



## October 2017 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## The Word of Life Led Us to the Bread of Life

Ulf and Birgitta Ekman

When my wife, Birgitta, and I announced publicly on March 9, 2014 that we were becoming Catholics, it was the end of a long process over many years. I was the senior pastor of a non-denominational Charismatic church, Word of Life, in Uppsala, Sweden. We started this church in 1983, and it had grown locally over the years to include a large network of new churches in many nations, especially in the former Soviet Union. We had been deeply involved in missions, church planting, and outreach in Europe, Russia, and Asia. We had started Christian schools and Bible schools and published thousands of books in 30 different languages.

To stand in the pulpit in our 4,000 seat church building and announce to our dear congregation that we now, after 30 years as their pastors, had come to the conclusion that we would become Catholics, was not easy. For some of our members this was an emotional tsunami; for others, who knew us better, it was the confirmation of their suspicions.

It was indeed the fruit of a long development stretching back some 15 years. It was not a hasty decision, even if for many it came as a surprise and a shock.

I had met my wife, Birgitta, as I studied to become a Lutheran minister at the University of Uppsala, Sweden in the mid-1970s. In May of 1970, I had come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ through strong conversion from a secular lifestyle. Birgitta had a Methodist background. Her parents were Swedish Methodist missionaries in India. When we met, we both had experienced the Evangelical life and the Charismatic movement. We loved Jesus and wanted to serve Him with all of our hearts.

My studies completed, I was ordained a Lutheran minister in 1979 and became a student chaplain at Uppsala University. This gave me an opportunity to continue to do what I had loved doing throughout my studies: to lead Bible studies and to evangelize among students.

In the early 1980s, we decided to take a year off to study more about the Charismatic life at a Charismatic Bible school in the USA. This was a huge step of faith for us, and we had to trust the Lord for all our needs. I learned a lot about the Christian life that I had never learned at the secular state university back home, with its rather liberal theology department.

When we returned to Sweden, we started a non-denominational Bible school and a new ministry that we called Word of Life. Eventually, I resigned as a Lutheran pastor, seeing that our activities involved church planting and our way of working was more Pentecostal/Charismatic in style and theology. The ministry, the Bible school, and the newly started church grew. *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Many, mainly young people, were attracted to it. There was a real hunger in Scandinavia, a desire to follow and serve Jesus. We started to send out many evangelistic teams and eventually long-term missionaries.

At the end of the 1980s, the Iron Curtain collapsed. Living only two hours by air from Moscow, we were able to engage heavily in missions into the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. From 1989 onward, it was an amazing time, an unprecedented opening for the Gospel into these former Communist nations. It filled us with joy and purpose as we shuttled in and out, preaching and teaching. Atheism had been the norm in Russia for seven decades, but now we saw thousands of people turning to Jesus and new congregations being formed. Numerous Bible schools sprang up to train and equip these new Christians.

During this adventurous and busy time of the early 1990s, I visited Albania. We had a unique opening there, and I was able to preach at the main stadium in Tirana, the capital of Albania. We had brought with us our big choir, and 20,000 people filled the stadium. Our event was broadcast on state television in spite of the fact that Albania still had a Communist regime. It was amazing to see how people responded to the Gospel and how they hungered for Jesus Christ.

The following year, the Communist regime fell, and I returned to Albania and met the President-to-be. His elderly male secretary seemed particularly happy to see me; he greeted me with these words: "I am also a Catholic."

This jolted me a bit, and I thought, "I am not Catholic, but Protestant." And in my mind the following thoughts raced quickly: "In justification I am Lutheran, in holiness more of a Methodist, in Baptism more of a Baptist, but not just a Baptist, because I do believe Baptism actually confers the Holy Spirit. In believing in the Holy Spirit, I am more of a Pentecostal, but not just a Pentecostal, but also a Charismatic." All this — really the history of the developments and divisions in the Body of Christ — raced through my mind. As I clearly did not know how to communicate all this to

a happy Albanian who thought I was Catholic, I merely replied, "God bless you, brother!"

I found unforgettable this momentary experience that I was not in the center of the Church, but more on the peripheries, influenced by inner divisions and constantly splintering new movements. Although I had seen many wonderful things in my work, I was still a part of these divisions. Yet I knew the Bible taught unity and understood that this disunity was not what Jesus wanted from His Church. From this moment in Albania, the question of unity started to grow in me.

Some years later, I encountered a number of related challenges in our widespread missions work. They concerned authenticity in leadership and the need to have some form of doctrinal authority (or what Catholics called "magisterium" — although, of course, I did not use this term). When theological and moral issues arose, who had the right to decide what was to be believed? Who had the last word, and on what basis? How are authentic pastors appointed? Can just anybody start a group and call himself a pastor? In what relation did our pastors stand to other leaders, to be helped and corrected?

When everything was going well, it seemed like the independent and congregational view worked well enough; it was practical and effective. But when things started to go wrong, we had real trouble. Who could intervene in a local congregation or into a leader's life and ministry — and on what authority? These reflections and actual experiences in our missions work led me to study and reflect more deeply about what the Church actually is.

