

Saints Alive!

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Mobilizing Catholics in World Evangelization

By Rich Cleveland

Pope Benedict XVI's statement is a powerful challenge that when acted upon could unleash a labor force of millions to advance knowledge of Christ and the Gospel.

Increasingly we are hearing Church leaders speak with urgency about reclaiming the missionary mandate. More and more, the laity is being exhorted to become engaged in advancing the Gospel of Jesus in their natural spheres of influence. For instance, Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the 81st World Mission Day pointed out the “urgent need to re-launch missionary activity to meet the many grave challenges of our time.” He further said that for Catholics this task “is no longer simply to collaborate in the activity of evangelization, but to make people feel that they are protagonists and share responsibility for the Church’s mission.”

A protagonist is the main character, the leading or principal figure in a drama, the leader of a cause or its champion. Consequently, Pope Benedict XVI’s statement is a powerful challenge that when acted upon could unleash a labor force of millions to advance knowledge of Christ and the Gospel. Unfortunately, the magnitude of the challenge is met by the complexity of the problem of training, motivating, and loosing the laity to accomplish this task. Both Pope John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* and Pope Benedict XVI in his many writings and messages clearly say there is a need to do things differently when it comes to evangelization, one of them being to mobilize the laity.

We must ask ourselves: “If I keep doing what I am doing, the way I am doing it, will it result in mobilizing dozens, hundreds, thousands of Catholics in evangelization?” If the answer is not a resounding “yes!” we must then ask, “What changes can I make that will bring about this result?”

Mobilizing Catholics to participate enthusiastically in the advancement of Christ and

his kingdom seems to revolve around two issues: motivation and training. People who are in love talk about their beloved. When we are in love with Christ his name and thoughts will be on our lips. St. Ignatius of Antioch said, “Do not have Christ on your lips and the world in your heart.”¹ This is a great admonition, and I think if we could ask him he would also say if the world is in your heart, Christ will seldom be on your lips. Sacred Scripture affirms that, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). So the key to solving the riddle of how to mobilize Catholics in the task of world evangelization is to figure out how to help Catholics fall heads over heels in love with Christ.

This is of course what St. Paul did. The Thessalonians he and his team ministered to had a profound region-wide witness: “the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia . . . your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

How did they do it without seminars, books, DVDs, laptops, or iPods? They did it the old fashion way, by giving themselves and their time to people; “just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. . . . But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:4,8). If St. Paul and his team were here today, I think they would use the resources mentioned above, but I don’t think they would allow these resources to replace their personal involvement, the

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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

"I'm the one who will bring real change" say presidential candidates on both sides of the aisle. Though often the speakers and audience have different things in mind in their desire for change, we nevertheless hear *change, change, change* often called for and promised.

I once took a seminary course on introducing change. Recently I reviewed my notes and was reminded of a helpful saying; "There are two kinds of fools: One says this is old therefore it is good, and the other says this is new therefore it is better." Change for the sake of change is not helpful, whether it is political, social, or religious.

Unfortunately, no matter how many changes we introduce, mankind cannot produce the much sought for City of God, and any political or social changes we do introduce will at best be like sticking a finger into a crumbling dike. What this country needs is inner change, a change in values, values rooted in absolutes. That is why, though I fulfill my obligation as a citizen and vote in every election, I put no hope in the political process.

That which I do hope in is the change that can only be brought about by God. As one reads sacred Scripture, we see people like St. Paul experience significant change. He changed from being a religious zealot who forced people to deny Jesus' resurrection or be put to death, into being a man of humility, sacrifice, and loving martyrdom. We see cities like Nineveh repenting, not by social or political experimentation but by the power of God. What we need in this country and around the world is a change of heart, a change of behavior brought around by a change in values—values found only in God.

Who is in the best position to bring about this change? I believe quantitatively and qualitatively we as Catholics are best positioned to do so, but the change must first begin with ourselves if we are to become the agents of change. St. Thomas à Kempis grasped the essence of this dynamic. Speaking of Christ he said, "The Prophets can preach the word, but they cannot bestow the Spirit. They speak most eloquently, but if You are silent, they cannot fire the heart. They instruct in the letter, but You open the understanding. They set forth the mysteries, but You reveal the meaning of all secrets. They teach your commandments, but You help us to observe them. They point the way, but You grant us strength to follow it. Their action is external; You instruct and enlighten the heart. They water the seed; You make it fruitful. They proclaim the words, but You impart understanding to the mind."¹

As we respond to Christ . . . we will become equipped as change agents and help begin a worldwide process of life-changes.

