

You Can Make A Difference

BY MICHAEL D. WICK

After being in the corporate world for nineteen years, Mark Midendorf left behind a large six figure income in order to work with ordinary Catholics—people in the pew—to evangelize using inspiring Catholic audio CDs and informative brochures. When he reflects on this, he marvels at how with God “nothing is impossible.”

He is also very grateful to the Lord for allowing him to utilize his M.B.A. in Finance and his experience in sales and operations to play a role in helping to build the distribution system and expansive network of committed apostles and evangelists to distribute tens of thousands of CDs and leaflets every month to hungry hearts and starving souls seeking to know, love and serve Christ.

Thanks to God’s providential design, Mark was able to connect with Terry Barber (founder and president of St. Joseph Communications) and Dave Durand (best-selling author, executive of a \$250 million company, and trainer of well over 100,000 individuals in sales, marketing, and business management) to launch Lighthouse

Catholic Media, an innovative way for Catholics to evangelize their family and friends, those fallen-away from the Faith and those whose fervor may be lukewarm.

Becoming Beacons of Light

“It’s not simply being in the right place at the right time,” reasons Middendorf, husband of a loving wife and father of four young children, who gave up his job as a manager of one of the top-ranking software companies in the world. “The Lord puts the people He wants us to meet along our path—we simply need to open ourselves to recognize these beacons of light along the road and orient ourselves to His inspirations.”

Mark’s pilgrimage of faith began soon after college while playing basketball and other sports with twelve other guys who were also beginning





their professions. “The Chicago-based group was a mixed lot, but there was a core group of evangelical Christians who would lead prayer and Bible study after shooting hoops,” explains Middendorf. Although raised Catholic, Mark was not well catechized. He admired the sincere fellowship and open discussion that followed prayer.

As the group got better acquainted, they began to ponder the deeper questions of life. Their discussions examined various topics such as morality and current events. The dialogue was open and honest and rooted in three distinct areas: history, Sacred Scripture and human reason. They would converse and write about the chosen topic until they came to some sort of group consensus.

Oftentimes Mark found himself, as one of only three Catholics in the group, called upon to do research to articulate the Church’s position on particular matters. This personal quest for truth led him to read books, listen to audiotapes and ask his parish priest in the search for answers. This process deepened Mark’s love for the Faith and formed him into a budding evangelist.

A Man on the Move

When a career change forced Mark and his family to move to Connecticut, he continued his close relationship with his buddies via mail. They would correspond on a monthly basis about the topic at hand, drawing much insight from one another.

When the group examined the burning question, “Are you saved and what do you base it on?,” they could not come to a consensus. This facet of the subject concerning salvation plagued members for nearly three years, and engendered a wide diversity of opinions, causing quite a quandary. Little by little they came to a consensus. In fact, by the time they resolved their differences of opinion, 100% of the group members converted to Catholicism!

As Mark came to deepen his un-

derstanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith more intimately through his research and reflection, he also became acutely aware of the apparent separation between the truth taught and the truth believed. Very often he found that many practicing Catholics—including priests and religious—were not fully living the Faith. Mark and his family failed to see “faith in action,” and easily got discouraged.

Through work he did meet another Catholic—a husband and father of eight young children—who invited him to come to his parish where “everyone practices the Faith.” The church was an hour and half’s drive away but when Mark and his wife did finally attend, they found it just as his friend Frank described. Here there were many young and large Catholic families who seemed to integrate their



How the Program Works

There are three options available as starter kits that provide all the necessary materials to set up an attractive Lighthouse Catholic media display. The initial cost of the kit can be included in the parish’s evangelization budget, or it is often underwritten by a donation from a generous individual or a parish group such as the Knights of Columbus, Serra Clubs, parish vocation committees, Altar and Rosary and Holy Name societies. Future CD and brochure refills should be covered by freewill donations from the display when it is properly promoted and correctly managed.

Training and support is readily provided to ensure the program’s long-term success. Creative bulletin and pulpit

announcements, CD synopses and other promotion materials help get the word out. New titles and products are added on a regular basis and orders can be tailored to focus on a particular theme or pastoral need (e.g., marriage and family life, conversion and evangelization, pro-life, stewardship). Materials are also available in Spanish.

