

# Saints *Alive!*

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## A Ministry of Accompaniment

It doesn't take a seminary education to be a friend

By Rich Cleveland

**E**ffective conversion is rooted in relationship. Jesus inherently understood this; consequently, when he began his ministry among ordinary Israelites he didn't solely rely on proclamation but rather gathered around him 12 individuals to be with him (Mark 3:13-14; Acts 4:13). The Gospels are a record of his walks and talks with the Twelve. He listened to their questions and asked a few of his own to stimulate their thinking. He shared simple illustrations for everyday problems and enabled them to encounter the living God in their daily lives. He called them friends, and in the midst of his friendship with them revealed truth about God through his life and by his words. He not only enabled these ordinary individuals to answer his call to follow him, but also equipped them with a foundational understanding of the Kingdom of God. This understanding enabled them to turn their world upside down for Christ.

Pope John Paul II as a young priest (Fr. Wojtyla) developed a similar approach to evangelization, which he called the “ministry of accompaniment.”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 which at that time in the life of the Church was pretty radical). 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, etc. He chose to live among them.

While entering into their life through these recreational activities, Fr. Wojtyla never forgot his call to make Christ present among them or his responsibility to call and form them to be Christ's disciples. Even at such a young age, he knew that his effectiveness as a priest, as a witness, and as a maker of disciples came from within his own relationship with Christ. He would always find time to “drift back to the end of the line of hikers for an hour or two of prayer alone.”<sup>3</sup>

To ensure that he had the opportunity to personalize his message, Fr. Wojtyla found ways to minister to individuals and not just the group. He sought occasions to eat with a different family each night, or to share a canoe ride with one other. 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 of accompaniment as “living our problems”<sup>4</sup> and as being a life-changing impetus to their conversion and formation.

Biographer George Weigel writes of the young priest's unusual ministry, “Wojtyla's pastoral strategy of ‘accompaniment’ was an attempt to get beyond the pattern of sporadic encounters between priest and young people that frequently resulted in the priest being suspected of prying into the crevices of conscience. ‘Accompaniment’ was a way of ‘walking with’ young adults, of helping them unveil their humanity by living through their problems with them. This is what he understood was the way of Christ. God entered into our world, and walked among us experiencing our life with all its problems, and while bringing the Kingdom of God to us, he brought us to the Kingdom of God.”<sup>5</sup>

Was it easy for Jesus to reach the world through friendship evangelization? Was it

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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 non-religious.
- 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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## From the Heart

By Rich Cleveland

### Principles of Friendship Evangelization

Evangelization is often a fearful prospect for many Catholics; yet it is the Christian mandate and one of the highest callings we can pursue. It probably created some apprehension for Jesus' disciples also. For many in this world, the beginning of hope is the realization that God and his life are accessible to them. We are the best vehicles for communicating this hope as everyday followers of Christ. Jesus' instructions in Luke 10:1-20 are pregnant with principles of evangelization that can remove much of our anxiety and increase the effectiveness of our witness. These principles include:

**METHOD:** The Lord "**sent them on ahead of him two by two.**" Evangelization always works best when it is a joint effort. A companion in Christ reduces the stress of relating and talking to someone about Jesus, and more than doubles the creativity and wisdom that can be brought to the process of revealing the Kingdom of God to others. Having another with whom we can pray for an individual's conversion is very empowering. Together you can ask the Holy Spirit to soften and prepare the hearts of pre-believers so they will be ready to welcome the Good News of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice for them.

**ATTITUDE:** The Lord said, "**I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.**" One reason witnessing has received such a bad rap, and causes many of us to shy away from it, is that we know—and in many cases have experienced—the abuses of overzealous witnesses who did not manifest the attitude of a lamb. Lambs are gentle and meek, humble of heart if you will. It would be totally out of character for a lamb to beat a wolf (or any creature) over



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the head with the truth, so to speak. As witnessing lambs we can confidently tell others the Gospel truth of which we have become certain, but we must not attempt to overpower them into the Kingdom. If we are praying for them, if we are romancing them with the loving words of truth, accompanied by a humble spirit of service, they will frequently be wooed into saying "Yes!" to Jesus' offer of redemption.

