

6. André and Angele Regnier, Founders of Catholic Christian Outreach (Canada)

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Prayers and Testimonies:

WE ARE ALL MISSIONARY DISCIPLES (EG 119- 121)

by André and Angèle Regnier and family

(Mylène and Marc Moreau, Joel and Elizabeth Regnier,
Caleb and Alana Regnier, Natalie Regnier and Janna Regnier).

André:

Growing up in a Catholic family, I always had a soft spot for God. But growing up in the 1960s and 70s, this openness to God was not at all expressed in the way I lived my life. I pursued a pretty reckless, self-centred life with lots of partying and all that goes with it. In 1982, I was invited to make a significant decision—to make faith not just something that is hidden but rather central to the way I lived my life.

It started with a friend telling me she met a Christian. I responded by saying, “I’m a Christian too.” My heart was pierced when she revealed the state of my soul as she replied, “No, André. He’s a real Christian.” I had no defence! Like the prodigal son, the Holy Spirit used the pain of embarrassment to bring me to my senses.

The next Sunday afternoon I was with my friends and we were talking about what we were going to do that night. To my surprise, one of my friends said that he would meet up with us afterwards because he needed to go to Mass first. His commitment to go to Mass struck me. I wanted to be the kind of person that made that kind of decision. But the truth was that I had not even been to Mass for over two years.

All week I was haunted by my lack of decision to go to Mass and make my faith a priority. The following Sunday, I followed my heart and I went to Mass. I wanted to go, not to make my mother happy, but because I wanted to go. I wanted Jesus. I wanted the faith that was hidden in my heart to no longer remain hidden.

I went to Mass that day with my heart open, desiring God to be more important. I can't remember the homily or where I was sitting at the time but I remember an overwhelming sense of the presence of God. Every cell of my body was consumed by what I know now as the presence of God. I was overwhelmed by God's love for me and by my love for Him. You can see that I went to Mass that day open, ready to say 'yes'. And I left Mass that day with a converted heart. I experienced a metanoia, and my life's direction was now oriented towards God. I began to pray in a new way. I went to Mass with excitement and anticipation in my heart. My life priorities, my hopes and my dreams were rooted in my faith and God's love.

We read in *Evangelii Gaudium* that, "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus"¹. Growing up, this idea that every Christian was missionary and could encounter God's love was foreign to me. It took an invitation from a friend of mine who was an Evangelical Christian to come and visit his church, to help me discover my Catholic missionary nature.

I witnessed how these people loved God. They spoke of a personal and dynamic relationship with Jesus which gave words to describe my own experience. What was new but at the same time inspiring was their evangelical zeal. They wanted the world to know and experience Jesus Christ. These young people were sharing their faith with their friends and families. Some were courageously going on mission abroad to fulfill the great commission. They were authentic missionary disciples.

But what struck me the most was how it seemed that every second person was a former Catholic. They would share with me how they now know Jesus in a personal way. They were essentially saying that they had to leave the Catholic Church in order to encounter Jesus. I wanted to drop to my knees right there and then and beg them to come back to the Church. I prayed that I could do something about this great need.

A few months later, I went through the Life in the Spirit seminar, something Pope Francis has asked all Catholics to experience. On the fifth night the leaders prayed for the Holy Spirit to be stirred up in a person's life. As they prayed with me, one of the leaders felt the Lord wanted me to know that I was to be an evangelist of the youth. In 1987, this did not make much sense to me, as a Catholic lay person! I asked myself, "What is an evangelist to the youth anyway?"

¹ EG, 120.

This question became clearer when a month later the Lord called me to go on a one-week mission trip with an Evangelical group to the northern part of Canada. Over the week, my heart was captured by the great mission Jesus left his apostles to go out to every corner of the world with the Good News.

Recognizing that I was Catholic they brought me to what seemed to be a large Catholic Church. I was so happy to talk to a Priest about what I was doing. To my surprise the Church seemed to be closed with no one around. After a long search, a religious Brother finally came out to talk to us. He shared how this community had seen a significant decrease in families, to the point that his superiors were considering closing the mission down. My heart was so heavy. But at the same time my missionary heart was set aflame. I desired to help.

