

Saints Alive!

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The Quarterly Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Catholics are perfectly placed alongside secular man for a major evangelization thrust if only they could break the chain that binds them to old methods and values regarding evangelization and formation.

Setting the Elephant Free

By Rich Cleveland

When young elephants are being trained, according to management expert James A. Belasco, they “shackle them with heavy chains to deeply embedded stakes.” In this way the young elephant learns to stay where it is placed. An interesting phenomenon though, is that older, much stronger elephants never try to leave the place where they are staked even though they have the strength to pull up the stake and roam free. As a matter of fact, the older elephants are often chained with only a “small metal bracelet around their foot attached to nothing.” It is the mental conditioning they learned in their youth that binds them to the place. Belasco goes on to explain that in a similar way we are bound by the conditioning we have received: “We’ve always done it this way’ is as limiting to an organization’s progress as the unattached chain around the elephant’s foot.”¹

Whether elephants are trained this way or not, I do not know, but I do know that sometimes our methods are so ingrained that we become like the elephant in the above illustration. At the end of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI spoke of the need for change in the way we do evangelization in order “to make the Church of the 20th century even better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the 20th century.”² He goes on to explain, “The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man.”³

We are now in the beginning of the 21st century, some 20 years since Vatican II ended. Is that objective being met? Are we better fitted? Have we sought “by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man”? Like the elephants mentioned above, what will it

take to release some individuals, parishes, and the Church at large from the imaginary concepts that trap and ensnare us in a place of immobility? Someone has said if you want the same results, simply keep doing the same things. However, Pope Paul VI is suggesting very strongly that it is time to accomplish the same time-tested task of world evangelization by incorporating some new methodologies and doing things differently, thus enabling us to see different and more fruitful results.

One of the things I loved about Pope John Paul II was his ability to keep sacred those things that are sacred while at the same time thinking afresh about “bringing the Christian message to modern man.” Rooted in the sacredness of the sacraments and liturgy he nevertheless recognized the need for changing the way we think about evangelization. Perhaps there was no bigger innovation introduced by him than his view of the laity’s role in evangelization—which in reality was not an innovation but a return to a first century view of evangelization.

I remember how my heart was warmed and my spirit buoyed as I read Pope John Paul II’s statement: “It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith.”⁴ This is a profound validation of the essential importance of the laity’s involvement in evangelization and mission.

These last several months I have been haunted by the realization that Catholics are next to everybody both in this country and in most countries around the world. They are perfectly placed alongside secular man for a major evangelization thrust if only they could break the chain that binds them to old methods and values regarding evangelization and formation—methods and values

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Emmaus Journey Mission Statement

Emmaus Journey is a Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry that is conducted primarily in and through Catholic parishes. Emmaus Journey has embraced Goal 1 of *Go and Make Disciples: A Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, produced by The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others."

Emmaus Journey's goals are:

- To help enable non-practicing Catholics, occasional Catholics, and nominal Catholics experience conversion to Christ, transformation in Christ, and mobilization for Christ as Catholic disciples.
- To encourage Catholics to embrace Jesus' call to advance the Gospel and his Kingdom by becoming laborers who live and disciple others from among the nonreligious.
- To help mature and gifted Catholics discover a particular call to participate more fully in the task of evangelization.
- To indirectly serve Catholic parishes' evangelization efforts through small-group materials, evangelization and discipleship resources, seminars, ministry events, and messages that move them forward in their efforts to make Christ known, and to nurture mature Catholic disciples who can help others experience conversion, transformation, and mobilization for Christ.



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Multiple copies of *Saints Alive!* are available upon request.

From the Heart By Rich Cleveland

Join the Encyclical of the Month Club!

The room was packed with about 40 Catholics eager to talk about reaching seekers (people on the fringes of Christianity) through small-group evangelization. I referred to a statement by Pope Paul VI on evangelization and then asked, "How many of you have read through an entire encyclical?" Only three people raised their hands and one of those was a priest. In one way I wasn't surprised because I find that it is a rare Catholic who takes the time to familiarize themselves with encyclicals or other writings on that level. On the other hand I was somewhat appalled that in a room full of people eager to learn about evangelization they had not read even one of the three best resources available on evangelization.

In light of this *Saints Alive!* lead article and the need to break the chain of conditioned thinking that contributes greatly to the immobility of Catholic laity, I have decided to use this space to launch a crusade to get as many Catholics as possible to read and think about three vitally important encyclicals:

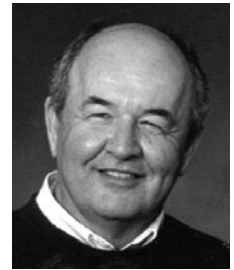
- ***On Evangelization in the Modern World, an Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Paul VI***—Lays out the case that participation in evangelization is a mandate for all Catholics and explains and expands on what is involved in evangelization, such as the content, methods, and so forth.
- ***Mission of the Redeemer, an Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II***—Picks up the missionary mandate thoughts of Pope Paul VI and discusses them in the context of Jesus being the only Savior, the Kingdom of God, the role of the Holy Spirit, and missionary activity.
- ***The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II***—Elaborates on the role of the laity by discussing issues like the participation, co-responsibility, and formation of the lay faithful to carry out the mandate for evangelization.

Catholics, who read, discuss, and think about the content of these three booklets will have their lives changed.