**RELATIONSHIP:** The Lord instructed them to "**remain in the same house eating and drinking what they provide ... heal the sick in it.**" Evangelization should not primarily be an onslaught of religious words and challenges but rather an incarnational dwelling among those without Christ. The witness must be willing to dwell among them as a visual aid of God's love, embracing their culture and carrying their concerns. As they experience our good works on their behalf they will choose to also glorify the Father (Matthew 5:16). In this way Christ comes to dwell among people again, in the form of the witnesses who lend their bodies to Christ so he can convey his love through them.

**MOTIVE:** "**Nevertheless do not rejoice in this ... but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**" There is great joy in observing someone's passage from darkness to light. We are thrilled to see someone to whom we have communicated the Gospel unite with Christ and his Church, but we must not be motivated by a "trophy mentality." Our relationship with Christ must be the motivating factor for all we do. It must be so meaningful to us that the reason we are witnessing is so that others might experience the joy we know in Christ. He desires to reach the world, beginning with *your* world and *your* witness. It's unreasonable that a witness should have to be sent from the other side of the world, or even from across the city, to bring the Gospel to your neighbors or your acquaintances. That's why God has you there!

# Saints: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People

## Saint Alphonsus: Going to the People

Saint Alphonsus Liguori was born in 1696 to a wealthy family in Naples, Italy. Alphonsus' father had great expectations for his firstborn son and demanded excellence from him. Much of his youth was spent in study. He received a classical education in a highly prestigious school, and there excelled in classes on architecture, philosophy and law.

Simultaneously Alphonsus was schooled in the virtues of Christianity and the Catholic faith. His parents were deeply religious and faithful in both the practice of their faith and the training of their children to be spiritually faithful. At an early age and throughout his youth, Alphonsus showed an inclination toward the religious life. This devotion to God intensified as he matured into a young adult and became a candidate for the priesthood.

Large cities such as Naples had an abundance of priests, and Alphonsus was one of the most sought after for his eloquence and meaningful sermons. Yet he was drawn to those who did not attend church. Peasants and shepherds had few opportunities to know the Good News or to develop their faith due to the unavailability of churches and priests in rural areas. Consequently, Alphonsus and his companions brought the Gospel to the people. "... he began to think more than ever of the needs of souls living in the country districts, for he found the shepherds and peasants living about those parts sadly in want of spiritual care."\*

Our cities and our suburbs are full of people who also are "sadly in want of spiritual care." Many have not darkened the door of a church for years, if at all. Most do not recognize the degree to which they are impoverished spiritually. Our country and our generation need men and women with the heart of St. Alphonsus, who will take the Gospel to those who need it but who will not come to it. This is what our Savior did; "God decided to enter into the history of mankind in a new and definitive manner, by sending his own Son in human flesh so that through him he might snatch men from the power of darkness and of Satan and in him reconcile the world to himself."\*\*

\* *Saint Alphonsus Liguori: Bishop, Confessor, Founder of the Redemptorists, and Doctor of the Church*, Tan Books and Publisher, Inc., Rockford, IL. Pages 9, 11, 14, 52.

\*\* *Decree of the Church's Missionary Activity*, (11).

## The Andersons: Loving Neighbors to Christ

Ken and Judie Anderson had two priorities upon arriving in the Boston area: find a parish home where they could become active and involved in their parish community; and become involved in the secular community as representatives and witnesses of Jesus Christ.

The Andersons base their approach on a verse of Sacred Scripture that explains God's philosophy of ministry: "I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks" (Hosea 11:4).

As Pope John Paul II points out, God is drawing people to himself for redemption and healing and chooses to do so through humans who will be the cords of love that draw them. The Andersons feel their role is "not forcing people to do anything but by acts of kindness and gestures of affirmation and affection seek to build stronger bonds that bring us closer to people."

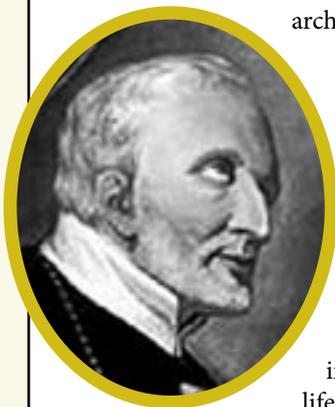
For example, when a young couple moved into the apartment below Ken and Judie, they welcomed their new neighbors with a plate of cookies. Ken and Judie learned their names and later wrote them down. Similarly, when their neighbors mentioned that they were celebrating their four-month anniversary that evening, Ken and Judie wrote down on their calendar the date of the couple's anniversary.

