

takes over 800 Catholics in this country to produce one convert — certainly this is not the way to make the Church grow. We need to set up parish programs by which our people will be helped to do their part. In this the priest must take the initiative. We need especially to help our people to overcome their timidity and reluctance in speaking about Catholicism. Classes on apologetics will instill confidence so that when a non-Catholic raises an objection to the Church that person will have the knowledge necessary to overcome misunderstandings.

Further, there is sufficient information published to guide those interested in evangelization at the parish, community, or diocesan level.

The priest as the representative of the hierarchy can provide the training primarily by forming small groups who talk over the problem, set goals and objectives, and assign tasks. They do not have to have any special abilities.

Inquiry forums must be set up, with qualified teachers able to answer questions from prospective candidates.

RCIA programs must primarily focus on Church teaching and the foundations for these beliefs.

Though a lay training program may seem difficult to fit into a priest's busy schedule, he will find it eminently worth the sacrifice. He will find the help mates he needs to carry on the work and at the same time help parishioners to grow. Constant experience shows that where Catholics are involved in trying to bring others to Christ, they themselves are drawn closer to him. The Mass, prayer, and the sacraments — all mean much more to them

when they are conscious of being co-workers with Christ.

The laity have a special part, which cannot be performed by the clergy. It is the work of parents, for example, to teach their children about God and train them in Christian morality; this cannot be left to the school or any other entity. It is the work of lay Catholics to manifest Christ to their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and in short, to everyone with whom they come into contact. They have a need and a right to responsible participation in order to fully develop as Christians. Religious instruction alone will not do it. Only responsible participation makes for maturity, and for lack of it many Catholics today are spiritually very immature. This explains the inability of so many to stand up to the evil influences around them.

The specific vocation of the clergy is pastoral; the laity are simply helpers in this area. The specific vocation of the laity in the Church's work is apostolic; this they have from God because they are laity, each at his own level. They also are Christ, sent to make Him known around the world. They should bring Him everywhere they go and to be ready to present Him to all they meet.

We should not expect a person to do the work of a priest without the necessary training. Nor should we expect a person to do the work of an evangelist without training.

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## I have no hands but yours



Towards the end of World War II, a squad of American soldiers came to a little town in France, which had been bitterly fought over. In the village square they found a statue of Christ lying battered and broken. Some Catholic men of the group put it together as best they could and set it back on the pedestal. But they could not find the hands. Finally, one of them made a crudely lettered sign: "I have no hands but yours." Surely, he was thinking of the poem, penned in the sixteenth century, by St. Teresa of Avila.

Christ has no body now but yours  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours  
Yours are the eyes through which He looks  
compassion on this world  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

When Our Lord, about to leave this earth, commanded His Church, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). He was telling each one of us that we must continue His work of bringing to mankind His message of God’s Love to mankind. Where he made in known only in Palestine, now we must spread the Word throughout the entire world. We must be Christ to those around us, of helping them, in the words of Father Henri de Lubec, “to recognize the image of God in one another, so that they may identify themselves with one another and love one another.”

Yet, today there is little zeal on the part of those who profess love of Christ to make Him known and loved by others. Secularism, not Christianity, has become the world’s greatest movement. We have to deplore lukewarmness in perhaps the majority of the world’s Christians. “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15-16). In addition, there has been the wholesale defection of so many of Christ’s favored poor from the Church.

Jean Danielou, in *The Salvation of the Nations*, suggests a reason. “Catholicism loses its hold on souls in the measure that it ceases to present as an urgent task, to be accomplished as soon as possible, the unity of all men within a single religion.”

### **Are we doing the job?**

As we study the situation of the Church today, one inescapable fact stands out: we are not fulfilling Christ’s command to convert the world. Our present conversion methods are

entirely inadequate. We are actually falling far behind. Rather than attacking the issue, we are in a defensive posture, simply trying to hold on to those already in the sheepfold.

After nearly 2,000 years of Christianity, the total number of Catholics today is roughly about 17% of the world’s population, a decrease of about 1% since 1990.

The need to mobilize the Church exists in every country of the world. If we are to make inroads in the battle for Christ and against secularization we must apply the principle of putting hundreds and thousands of pairs of apostolic hands to work where only a few have worked before.

We must not rely on the efforts of so few priests to do the job Our Lord is the responsibility of every Catholic. The Laity must be mobilized in an organized program of winning souls Christ and His Church. The world population grows because people have children, but the Catholic population will only grow as the result of one on one conversion.

Although estimates vary, it is not unreasonable to conclude that out of a U. S. population of approximately 300 million, 75 million Americans, not only do not attend church, or synagogue, but also do not have any religious affiliation whatsoever. Another 141 million Americans do attend church on any given weekend, which leaves about 84 million with marginal or no church involvement.

Non-church goers are increasing far more rapidly than the number of conversions. Furthermore, the number of Catholics who fall away is far greater than the conversions, so that whatever Catholic increase we have is due rather to immigration and birth rate than to conversions. Almost every one of us can see

this in his own parish. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9 37-38).

Christ would not give us a task that would be progressively more difficult over the years. The fault must lie in either the motivation or methods, or both. Church leaders do not view evangelization as a priority or sufficiently train and encourage lay involvement. For the most part the laity do not take responsibility to learn the basics of the Faith, and leave the education of perspective converts to the priest. We need to enlist all the laity, not just a few specially trained people. How different it would be if the laity were actually tasked to learn and were taught the science of apologetics. They must be brought to the understanding that we all share the responsibility to evangelize, “Service of and witness to the Faith are necessary for salvation (CCC §1816).

To be a successful sales person, one must be enthusiastic about the product you are selling. Why is it that Catholics lack enthusiasm? Contrast the current situation with the early years of the Church when a small handful of Jewish converts brought about the conversion, according to some historians, of 20 % of the Roman Empire.

Carrying out the mandate of Christ is a mathematical impossibility left to the clergy and religious, unless we act on the basis that the Church’s growth, like that of population, must be by a process of multiplication. It now