As we respond to Christ, the Logos of God, we will become equipped as change agents and help begin a worldwide process of life-changes. I believe this is what Pope Benedict XVI hoped for when he invited "local Churches on all continents to a joint awareness of the urgent need to re-launch missionary activity to meet the many grave challenges of our time. . . . I pray that missionary cooperation may intensify, making full use of everyone's potentials and charisms."² Imagine what would happen in our parishes and dioceses in our country and around the world if Catholic missionary activity and cooperation would intensify, if Catholics would simply start making full use of their potential and charisms.

We must begin today calling people to true conversion, the kind the Holy Father has described: "Conversion means to seek God, to walk with God, to follow docilely the teachings of his son, Jesus Christ." We must begin today genuinely forming them in their faith, a faith that will both enable and compel every baptized person to become a participant in the Church's missionary activity. Christ is the only hope for the world; he has entrusted to us the mission of reconciliation that will introduce the fundamental changes the world seeks.



¹ *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, page 92

² Pope Benedict XVI's message for the 81st World Mission Day

Saints: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People

Saints Aquila and Priscilla

Saints Aquila and Priscilla stand out among the believers mentioned in Acts and other places in the New Testament by their identity as a *couple* who ministered together. Paul encountered these two Jewish believers in the city of Corinth, where they resided after being expelled from Rome along with other believers. They were involved in the same trade as St. Paul, making tents, and so he befriended them and mentored them in the faith. When St. Paul left for Syria, they joined him on his journey. Along the way they stopped in Ephesus, where Paul had Aquila and Priscilla remain to minister to the Ephesians.

While in Ephesus they encountered a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. Acts 18 describes him as “an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.” Aquila and Priscilla having been instructed more accurately by St. Paul regarding Christ, “took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.” In the subsequent chapter of Acts, Apollos is seen having a profound ministry to the followers of John the Baptist who needed their faith completed, and to the Jews, where “he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God.”

Other passages of Scripture give us a glimpse into the lives of these partners in ministry. In Romans 16:3,4, St. Paul calls them his “fellow workers” and alludes to a time when they “risked their necks” to save St. Paul’s life. Additionally, the book of 1 Corinthians mentions that the church met in their house. Obviously theirs was a lifelong commitment to serve Christ and his Church.

Many profound lessons are wrapped up in the lives of Aquila and Priscilla. First was their receptivity to being taught by St. Paul and their desire to pursue and know the truth more fully. Second was their willingness to sacrifice their comfort and security to travel and minister with St. Paul, and then to remain behind and minister to the Ephesians. Third, they exemplified the process and the purpose of laity’s involvement in forming people in their faith—individualized attention and expounding the way of God accurately. Increasingly, we need to see this kind of couples developed to help with the task of evangelization.

Michael and Rose: Serving Together

Michael and Rose Sanchez are a young, vibrant couple involved in ministry at Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque who also are learning to *partner* in ministry together. They have always been strong in their Catholic faith; in fact, one of their first dates involved going to a bible study together. As a natural result of their faith, appreciation to God for the many gifts he has given them, and their being formed as disciples and growing in their understanding of Scripture, they have learned to put Christ at the center of their life and marriage. Consequently, they have been involved in such positions of service as teaching Religious Education, involvement in the Small Church Communities, and participation in putting on both Advent and Marriage Encounter Retreats.

However, in 2004 they entered a deeper level of ministry when Rose attended an ACTS Retreat in El Paso, Texas. ACTS stands for *Adoration, Community, Theology, and Service*, the foundational underpinnings of this formation process. During the weekend participants gain a better understanding of prayer, liturgy, the sacraments, Scripture, and service, which enable them to forge a deeper spiritual relationship with Christ. The retreat put Rose “on fire” spiritually.

ACTS Retreats are led by fellow parishioners, and God impressed on Rose’s heart that she should be involved in bringing the retreat to Albuquerque. This, along with her enthusiasm, motivated Michael to attend a men’s ACTS Retreat in 2005. He returned eager to help Rose in initiating the ACTS Retreats.