By the end of the nineties, these thoughts were a constant challenge to me. It seemed the Lord was urging me to get to know the essence of the Church. I felt compelled to search, not only for the most effective strategies and activities for the church, the missions, and the evangelization, and not only for the building up of congregations and the training of leaders. I had to go deeper. I had to know the *very essence of the Church*. I realized more and more how weak I was in ecclesiological

*Continued on page 5* ➤

## FEATURED RESOURCES



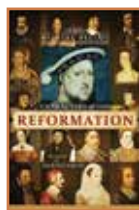
### The Forerunners to the Reformation CD

— By Dr. Scott Hahn

In this powerful talk, renowned convert and theologian Dr. Scott Hahn examines the intellectual and cultural ideologies, as well as the historical figures, that led up to the Protestant Reformation. Dr. Hahn discusses in particular focus the necessity of the papacy.

\$35

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### Characters of the Reformation

— By Hilaire Belloc, Forward by Marcus Grodi

In one of his most fascinating books, Hilaire Belloc presents in bold colors twenty-three principal characters of the Protestant Reformation. He illustrates how the motives of Protestant leaders were rarely religious in nature, but usually political or economic. Belloc argues the Reformation and break away from the Church wasn't only about theology, but about nationalism and resentment of the pope's authority.

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# Luther: The Rest of the Story

## PART 1: THE ROAD TO THE MONASTERY

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

“Reverend father, will you die steadfast in Christ and in the doctrine you preached?” Martin Luther looked up at his good friend Justus Jonas and answered, “Yes.”

It was February 18, 1546. Luther had traveled to Eisleben, the town of his birth, to settle a dispute between two brothers. Thinking he had little time left, he had joked with his friends, “When I get home to Wittenberg, I will lie down in my coffin and give the worms a fat doctor to feed on.” It wasn’t to be. A messenger was sent that day announcing Luther’s death.

One of his biographers describes the scene:

It was early morning and as usual during the semester, Philipp Melancthon, Luther’s long-time colleague and comrade-in-arms, stood in the lecture hall explicating St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans for his students. In the middle of the lecture a messenger burst in with the news of Luther’s death. Melancthon struggled for control, unable to speak, but finally — his voice faltering — told his students what had happened, breaking out in anguish with Elisha’s horrified cry as he saw the prophet Elijah ascending to Heaven in the chariot of fire: “The charioteer of Israel has fallen!”<sup>1</sup>

An armed escort accompanied Luther’s body as thousands came to say their goodbyes. At Luther’s funeral, Melancthon spoke of him as “God’s instrument for renewing the Church.”<sup>2</sup>

### The Beloved Reformer

It may be difficult for Catholics to understand that *this is how* countless of our Protestant brothers and sisters feel about Martin Luther. But it’s true. And on October 31 of this year, millions will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the movement Luther sparked when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, challenging the Catholic theologians to debate.

This is how countless Christians who take their Protestant Christianity seriously feel about Luther. This is how I felt — for many years!

I had only been a believer a short time when I first saw the old black and white classic film “Luther.” It was in a world religions class my wife, Tina, and I took together in college. Of course I knew almost nothing about ecclesiastical history, but images are powerful things, and I can recall to this day sitting in the back of that lecture hall, looking up at the screen and watching that humble Scripture scholar standing before the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the Electors of Germany, and, of course, all those grim-faced, intolerant, narrow-minded Catholic authorities, and insisting that he must stand with what he saw Scripture to be teaching, even if it meant opposing popes and councils and the entire weight of Catholic Tradition.

Unless I am convinced by Scripture . . . My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me! Amen.

1 Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, p. 8.

2 Ibid.

As I watched Luther and heard him speak those historic words, my eyes instantly filled with tears. I wanted to be like that man!

In the more than four decades since that night, I’ve read a number of Luther’s books. I own and have read a number of Luther biographies and books on his theology. I’ve graduated from a Protestant seminary where Luther was held in the highest regard and gone on to pastor Protestant congregations for more than eleven years.

And now I’m Catholic.

Does this mean that I now see nothing good in Luther? Does this mean I now believe the rumor circulating among some Catholics at the time, that Luther’s mother, Margareta, had had relations with the devil at a bathhouse in Eisleben and that Martin was not a human child at all? Does this mean that I think Luther had nothing valid to say and that his critique of the Catholic Church at the time was entirely without merit?

No. In fact, the Church has *admitted* that much of Luther’s critique of the moral state of the Church at the time was *true!* The Church in the early 16th century stood in desperate need of spiritual reform. There was corruption and abuse of authority, and it appears to have extended to the highest levels of the Church’s hierarchy.

Indeed, Pope Hadrian VI confessed publicly in 1523 — only two years after Luther spoke those historic words before the Diet of Worms:

We know that for years there has been many abominable offences in spiritual matters and violations of the Commandments committed at this Holy See, yes, that everything has in fact been perverted . . . . The first thing that must be done is to reform the curia, the origin of all the evil.<sup>3</sup>

Catholic historian Hilaire Belloc admits the same.

