

APOSTOLIC ACTION

Recommended time: 30 minutes

I. Orientation

The Apostolic Action talk completes the tripod of piety, study and apostolic action. Effective apostolic action flows naturally from a life of grace (piety) and its foundation is the continuous program of study of the Christian ideal. Renewal of the heart and mind is complete when participants realize that a Christian, strengthened by God's love, must pour out God's love to others. Apostolic action is the giving of self to another for the purpose of sharing Christ with others. It is not simply doing Christian things. Being an authentic, responsible Christian leads a person to apostolic action.

This talk emphasizes that apostolic action is a natural and logical response to God's love. It is a part of the process of living out our Christianity and fulfills the call from God in our Baptism. Being Christian involves a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with people. As a response to God's love, we love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. This talk presents the practice of apostolic action—the evangelizing testimony of our lives. The goal is to share Christ with the world.

Jesus entrusted the task of finishing His work to His followers. Since the Church is the body of Christ, it exists to bring all people to Jesus' saving grace. When each part of the Church works as it should, the whole body grows and reaches out to the world with love. (Ephesians 4:16) Without our personal apostolic action, the whole world will not be brought to Christ. Our task is to discover the will of God for our lives and follow that call. Everything we do is a response to God's unconditional love for us.

The principle points of the Apostolic Action talk are:

- Apostolic action naturally follows piety and study.
- Apostolic action is anything we do with the sole purpose of leading others to a relationship with Christ.
- Apostolic action is non-manipulative.
- Apostolic action's purpose is to infuse Christ's ideal into the world.
- Friendship is the key to sharing Christ with others.

II. General Comments

The Apostolic Action talk brings out the essence of the Via de Cristo. It describes the importance of apostolic action and its place in the life of a Christian leader. The talk shows the relationship of apostolic action to the life in grace and begins to describe an approach to action. As the participants begin to understand what apostolic action is, they should desire to live a life of grace, grow in their relationship with God and share Christ with others.

The first day of the weekend laid the foundation for everything that is done in the second day. It described Jesus' offer of new life with God and the response of a Christian to that offer. It included an emphasis on the importance of living the life in grace. The Ideal talk presented participants with a soul-searching challenge to know their ideal in life. The Layperson as the Church in the World talk made clear that because each layperson is a member of the Church, s/he has an apostolic mission. Each Church member must work to share Christ with the world. In the Piety talk, the speaker shared a living example of someone directing his/her whole life to God.

The second day of the weekend begins to explain to participants how they can effectively build upon the foundation presented on the first day. The whole second day

presents a picture of what Christian leaders do.

Apostolic action is primarily concerned with personal contact. Making friends with others allows us to introduce them to Christ. As a result of this talk, participants should want to work personally with others to draw them to Christ. By focusing on personal contact, the Apostolic Action talk prepares the participant for what is presented the rest of the weekend.

Apostolic action is not doing good deeds. Being a good parent, worker, or employer is not in itself apostolic action. Non-Christians do the same things. Rather, apostolic action comes from our response to God's love, moving us to renew the world for Christ. For instance, being a good neighbor has an important role in apostolic action, but it is not automatically apostolic action. Apostolic action involves an effort to build the Kingdom of God, to create an atmosphere in which people can grow in God's love and to renew the world in Christ. It is the motivation that makes an action apostolic.

The Via de Cristo weekend describes an effective approach for Christian renewal of the world. The core, or heart, of changing environments is drawing people to Christ. The strategy of the weekend is described on the third day, especially in the talks, The Study and Evangelization of the Environment and Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments. The Christian's fundamental motivational force should be the desire to bring others to Christ, so that all people are able to love and be loved in return. The more Christ lives within the participants, the more they will naturally desire to be used by the Holy Spirit to lead others into a relationship with Christ and to renew their environments.

The Apostolic Action talk describes the mature Christian in his/her relationships with others. The speaker does not cover everything about apostolic action; rather, s/he describes an approach to Apostolic Action. It shows how the participants can begin to approach their friends with Christ-like love to bring them to Jesus. The Apostolic Action talk is incomplete without The Study and Evangelization of the Environment and Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments talks.

The Apostolic Action and Leaders talks are transition talks. The Apostolic Action talk starts participants thinking about what Christ would have them do in the world. The Leaders talk makes them think about it more. This talk usually causes participants to begin to change their attitudes. They learn a new way of sharing Christ with others and are given an idea of what it is like. Through this process, the participants develop a desire to strengthen their personal relationship with Christ. Apostolic action is an overflow of that relationship as each participant sees his/her life in Christ as a personal testimony to others. This requires a strong and growing relationship with Jesus. An apostolic Christian is a living example of how that relationship shapes daily life.

