

Mission Made Possible
(Second Edition)

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MISSION OF THE **REDEEMER**
MINISTRIES



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Chapter 4

Part A

Maxims and Key Concepts for Evangelizers

Let's get something straight: We are literally "made for mission." God has equipped us perfectly with everything we need to play the unique part that He has written for us. Jesus tells us to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). Surely the Father would only send His beloved sons and daughters out to achieve this noble task if He were supremely confident that it was entirely possible for us.

Working on the premise that *there is no evangelization as such; there are only evangelizers*, much of preparing to evangelize is about developing ourselves. We must understand the power invested in us as followers of Jesus to influence and affect others in coming to know Him.

When we begin, evangelizing can be uncomfortable. It means moving beyond your comfort zone, being vigilant for an opportunity, getting over yourself, and having a go when fear suggests not. To grow means to embrace change and be willing to take a risk. But, with time, prayer, and complete trust in God's promises, it gets easier. You learn to pray more deeply and to give each day up to accepting and acting upon what the Holy Spirit puts before you.

Trust involves making ourselves vulnerable, which means it is a risk. Such risk can trigger the fear mechanism. But with prayer and grace, we can let go of our fears. Think of it this way: If we truly believe in God's infinite and tender love for us and in the immensity of His power, revealed in the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and all the extraordinary and wonderfully mysterious truths of our faith, if we are convicted that God Himself died on the Cross to free us from the dominion of sin so that we may have eternal union with Him, and if we believe in true miracles and the intervention of angels and the testimony of countless saints, *why would we not trust in God?* Can He not help us with our fear? Is He not bigger than the obstacles we face?

God has equipped us; we just don't realize this, and so we are afraid. Fear abates when we learn to *trust* in His love and the immensity of His plans and power. We have to unlearn all of our accumulated fears and inhibitions that get in the way and prevent the

creativity of the Holy Spirit working through us. Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict) said, “To evangelize is to learn the art of living” (Address given to Jubilee of Catechists VC 2000). Learn the art of living.

Ever since I (Michele) can remember, I have loved gymnastics. My teenage hero was the Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci. I thought she was so talented, elegant, and clever; I wanted to be like her. My own efforts weren't too bad. I won a few local competitions. I had the bug for it. During lunch, I practiced at school where there were crash mats and equipment. After school, I would practice in a nearby parking lot. The ground was hard, and I still have some scars from the number of times I fell as I attempted more and more complicated moves, but I would take my little cassette player and become Nadia with the parking lot as my Olympic Stadium.

As I watched Nadia win three gold medals at the 1976 Olympic Games, my passion grew, and practice and determination increased. I marvelled that although I would never be in her league, my body was capable of extraordinary things. I could turn a somersault from standing, or run and turn tumble after tumble only stopping because I was out of space. I would dance, twirl, swoop and bend into improbable shapes and finish with a jut of my hip and a flick of my head at the end just like Nadia before triumphantly taking my bow to the imagined deafening applause. I constantly wondered what else I might be capable of, and I dreamed and schemed my next astonishing performance.

My highest accolade in gymnastics was a county gold medal. But more importantly, I realize that through my love of gymnastics, God was teaching me valuable life lessons which were to prepare me as His disciple:

- Dream big – You are capable of more than you ever thought possible. You are incredibly made. Marvel at what you have yet to uncover.
- Be disciplined – To learn anything well, you have to practice. It is uncomfortable until the mind and body gain a new harmony. It is essential to learn what doesn't work as well, so every attempt is a positive one, even if it leaves a scar!
- Recognize that desire overcomes fear – Feed your desire, embrace it, pray with it, let your imagination run wild with it. Let Jesus be your passion, aspire to be like Him, and believe it's possible.
- Take risks– Nothing incredible happens without it. We are naturally afraid of the unknown and failure, but what if we changed fear into anticipation? What if failure is a stepping stone to success? What if the adrenaline that we interpret as fear is actually excitement? Push the boundaries of your comfort zone, and you

will see that it is there that the adventure begins, and the fruit is found. Pray for the unknown, unexpected, and uncomfortable. Surrender all to Jesus in trust, and you will come to know that “with God anything is possible” (cf. Matt. 19:26).

