

# The *Coming Home Network* *International*

FEBRUARY 2006 NEWSLETTER

## **Journeys Home** **The Convert** **and the Revert** (And a quiver-full of blessings!) by David and Michele Zampino



The Zampino family lives on a tree-lined street in a small town in southeastern Wisconsin. They live right across the street from the Catholic Church to which they belong. Four of their children attend the parish school. A fifth takes a bus to the local Catholic High School. Three others are at home with Mom. Three days a week, the Dad drives an hour into Milwaukee, where he teaches theology at a local university. The Mom works a few evenings a week at a nearby restaurant. The family is very active in their parish and enjoys fellowship with students and colleagues from the university, friends from the parish, and neighbors about town. To the casual observer, the Zampino family is a fairly typical, rather conservative, Catholic family. But that is not how the story began . . .

### David

I was raised in an actively Christian home. My father was an Episcopal priest; the rector (head Pastor) of a rather large church outside of Baltimore, Maryland. The church, St. Timothy's, Catonsville, was one of the first Episcopal parishes in the United States to be actively involved in the Charismatic Renewal movement. Unlike many "renewed" Episcopal churches, however, St. Timothy's was also fairly "high-church". Communion was offered on a daily basis, auricular confession was practiced, and there was even incense on holy days. The preaching was sound and biblically based, and there was a blend of music, ranging from the best of the Anglican choral tradition to praise music.

I was educated in Christian schools from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds: Missouri Synod Lutheran,

Independent Baptist, Episcopal, Assemblies of God, and Church of the Brethren, among others. This eclectic educational background would certainly provide me with a variety of religious perspectives and opinions to consider! When I was 12, my father was commissioned as an evangelist in the Episcopal church, and after two years of living in Central Florida, our family returned to Maryland, where my parents founded the Life in Jesus Community.

In 1985, I left for college – Oral Roberts University, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I quickly found a Charismatic and contemporary Episcopal church home, and I became very

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active in that parish. At this point in my life, I had great respect for the Catholic Church, and would occasionally attend Mass at local parishes, but my focus was very much centered in the Anglican tradition. I prayed with all my heart that the Church of England and the Church of Rome would be able to achieve organic unity, and I felt that I could work toward that unity from the Anglican side, just as easily as from the Catholic side. At this point, I felt a definite call into ministry, but was also becoming involved with the wonderful woman who would become my wife. The Episcopal ministry, with a Catholic emphasis, seemed to be “just the ticket”.

*Michele*

I was raised in a Roman Catholic family, and educated (for the most part) in Catholic schools in Baltimore, Maryland. (Ironically, I had never heard of the Baltimore Catechism until I decided to home school our children with traditional, Catholic values!)

As a child, I knew the basic tenants of the faith primarily from reciting the Nicene Creed each week at Mass and from religious education. Unfortunately, I was of a generation which was never properly catechized in the Faith even though I went through Confirmation classes.

At the age of 17, I left the practice of the Catholic faith, never realizing that I was leaving Jesus in the Eucharist. I became involved with a local Methodist church which had a very youth-oriented, charismatic pastor, and over a four year period, made a number of poor choices and drifted further and further from God. After a truly “Dark Night of the Soul” experience, I re-dedicated my life to Christ, but still knew next to nothing about the faith in which I was raised. Upon the advice of a friend, I decided to attend a Charismatic Protestant school – Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Being in the world for a few years out of high school did not prepare me for the new world college life brought at a Christian university. I never knew there were so many Christian groups until I was in the heart of the Bible belt. It was hard to know which things were true. So many different beliefs were being expressed, I couldn’t back up what I believed, especially when the Bible was always being quoted. I was very confused in the first year and a half. The Lord blessed me with a theology teacher, Dr. James Shelton, who taught from the Apostle’s Creed and knew a great deal of Catholic teachings. I began

to see I really did have a Catholic faith. It was when I started dating David and attending (eventually joining) an Episcopal church with a charismatic flavor I began to believe I was home.

*David*

We continued to be active in our local Episcopal church, but were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the ECUSA denomination as a whole. It was made very clear to me that I would never be accepted for consideration for seminary if I didn’t pay lip service to the liberal (and anti-Catholic) trends of the denomination. In 1992, in great frustration, we began exploring other church options. One person who was familiar with our struggle was Dr. James Shelton – a professor of theology at Oral Roberts University, and someone who had become a good friend. He introduced us to a newly formed denomination – the Charismatic Episcopal Church – the CEC. (Dr.

Shelton eventually would leave the CEC and “swim the Tiber” with the assistance of the Coming Home Network.) We were received into the CEC in July, 1993, feeling that we had found a home in which I could exercise ministry, remain true to my beliefs, and maintain (I thought) a certain “catholicity”.