No one can deny that the evils provoking reform in the Church were deep-rooted and widespread. They threatened the very life of Christendom itself. All who thought at all about what was going on around them realized how perilous things were and how great was the need of reform . . . . Every kind of man would violently attack such monstrous abuses . . . . It was from all this that the turmoil sprang, and as it increased in violence threatened to destroy the Christian Church itself.<sup>4</sup>

The position of the Church has *never been* to insist that everything Luther had to say was wrong. No. Much of what he had to say was right and true. What the Church *has* insisted, however, is that the key solutions Luther gave to the Church’s problems, summed up in his doctrines of *sola fide* (justification by faith alone) and *sola Scriptura* (Scripture as the sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the Church) were wrong and have had catastrophic consequences, not least being the shattering of Christendom.

3 Ibid., p. 39.

4 Hilaire Belloc, *The Great Heresies*, pp. 112-114.



The split that resulted from Luther's head-on collision with the Church is one of the great tragedies of Christian history. As a result, there are now hundreds and even thousands of Protestant denominations, sects and independent ecclesial movements.

What I wish to do in this series of short articles is tell the story of Martin Luther. I want to tell it as sympathetically as I can. As one who nearly worshipped Luther for a long, long time, this isn't hard for me to do. I want to tell the story as Lutheran schoolchildren are taught it all over the world, as my son and daughter, who as children attended Lutheran schools, were taught it.

But then, I want to also tell the parts Lutheran schoolchildren do not hear. As Paul Harvey used to say, I want to tell "the rest of the story."

## Saint Anne, Help Me!

Luther was born November 10, 1483 in the German village of Eisleben. As was the custom of the time, his parents brought him to St. Peter's Church the very next day where he was baptized Martin, after St. Martin of Tours, whose feast day it was.

Early on Luther's parents, Hans and Margaretta, saw tremendous potential in their son and took steps to make sure he received a good education. After attending school in Magdeburg and Eisenach, where Luther lived for a time with relatives, he entered the University at Erfurt, considered by many to be the finest German university of the time. In fact, a common saying held that "He who would study rightly, must go to Erfurt." Luther's parents cherished high hopes that their son would use his obviously bright mind to make a career in law and be in a position to support them in their old age.

But this was not to be. At the age of 21, returning to the University after visiting his family, a dramatic incident occurred that marked a turning point in young Martin's life. As he walked along the road just outside the Saxon village of Stotternheim, the sky grew dark. Suddenly a violent storm broke out, so violent that Luther feared for his life. He cried out, "Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk!"

The time would come when Luther would repudiate the decision he made that day. In fact, he would later say that the call that came to him was not a call from God, but from the devil. At the time, however, he viewed it as a call from God. And he wasted no time in acting upon it. He spent two weeks putting his affairs in order; his friends threw him a farewell party and the next morning accompanied him to the gate of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. "You see me today," he said, "and never again."

## Why Luther Became a Monk

The question has been asked: Why did Luther decide so quickly to leave the path he had chosen, to abandon the goals his parents had set for him, and become a monk? Hans and Margaretta were infuriated when they heard what he had done. Why did he do it?

It's clear, first of all, that Luther already had some attraction to the monastic life. In other words, this wasn't something that came *entirely* out of the blue, as it can seem from reading the account we have.

You and I live at a very different time and culture. We can walk around for a year and not run into a monk. And if we do, we think we've stumbled onto a movie set. In Luther's day, there were monks

everywhere. Young Martin had seen these saints on the streets and was drawn to their holiness.

Later in life, he recalled an image that had particularly struck him at a very young age — Prince William of Anhalt, who had forsaken his place in the nobility to become a begging friar.

With my own eyes I saw him. I was fourteen years old at Magdeburg. I saw him carrying the sack like a donkey. He had so worn himself down by fasting and vigil that he looked like a death's-head, mere bone and skin. No one could look upon him without feeling ashamed of his own life.<sup>5</sup>

Add to this the fact that at the time it was common belief that the surest, straightest route to heaven was living out the monastic disciplines of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Some said that a monk who died wearing his cowl could expect to receive special treatment at the gates of paradise, sort of like a celestial "Easy Pass" for those navigating the toll roads to heaven.

There was a story told of a Cistercian monk who in a high fever had taken off his cowl and died before he could get it back on. He went to heaven but was out of uniform and so was not allowed in. He was condemned instead to walk around the outside looking in at the festivities — that is, until someone had mercy on him and he was allowed to return to earth to retrieve his missing garment.

All of this would have been in Martin's mind.

But there was more. Later in life, on more than one occasion, Luther is reported to have spoken about *why* he had entered the monastery. And when he did, another factor comes into focus. He is reported, for instance, to have said, "My mother caned me for stealing a nut, until the blood came. Such strict discipline drove me to the monastery, although she meant well."<sup>6</sup> On another occasion he spoke of his father whipping him so harshly that he ran away from home. In another place Luther repeated this same basic theme: "The serious and austere life that they [his parents] led with me caused me to enter a monastery and become a monk."<sup>7</sup>

Now, it's clear that Luther loved his mother and father and understood that what they had done they had done with good intentions. But it's also clear, and anyone reading Luther's life will see this, that his experiences growing up — and in a special way his relationship with his father — contributed to struggles he had with depression throughout his life.

I believe this also had a tremendous effect on how Luther viewed God. It's impossible from so great a distance to weigh these sorts of influences, but I have no doubt that Luther's upbringing played some part in instilling in Luther a vision of God as severe, demanding, impossible to please — a vision of God that would later drive him to rethink his entire theology of salvation.