These must become essential reading. Catholics, who read, discuss, and think about the content of these three booklets will have their lives changed. They capture the biblical mandate to reach the lost, Jesus' heart for the world, and the essence and cruciality of proclaiming the Good News. The chain of pre-conditioned thinking that causes many Catholics to see themselves as unimportant in the process of evangelization will be snapped and people will become invigorated and willing to be involved. Many will still need to be formed as disciples, trained to relate to those who are on the fringes of Christianity, and equipped to communicate Christ's love verbally and non-verbally, but they will have a new impetus to learn.

In 1993 I took a small group of 17 Catholics through the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops' booklet called *Go and Make Disciples*. We would read a section each week and discuss the content and ramifications. (I think we took six weeks to complete it.) Week after week they were amazed at the simple truths of evangelization, saying, "Why hasn't anyone told us about this before?" I didn't know the answer as to why someone hadn't told them, or why they hadn't sought out what the Church and sacred Scripture teach about evangelization. But looking back almost all of them have since then demonstrated a heart for evangelization. These, like most of the Catholics I know, are not lazy, they are not against evangelization, they are not rebellious. By-in-large they have been left uninformed regarding their responsibilities, and unformed regarding the practical aspects of sharing their faith.

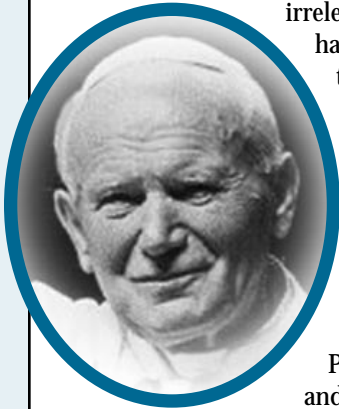
What about you? Will you join me on this mini-crusade? Will you go out and buy and read and meditate on these booklets—preferably with other Catholics? Will you begin inviting fellow Catholics to join you on the path of discovering the purpose of their "entire existence?" Please, let me know if you will.



Saints: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People

Pope John Paul II: He Came Alongside

Blessed Pope John Paul II learned the hard way that ministry formation needs to adjust to the culture and people needing to be formed in their faith. When John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla) was a young man, Hans Frank, the fascist leader of Poland, closed down the seminaries and endeavored to make religion irrelevant to Poles. Karol joined a handful of young men who chose to be formed as priests in the clandestine environment of an underground seminary. In that repressive culture they had to rely on self-study and personal mentoring rather than on the normal classroom setting.



Later, after studying in Rome, Fr. Wojtyla returned to Poland amidst a hostile, atheistic, and highly secular Communist rule to serve as a university chaplain and parish priest. He introduced several innovative programs designed to engage the hearts and minds of university students in this hostile environment. Perhaps the most innovative method he developed was what he called a “ministry of accompaniment.” He felt it was a priest’s duty to help make Christ present to people in their world rather than only minister at the church. Rather than wait for the people to come to him, he mingled among them—particularly the young adults he was trying to influence (a method that was pretty radical for its time). He joined them on hiking expeditions, kayaking trips, and ski outings. He shared meals with them, performed chores, sang with them, and told jokes. He chose to live *among* them. In these smaller groups he was able to listen with interest, engage them in deep conversation, and provide the spiritual direction they sought. Many years later these individuals would recall his ministry as being a life-changing impetus to their conversion and formation.¹

His papacy also involved innovation and new methodologies, such as the international Youth Days which impacted so many young people during his term as Pope. This holy creativity undoubtedly came from his deep life of holiness, from a clear understanding of the necessity of evangelization, and from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We need to follow his example and rely on the Holy Spirit to discover and develop new methodologies to reach the demands of our times.

¹ Based on *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel

Rick Lentz: Starting Where They Are

Rick Lentz is a highly decorated Vietnam Veteran, plus he holds a master degree in Pastoral Ministry from the Aquinas Institute of Theology. Despite these impressive qualifications, God has led him into a simple yet innovative ministry of mentoring and discipling other Catholics.

As you listen to Rick’s life story it quickly becomes apparent that he tries to be responsive to what the Holy Spirit shows him and to act upon that insight. For instance in 2004, Kevin, his youngest son, was killed when hit by an automobile. Rick and his wife, Karen, were devastated. “Yet through all this jumble of emotions, my anchor of faith kept me from crashing upon the rocks of despair,” Rick says. “God provided me with friends who listened repeatedly to my story and allowed me to share my emotions without judgment or needless advice. Slowly, I began to heal and as I healed, I came to the realization that to fully heal, I had to forgive.” During the trial of the young woman who killed his son, Rick stood up and told her that he forgave her. Shortly thereafter the father of this woman called Rick and asked how he could forgive his daughter. “I explained that through prayer, God gave me the grace and strength to forgive her. Then through our discussions and seeing what God has done in my life, the girl’s father rededicated his life to Christ.” They began meeting together and eventually entered into a mentoring relationship.

Rick explains why he mentors men: “In one-on-one relationships, both the mentor and the one being mentored grow in their knowledge of sacred Scripture, in their relationship with Jesus, and into a deeper understanding of what God is asking of them.” Also, “Being a mentor is not rocket science. All it really takes is for you to be FAT (faithful, available, and teachable), to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, and have a heart for helping others grow in faith.”

Rick will tell you of others he is mentoring. Most were not ready for a traditional approach to conversion and formation. But because he was willing to begin from where they were on their journey, and form them through mentoring, they have come to follow Christ and unite with his Church.

Rick and Karen have been married for 32 years. They have four children, a granddaughter, and are expecting another grandchild. They are members of Divine Redeemer Parish in Colorado Springs, Colorado.