I was ordained as a deacon in the CEC in August, 1995 and in April, 1996, we moved to Nashotah, Wisconsin so that I could obtain my seminary degree. I earned a Master of Theological Studies in Historical Theology at Nashotah House – a conservative, “Anglo-Catholic”

Episcopalian seminary, and was ordained a priest in October, 1998. I began serving as the assistant priest at a local CEC church, while continuing my education at Marquette University, where I received a Master of Arts in Systematic Theology in December, 2002.

My ministry in the CEC was very satisfying and I enjoyed enormous support from my parish and from my senior pastor. In November, 2002, I was even named “Canon Theologian” to the CEC bishop under whom I served. In addition, I served on several key committees, and did much of the historical and liturgical research for the lectionary and church calendar used by the CEC. Unlike many converts, I had no theological issues with the Catholic Church. I had a deep devotion to Our Lady and wholeheartedly embraced the necessity for – and authority

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of – the Pope. I just continued to trust that I could work for unity on the CEC side of the Tiber.

However, over a period of several years, I began to increasingly question the CEC’s stated commitment to a “catholic” ethos. I knew that there were many in the CEC who were indeed desirous of catholic teaching and expression. However, I was running into an increasing number of my co-denominationalists who were either satisfied with where they were and had little desire to grow; or who had become increasingly triumphalistic, with regard to the place of the CEC within the greater Christian world; or, in some cases, who were openly anti-Catholic. All the while, I was becoming increasingly convinced of the truth of the particular claims of the Catholic Church. Something had to give. That “something” finally happened during the summer of 2004. For more than two years, I had been serving as a “Canon Theologian” (think – “Monsignor”) in my diocese. I thought everything was going well.

*Michele*

We felt strongly about David’s call to the priesthood but, with the politics of ECUSA leaning more and more to the left, we weren’t sure where to turn. It was with the hope of further unity among the churches, that we had originally joined the CEC. Our values were traditional. We believed we were remaining true to our faith and David’s call would be fulfilled. After nine years of marriage, a bachelor’s and a master’s degree, and several years of service as a deacon, David was ordained a priest. We further backed up our faith by home schooling our children with a traditional Catholic day school out of California. All of these factors brought us closer to Christ and a Eucharistic-centered life. There were times when we would ask each other about the direction that the CEC was going but we realized that a young denomination had a great deal of work to do. It became frustrating when our church began altering aspects of church services so that the worship would not appear too “Catholic”. David and I had always believed that our goal would be unity with Rome. Now we were getting mixed signals – and many of those mixed signals were coming from church leadership.

*David*

In the summer of 2004, we attended a service initiated by a pastoral visit from our bishop. What transpired that

evening was anything but pastoral. The man under whom I had faithfully served for years openly denounced the Catholic faith, mocked Pope John Paul II, and announced that he planned to drive any “closet Papists” out of his diocese. In the private meeting which followed, my bishop made clear his contempt for anything remotely resembling the Catholic faith, personally demeaning both myself, and the pastor with whom I had served. He gave me an ultimatum: Either conform my beliefs to his (which were Calvinist in orientation) or submit my resignation. If I remained, he threatened me with a church trial. After a night of prayer and agony, I realized that the time had come. I returned the next morning, submitting my resignation – a resignation which he chose not to accept for five months – a time period during which he continued to attack and threaten me.

In spite of my former bishop’s opinions, the Zampino family felt itself free from our burdens immediately upon my resignation. I soon contacted the local Catholic Archbishop and was welcomed with love and support. I also contacted several local Catholic priests whom I had previously known, and received incredible pastoral support. In February, 2005, our youngest child was baptized, Michele publicly reconciled herself with the Church, and I and the rest of our children made our public profession of faith. At last, the Zampino family was Home!

We do not know what the future will hold. At this time, Michele is working in the music ministry at our local parish. I’m teaching theology at

Marquette University and am a substitute teacher at the local Catholic high school. In addition, I have formally petitioned the Church (under the provisions of Canon Law) to be allowed to continue in ordained ministry. Regardless of the outcome of the petition, the entire Zampino family feels at home and at peace.

Our story would not be complete without an acknowledgement of those persons who have been such a tremendous support on our journey. We especially thank Fr. Brian Holbus, pastor of St. Andrew Church, Delavan, Wisconsin for his warm affection and acceptance. We also thank Fr. Dennis Klemme, who sponsored David at his conversion; Fr. Bill Kurz, SJ, who has provided spiritual direction; and Fr. Kenneth Yossa, godfather to our 7th child, and longtime friend who “stuck it out” with us! We could not have done it without you!

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