Rose and Michael have assisted in seven retreats and have helped lay the foundation for the ACTS Retreats in Albuquerque. One reason they desire to see the retreats continue to flourish is “so that the Holy Spirit can touch as many lives as possible,” and they are seeing the lives of fellow Catholics changed for Christ.

It is easy to make commitments in the holy environment of a spiritual retreat. The difficulty—and success of Michael and Rose’s ministry—is how it enables people to live out the commitments they made in the weeks and months after the retreat. Consequently, those attending the ACTS Retreats are formed into small groups, where they can strengthen relationships, build community, find personalized help in spiritual growth as Catholic Christians, and live out their commitments every day.



Tools You Can Use

A One-Two Punch for Small Group Formation



Lent comes early this year and we would like to recommend a one-two punch for using this season of the year to attract people to small-group formation that will change their lives. *The Seven Last Words of Christ* is an ideal bible study to use during Lent. Some years ago we stumbled upon a valuable concept for recruiting people to small group bible studies. During the weeks prior to Ash Wednesday, we advertised the beginning of a Lenten bible study in the parish bulletin by suggesting, “Instead of simply giving up something you enjoy, like coffee or chocolate, as part of your Lenten fast, why don’t you think about giving up 90 minutes a week to study the Passion of Christ with a fellow group of parishioners?” Amazingly, our Lenten bible study numbers jumped from 50 participants to more than 200 participants each year. As an added treat, many of these participants then continued on into other small groups.

With Lent and Easter coming early this year, it gives adequate time before the summer break to recruit those who completed *The Seven Last Words of Christ* to hear “the rest of the story” by completing *The Words of the Risen Christ*, our newest small group bible study. Lives will be changed as they consider the important subjects Jesus dealt with prior to his ascension and as they come to understand and accept the role he gives them.

Both are available online from www.emmausjourney.org.

Saints Alive! Back Issues

Saints Alive! archives are now available on the Emmaus Journey website. Click on the “*Saints Alive!*” image. You will find:

- Issue 1 “Being Dogged About Evangelization”
- Issue 2 “A Ministry of Accompaniment”
- Issue 3 “Pray for Conversions”
- Issue 4 “It Is Necessary—Use Words!”
- Issue 5 “Never Say Retire”
- Issue 6 “Isn’t That An Oxymoron?”
- Issue 7 “Come and See—Go and Tell!”
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- Issue 11 “Scripture Training: The Hallmark of Our Formation Process”

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sharing of “our own selves”—or as another translation states it, “our very own soul.”

The clergy are really overworked today, but I know of several who in the midst of their busy schedule make it a point to develop and sustain edifying friendships with a handful of young adults whom they are mentoring in the faith. Some lift weights together with those they also have in weekly bible study—vibrant young men with a passionate love for Christ. One priest I know wanted to reach men who were not involved in other parish activities, so he began a challenging 5:00 a.m. small group bible study—and men came with whom he could share his life. As a young priest Pope John Paul II also figured out a way to impart his own soul to them, which he called the “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. “The duty of a priest is to live with people, everywhere they are, to be with them in everything but sin,” he said. Rather than wait for the people to come to him, he mingled among them—particularly the young adults he was trying to influence. He joined them on hiking expeditions, kayaking trips, and ski outings, and participated in other activities. In the midst of these fun times he shared meals with them, performed

chores, sang with them, shared jokes, and the like. He chose to live among them.²

This life-on-life discipleship provides the motivation that sets hearts aflame with the love of Christ. These individuals will never be the same. They will become the vanguard of those who are taking up Pope Benedict XVI’s challenge to become protagonists for advancing knowledge of Christ and the Gospel. We who are lay people need not only to follow these examples, but also to become the leading or principle figure in the drama of salvation. In the midst of our busy world we especially need to be involved forming disciples, and do so by developing edifying, life-changing friendships wherein we can impart our heart and soul for Christ. When we do, it will result in people becoming Catholics who are deeply in love with Christ, and who have his name ever on their lips. In the words of Avery Cardinal Dulles, “We can’t wait for people to find their way into the Church.”³ This kind of ministry is something we, the laity, can and should do.

1 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Liturgy of the Hours*, page 329

2 Based on *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope Paul II*, by George Weigel, pages 103–107

3 Avery Cardinal Dulles, from a message given at the Evangelical Catholic Institute 2007, Madison, WI