

**Presentation by Tom Peterson**  
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Opus Dei Founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá teaches:

“Scatter your seed, apostolic soul... Sow, and be certain that the seed will take root and bear fruit.”

(“The Way”, #794)

Our beloved Pope Benedict XVI said in Columbia Magazine: “The Greatest crisis facing our world today is absence of God. We all need God.”

As Catholic communicators, we are entrusted to spread the Good News of Jesus and His Church to a post modern world that no longer chooses God as its priority.

When you and I participate in this essential work of evangelization, we serve as modern day apostles, bringing Jesus to a world in desperate need.

So many people don't know God, because they are distracted by the secular lures of a busy world. Just as Jesus went out of the temple, we too must meet people where they are, and in today's society, that means harnessing the power of social communications.

As Jesus called Simon Peter and the apostles to join this mission, He also calls us.

In Luke Chapter 5, Jesus calls His disciples to put out into deep water and lower their nets for a catch.

When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.

Jesus assured them not to be afraid, and informed them that from now on they will be catching men.

They immediately brought their boats to the shore, left everything and followed Jesus.

Now is the time for us to “put out into the deep” as Jesus invited. We Catholic communicators are called to become modern day “fishers’ of men.”

The time is critical, because statistics now show a skyrocketing epidemic of secularism. Studies demonstrate that nearly 70% of baptized Catholics worldwide are not active in their Catholic faith.

Sadly, we all know close relatives, friends, and neighbors that have drifted away from the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, media isn't helping to bring souls closer to Christ either. As you well know, the Good News of Jesus and His Bride, are not portrayed positively in the news. The history, beauty, accomplishments, love, and spirituality of the Catholic Church, started by Jesus Himself, 2000 years ago, are almost never discussed.

It seems that even if our beloved Holy Father were to literally "walk on water," the anti-Catholic media would probably distort this miraculous event by reporting it with their negative headline: "Pope can't swim!"

Rather than condemning the media, we are called to find strategic ways of harnessing mass communication to spread the Gospel.

It's not easy, but St Paul reminds us that we are called to teach the truth and refute error whether it's convenient or inconvenient, in season or out of season.

In Ecclesia in America Pope John Paul II wrote:

"Using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine enculturation of the Gospel."

He continues by saying:

"This vital field of action for the Church requires a radical change of mentality, an authentic new awakening of conscience in everyone. New methods are needed, as are new expressions and new courage."

In answer to this directive, a few years ago, we launched a Catholic non-profit apostolate called "CatholicsComeHome.org®"

We are a grassroots movement of lay Catholics, faithful to the Magisterium and blessed by the wise guidance of priests, bishops, and cardinals.

CatholicsComeHome.org® produces television commercials and web sites, and partners with dioceses to invite fallen-away Catholics and non-Catholics home to the Church. The critical role of the diocese and their parishes is be welcoming. Just as we would welcome a long lost family member into our home, so too must parishes welcome our brothers and sisters home with genuine hospitality.

Our communications strategy utilizes television and the internet, since American research shows the average person consumes over 35 hours of media per week. By age 75, many people will spend 14 years of their lives watching television and 4 years watching commercials.

While these media statistics may vary in other countries, it's critical for Catholic communicators around the world to harness media in the New Evangelization.

At this time, we would like to share with you three of the CatholicsComeHome.org® television commercials from our portfolio:

- The branding strategy behind the first ad called “Epic,” is to integrate truth and charity, in a clear and concise message.

In versions ranging in length from 30 seconds to 2 minutes, “Epic” positively communicates the 2000 year history, beauty, spirituality and accomplishments of the Catholic Church.

It ends with a call to action that invites viewers to take another look at the Church, and gently welcomes them home to our Catholic family.

- The next ad featuring “Testimonials,” opens dialogue with fallen-away Catholics.

It features common stories of people who left the Church for various reasons like divorce, drifting away during college, and marrying outside the faith.

It communicates feelings of emptiness while they were away, and their new found joy upon coming home to the sacraments.

- The third commercial called “Movie ” has a “prodigal son” theme.

This creative execution shows a variety of people as they review the good and bad moments in the movies of their lives.

Viewers witness the regret of these deadly sins, but then discover the joyful hope of redemption that only comes through the divine mercy of Jesus.

This commercial seeks to open dialogue with two prime target audiences: secular humanists and non-Catholics.

Let’s now watch “Epic”, “Testimonials”, and “Movie”....

(Show DVD: \*1. “Epic”, \*2. “Testimonials”, \*3 “Movie”)

These television ads reach people while they are watching major sports programs, Novellas, the evening news, and the most popular secular programs on television.

These powerful television messages along with our interactive websites, created in various languages, are having a profound effect. Here are key findings from the campaigns:

In our focus groups and dial testing research, a vast majority of participants came in with an overall negative identity perception of the Catholic Church.

However, after viewing these commercials just one time, 76% of former Catholics, Protestants, and even agnostics rated these messages very positively, and over 53% said they would look into or return to the Catholic faith.

Those surveyed said the ads are “authentic, inspiring, well produced, and inviting”. They embraced the themes of “Catholic family,” “service to others,” and “broad cultural diversity” of the Church.

In the past two years, over 20 million people saw these ads on secular television in the United States, in 15 dioceses and archdioceses, from Chicago to Seattle, from Sacramento to Providence.

In the first two dioceses where these television ads aired, 100,000 inactive Catholics and converts came home to the Catholic Church in a matter of weeks, with retention remaining strong.

Now that these media campaigns have aired in multiple dioceses across the U.S., dioceses are witnessing an increase in Mass attendance by an average of 11% per parish, when comparing pre and post campaign census data.

One million visitors from over 80 countries have used the CatholicsComeHome.org® website, showing the power of viral communications.