A few days later I heard the words of St. Paul, “All that matters is that Jesus be proclaimed, this is what brings me joy.” (Philippians 1:18). It was as if God was speaking directly to me: “André, for the rest of your life, all that will matter is that Jesus be proclaimed, that is what brings me joy.”

Angèle:

I was baptized Catholic but following my mom’s divorce and remarriage we joined an Evangelical Lutheran community. There I grew up knowing what it meant to have a personal relationship with God. I was also taught about the need for missionaries to go into the world and proclaim the Good News to all people.

While I was a university student, I served on a brief mission to Cuernavaca, Mexico. While there, I was aware that the Holy Spirit was inviting me over and over again, rather insistently, to abandon myself fully to God and his mission. Frankly, I was terrified of what God might ask of me or how far away from home he might send me.

I was unable to sleep due to the intense struggle going on inside of me. I was afraid he would ruin my dreams for my life. How could I give God such radical permission to lead me? But in the same breath I didn’t know how I could live without Him close to me.

The fear of losing God was more frightening than the fear of what he might ask of me. So in earnest I promised Him ‘I will go anywhere you want me to go, and I’ll do anything you want me to do, and I’ll say anything you want me to say.’

I prayed those words with absolute sincerity. The Lord immediately flooded my heart with joy, freedom, lightness and confidence. Even though I still didn’t know what He was going to do with my life, the fear was replaced with patient anticipation.

Within a year’s time, the Lord made it clear where my mission field would be; and I never would have guessed it. It was in the Catholic Church! It all came about through meeting a young Catholic man (point to André) who was passionate about reviving the faith of Catholic young people.

As our relationship grew, a number of things resulted: 1) I was confirmed into the Catholic Church and 2) we got married, but I'm sure you've figured that out by now.

But there was even more.

In October 1988, together with our parish priest, André and I felt that God was inviting us to start a new apostolate called *Catholic Christian Outreach*: a university student movement focused on evangelization. We were concerned about the thousands upon thousands of young people who walk away from the Church, especially those on the periphery.

The university campus is a daunting mission field. Every distraction, philosophy, practice and offering of modern society is available for the taking. Traditional values are challenged. In fact, studies tell us that $\frac{2}{3}$ of Catholic young people who were practicing their faith, will make the decision to stop, for life, while at university.

Despite these negative trends, we have seen for over thirty years now that young people are hungry for compelling reasons to stay Catholic or embrace Christianity for the first time. The outreach which our apostolate does is very personal.

We use small groups as a venue to share the teachings of our faith. The message of first importance which we bring is—Jesus. We present Him and the gift of His death and resurrection in a clear and simple way. We invite them to open their hearts to His mercy, salvation and friendship. Over and over again we see the effectiveness of communicating the good news of Jesus. We have witnessed the lives of thousands of students impacted and converted - from moving away from God to living for Him as a disciple. Their relationship with God and the Church comes alive.

We wholeheartedly agree with Pope Francis when he says that the young people are protagonists, the leading characters in the renewal² of the world. With clear training and accompaniment we equip them as missionary disciples who can witness to their peers and help them grow in their faith.

Not only are these young people leading evangelization efforts on campus and to their peers on the periphery, but upon graduation they take leading roles in their parishes and dioceses. They are a sign of hope as they go into the world as that new generation of doctors, lawyers, professors, policy makers, parents, priests and religious who desire to be the salt of the earth and light of the world.

André:

² WYD Rio 2013 Vigil Mass.

Dear friends, it is the Holy Father's document *Evangelii Gaudium*, which unites us all together today and it aims to propel us into mission since we are all called to be missionary disciples. Pope Francis says in paragraph 120:

“In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”.³

In our work on campus we have seen how quickly a young person can have a conversion and then desire to go out to others. In our home we have seen how even children can be missionary disciples. Each of our children have encountered the mercy of God for their own lives at a young age. They have made courageous decisions to live as faithful disciples and they have been witnesses to their peers throughout their school years. Indeed there is no need to “postpone the evangelizing mission...each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are”.⁴

Angèle: May we bring our family on stage and introduce you to them? Great, we would like you to hear each of their own experiences. Here are our five children and three children-in-law.