The Lighthouse Catholic Media is structured in a way so that it is a turn-key method. In addition to the local coordinator working with volunteers, there are regional and account managers available to answer any questions and to offer suggestions to reach many more souls with the saving message of God’s Word. Evangelization could not be any easier—or more effective!

beliefs with their everyday lives. The parish was part of the schismatic Society of St. Pius X.

The whole experience plunged Mark into a real dilemma. “I had finally found a parish community where Catholicism really meant something,” explained Middendorf, “but I struggled with the fact that they were not in full communion with Rome.” During this time one of Mark’s best friends, Tim, who three years earlier had left the Catholic Church but later returned, challenged Mark on being part of this group.

Uncertain what to do, Mark decided to write to the Vatican for clarification on the matter. To his utter amazement he got a reply from Rome clarifying that the Sacraments administered by the Pius X priests—except for Confession and Marriage—were valid but illicit. Seeking additional guidance, he called the local bishop of the Society who immediately called Mark back. The bishop had ready answers to Rome’s objections. This further confused the situation.

Not certain what to do, Mark placed his trust in God to show him the way.

An Answer to Prayer

At that time Middendorf was being groomed to become president of



“The CDs and brochures are a welcome addition to the faith life and continuing education of our people. I heartily recommend your program to all the pastors in the Archdiocese as a way to rekindle the faith of Chicago’s Catholics and help fulfill Pope John Paul II’s call for a New Evangelization.”

—Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.,
Archbishop of Chicago

one of his employer’s larger companies. While back in Chicago, Mark visited St. John Cantius Parish where his friend Tim suggested he might find what he was looking for. Here he found the Sacred Liturgy being celebrated with remarkable devotion and reverence. Immediately he felt at home. The Lord answered his prayer and was clearly directing him back to Rome!

During his brief stay in Chicago, Mark was offered a tremendous job opportunity in sales. This meant that he and his family could move back to “Sweet Home Chicago” and join St. John Cantius Parish. But it also meant that he would have to abandon his aspirations for management and sell his Connecticut home in less than four weeks.

Trusting that this is what God wanted, Mark moved ahead. Providentially, his home sold within a week of putting it on the market and his wife’s parents, aunt and his father, who were coming for a visit, were able to help the family pack.

Everything seemed to be falling into place for Mark and his family. His job was providing materially, he was being fed spirituality by the Society of St. John Cantius, and soon he was the top sales representative for his new company. The Lord was blessing him tremendously.

Given a Gift to Share

Yet all this success did not dissipate the thought that constantly nagged at him, “You have been given a gift. You must share it.”

Mark soon began to realize that Christ was calling him to spread the Faith as a lay evangelist. Realizing how much he benefited from audiotapes in learning to understand and defend Catholic doctrine, he decided to be-



“It is my hope that all the parishes in the Archdiocese will take advantage of this efficacious means of evangelization and adult catechesis. The tools made available are vital to the growth and development of the Catholic Faith.”

—Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke,
Archbishop of St. Louis

gin a personal apostolate of distributing tapes to others. The impact of listening to talks by Dr. Scott Hahn, Tim Staples and other leading apologists was astounding.

With the help of his father and brother-in-law, Mark designed a small wooden display box and sought permission from Fr. C. Frank Phillips, C.R., pastor of St. John Cantius, to place seven different audiotapes and informational tracts from *Our Sunday Visitor* in the back of the church. Mark figured that people would take tapes and brochures for themselves and distribute them to others. His idea struck pay dirt. It proved to be quite popular. Each week Mark would restock the display and add new talks on pertinent topics.

As he placed orders for tapes from St. Joseph Communications, its President, Terry Barber, noticed the steady increase in the amount of product ordered and the frequency of the orders. Terry finally asked him, “What are you doing?” and Mark zealously explained the pilot program.