About eight months later, Ken and Judie slipped a one-year anniversary card under their neighbors' door. Later the wife came up to thank them for the card and to tell the Andersons how much it meant to them. She'd been laid off that week, and even her mother had forgotten their anniversary. Ken and Judie immediately offered to pray for her job situation.

These simple gestures are becoming "cords of love" by which God is drawing their neighbors to himself. In a recent conversation their friend said she was feeling drawn back to the Church.

The Andersons are aware that they are called to be "salt and light" in the world and not simply faithful participants in the parish—and that all people "have a right to know the value of this gift [Christ] and approach it freely."<sup>1</sup> This is how we all, as ordinary people, can bring the Good News to those who won't come to it.

<sup>1</sup> *Mission of the Redeemer* (11) by Pope John Paul II, December 7, 1990



# Tools You Can Use

## Changing The Way People Think About Evangelization

People who study how to introduce change into the lives of people and organizations point out that unless there is a shift in values, very little can be accomplished. The many encyclicals and Church documents we have referred to in *Saints Alive* point out that we Catholics need to change our values regarding the task of evangelization. Change agents tell us that unless there is a significant level of discontent with the status quo, people will not be motivated to change. The best source of therapeutic discontent is self-identified discrepancy. In other words, people see and embrace a new value as good and right while recognizing that their current manner of life falls short of this new value. Recognizing this discrepancy, they become motivated to change.

The Journey of a Lifetime Conference messages can help people recognize and embrace Kingdom values, especially that of being Christ's witnesses. These messages effectively weave together an understanding of evangelization, motivation for becoming involved in evangelization, and practical suggestions for doing so.

All five of the main messages are available as a video DVD set that can be used with individuals or groups in your parish. The five messages are:



**The Task Before Us.** Rich Cleveland presents a framework for evangelization that includes calling people to conversion, helping them experience transformation, and mobilizing them to share the Good News.



**The Christian Mandate.** Fr. Sean Wenger explains the essence of evangelization and presents a compelling case that every Christian is called to be actively involved in evangelization.



**The Role of the Laity.** Fr. Sean Wenger talks about the laity's role in evangelization. He points out that "none of us are spare parts. We are all critical to the Body of Christ. He is counting on us to fulfill our role in evangelization and has gifted us for that purpose."



**The Universal Call to Holiness.** Michael T.O. Timmis teaches that a man or woman living a life of holiness is the most effective evangelistic strategy in the world.



**Having a Life of Influence.** Mike Shamy provides a practical discussion of how we can be witnesses in our natural spheres of influence through the way we live and the way we communicate the Good News.

Order the *Journey of a Lifetime Conference Five-Message DVD Set* for only \$91. (This price includes shipping, handling, and sales tax.) Simply send your request for the tapes, along with your check, to Emmaus Journey, PO Box 63587, Colorado Springs, CO 80962-3587.

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## A Ministry of Accompaniment continued from front page

easy for this young priest to do the ministry of accompaniment? Will it be easy for us to enter the world of the non-religious and develop friendships to bring Christ into their world? The answer is both yes and no. It is demanding to live as a witness for Christ in a non-Christian world. It is demanding to enter into others' problems and time-consuming to join in their fun. It would be so much easier simply to dwell among people like ourselves, but the Gospel doesn't advance very quickly that way. On the other hand, if you love people and love life it can be fun to walk with others on their journey and share in their life. A very important aspect of

our witness is helping pre-believers to see that following Christ should be a joyous, abundant life experience.

If we are interested in helping people understand and respond to the Gospel and also are committed to helping them become lifelong disciples of Jesus, we need to recognize that evangelization is a long-term relational process. We need to enter into the world of our non-religious acquaintances and friends in everything but sin. We must demonstrate our willingness to engage them in conversation, listen with interest to those things that interest them, and to seek opportunities to talk with them about all aspects of their lives—including

ing Jesus and the things of his Kingdom. As we do this God will enable us to be an ever present visual aid that clarifies the essence of mercy and grace.

It doesn't take a seminary education to be a friend. Fr. Wojtyla has shown us that this is a ministry we can do. This is a ministry we should do!

1 *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel, page 104

2 *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel, page 104

3 *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel, page 103

4 *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel, page 107

5 *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel, page 106