André: This is our daughter-in-law Alana. She, along with our other adult children and their spouses, are all full-time catholic missionaries reaching out to university students across Canada. Alana, what would you say compels you to actively proclaim Jesus to others?

Alana: It really comes from our deep desire to see lives changed through the encounter with Jesus. It is our deep conviction that the call to Jesus—to conversion and to mission—is the call for ALL Catholics, young and old, in our parishes, in our dioceses, in our movements and especially within our families.

³ EG, 120.

⁴ EG, 121.

The message that we respond to when we give our lives to Christ is the same message that we need to share as missionary disciples. Our movement trains evangelizers to share their faith by focusing on the Kerygma⁵ —that God created us for a loving relationship with Him but that relationship is broken through sin. Thankfully, God sent His only Son, Jesus, “ We want to have better training, a deepening love and a clearer witness to the Gospel. “to die on the Cross and rise from the dead to restore us to Himself. This is the gift of our baptism, and each of us is invited to choose to follow Him as a disciple and be in a living relationship with Him.

André : Well said, Alana. A message of such importance begs a response. Angèle and I have seen each of our children at one point respond to this message of the gospel with a clear decision.

Angèle : It’s true! This is our 16-year old daughter Natalie. Natalie, how did knowing God loves you ‘personally’ transform your relationship with Him?

Natalie: “For me, growing up, God was always discussed within our family. We went to church on Sundays and attended many Catholic events. I knew about God and was told many times that God loves me. My relationship with God was radically transformed three years ago. I was 13 years old when I went to a youth conference organized by my diocese. There was energetic music and powerful talks which really inspired me. As I listened, I realized that God didn't just love everyone —He loved ME personally. I was convinced that I needed to start living a real friendship with God. During Eucharistic Adoration, I remember praying with my whole heart, and telling Jesus I wanted to live for Him. That decision changed everything in how I relate to God.

Angèle: Yes, we’ve seen how seriously you’ve taken that decision. The whole family has noticed how you’ve grown in your joy and confidence.

André: Now, let me introduce you to our son in-law Marc who also experienced a great transformation as a young person. Marc tell us about that.

Marc: Yes, my life totally changed through the hearing of the kerygma. Due to some traumatic events in my childhood, I turned to a life of sin as a teen. It ultimately weighed me down and sent me into a spiral of wrong decisions. I was an altar server on Sunday mornings but throughout the rest of the week, my Catholic faith was little to non-existent. Sin controlled my actions.

⁵ 5 EG 121.

By God's providence I attended a night of Eucharistic Adoration. There, I truly felt for the first time that God loved me. In the moment of realizing this, my heart transformed radically. While I experienced His love profoundly, I became keenly aware of my own sins. I realized that the wrong decisions I had made in my life did not just affect me, but they were a barrier between God and I.

I finally recognized my sin for what it was: an impediment to my relationship with God. And for the first time in my life, I wanted that relationship. So I ran to Him in the sacrament of Reconciliation, and confessed all those sins that were weighing me down.

André : That is beautiful, Marc. We are so grateful for your decision to return to Jesus through the Sacraments.

Angèle: Marc and our daughter Mylène, are a missionary family in Eastern Canada with 3 children. Mylène, even though you grew up in a family of missionaries, you still had to come to your own personal realization of your need for Jesus. Can you tell us about that?

