a visible Church and invested His interpretive authority of Sacred Scripture in the human leaders of that Church. I found this claim to be increasingly persuasive.

A related issue with respect to authority involves the process by which the Bible came to us in its current form. The New Testament did not fall from heaven in shrink-wrapped packaging, nor did it come with an inspired Table of Contents. Bishops and leaders of the Catholic Church, meeting in councils over a period of many years, discerned the divine inspiration

of the 27 books that became our New Testament. This placed me on the horns of a dilemma. I claimed the Bible alone as the sole authority in matters of faith, and yet I was depending on Catholic tradition to define the canon of Scripture. I realized that if I could not trust the infallible guidance of the early Fathers and Bishops of the Catholic Church to determine which books were canonical, then I could not be certain that the contents of the canon—the Bible that I used and preached from—were inspired and infallible.

After almost three decades in ministry, I was confronted with two crucial questions: what is the Church, and how do we know and discern the truth? As a Protestant, I had inherited a view of the Church as the invisible conglomeration of all who have faith in Christ. I did not believe the Church to be the visible organism of unbroken succession of Bishops coming from the Apostles.

I discovered that my view of the Church as an invisible reality shared traits with Gnosticism (a heresy that rejected material reality as evil and located truth in a hidden, spiritual realm) and Docetism (an ancient heresy that denied Christ had a physical body). I began to see that my view of the invisible Church led to the realization that no denomination possesses divine authority or interpretive authority to which all Christians should submit. Scripture alone could bind the conscience. But if the Church is not the visible organism based on apostolic succession, then no person or denomination has any greater interpretive authority than another, so no interpretation of Scripture is more authoritative than anyone else's. This was an increasingly painful reality for me during almost three decades of Protestant ministry.

I finally came to believe that the Catholic Church is the visible, hierarchically led, divinely appointed institution established by Christ to be His continuing presence in the world. The Church is the fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom in the Old Covenant. She is the "new Israel," the "Israel of God," as Paul tells the Galatians. However, the Church is more than a human institution. It is Christ's Body, not in a metaphorical sense, but in a real sense. It is a divine organism, and as such is an object of faith, such as we recite in the Creed when we affirm belief in "one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church." Christ and his Church are inseparable. Thus, Paul could remind Timothy that the Church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church is the divinely ordained and divinely guided truth-telling organism in matters of faith.

### **Faith Received, Not Reinvented**

For me, the implications of this were staggering. During the last several years of my search, while I was discerning my personal path to the Church, I met many persons on a similar journey. Their viewpoints often went something like this: "I won't become Catholic because I don't agree with the Church's teaching on contraception," or the Eucharist or Marian dogmas—fill in the blank.

This inverts the equation, in my view, because it continues to place the individual in the seat of authority with respect to

**“Think well. Speak well. Do well. These three things, through the mercy of God, will make a man go to Heaven.”**

**ST. CAMILLUS DE LELLIS**

how we discern divinely revealed truth. I came to see that the more fundamental question is whether the Catholic Church is who she claims to be, that is, the organism founded by Christ to safeguard, teach, and pass on the Deposit of Faith infallibly. If the Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth—and I had come to believe that it is—then I don’t get to decide what is and is not valid Christian dogma. Christian faith is handed down. It is something that is received, not constantly reinvented. The fundamental question is not whether one agrees with the Church’s teaching on issue x, y, or z before becoming or remaining Catholic. The fundamental question is the source of authority in determining divinely revealed truth.

It took me many years to realize that my understanding of the Catholic faith was based on a caricature, a distorted picture I inherited without ever questioning any of that picture’s underlying premises.

During this journey, I was forced to admit to myself the truth spoken by the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen when he observed that there are millions of people who hate what they mistakenly believe the Catholic Church teaches, but relatively few who hate what the Church actually teaches. I had inherited, and uncritically accepted, every anti-Catholic bias in existence. I have now come to believe (with Chesterton) that while there may be hundreds of reasons why a person would become a Catholic, the ultimate reason for such a decision is because Catholicism is true.

Time would not permit me to explain fully all of the contours of my journey that have led me to this decision. Even if I were to do so, my reasons would likely not be compelling to those who do not understand or agree with my decision. This is because all of us live our lives based on some perceptual framework, a lens that shapes how and what we see in life. We become comfortable in our views, and we unconsciously reject evidence or experience that creates anomalies or problems with those views. Perhaps Mark Twain said it best: “It’s not what we don’t know—it’s what we do know that just ain’t so” that causes problems for us.

This was my experience for almost 30 years as a Protestant pastor. I have since come to believe that the claims the Catholic Church makes for itself are true, namely, that it is the visible Church Christ founded, and that the fullness of the Christian faith subsists in her teachings and practices.

Ironically, I have not had to reject or abandon much of my wonderful heritage in the Wesleyan tradition in order to become Catholic. On the contrary, I continue to give thanks for that heritage and bring much of it with me as I embrace the Catholic faith.

I owe a great deal to the godly persons who introduced me to Christ and nurtured me in the faith. My Protestant heritage bequeathed to me a love of Sacred Scripture and the importance of a vital, living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I have been blessed and inspired by countless persons who have led exemplary lives of sacrificial obedience to Christ. I have been privileged to pastor churches filled with persons who loved me and gave generously of their time, talent, and treasure in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

My coming home to the Catholic Church is motivated by that same spirit of obedience. I believe there are compelling reasons to do so. But, in the final analysis, I came to the Church because I love Jesus and want to obey him—in radical obedience—motivated by love—at any cost. This is what my Wesleyan heritage taught me. This is what I now seek to do in this season of my life.

It’s a frightening prospect in some ways, because pastoral ministry is all I’ve ever known. My identity is bound up with pastoral life, and that has come to an end. The prospect of finding a new vocation and a new income as I approach my 60th birthday seems daunting at times. I served my congregation here in Boise for 22½ years, more than a third of my life. However, I am consoled by the fact that I believe I am doing what Christ asks of me.

The hymn, “Be Still My Soul,” is especially meaningful to me when it says:

*Be still my soul, thy God doth undertake, to guide the future as He has the past; Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last.*

I am profoundly grateful for God’s faithfulness to me in the past, and I’m trusting that He has a plan for me as I embrace this new chapter of my life. I was confirmed on Shrove Tuesday of 2023 by Bishop Peter Christensen in the Diocese of Boise. In addition to my family, many friends and former parishioners were in attendance, including a friend who made the trip from North Carolina. Many Catholic friends also supported me with their presence and hosted a wonderful reception following the Confirmation. I received my first communion on Ash Wednesday, making it a memorable beginning to the Lenten season. In the intervening time, I’ve had the privilege of sharing my story with a group of men at Boise State University, and my wife and I were blessed to attend a retreat sponsored by the Coming Home Network in March. It has truly been a blessing. ■

*Brook Thelander recently finished a book that will be forthcoming from Wipf and Stock Publishers, entitled It’s About Time: Encountering Jesus Through the Seasons of the Church Year. He continues to pray while discerning what should come next in his vocation. Currently, he and his wife attend Mass at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Boise. This story first appeared in the Idaho Catholic Register.*

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**“Give us, O Lord, a steadfast heart,  
which no unworthy affection  
may drag downwards; give us an  
unconquered heart, which no  
tribulation can wear out; give  
us an upright heart, which no  
unworthy purpose may tempt aside.  
Bestow upon us also, O Lord our  
God, understanding to know you,  
diligence to seek you, wisdom to  
find you, and a faithfulness that  
may finally embrace you; through  
Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

THOMAS AQUINAS

