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### **In search of truth**

#### ***Man's quest for meaning leads to monastic life***

by KATIE MOORE  
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*Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of conversion stories.*

CHARLOTTE — Rodney Odom's journey to Catholicism began in the main library of Philadelphia about seven years ago.

He was Christian by birth, but had abandoned religion. Then, a general interest in spiritualism ignited his quest.

"In my search for more, I found myself reading about the popular religions," said Odom, who is now a parishioner at Our Lady of Consolation Church in Charlotte.

After looking into other world religions, he found that he was being drawn back to his Christian roots.

He began reading books about Catholic saints — John of the Cross, Padre Pio, Teresa of Avila and Francis of Assisi.

"I could feel or understand what they were saying," said Odom. "I thought, 'I want to follow these people to Jesus.'"

He also began reading books about Mary, particularly about her apparitions in Fatima and Lourdes.

It was around that same time that Odom decided he wanted to become a monk.

"I sold my house, gave my car away and I moved to Greenville, North Carolina," he said.

He wanted to start living a simple, monastic kind of life.

"I decided no sense in waiting until I go to into a monastery, I might as well start now," he said.

Through further research, Odom discovered Belmont Abbey, which prompted his move to Charlotte.

"Belmont Abbey was the closest monastery that I knew about," he said. "In my head, monasteries were places where there weren't a lot of people."

He was surprised to find Belmont Abbey at the center of a bustling college campus and decided he would probably be better off in a more secluded environment.

“When I came to Charlotte, I came here with nothing. So I basically was in the men’s shelter for three or four months.”

In the meantime, he got a temporary job, found a place to live and began attending Our Lady of Consolation Church.

It was there that he met Dale Brown, pastoral associate and coordinator of the parish Right of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) program.

Brown said that Odom’s conversion was unique because he felt drawn to religious life from the beginning.

“He knew where he wanted to go but he just didn’t understand how to get there,” said Brown, who was able to point him in the right direction.

“I said to him, ‘Rodney you have to keep in mind that God is not going anywhere,’” said Brown, as she explained to Odom that he would have to go through RCIA before he could become a monk.

“Once he came to fully understand what the church teaches, he was willing to abide by those teachings,” she said.

After his meeting with Brown, Odom said his approach to his conversion process shifted.

“In my mind I was fired up to get through the process,” said Odom, but he was beginning to understand that he would have to be patient.

During his time in RCIA, Odom continued his search for a monastery with a more cloistered environment.

In his search, he came across Mepkin Abbey in Moncks Corner, S.C.

### **Practicing patience**

When he visited Mepkin Abbey for the first time, he stayed for three days.

He went for a second visit in fall 2007 and stayed for two weeks.

“During those first visits I guess I was just extremely nervous,” said Odom, reflecting on the difficulty he had adjusting to the strict monastic lifestyle, which included rising at 3 a.m. each day for prayer.

After he became Catholic at the Easter Vigil in 2008, Odom arranged to make a 30-day visit to Mepkin Abbey in February 2009.

“Each time he came back with a better attitude,” said Brown.

“When he came back from the month-long visit, he had a glow on him that I had never seen before,” she said.

Odom agreed that his most recent visit was also the most beneficial. He attributes that to a stronger devotion to the Eucharist and a more open state of mind.

“I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that I had been dedicating myself to go to Mass five times a week,” he said.

In keeping with his simplistic lifestyle, Odom relied on public transportation to get to church — a three-and-a-half hour roundtrip journey by bus.

“I was now used to dedicating a significant portion of my life to God,” he said. Going to Mass became a priority for Odom. It became “more important than getting sleep,” he said.

“Somehow I must have been made empty,” he said, because “this time when I went to Mepkin, I received a lot.”

“After the first week, your mind starts to quiet down,” he said of his month-long stay at the monastery. “You sit and you start to discover things that you never knew you could discover just by sitting.”

During his visit, Odom also had a chance to meet with the abbot and several of the priests.

He filled out an application, and if all goes according to plan, he will enter the monastery in September.

“The reason I became Catholic is because of the saints,” said Odom, “reading about the saints and how they lived their lives.”

On his journey from the book-lined walls of the Philadelphia public library to the tranquil Mepkin Abbey monastery, Odom has learned that certain things in life just take time.

“Patience was not one of my strong points,” he said. But “it is a characteristic of monastic life.”

“If you don’t learn patience then you can’t be a monk,” said Odom.

But sometimes he has a hard time hiding his enthusiasm.

“Once you discover the love of God and how sincere it is and how pure it is, it’s hard not to follow it,” he said.

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