Mylène: After a season of choosing sin over God, I became aware of the profound emptiness I felt without having God in my life. In a time of adoration after mass, I lamented to God about how I had failed Him and how I felt like everything in my life seemed to be too big of an obstacle to face. But radical healing came into my heart when God showed me that I didn't have to face my life, my choices, or my future alone. Every wrong decision I had made I could hand over to Him. I was in awe of the realization that I was not alone, that he wanted to redeem me, that I needed Him to redeem me. While I had allowed my sin to create a giant impassable divide between myself and God, Jesus' death on the cross became the bridge for me to cross to come to union with Him. I finally realized that a relationship with God was what was missing in my life and after going to Confession, I felt this divide disappear.

André: This is so powerful. When we truly understand that Jesus died for us, we also realize we are offered a restored relationship with God the Father. Caleb, can you tell us how you came to realize that God is offering this relationship to us, and that it's something we need to respond to?

Caleb: Growing up, I always knew that Jesus died for my sins and that He was the bridge to a restored relationship with God. My parents taught me, but never pressured me, that God wanted me to choose, on my own, to follow Him for the rest of my life.

One day, when I was 15 years old, I remember walking home from school, and in the quiet of my own heart I felt prompted to ask myself that important question “Did I want to open myself fully to Jesus and to really live my faith?” With the help of the Holy Spirit, I prayed from the heart, giving God permission to be the Lord of my life.

While the experience of praying on my walk home was pretty ordinary, the decision I made to essentially be a missionary disciple changed my life forever. I really didn’t feel any different but I knew that my decision would make things different. Jesus was the bridge that made the way for me to live for him. I marked that day as my conversion and I thank God for the grace to have made that decision to live for Jesus.

André: This is so important. A decision to choose Christ might not be followed by immense feelings or ‘fireworks’ but that doesn’t mean it isn’t serious.

Angèle: Our daughter-in-law Elizabeth also made this decision. Elizabeth can you share with us how you realized that this relationship with Jesus isn’t just meant to be kept to yourself, but is meant to be shared?

Elizabeth: Yes, Jesus is for everyone! For me, I had the grace to invite Jesus to be the centre of my life when I was 12 years old. In the years that followed, I absolutely loved my faith and doing things like singing at the Parish, praying at Mass, Eucharistic Adoration or just praying or singing in my own bedroom. I loved God so much that I didn’t enjoy being with others who didn’t share my faith. In fact, I was afraid of people in the world. I felt the need to shut them out and protect myself from them.

Then one day when I was 16 years old, I realized that my faith wasn’t just about me; I needed to see past myself and realize that I am not just called to be a disciple but I am, by virtue of my baptism, a missionary disciple. This changed the way I saw the world and how I perceived those who were in the periphery. I realized that the “people in the world” were not the enemy but rather, they were my mission. These were the people I was called to reach with God’s love.

Angèle: Elizabeth is an example of what we have seen over the past 30 years of university evangelization, that the call for all Catholics is not only a call to conversion , but also a call to mission. André and I didn’t only teach this in our apostolate. We raised our children, from an early age, to have this mindset too.

André: Janna, you're 13 and you consider yourself a missionary disciple! How have you given your 'yes' to Jesus?

Janna: I have watched my older brothers and sisters grow in their own relationships with Jesus, so I know what my faith is supposed to look like. I know that I am supposed to love Jesus with my whole heart and learn to live for Him every day. I made my own serious decision to live for Jesus two years ago. I know I'm pretty young and I'm still learning how to take time for daily personal prayer. I want to be holy and even become a Saint! But it's not just about my becoming holy. I want to be missionary too.

André: That's awesome Janna. So tell us, how are you missionary?

Janna: I make a point to be kind to people at school even those who are mean to me. I figure if they only knew the love that Jesus has for them, they would be happier. There was once a boy at school who often bullied and teased me. But I kept being nice to him. One day, in religion class, our teacher asked us "What do you think Jesus must be like?" I was so surprised when this boy said, "I think Jesus must be a lot like Janna."

I was so touched. It made all the times I chose to be nice when he was mean to me worth it! I just want him to have the joy of knowing Jesus.