As we evangelize and experience the powerful effect of the Holy Spirit, we move to a new dimension of freedom and possibility. On a human level, we grow in confidence, and the desire to share the life-giving Good News burns within us. Spiritually, as grace is received, we seek a greater understanding of the Cross and Resurrection as the very foundations of our lives. We hunger to uncover the truth contained in Scripture, our prayer lives deepen, and Jesus’ presence in the Blessed Sacrament—the source and summit of our Catholic faith—takes on an increasingly vital profundity. With each experience of proclamation, our perceived boundaries expand until we realize that if we are willing to let Him, God will use us more powerfully than we ever thought possible. As we grow in our discipleship, we see how catastrophic and debilitating sin is (in us and others), and we urgently seek to foster the reconciliation of all souls with their Creator.

In summary, by virtue of our baptism and the power of God's Spirit, *we have all we need*. We must practice, learn, and create habits that will, with His grace, effect a transformation in our lives, those around us, and the lives of those we encounter.

In light of this, the following maxims and guiding principles will help you develop the confidence and ability to evangelize using the “Genesis Method.” The Genesis Method is a simple and effective way by which anyone can share their Catholic faith. These maxims and guiding principles will help you develop the internal attitude that you need to push through and overcome many of your fears and inhibitions, while also helping you to attain a more Christ-centred spirituality that is always on the lookout for the good of souls. Thus these maxims and guiding principles bring about growth within the person that becomes the driving force behind the integration and application of the Genesis Method. This is like driving a car: the internalized skill, confidence, and ability of the driver (maxims and guiding principles), allow the car (Genesis Method) to be driven at its full potential (instrument in the conversion of souls).

Maxim: Passionate Prayer – Explained

- Prayer is an essential activity for every Christian.
- Our missionary efforts must be surrounded by prayer – before, during, and after.
- Prayer bears fruit and changes lives.

As Catholic Christians, prayer should be a part of our daily life that is as natural to us as eating and sleeping. Sometimes we wonder if we are praying properly. At the start, whether it be silent, spoken or in song, and whether it be in praise, thanksgiving, or supplication, what matters most is that we pray. Lifting our hearts and minds to God is what matters. St. Paul tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:16). If we could only see how effective our prayers were, we would indeed never stop.

Prayer is not just about what we say to God; it is even more about what He says to and does in us. It is in and through prayer that we allow Jesus to capture our hearts. He takes us on a journey through ourselves and shows us the authentic person He created us to be. With consistent prayer, He illuminates our blind spots and sinfulness to set us right and help us to enjoy the fullness of life. Through prayer, we are encouraged, edified, and filled with a burning zeal to share Jesus' mission.

Maxim: Passionate Prayer – Encounter

During some outreach, I was on the street inviting passers-by into the church to light a candle. As usual, the reaction was mixed. Many people were delighted and agreed, many more were polite but refused, and a few would just grunt and pass by (but no one was ever hostile or rude!). It wasn't hard to get people to light a candle.

The measure of success our ministry tended to use was to count how many candles were lit. My heart, however, had never been satisfied with that. I wanted to seek those who were suffering, who needed to know that they were not alone, for whom the message of eternal life would salve their pain and lead them to Jesus. Yes, I believed that the ambiance of a candlelit Church, the beautiful music, and Jesus exposed in the Blessed Sacrament were sufficient to effect a transformation in someone's life. Still I knew that life-giving words sharing the truth of Jesus' passion should, if possible, be offered along with all of these. Thus it had become my usual practice to ask each person for whom they were lighting the candle and what the story was. That small additional effort had opened up many moving and profound encounters.

On this evening, nothing had transpired, so I offered a prayer: "Lord," I said, "I know people are walking around in this city with hearts aching in pain. People who do not know You or Your love. I am here, ready, now, to do my part to bring You into their lives, to clear their confusion and lead them to You. Lord, bring them to me and give me what I need." As I finished, I noticed a young man walking a few feet away. I called out, "Sir, would you like to come into the Church and light a candle for a loved one?"

