



Martin Lueders/CNS

"The connection between faith and life is always in danger of coming apart," observes H. Richard McCord Jr. "To keep it together means fixing our eyes on the reign of God and letting it serve as our model — our lens — for making choices and actions."

A 'blueprint' for lay evangelization

H. Richard McCord Jr./CNS

For the last few months our family has dealt with a family crisis involving our son and a serious auto accident. Many people have reached out to us. All have offered something helpful, but some assistance has made more of a difference. Why?

All other things being equal, we have been helped more by those who drew from a wellspring of faith to establish a relationship that strengthened our faith. They made a connection between faith and life.

Our friends were not simply good neighbors. They were good Christians who gave witness by being good neighbors.

It has been so from Christianity's beginning. The pagans noticed how "these Christians love one another." It wasn't that pagans themselves weren't capable of loving, but that the followers of Christ were inspired to imitate their Master through love and sacrifice, and to witness to his proclamation that the kingdom — the reign — of God is at hand.

Nevertheless, the connection between faith and life is always in danger of coming apart. Keeping it together means fixing our eyes on the reign of God, which becomes our model for living.

Jesus' preaching, parables and miracles form a blueprint against which we can measure whether and to what extent our decisions, choices and actions bring our world clos-

IN A NUTSHELL

The last words of the Mass are, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." As we strive to bring the Gospel to our everyday world, we can ask ourselves, "Do my choices favor life, the least and the lost?"

er to the kingdom or push it in the opposite direction.

I suggest three standards — drawn from Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom — we can use to shape and evaluate our decisions and actions. They answer one question: Do I consistently make choices that favor life, the least and the lost? Jesus made a clear option for these throughout his ministry.

1. Obviously, opposition to terminating life before birth or natural death is essential to living the Gospel. But there also are less-obvious ways of acting in favor of life, such as reducing one's patterns of consumption and waste, caring for the environment, raising foster children, or opposing the sale and spread of firearms.

2. Making an option for the least among us — those who lack power and status, and can barely lay claim to any resources — requires a deliberate choice, one that is neither easy nor popular.

The least among us are the young and the old, the poor, refugees and

immigrants, the disabled and so on. They might be socially invisible, but they are not strangers to our families or communities! They are with us, and the Gospel challenges us not only to include them but to show a certain preference toward them.

In today's world this could mean "adopting" an older person into our family, sponsoring a refugee family or mentoring a person whose family has failed him. We can also show this option through our positions on immigration issues, a living wage and tax policies that favor one income group over another.

3. The lost are those who need to be brought back to the community and reconciled. Think of Jesus' story about the shepherd who leaves his flock to search for one lost sheep.

Today's lost ones can be those who have fallen into addictions, left marriages and families, or those whom society shuns because of their background, lifestyle or behavior. It is easier to forget these "lost souls" or to blame them for their condition than to try and bring them back.

It often is said that the laity are to bring the Gospel to everyday life. But it might be more accurate to say our task is to draw the Gospel message out of the world and express it by how we live and act in family, workplace and community.

McCord is director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth.

FaithAlive!

This month's adult-education package examines the laity's role in bringing the Gospel to the everyday world. How can this be done? How do each person's gifts contribute to the work of evangelization?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"If believers do not bring the Gospel into their own situations, nobody else can," Irish Bishop Donal Murray observed in a 2003 speech.

He noted that Christians who are extremely well-informed about areas such as medicine, environmental issues or the tax system sometimes "ask why priests and bishops do not speak about the issues that arise in these areas, without any apparent awareness that they might very usefully say something themselves," Bishop Murray commented.

All church members must "bring their gifts to bear on the profound human questions that arise from living in our kind of world," Bishop Murray said.

FAITH IN THE MARKETPLACE

In April, Faith Alive! asked readers around the country if and how lay people really can bring faith to bear in the world.

Selected reader responses:

"Yes. ...They can best do this by modeling Christian values, but more importantly by speaking out when the situation calls for it." — Chris Armstrong, Pueblo, Colo.

"I'm a financial planner. I stay abreast of the marketplace, and I put my clients' interests first." — Virginia DiDonato, Worcester, Mass.

"Yes — by being more Christ-like." — Barb Stenberg, Fargo, N.D.

"Our No. 1 priority is to bring Christ into all different environments. Personally, I feel that I need to stay close to Christ if I am to bring him to others." — Agustin Ramirez, Kansas City, Kan.

Lend us your voice:

An upcoming edition asks: Is your attitude toward Muslims different today than it once was? How, and why?

If you would like to respond for possible publication, please write: Faith Alive! 3211 Fourth St. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100.