Stay tuned for part 2. ■

5 Quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, p. 33.

6 Bainton, p. 23.

7 Oberman, p. 92.

### God is Offended

By Marcus Grodi

"God is Offended"

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Why should we want to help anyone “come home” to the Catholic Church? For most of you reading this CHNewsletter, this may seem like an absurdly rhetorical question, yet you still may offer a variety of answers: because Christ started one Church which “subsists” in the Catholic Church; because this one Church continues in union with the Bishop of Rome and those in union with him; because through apostolic succession, Christ continues to give His Church the authority to confect the Eucharist and the authority to forgive sins; because apart from this Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, one cannot be certain of salvation, or, as the Church teaches, “Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved” (*Lumen Gentium*, 14).

Others reading this question — Protestant or Catholic — may merely consider it absurd, period: As many of our members have been told by Catholic priests, laity, and even a few bishops, “Ever since Vatican II, it isn’t necessary to convert!”

I’d like to address this question by briefly comparing four current anniversaries. The first two, which every Catholic should be aware of, should be approached with reflection: Why did God cause or allow these events to happen? The third anniversary is far less significant on the grand scale, but bears reflection, while the fourth is maybe the most significant, though few of us may be aware of it. The question is, what single thread unites all four anniversaries, particularly in relation to the question of being Catholic?

First, this October 15th is the 100th anniversary of the Miracle of the Sun at Fatima. One hundred years ago, when most of the western world was at loggerheads in the most brutal and devastating war the world had ever known, Our Lady appeared to three Portuguese children above the branches of a holm oak tree near Fatima, Portugal. There is much to say about this Church-approved apparition — and many thoughts go to the Miracle of the Sun or whether the consecration of Russia actually took place or whether the third secret was fully revealed. But to me, the significant theme of Fatima, which starts the common thread of these four anniversaries, was expressed by our Lady to Lucia: “I am Our Lady of the Rosary. I have come to exhort the faithful to change their lives and to stop offending the Lord by their sins. He is already too much offended.” One hundred years ago, our Lord was so offended by our sins that He sent Our Lady to warn us, to awaken us from our “lukewarmness” (Rev. 3:16), and to call us to prayer, repentance, conversion, and holiness. Please think on this a moment: our omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, Triune God, was deeply of-

fended, not just by the sinful lives of pagans and atheists, but by Christians, Catholic and Protestant. In 1982, a year after the assassination attempt, Pope John Paul II stated that “the message of Fatima is more relevant and more urgent today than even when Our Lady first appeared.” Given the news that we hear every day — and given the present state and direction of the Church — I wonder whether God has grown less or more offended by our sins?

Second, this October 31 is the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation. Again there is much, much that can and needs to be said about this event. It is not something we Catholics should in any way celebrate, yet one which we should ponder: Was the state of the 16th century Church so dire that God, at least, allowed the Reformation as a wake up call to prayer, repentance, conversion, and holiness? Was He so offended then by the sins of Catholic priests, bishops, laity, even the Pope, that He allowed His Church to experience a sort of purging — that has not abated, even to this day?

I can’t remember the source, but I recently read a commentary that emphasized that Fatima actually occurred on the 400th anniversary of the Reformation, and the author felt there was significance in this: Whereas the Protestant Reformers essentially downplayed, if not negated, the freedom of the human will to do anything pleasing to God, Our Lady’s message at Fatima was just the opposite. Everything our Lady promised — everything she said we might expect from the mercy of God — was dependent upon our freely-given response in prayer, repentance, conversion, and holiness. Certainly, our very ability to believe, hope, and love — to pray, repent, turn in conversion, and grow in holiness — all comes to us as a gift of grace, but yet we must freely respond. Over the past 500 years, our separated brethren have promulgated a vast assortment of *Continued on page B* ➤

views concerning sin and salvation — most following Luther’s lead that once a person has placed his faith in Christ, he cannot lose his salvation, no matter what sins he might commit. Does this widespread presumption and lackadaisical attitude toward sin, offend God?

Are we Catholics any less guilty of presumption? Have we become so accustomed to emphasizing and celebrating the good things we share with our separated brethren, that we forget that every single person walking the face of this earth is potentially guilty of sin and deserving of the hell of which Saint Jacinta was given a glimpse? Certainly, we may want to cull this statement by pulling out the newly baptized or the newly absolved, or those who might be invincibly ignorant, but only God really knows the state of anyone’s “thoughts, words, what we have done, and what we have failed to do.” This is why Our Lady insisted that even anyone gaining the graces of praying the Rosary, still should pray, “Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, and save us from the fires of hell.”

The third event, which I said is of least significance, is the 20th anniversary of the start of *The Journey Home* program on EWTN. By God’s mercy, over 800 guests have shared their journeys home to the Catholic Church — but the bottom line is not specifically their becoming Catholics. Rather, it is their convictions that apart from the truth and authority of the Church, they could not be certain that they knew what sin is and what it is that truly offends God. Apart from the teaching and sacraments of the Church, they realized that they could not be certain their sins were washed away by the blood of Christ and whether they even had life, for as Christ insisted, “Unless you eat my body and drink my blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:56).