He stopped and looked at me. “I’m in a hurry. I’m headed for the shop to buy my mother some milk and flowers before I go to visit her. She has just been diagnosed with cancer.” He then walked off.

As he did, I prayed to the Holy Spirit. I was stunned that my prayer had been immediately—but only half—answered. Somehow I knew that there would be more. I asked the Holy Spirit to guide me. Within a short time, I saw him returning with the milk and flowers in hand. I knew I needed to approach him again.

“Sir,” I said, “I am so sorry to hear about your mother. I have been thinking about it since you passed by.”

He seemed content to talk and told me that it was a return of cancer from some years ago and that his mother was coping well with the news, but that he was “finding it more difficult.” I missed this first important clue and instead asked if his mother had faith. He said yes, and he told me how she raised him as a Christian. While the conversation was positive, I had the sense that there was something more. I was going to offer to pray with him to help to ease his anxiety, but I felt I should hold back, and instead I said, “Perhaps to take just a moment to light a candle for your mum will be a good thing?”

“Look,” he responded, “I’ll never set foot inside a church again. When I was twenty-three, my wife and baby son were killed in a car accident. I survived. My mother has cancer for the second time. She is putting a brave face on it, she still believes! I can’t. I am angry!”

So there I was. God had delivered to me an immediate and direct answer to the prayer I offered not fifteen minutes earlier. Now, what was I to do? How could my inadequate platitudes help this suffering soul? I prayed silently. It was apparent to me that belief was not the issue; it was his understandable anger and confusion that was standing in the way of the peace he needed. I felt great compassion for his grief, and after I said as much, I added as gently as possible, “I can understand why you would question the presence of God or even reject him outright. Your heart is torn, and your soul has borne a terrible wound. But this is exactly when God grieves for you and longs for you to turn to Him. God came and suffered. He, Jesus, knows what it is to suffer for love too. Look at what He did. He will help you and heal you. Ultimately your family is not lost to you. We are not promised that life will be perfect. The opposite is true, but we are promised that we will never be forsaken, that every tear will be wiped away and that death is not the end.”

My friend was pretty emotional now. He simply said, “I know it.”

At that point, I knew he wanted to move on, so I said, “May I go into the church and light a candle for your family?”

He replied, “Thank you. I would like that,” and departed.

This encounter was the fruit of praying constantly.

Somehow, each day, we must take out some specific time for prayer until it becomes an unbreakable habit. Prayer and developing our interior life is essential for discipleship and our ability to evangelize. Within our time of prayer, we should explicitly ask that the Lord would open our eyes to the opportunities to reach out in creative ways and share the Gospel. In handing ourselves over in this way, we offer complete access to the Holy Spirit so that He may use us to breathe life into others.

Maxim: Dynamic Discipleship - Explained

- The first disciples followed Jesus daily and grew in faith and understanding.
- Living as a disciple changes who we are. Since what we do flows from who we are, our life as a disciple transforms our evangelical work.
- Discipleship is dynamic, not static.

Jesus recruited His followers specifically so that they would witness to Him as they lived according to His teaching. He had the explicit intention of building His Church through their spreading of the Gospel. Had these faithful men done otherwise, we would have neither this transformative message nor the means to eternal salvation.

As disciples today, we have been passed the baton so that we might pass it on to others. Jesus continues His mission through us and provides us, through the same Holy Spirit, with all that we need to do our part.

Evangelizing takes us deeper as we realize that our life must witness to the words we profess. We often hear the spurious quote from St. Francis, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” This is used as an excuse not to speak and to stay in the comfort zone of merely good deeds. St. Francis’ life was dedicated to sharing the Gospel. In an equal measure, he lived and witnessed to an authentic life in Christ while preaching the Gospel at every opportunity. We are called to do the same.