Knowing the trends in the industry, Terry suggested that he consider going to CDs and redesign the display to accommodate the new format. Soon, the Lighthouse Catholic Media Project was launched, an innovative way for ordinary Catholics to participate in the New Evangelization.

A Turn-Key Method of Evangelization

With Terry's 28 years of experience building St. Joseph Communications and The Catholic Resource Center, Dave Durand's extensive knowledge in sales and distribution, and Mark's operational and marketing background, Lighthouse has rapidly grown across the country. Soon Cardinal George, Archbishop Burke and many other bishops were offering their endorsements to the program that finally put the principles of Catholic evangelization into an easy turn-key method which anyone can follow.

The CDs and pamphlets featured in the attractive display can be targeted to touch upon pertinent topics and pressing pastoral issues. Subject matters include the Da Vinci code, prayer, the Sacraments, contraception, abortion, stewardship, and anger and forgiveness, and much more. Speakers include experts such as Dr. Scott Hahn, Blessed Mother Teresa and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Conversion stories by Fr. John Corapi, Kimberly Hahn, Jeff Cavins, Fr. Don Calloway and others are used with great effect bringing back the "fallen away" or to animate those who may have "fallen asleep" in regards to the Faith—as well as planting the seeds for priestly and religious vocations.

"Conversion and reversion stories are powerful in reawakening others to the reality of Jesus," explains Barber. "Our desire is that in these compelling stories of others, people find elements of their own story and realize how only Christ can bring us happiness and fulfillment."

"We have gotten calls and letters from people who say that by listening to a particular talk or reading a certain leaflet they were brought back to the Faith," says Middendorf. "It is sim-

ply amazing to discover that someone's testimony helped a young person decide to become a priest or join religious life!"

Recently Mark obtained copies of Msgr. Charles Mangan's novena booklet, "Living Signs of the Gospel" as a way to encourage believers to pray for vocations. This 32-page booklet published by the INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE encourages Catholics to implore the Lord of the Harvest for a renewal of the consecrated life and new vocations.

Materials to be Managed

Currently, with the help of five regional managers, twenty-five divisional managers and many "on-fire" account managers across the United States and Canada, the Lighthouse Catholic Media displays are now being used in over 500 parishes, schools, religious houses and retreat centers. People are starving for the truth and materials are quickly gobbled up as soon as they put out.

The importance of having someone to coordinate the display is critical to the program's success. Designed to be self-sustaining through suggested donations, Lighthouse displays that are carefully and consciously managed are far more effective than those that are simply erected and neglected.

To help ensure the program's success, seminars and workshops are put on so that useful training and practical tips can be readily shared. These meetings are held monthly and have a retreat-like tone to the scheduled events, which always include Mass and devotional prayer such as the Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Guest speakers include Dave Durand, David Currie, Michael Barber and others who have witnessed firsthand the efficiency and efficacy of the program.

Bro. Paschal Kolodziej, OFM CONV., an IRL Board member who is stationed at Marytown Retreat and Conference Center in Libertyville, Illinois, has addressed seminar participants.

"Besides encouraging them to consecrate themselves totally to Our Lady in order to become more effective instruments of evangelization, I share with them how well the program has worked for us," notes Brother Paschal. "We can hardly keep our display stocked with CDs and brochures at Marytown."

Hearts Touched and Souls Saved

Lighthouse Catholic Media is making a difference in the Church today. And as the program expands, many more hearts will be touched and souls will be saved by the "truth that will set them free."

Materials in Spanish are also available for the displays. New talks and brochures are added on a regular basis so that the program does not get stale or passé.

"The only thing a person needs to do is accept God's call to make a difference," encourages Middendorf. "We must respond to Our Lord with the same willingness that Our Lady and the saints have had throughout the centuries. We must simply trust God and learn to get out of the way!"

Often, even Catholics who understand what the New Evangelization is all about will ask, "But what can I do?" Lighthouse Catholic Media provides a clear answer for those who feel willing but ill equipped to be an evangelist.

For more information or to become a part of the Lighthouse Catholic Media Apostolate, visit www.lighthousecatholicmedia.com or call 866-526-2151 ext. 419. 🙏