But there is a fourth anniversary which maybe few of us consider. We are living in the days of the 2000th anniversary of the

silent years of the life of Jesus. From the time His parents found Him in the temple and He returned to Nazareth “obedient to them” (Lk 2:51), we don’t hear of Him again until about twenty years later when He appears, ready to be baptized by John and start His public ministry. All we know about these silent years, other than His work as a carpenter under His foster father, Joseph, is that during this time, He “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52). Why is this time of silence important? The author of Hebrews states that Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). Given our own experiences with temptation, isn’t it fair to suspect that our Lord’s silent years — as an adolescent, teenager, and young adult, all the while seeking only to learn and do the will of His Father in Heaven — were the very years He learned the most about temptation and sin? The very temptations and sins that now run rampant in our society — that define our society apart from any society that has existed before us? It was out of the experiences of these silent years that our Lord came, willing to carry our sins on His sinless soul to the cross, to turn aside the offense of His Father.

Two-thousand years, five-hundred years, one hundred years, twenty years, these are all in their own way important anniversaries. Yet, more importantly, we should ask ourselves how many years has it been since my baptism or since my last confession? How long has it been since the last thing I thought, said, did or didn’t do, something that offended God? The message still remains; we must recognize how our sins offend God and then turn to Him in prayer, repentance, conversion, and holiness, which is why we need the Church and Her sacraments, for apart from Christ, we can do nothing. ■

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## CHNetwork Staff Interview



**What is your name and title?** Jim Anderson, the Ministry Member and Pastoral Care Coordinator for the Coming Home Network.

**How long have you worked for the CHNetwork?** I began working for CHNetwork on the day after Memorial Day in 2001, so I’ve worked here for 16 years.

**Before working at the Coming Home Network, what was the most unusual or interesting job you’ve ever had?** Before coming to CHNetwork one of my most interesting jobs was working as a librarian in a medium security state prison. The staff in the library was made up of about ten felons, who ranged from drug dealers to murders. What made my job interesting was the opportunity it gave me to share the Gospel of Jesus to these men who desperately needed to hear it. I was also able to present the fullness of the Catholic Faith to people who previously were either totally ignorant of the truths of the Catholic Church or had a scandalously distorted understanding of what the Church believes.

**How would you describe your job to a stranger on an airplane?** I share the fullness of the Catholic Faith in Jesus Christ with non-Catholics who want to have a better and clearer understanding of the Catholic Church. I also assist and guide people who are seeking to enter into full-communication with the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**What does a typical day in the office look like to you?** After filling my coffee cup, I begin my day with checking to see what new emails have come to me over the night. Often these are from people, clergy and laity, who have questions about what the Catholic Church teaches. I also add the new people to our membership who have contacted us asking for our assistance in learning about the fullness of the faith. Additionally, I reach out to our older members, converts and those on the journey, on a daily basis to see how they are doing and if there is anything I can do to be of service to them. In addition I also help people who call us on the phone with questions and concerns. Lastly,



when we record episodes of *The Journey Home* with Marcus and his guests, I'm the guy behind the camera in the studio.

**What is the most rewarding part of your job?** My greatest reward and joy of my job is to have the opportunity to share the beauty of the Catholic Faith to people who have previously never experienced it and are hungering for God's grace, most especially in the Holy Eucharist.

**What is one fact about you that might surprise people to know?** My great, great, great grandfather was a counterfeiter and a horse thief who spent the Civil War in the state prison in Pittsburgh.

**Who do you nominate to be our next staff interview?**  
Seth Paine ■

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We've recently launched a beautiful and powerful new version of

our website, [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org). Along with the overhaul to the look and feel of the site, you'll notice five new main pages: Conversion Stories, Answers, Connection, Spiritual Direction, and Vocational Support. Take a few minutes to explore, share the new website with others, and let us know what you think!

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# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Marcy, a non-denominational lay minister, that the Lord Jesus would lift her heart to Him as she explores the Catholic Faith.
- For a Disciples of Christ minister, that as he continues to ponder on the lessons of philosophy and Church history, the Holy Spirit may guide him home.
- For Lucas, an Anglican priest, that the Holy Spirit would open a way for him to come into full-communication with the Catholic Church.
- For Michael, a former Episcopal seminarian, that he and his family would be showered with grace and blessings as they enter the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For a former Muslim imam in Africa, that God would protect him and guide him as he follows the Lord Jesus' call to become a Catholic Christian.
- For Jenny, that her minister husband's heart may be softened enough so that she may receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- For Gabriele, a Lutheran minister, that the Holy Spirit would guide her to gainful employment enabling her to enter the Catholic Church.

## Laitly

- For a woman who considers herself a closet Catholic and believes in the Real Presence of Jesus, that our Lord lead her toward the fullness of the Eucharistic Faith.
- For Cindy, who is fearful of what she might discover during her exploration of Catholicism but is drawn by the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confession.
- For Kathy who is searching for a parish she can relate to and begin RCIA at, that she may find good local support so she doesn't feel so alone.
- For a Pentecostal who has been indoctrinated with many anti-Catholic sentiments, that she overcome them as she begins to see the value of tradition and holiness in the Catholic Church.
- For someone who recently experienced Christ's true presence in the Eucharist during adoration and intends to start RCIA this fall.
- For Sammy, that he be touched by the Holy Spirit and open his eyes to the truth of the Catholic Faith.
- For Peg, a revert, who feels she needs to unlearn and relearn various beliefs she has held the majority of her adult life.