Maxim: Dynamic Discipleship – Encounter

Although I frequently buy a coffee or snack for people living on the street, I know that their spiritual needs, not just their physical needs, must be the priority. As disciples, our work is to light the path to eternal salvation. So I carry prayer cards and rosaries to go with the coffee. I will stay and listen if they want to talk. I will ask if they have prayed that day and offer to pray with them if it seems appropriate. I will encourage them to look to Jesus as the starting point for a transformation that will change them forever. I leave the rest to the Holy Spirit.

Part B

Maxim: Desire – Explained

- Desire is the starting point of every encounter.
- The Holy Spirit fans our desire into flame.
- Prayer and action continue to nourish this desire.
- This desire is fundamentally a hunger and thirst for God and His Kingdom.

Our longing for God was placed within us by Him. It is His call to us; it is the way we experience His beckoning and sending. God’s call challenges and encourages us to uncover our deepest identity as His creatures and to uncover our unique gifts, so that we may use them for His glory.

Our desire, like a small flame, needs to be fed. We do this through the Sacraments, in particular the Eucharist and Confession. The flame is also fuelled through daily prayer (particularly before the Blessed Sacrament), studying Scripture, and reading the lives of the Saints. While serving in our parishes as witnesses to Jesus through words and action, the Holy Spirit fills us with ever-increasing zeal.

Shortly after the crucifixion and unsure about claims regarding the empty tomb, several of the disciples were walking toward Emmaus when they had an exceptional encounter with Christ as He joined them in their journey and began to open the Scriptures to them. Afterward they said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us?” (Luke 24:32). *That is desire.* Desire seeks and drives, impels and compels. It is the fullness of life to seek and proclaim Him.

In evangelizing, we often mistake the adrenaline of desire for fear, and so we hold back when we should go forth, particularly when the kingdom of God is so very near.

Evangelizing is perhaps the ultimate “test” of our commitment as disciples (since, fortunately, we are unlikely to be tested as martyrs!), as it calls us to put our love for Him above all else. Think of the exhortation to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind,” and the command, “Thou shalt have no other God but me” (Exodus 20:3-5).

How often have I held back when I should have spoken, for fear of risking a relationship, or worse, my own ego? Who did I love more? Who was I serving? Was I selfless and loving by leaving someone with an erroneous notion of Jesus? Although my heart knows Him, was I too cowardly to proclaim Him? Have I made myself out to be more important than Him? Have I put my own needs first for fear of looking foolish? While being respectful and discerning, are there times when I am guilty of false humility that convinces me I am sparing someone else's feelings or respecting their beliefs by holding back on the truth? In answering these questions, we should allow desire to triumph.

Maxim: Desire – Encounter I

I remember being told of a lady who had not been seen at church for many months. She burst into tears of gratitude when a fellow parishioner ran into her on the street and, after some general chatting, politely and lovingly asked her why she had not been to Mass for so long. Her reply was, “Thank you so much for asking me. I have bumped into so many people I used to know from the church, but not one of them has asked why I don't come anymore. I thought nobody cared.”

Our love should be outwardly seeking, generous, and expecting nothing in return. But we are tempted instead to turn inward and be self-serving. I have learned that the flames of desire seek not only to fill us with zeal and commitment, but also to purify our intentions. Each time we hold back, when we know full well we should have spoken, the Lord will give us an almost identical opportunity to try again.

I have many examples of this, but perhaps this one is the most astonishing...

Maxim: Desire – Encounter II

Travelling with a group of young people to a Catholic youth rally some 400KM from home, we made a pit-stop at McDonald's. Father Jon (one of the co-authors of this book) struck up a long conversation with a woman carrying a young baby. Afterward, I

asked him, “Did you offer a blessing and speak to her about baptism?”

“No,” he replied. “I didn't think of it.”

We discussed the conversation and agreed it was an opportunity missed.

On the return journey, five days later, we made another stop. This time we carried our food back and ate on the bus. We finished eating, and since it was his turn to drive, Father Jon asked me to help him reverse the mini-bus out of the parking space.

As I climbed down, I noticed the car next to us with the door open and a woman inside cradling a very new baby. Aha! “Thank you, Lord,” I silently whispered. I recognized that the Lord had brought another woman and child to us and that this opportunity was not to be missed.