People are now spending almost 6 minutes on the site, viewing about 4 pages per visit.

About 25% of returnees visit our interactive website first, whereas the majority of viewers just return to their local parish to Confession or Mass.

Before the launch of our current website, we discover many of our deficiencies and learned that we needed to make the following enhancements:

- Contemporary Web 2.0 graphic design
- Ease of navigation
- Employ blogs, both video and written.
- Greater use of streaming video and audio
- Optimization of the site
- Improve teaching sections on: divorce and annulments, abortion, and infertility...i.e. the key moral issues facing the culture today.

In addition to website enhancements, we needed to develop an extensive social media strategy in order to communicate the relevance of faith and Church teachings in our post modern society.

Our next endeavor will be iPhone apps.

As a result of the campaign, current Catholics say they now feel “proud to be Catholic.” Dioceses tell us that these inspired Catholics delve deeper into their faith, contribute more financially and through service, and begin to evangelize others.

Additionally, this media outreach is inviting inactive Catholics, Protestant converts, even atheists home to the Catholic faith, for a return on investment of only two dollars per soul.

Here is one amazing story that came to us through one of our 7,000 new Facebook fans:

Adrian grew up an atheist, and spent his young life arguing against the Christian faith. Then, in May 2009, Adrian saw the Catholics Come Home “Epic” commercial “which brought comfort” to him. He felt like God was personally calling him home, when he heard the ending line ‘We are Catholic. Welcome home.SM’

Adrian said “I felt something warm, comforting, and powerful. I felt like God had guided me to this commercial.”

On Easter 2010, Adrian, along with his wife and children became Catholic, and received the sacraments.

“Months ago, I was an atheist trying to convert people out of the faith,” Adrian admits. “Today I have returned to the Church, and now I am learning apologetics and defending the faith!”

Inactive Catholics who were inspired by the ads, returned directly to Mass and Confession. One priest had 16 returnees in his confessional the first week the ads aired in his diocese. Many returnees had been away for nearly thirty five years.

Up to 90% say they didn’t have a specific complaint against the Church nor strong opposition to teachings, they just drifted away when the secular lures of the world distracted them.

Some didn’t realize that God would forgive them. They believed it was too late, and thought the Church wouldn’t want them back.

About 10% have divorce and annulment issues, and many didn’t realize that they were not excommunicated upon their divorce, and the Church would want them back.

Amazingly, 90% of those survey said they came home, simply because we invited them.

Almost 25% of the web visitors to our Catholics Come Home.org website are potential converts, whose interest in Catholicism was piqued by the truth, beauty, and production quality of the commercials. Another uplifting testimonial from Facebook, is the story of Harrison:

Harrison was raised Methodist and attended a Protestant university. Then he came across the Catholics Come Home.org website.

He says: “As a tired and exhausted Protestant, the commercial "Epic" brought me to the edge of tears. The universality and beauty of the Catholic Church reached out to me. I felt like the Church was extending an invitation for me to come home, not to a home I left, but the home no one had ever told me about.”

A year later, Harrison converted to Catholicism, and now attends a Catholic University.

CatholicsComeHome.org® is currently expanding into several more United States dioceses as well as discussing partnerships with international dioceses.

By harnessing new communication strategies, we are opening dialogue in a search for truth, strengthening Church identity, and positively communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ to a world in need of hope and healing.

Years ago, I met a man named “Hulie”, who was an immigrant to the United States, and had strayed from the faith in his youth.

One day after morning Mass, I was asked by his Vietnamese mother to help her son Hulie, who was away from the Church for 20 years.

For months I visited Hulie’s at his neighborhood store. He said that he “didn’t need Church”, because he “found God in nature”, and preferred fishing over going to Mass.

On two occasions Hulie said he would come to Mass with me, but on both Sundays, Hulie never showed up.

Finally, one Sunday, Hulie called me, and said he everything changed. He would finally accept my invitation to come to Mass!

When I asked why he changed his mind and decided to come back to church, Hulie said, “I went fishing this morning, and I fished a Crucifix out of the water!”

He asked, “Do you think it was a sign?”

Sometime later, Hulie came to my house, and shared with me why he and his mother were so grateful that I invited him back to church.

Hulie confessed that he was in the Mafia in Los Angeles, and spent the past 15 years in a Federal Penitentiary for serious felony crimes.

Profoundly, Hulie told me that in prison, people had time to talk about God, but in society people are just too busy to share God with others. Hulie and his family were so grateful that someone took time to help him find faith again.

There are a billion people like Hulie, Harrison and Adrian who once felt emptiness in their souls, but whose lives were profoundly changed after receiving a humble invitation to come home to the source of true fulfillment...Jesus and His Church.

In conclusion, I’d like to close with these thoughts....

I awoke one morning at 3am, feeling the awesome yet incredible responsibility that God has entrusted to me, by having me speak at conferences and create Catholic ads viewed by millions of souls.

So I prayed for God to guide me to the most important thing He wants me to share with others. And, as quickly as I said that prayer, God answered with these words: “Tell them I love them.” “Tell them I love them.”

As Catholic communicators, we are called to share God’s love with truth and charity. As we grow in wisdom, we learn that nobody cares how much we know, until they know how much we care.

In all of our focus groups and subsequent airing of thousands of commercials, we heard a consistent theme. People responded to the Catholics Come Home commercials and website because they felt the message was “sincere and authentic”. Viewers said they didn’t feel we were trying to “sell them anything.”

So as we absorb all of the great lessons learned during this Church Communications conference, let us go forth proclaiming the truth of the Church with sincerity and love, trusting St. Josemaria Escriva’s exhortation to “Sow, and be certain that the seed will take root and bear fruit.”