- For Carolyn, a convert, who is experiencing frustration with those in her life who don't understand or respect her great joy in becoming Catholic, that she have the words and the grace to effectively share about her conversion.
- For Linda who is struggling with various aspects of the Catholic Faith, especially the bad witness of Catholics, and is prayerfully considering how best to proceed with her journey towards the Church.
- For Maggie who is planning to begin RCIA again this fall and has decided it is time to let her church leadership know about her discovery of the beauty of the Catholic Faith.
- For a woman who is beginning RCIA and is having a hard time knowing how to reach her fallen-away Catholic husband with the truth of the Catholic Faith.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org). We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

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



### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET  
*The Best of The Journey Home*: Wednesday 1 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-Thursday 12 AM ET

**October 2**

Leila Marie Lawler\*  
 Formerly unchurched

**October 9**

Christopher Zehnder\*  
 Former Missouri Synod  
 Lutheran

**October 16**

Jeannie Ewing\*  
 Revert

**October 23**

Tom Murphy\*  
 Former Evangelical Protestant

**October 30**

Deacon Michael Ward\*  
 Former Anglican priest

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

\*Schedule is subject to change.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

understanding and how pragmatic, even shallow, my understanding of the Church really was.

This led to a gradual change in my theology. There were ideas that were prevalent within our particular Christian circles that I had never really reflected on, even though I believed and taught them. Among these was a definite lack of respect for the past, for Christian history. Progress, growth, and “visions for the future” occupied us, at the expense of our historic sources and church tradition. We were anti-institutional because institutions were seen as threats to evangelical and spiritual freedom. A suspicion of perceived leadership abuse was prevalent, and the idea of obedience was not a popular concept. Personally, I saw the need to strengthen the training of pastors and leaders; I even wrote a book about it. But in our charismatic culture, “authority” was often viewed as a hindrance to the initiatives of the ordinary believer. There was an understanding of the common priesthood of the believer, but not really of the ministerial priesthood, at least not in the Catholic sense of the word. Little by little, I became aware of the need of all these things we Evangelicals had rejected. I started to study more about the historicity, the continuity, the authenticity, the authority, and the sacramentality of the Church. It was in this quest that I began to find the answers I was looking for, although I did not at first want to admit it.

I started to see that many of the activities we had engaged in were good and needed, but in themselves, they were not enough. I realized that we should not have to “reinvent the wheel” in every new generation. Continuity was stronger than discontinuity, and we were supposed to build on something that existed before us instead of departing from it or disdaining it as outdated or dead. This was a sobering and uncomfortable challenge, although in the end, it became very satisfying because of all the treasures we were discovering. Even more uncomfortable, especially at first, was the fact that the best answers to my ecclesiological questions invariably came from a source that I did not want to recognize: the Catholic Church.

While these questions were swarming in my mind, my wife was busy reading about St. Birgitta of Sweden (St. Bridget in English). 2003 was the 700th jubilee of St. Brigitta’s birth. At that time she was the only Swedish saint canonized by Rome, and there was a renewed interest in her. While my Birgitta was studying about her, she encountered a number of problems. This saint was certainly strongly used by God and loved Jesus dearly. St. Birgitta heard from the Lord, but she also — and this was troublesome — talked with Mary. Even more troublesome, Mary replied to her! We thought she must surely have been mistaken about these experiences with Mary, that she had confused Mary with the Holy Spirit. We spent a great deal of time reflecting and discussing these things. Slowly but steadily this took us to a point where we had to reconsider the place and purpose of the Virgin Mary, which previously was so unfamiliar to us as Protestants. For us, the question about Mary was not the last nut to crack, but the very first one we had to deal

with in our quest into the Catholic Faith. In this way, the Virgin Mary became our entryway into the Catholic Church.

At this time we were sent by our Word of Life church to start a study center in Israel. We moved to the village of Ein Kerem on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Ein Kerem is the village of John the Baptist and the meeting place for Elisabeth and Mary. For us, too, it became a meeting place with Mary.

The three years we spent in Israel brought us a much deeper respect for our spiritual roots and for the continuity of the faith. It was a place where the divisions in the Body of Christ became painfully visible to us. Christian unity became a deeper concern than ever before.

Wherever we were in Israel, we bumped into Catholics. In Sweden we rarely met them, but here in Israel they were everywhere. And as we got to know them, they impressed us as great Christians, open and loving, with a great love for Jesus. Much of our ignorance and inherited prejudice crumbled in this atmosphere of free communication with our Catholic brothers and sisters. We had the usual questions, and they were important to us: questions about the Pope, Mary and the saints, — and of course purgatory. We needed answers.

These questions were rooted in our Protestant belief in *sola Scriptura*, in which we were steeped. Gradually it dawned on me that “Scripture alone” was really not so scriptural after all. Nor was it true that Catholics put Tradition, the Church, and the Pope over the Bible, or that they never read the Bible. Another Protestant misconception was that the Catholic Church tried to keep the Bible away from the lay people. These were propaganda and myths that we had unwittingly inherited from the time of the Reformation, still prominent in our culture.

