

New book this fall for “Faith Alive” 2009

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LA CROSSE – This fall the Faith Alive faith-sharing program enters its third year in the Diocese of La Crosse with a new book – “Who Is My Neighbor?”

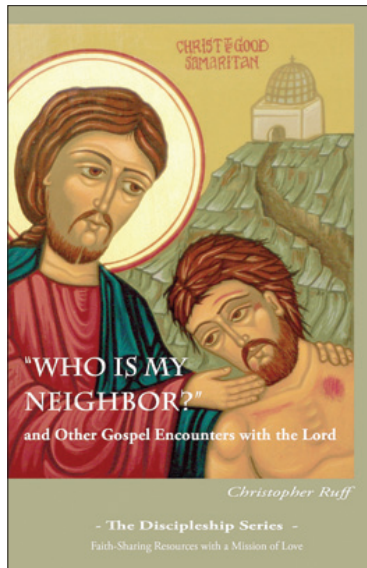
Much positive feedback has been received with regard to Faith Alive over the past couple of years, but a recent e-mail message from Tom Skemp, chaplain of the La Crosse County Jail was inspiring. One of the things Skemp does is facilitate Bible studies with the inmates, along with David Allen, a deacon candidate and parishioner of Blessed Sacrament in La Crosse. They decided some months ago to use the recent Faith Alive book, “The Greatest of These is Love,” with a group of inmates.

When asked how that was going, Skemp’s e-mail response said that the inmates like it better than some other materials because “it is less head stuff and more heart stuff.”

He said that at least one inmate had modified his behavior as a direct result of group discussions, and he closed with the following remark: “For me the most powerful piece has been talking about the service component as they discover ways in which they may be of service even in jail or prison.”

Anyone familiar with the Faith Alive program knows that it focuses on a modest commitment to service as a fruit of shared prayer, reflection and fellowship. This has been going beautifully in parish groups around the diocese, with participants as diverse as Catholic school administrators and teachers, residents of assisted-care facilities and, mostly, hundreds of ordinary lay men and women. But to hear that it reached the hearts of inmates and moved them to want to give service in their confinement – that touched me deeply.

It is my sincere hope that the newest Faith Alive book, “Who Is My Neighbor?”



will help continue this momentum of loving service joined to shared faith and prayer. I hope that it will further cement the bonds of friendship in Christ that have formed in the many groups (and that additional groups will form).

The new book, which will be available in mid-October, follows the same format as the previous ones. Each of the six sessions includes a Gospel passage and reflection, relevant brief quotes from the Catechism and Pope John Paul II or Benedict XVI, a profile of some person who exemplifies the Gospel theme, discussion questions, and prayer.

The profiles in “Who Is My Neighbor?” include Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche communities for the developmentally disabled; Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement; Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, a heroic young Italian who lived to serve the poor and sick and died at age 24; Norma McCorvey, “Jane Roe” of Roe v. Wade; St. John Vianney, named Universal Patron of Priests by Pope Benedict XVI during this Year of the Priest; and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, formerly Edith Stein, a brilliant Jewish convert to Catholicism who died at Auschwitz.

My hope in writing these profiles is always that I can make them “come alive” for the reader, showing how the particular Gospel theme shines out in the joys and in the challenges they faced as followers of Christ. I also try to focus on ways they practiced Christian charity, modeling for us the call to serve our neighbor. Very short versions of the stories about Vanier and McCorvey were previously printed in “Deepening Our Life in Christ II,” a booklet published two years ago in the diocese, but they have been considerably revised and expanded for this book. The other four stories are brand new.

I just returned from giving a half-day Saturday workshop on the Faith Alive program in Missouri, sponsored by the Social Concerns Offices of the two Kansas City dioceses – Kansas City, Mo., and Kansas City, Kan. It was a privilege to share the vision of Faith Alive with representatives of close to 60 parishes, and the response was quite encouraging.

The Faith Alive books are being used increasingly in parishes around the country, but there is no question that the greatest response has been here in the Diocese of La Crosse, with nearly 5,000 of the resources distributed over the last two years.

Bulletin inserts/flyers for recruiting Faith Alive groups will be made available to the parishes of the Diocese of La Crosse soon. To keep pace with expenses, the cost of “Who Is My Neighbor?” will be \$4.50 in the diocese, plus 50 cents per book for those that need it to be mailed (the price outside the diocese will be \$9.95). To view samples from the new book, go to www.dioceseoflacrosc.com and click on Faith Alive. To order copies of “Who Is My Neighbor?” or any of the other books: “As I Have Loved You” and “The Greatest of These is Love,” please contact the diocesan Office of Ministries and Social Concerns at e-mail hhanson@dioceseoflacrosc.com or 608-791-2667.

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