Angèle: Janna, you sound like St. Paul when he said "all that matters is that Jesus be proclaimed, this is what brings you JOY".⁶

André: And that is really all of our joy (points to the family). We are filled with the joy of the gospel when Jesus is proclaimed. But this proclamation would not be complete if we did not invite the hearer to respond. Perhaps you have never heard this invitation or have never been invited to respond to it? This is my eldest son Jo. He has seen many people respond to this same invitation. Jo, how important is this kind of a decision?

Joel: Well, that kind of a decision changes the direction of our lives and gives us meaning and fellowship with God. Pope Francis said in paragraph 266:

⁶ Philippians 1:18.

“It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him”.⁷

In order for a missionary heart to be formed we first must have encountered Him and decisively chosen to be a disciple and live our baptismal promises. Each of us invited to respond to the gospel. Pope Francis told us,

“Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond. Under no circumstances can this invitation be obscured! If this invitation does not radiate forcefully, the Church’s moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological option.”⁸

Today, with all of you, we want this invitation to "radiate forcefully" for all of us here present. Because Jesus is inviting each one of us to respond to Him. Yes even here, even now. I invite you to open the Ultimate Relationship booklet you received today coming in. Please turn to page 12.

You'll see here that Pope Benedict provides us with an idea as to how we are to respond to Christ. He said,

“If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life”.⁹

This open invitation is made to each heart. If you are ready to open wide the door of your heart to Jesus and respond to the call to be a missionary disciple, then please pray with us. If you turn the page you will find this prayer on page 14 of the booklet.

This prayer invites Jesus to be the centre of our lives. We will each pray this aloud in our own language,

⁷ EG, 266.

⁸ EG, 39.

⁹ *Homily at the Mass of Inauguration* , 24 April 2005, Pope Benedict XVI.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit
“Father, I believe that You know me and love me.
I have not always chosen to love You,
and have broken my relationship with You through my sins.
Thank you for sending Your Son Jesus
Who proved Your love for me on the cross.
Lord Jesus, I open the door of my heart
And I invite You to be at the centre of my life —
to be my Saviour and my Lord.
Direct me by Your Holy Spirit
and help me to live the Gospel with my whole life. Amen”
In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

André: This is such a powerful prayer because this is a significant decision! And it is a great reason to celebrate, and it is that joy which sends us forth.

We see in Scripture that when the woman at the well encountered Jesus and believed in Him, she was filled with the desire to bring others to Him.

Today is not just a day to celebrate that you committed or recommitted your life to Jesus. Today we also celebrate that you are sent into the mission.

Yes, we invite you to live in the fullness of your Catholic identity—not just as disciples, but as MISSIONARY disciples. St. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 that we are sent out as ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making his appeal through us to be reconciled to God.

You too can go and share Jesus with others, and if you’re not sure how—then just use that little booklet we gave you. That’s what it’s made for!

Angèle: Dear friends, you have prayed with us and now we would like to pray for you. We want to pray for the Holy Spirit to empower and send you out as missionary disciples.

You see, the Holy Father wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* 119, that:

In all the baptized, from first to last, sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing.¹⁰

So, confident of the Spirit's anointing on your life, we want to pray for a fresh stirring of the Holy Spirit in you.

As our family prays for you, I invite you to open your hands as a gesture of receptivity to the Holy Spirit as we pray:

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit come!

*Holy Spirit we welcome you. Move in these dear people
and send them out as missionary disciples.*

*Holy Spirit... "today, just as at the beginning of the Church,
[You act] in every evangelizer
who allows himself to be possessed and led by [You].
Holy Spirit [You] [place] on his lips the words
which he could not find by himself"¹¹*

*Come Holy Spirit lead them and empower them
to bear joyful witness - to every human heart - the good news
of Christ's redemption.*

*And finally, we invoke the intercession of Our Lady,
Star of the New Evangelization.*

*"Mary[you] let [yourself] be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith
towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness.*

¹⁰ EG, 119.

¹¹ EG, 151.

*Today we look to [you] and ask [you]
to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all
and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn.”¹²*

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and enkindle in them the fire
of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created and You shall
renew the face of the Earth. Amen*

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

¹² EG, 287.