It was now that I encountered another term, much more in line with Scripture and how the ancient Church actually understood Scripture: “the primacy of Scripture.” I also started to realize that understanding true Tradition was basically the key to how to read Scripture. I began to see that there is a real need of a Magisterium which, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can discern the true interpretation of Scripture in times of arguments and disagreements. We were not just left to ourselves; so it was not just about “me, my Bible, and Jesus.”

This was actually a great encouragement. It was a tremendous help in discerning that there is an objective truth in Revelation, and that this truth was deposited in the Church, which has safeguarded it and handed it on safely to succeeding generations.

One day, we took a walk in the Yemenite valley outside Ein Kerem. As we passed an old olive tree, I felt a question from the Holy Spirit. He had a lesson about pride for me to learn. “Look at this olive tree; it is dead, isn’t it?” Looking at it casually, it really looked like it was dead. It had holes right through the trunk. So I thought: “Yes, it is.” Then I sensed: “Look again.” And, looking again a little closer, I did see many small green leaves all over the branches. It was not dead at all. And inwardly I heard something I will never forget: “Don’t you ever call anything dead again.” I understood it clearly to refer to the criticism and scorn that from time to time I

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

had felt and expressed towards the traditional, historical churches. I had to repent from my sin of pride then and there.

Through the years we had the opportunity to travel frequently, and this opportunity took us to Rome. Rome made a deep impression on us. The first time we went there together was in 1999, before we lived in Israel. We spent a week looking at churches and ancient monuments. Along the way, we discovered some excellent religious bookstores. We prayed and read a lot and discussed many subjects.

At his Wednesday audience, Pope John Paul II came quite close to us in his popemobile. My wife took the opportunity to give him a loud greeting and shouted happily, "God bless you, Brother!" I wasn't quite sure if he was a brother or not, but when I considered my thoughts on the matter, I felt rather ashamed. Of course he was a brother in the Lord, but I had to admit there had been times when I was not willing to recognize this.

In that very moment of my review of conscience, a young man next to me turned to me, asking: "Who is the Holy Father for you?" Surprised, I replied diplomatically: "The Bishop of Rome." The young man returned, with serious eyes looking at me: "Is that *all* he is?" I had no answer. I felt caught, uneasy, with a guilty conscience. As I fumbled for an answer, the Lord again had a lesson for me.

From Israel we travelled several times to Rome and continued our discoveries. Once, when we were in St. Peter's basilica, we had the opportunity to go down into the *Scavi* (the archeological excavations) under the sanctuary, where some bones of St. Peter apparently had been found. For me this was astonishing. I stood there and looked at these pieces of bone that very well could be from the buried body of Peter the Apostle. And as we climbed up the stairway to the sanctuary again, I realized that right above this grave was the high altar in the center of this magnificent church, where the successors of St. Peter celebrate the Eucharist. In that moment, the unbroken line from the ancient Church until today overwhelmed me.

The reality of this unshakable faith and unshakable Church, built by Christ on His Apostle Peter, whom He called "the rock," came crashing down on me. As we walked out, my mind was com-

pletely filled with questions and wonderings about what we had seen. Is this really and actually the Church that Jesus founded? As I stepped out on the stairs outside the church, together with my wife and a friend, all three of us in an instant saw the exact same thing: the sky was, as usual, filled with birds flying back and forth. But suddenly, from high up in the sky and down over the great square, the birds formed a gigantic exclamation mark, perfect in shape, complete with a dot underneath it. It seemed that all the birds stood still for a moment in that formation. All three of us saw this surrealistic phenomenon, independently of one another. Meanwhile, in my mind, all my question marks were turning into a huge exclamation mark, as if the Lord were saying, "Haven't you heard and seen enough now to believe?"

Grace turns our questions into answers, not by our own independent intellectual strength, but by Him revealing truth to us. We can only receive in faith and believe.

We began to realize more in depth that the Catholic Church is the original, authentic, and true Church. That did not mean we didn't see other Christians in other denominations as brothers and sisters. Of course they are! Instead, it meant that there is something about the Catholic Church that every Christian needs and actually yearns for, even though those on the outside often reject it. It means coming into the fullness of what God wants to give all His children, in and through His Church.

One thing that divides all Christians into two distinct camps is the sacraments. If it is true that the sacraments actually confer grace and are not just symbols of the grace God wills to give us, then many questions arise. In what way is grace conferred? How is the Church safeguarding the sacraments, so that grace can come to us? When are the sacraments valid or invalid?

Of course, Christians differ a lot on such questions, but we were beginning to understand that God's grace was truly present in the sacraments. The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist became very important to us. But if the Catholic Church taught this and we believed it, we were still on the outside. To be able to receive God's grace in its fullness, we had to partake of the sacraments, and to partake of the sacraments we had to be in full com-

### WHAT IS THE CHNETWORK?

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

Through the one-on-one outreach of our pastoral staff and volunteers, our monthly CHNewsletter, regional retreats, social media, and through the online community forums and groups at our website [CHNetwork.org](http://CHNetwork.org), we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



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The Coming Home  
Network International



[www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org)

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

munion with the Catholic Church. I felt like someone standing outside a bakery shop. There was a glass window separating me from the good things inside the shop. I saw them, and I wanted them, but I could not participate in them. Frustratingly, we had to become Catholics to partake in their fullness.