I admired this magnificent new creation and struck up a conversation with the lady, who I learned was the grandmother. It felt natural to ask if the child had yet been baptized. She said the child had not.

I then explained that we were travelling Christians and that we had a priest on board. Although he could not baptize the child on the spot, he could give the family a blessing.

At that point, other family members appeared at the side of the vehicle, and I hastily ran around to get Fr. Jon. We decided that this would be a great witness to the young people, so we ushered them off the mini-bus and gathered them in a semi-circle around the three generations of family.

Imagine the scene: A busy parking lot on a national holiday. A group of around 20 people, heads bowed and hands clasped in prayer; a proud family; and a priest leading the prayer and blessing an infant.

The bus was buzzing. We thanked God for this second opportunity and prayed that the scene had touched many onlookers, and that all of us involved, the family and our dusty young pilgrims, would tell others of this extraordinary, inspired encounter.

Maxim: Conviction and Authenticity – Explained

- We must know who Jesus is and who we are in Him.
- In every encounter, we must seek to be “real.”

You cannot give what you do not have. This simple truth applies as much to material possessions as it does to the Catholic faith. To be a Catholic Christian is to be a part of the Church founded by Christ Himself. Within the Church, we are on a lifelong pilgrimage to understand more fully the truth of God. Through the sacraments He nourishes us so that, with full conviction, we can pass on to others what we have received.

The more we know God, the more we can share Him. But our imperfect knowledge of Him (or of Scripture, or theology, or Church history, etc.) need never hold us back. People are open to engaging with a humble and genuine person no matter how much they know. If we are insecure about our knowledge or capacities and these cause a reluctance to evangelize, we have to dig deep within ourselves and stand with the conviction that our belief in the person of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, as objective truth, divinely revealed through the Catholic Church, is the crucial starting point. It is our ever growing communion with Him which will strengthen our conviction and and deepen our authenticity.

Maxim: Conviction and Authenticity - Encounter

Christmas is an excellent time for evangelizing. Opportunities abound for us to remark on a Christmas carol playing in a store or to ask a colleague whether they have completed their shopping and muse with them over the real meaning of the season. It is also a unique opportunity for outreach.

We have a church in the city centre with a purpose-built outdoor housing for our nativity scene. During Advent, we take to the streets with mince pies and oranges to entice people to stop and have a look at the crib. It is always very popular. Often families with children will stay and engage in easy conversation.

One Saturday in December I brought a group of first-timers to experience street evangelizing. They were nervous but excited. After praying together, we set forth; their only instructions were to be friendly, to pray silently, and to listen more than to speak.

One particular lady, happy to admire the crib, told the little group that she was a Catholic who drifted away from the church. “I still believe,” she told us. “My parents brought me up in the faith, and I went to church faithfully until a few years ago, but then everything changed.”

Without prompting, she continued, “My niece died, and I just lost the plot. I’ve been to church since for weddings and funerals, but I just feel like a hypocrite. I sit there and can’t make any sense of it. I do miss it, though. I still pray. I pray to creation because I know there is ‘something,’ and I can see the beauty in creation. But as I am praying, I know something is not right, and I wonder if I am really praying to God.”

This lady had given us a lot of information. I silently prayed that I would be able to help her. The “newbies” were listening carefully; when she stopped speaking, one suggested that she pop into the church. She said that she must move on because she was on the way to meet her daughter. The well-meaning recruit said, “It will only take a moment.”

I felt a sense of urgency as the Holy Spirit prompted me to act fast. I did not want her to leave this way. She was clearly troubled and confused, but so very close to the truth. I moved to her side, and with my hand lightly on her arm, I said, “I have listened to you, and I feel it is very important that I speak with you. Please, just a few moments. Will you step over here with me?”

She did not hesitate, so I knew she wanted to talk. I first asked her about her niece. She explained the devastating loss to her immediate and extended family. Soon after, she also lost her best friend, who was in her thirties. She said she could make no sense of it. She talked of a God who would see people suffer and do nothing about it. Recently she’d looked into Buddhism and Jehovah's Witness. She said none of them seemed right and talked again about praying to the universe and doing her “own thing.”