From this point on, it became increasingly important how we were to treat and value these truths and treasures deposited in the Catholic Church. It now became a question of communicating what we had been discovering and sharing it with our dear Evangelical brothers and sisters in a good and proper way.

This journey of discovery had taken several years. During that time, over and over again, I heard four short exhortations: “Discover! Appreciate what you discover! Draw nearer to that which you have discovered! Unite with what you have discovered!” The last sentence I put on the back burner for a long time. I was not at all ready for that! Honestly, I wasn’t sure I would ever be able to bring myself to become a Catholic. However, I did appreciate the Church and was strongly attracted towards it. My objections were melting away.

After three years in Israel, with this inner controversy raging, we moved back to Uppsala, Sweden. It was 2005, and I continued as pastor of Word of Life. My views had changed; my teaching and preaching had changed, and I started to share my nascent convictions. Many accepted this change, but not everybody, and I was still not sure of where all this would lead.

After our return to Sweden, we organized several tours to Rome with pastors and leaders from our international network. For many of them, it was a profitable experience, a real eye-opener that helped them to confront the ignorance and prejudices in their own lives, as it had my own. It felt good to be able to share this ecumenical openness with others, and sometimes it seemed like this would be enough. But the question of the meaning of the word “unite” that lingered in the back of my mind was still not resolved. Being in a position of pastoral leadership, with all the responsibilities this entailed, I could not simply forsake the sheep and leave. Over the past thirty years, we had built a community of some 200,000 Christians in many nations. How were we supposed to handle this situation?

From time to time, my wife, Birgitta, would ask me a simple but very compelling question: “But Ulf, what is the *truth*?” The truth — not convenience, not fear, nor the opinion of others — should be our guiding principle. But we did not want to hurt our people. Sometimes this looked like an impossible equation.

As I was more and more open about my convictions in my preaching and teaching, I also started to get more resistance and criticism. This openness towards the Catholic Church was not what some people wanted to hear, and deep-seated criticisms of the Catholic Faith surfaced. It was quite astonishing how deeply this bias was rooted throughout Sweden and all of Scandinavia. Since the Reformation in the 1500s, it seems the bias had been in our culture, even in our DNA. People who had never studied the subject could become furious if they perceived that I was inching toward Rome. Emotions started to run high, and we took some heat.

Some people started to accuse me of having a hidden agenda, and rumors came out, especially on the Internet, that we were al-

ready Catholics. Certain blogs were spreading wild rumors. We were accused of trying to collectively affiliate the whole of Word of Life with the Catholic Church, and there was a lot of murmuring. But the truth was that we, at that point, were not ready, not totally sure and did not yet have answers to all questions ourselves. So I stated what I was convinced of, nothing more. Eventually we started to see that this position was not acceptable to anyone. I was praying a lot, trying to understand God’s will in these things and how to handle the criticism.

Around this time, we spoke with the Catholic Bishop of Sweden, to let him know where we stood. As I was a well-known public figure, it was arranged that we could receive the RCIA classes privately, with no strings attached. We could make up our mind either way when the course ended. We agreed to have a kind and loving Jesuit priest meet with us once a month for a year.

One night, at two in the morning, I was suddenly wide awake and heard in my heart: “It is time to step out into the water. You can do it in the way of the prophet Jonah or in the way of the Apostle Peter.” Well, I did not want Jonah’s way, running away from God’s calling and getting in all kinds of trouble, so I said: “OK, I want to do it in Peter’s way.”

Following that decision, I fell asleep peacefully. I knew I had been dragging my feet and procrastinating this important decision, but now that time was definitely over.

My wife and I made our move in total unity. Shortly afterwards, we told our congregation that we were convinced that we needed to be in full union with the Catholic Church. A media storm erupted, going on for months, but now our hearts were at peace. With great joy and thankfulness in our hearts, on a beautiful spring day, the 21st of May, 2014, we were received into the Catholic Church in a small Brigettine chapel. We have never since doubted this decision for a moment, and every day we are thankful to God for this grace and privilege.

Jesus said: *If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* John 8:31-32. ■



*ULF EKMAN is the founder of Word of Life, a non-denominational Charismatic church in Uppsala, Sweden and was its Senior Pastor for 30 years. In May of 2014, he and his wife, Birgitta, left their ministry and joined the Catholic Church. Ekman has held conferences and leadership seminars in many nations, especially in the former USSR, Eastern Europe, and India. He founded Bible schools and a theological seminary, hosted a television show aired in many nations, and has written more than 40 books and booklets, which have been translated into over 30 languages. For three years, he and Birgitta lived in Jerusalem. They currently live in Stockholm. They have four grown sons and seven grandchildren. Ulf and Birgitta were guests on The Journey Home on September 14, 2015. Their program can be viewed at [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org) or purchased through EWTN’s Religious Catalogue.*



**The Coming Home Network International**

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# Resources for RCIA

Check out our newly updated and expanded RCIA page, for lots of free resources available for RCIA instructors and those on the journey!



**[Chnetwork.org/RCIA](http://Chnetwork.org/RCIA)**