I saw a woman desperately seeking truth. I sensed her anxiety as she stood lost in a fog of confusion. “The kingdom of God is so near” played over in my mind. My time was short, and so I said in effect, “I can see how distressed you are by all this. It goes very deep. It’s your soul that’s restless for the truth, and it won’t be at rest until it finds home. You have looked at all kinds of things, but none of them will satisfy. There is one name you have not mentioned: Jesus.” I pointed to the crib. “Jesus is who you seek; it is Jesus who is God Himself. Jesus, the Creator of the universe that you are praying to, is the truth of your very existence. Jesus is God incarnate, who came to show that even death is not the end. Only Jesus claimed to be God, and only Jesus rose from the dead. I can't tell you why stuff happens. I know we aren't promised life will be easy. But God tells us that He will wipe away every tear and that if we turn to Him we will know peace.”

At that point her phone rang. It was her daughter, and she needed to go. As a parting shot, she told me that earlier in the day, her daughter (who she said was not religious at all) had surprised her by asking if they could attend Midnight Mass together. I replied,

“Go for it. I think we were meant to have this conversation; it’s all stacking up. I will pray for you tonight.” She looked freer as she rushed off.

Maxim: Drop your preconceived ideas – Explained

- In every situation, we must be open and positive
- Negative and predetermined mindsets block the action of the Holy Spirit

How often do we find ourselves thinking of reasons why we can’t do something or why some initiative won’t work? We decide no one will be interested, or believe that we will be rejected. We think, “They don't look the type,” “They won't listen,” or, “It's been done before.” We fret about facing awkward questions if we speak about the faith or worry about it raining if we want to have encounters on the street! What does this say about us? Why are we terrified? Evangelizing challenges us to look deeply at our fears and motives (and perhaps our excuses.)

One windy and wet February day, Fr. Jon was headed to the local university to work his weekly chaplaincy slot. As he drove, that slimy spirit of negativity snuck inside his head, and he ruminated negatively. “What am I doing, what's the point of this? Young people won't want to speak to a boring old bald vicar like me. I'm old enough to be their grandad! It's a waste of time. I might as well turn the car around and go home.”

As he stewed, another thought shot through his mind: “*Drop your preconceived ideas!*” It was a moment of revelation that led him to consider the critical difference between fact and fear. The inspiration renewed his commitment to the university chaplaincy and the work he was called to do.

We have to dig deep since our concerns about what may (or may not) happen can dictate whether something gets off the ground at all. It can mean the difference between thirsty souls hearing the Gospel or being left as “dry bones.” That afternoon at the university, Fr. Jon was astonished at how liberating this maxim proved to be as he roamed the campus and had two great evangelical conversations.

Maxim: Drop your preconceived ideas - Encounter

I remember a recent Christmas in a parish in Cornwall. The church was in the middle of a residential area, so the pastor asked his evangelization team to visit each house with an invitation to an afternoon of mince pies and mulled wine. Some on the group said, “No

one is interested and so no one will come.” Others believed that “if they want to come to church, they will come without our going out.” Still others saw it as a waste of time and potential embarrassment. The priest, however, asked them to pray and do it anyway. The first surprise was that the people they spoke to behind the doors were friendly. The team, however, remained skeptical about anyone coming.

On the appointed day, the team decorated the hall, baked cakes and mince pies, and prayed. Many were still convinced no one would turn up. Soon the locals started to trickle in. Before long, more than 25 people arrived. They all lived within 5 minutes of the church, but few had even been in it. One person said she had never thought about it until she got the invitation; another said she thought you had to be a member. The team took people around the church answering questions and explaining the art and symbols. While most of the children knew each other, the adults, despite being neighbours, had never really spoken. That day relationships were forged both inside and outside the parish.

St. Joan of Arc is credited with the words, “Act, and God will act.” Who are we to decide what God can do?

Note: These are the first half of the maxims of the Genesis Method. In Chapter 5 we will explore the second half of them.