The Apostolic Action talk is a talk about love. Christians engage in apostolic action because they know God loves them, and they want to share that treasure. Apostolic action is loving friendship that draws others to Christ. "Make a friend, be a friend, bring your friend to Christ."

The Apostolic Action talk sets the stage for the rest of the talks. Each succeeding talk shows how the concepts presented in the Apostolic Action talk are applied in the world. This talk presents the key to true apostolic action – a Christian sharing the redemptive love of Christ with each person in his/her life.

The opening section summarizes the Piety and Study talks and places the call for personal renewal before the participants again. The section is summed up by presenting God's words to Cain: "Where is your brother?" The remainder of the talk discusses what the Christian's attitude toward others should be.

Section II defines apostolic action.

Section III describes some false concepts of Christian action.

Section IV demonstrates that authentic Christian action is empowered by God's love and brings that love into the world. The person's attitude and motivation make an action effective apostolic action. As an extension of the Ideal talk, Apostolic Action shows that self-giving is a measure of a person's human and spiritual development. It is a summary of all the previous talks on the Christian's approach to life.

Section V defines the qualities of apostolic action.

Section VI is the most important section. It introduces the method of apostolic action as personal contact with friends. Make a friend, be a friend, bring your friend to Christ.

The talk ends by reflecting back to God's question to Cain from Section I.

III. Atmosphere

The Apostolic Action talk usually follows lunch on Saturday. The participants have just heard the clergy talk called "Means of Grace: Word and Sacrament" or "A Day in the Life." Combined with lunch, this may cause the participants to be emotionally drained and sleepy. The speaker should be aware of his/her weekend schedule.

Most participants will have accepted the call from Christ by this time. The events of the morning have led most to commit themselves to Christ and they are eager to learn more of the "how." Thus, the Apostolic Action talk continues the process started by the Study talk. The participant is told how a Christian is to act and receives concrete suggestions on how apostolic action is to be a part of his/her everyday life.

IV. Suggestions for Preparing the Talk

The person chosen to give this talk should be someone who lives the life s/he will be explaining. The talk is not intended to be the inspiring talk of the day. It is clear and explanatory rather than enthusiastic. It is not to be a ringing call to action but should explain the place of apostolic action in the life of a Christian as a response to the life in grace. It presents an approach to apostolic action. It should have the tone of embarking upon an adventure. The principle way of convincing and motivating the participants is presenting a clear picture of apostolic action and the motivating truths that propel it.

Christians are trying to do an extra-ordinary thing – share Christ with the world. The speaker explains the ideas and the method. S/he tells stories of how God works and how the world is to be brought to Christ. For many of the participants, this will be a new dimension of Christianity.

The talk should contain real life examples of apostolic action. These examples should fit into the talk to clarify the points and are instructional in nature. (Examples in the Leaders and Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments talks are to be more inspirational.) Apostolic Action examples show the ideas as practical reality. The remaining talks continue to present the reality of the concepts through their witnesses. This talk should not try to do too much, although the temptation is great. The speaker must exercise restraint. His/her main job is to explain the place of apostolic action in the life of the Christian leader and to present a method of apostolic action.

The speaker may encounter resistance to this talk. Participants may equate any thought of evangelism with street-corner preaching or going door to door. Despite all the times they've heard Jesus' call to "Go and make disciples of all nations" in Matthew 28:18-20, many participants will come to the weekend with the misconception that evangelism is only done by pastors, under religious auspices, or by special groups organized to work in the church. Most examples of apostolic action should be used in section VI of the talk: Method of Apostolic Action. Examples of doing Christian works (i.e., teaching Sunday school, serving on the church council, etc.) should be avoided in favor of personal contact examples.

The main way the speaker overcomes this resistance is by clearly explaining the place of loving apostolic action in the life of the Christian. A clear, firm, joyful presentation of the ideas overcomes or greatly reduces most of the obstacles. The atmosphere of the weekend and the remainder of the talks will take care of what remains. It is important that the ideas come across with enthusiasm, but clarity is of utmost importance to set the stage for the following talks.

Excellent background reading for this talk is Eric Fromm's *The Art of Loving* (Harper & Row Publishers)

APOSTOLIC ACTION OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We heard in the Ideal talk that harmony and balance in the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual areas of life mark human maturity.
- B. Christian maturity is marked by harmony and balance in our piety, study and apostolic action. Apostolic Action is the third leg of the Via de Cristo tripod.
 1. Piety -- directing our whole life to God. Our relationship with God motivates our action. We want others to know Him too.
 2. Study -- learning and growing in faith and in the ability to discern God's will for our life. Our action is built on a solid foundation of knowledge and discernment.
 3. Apostolic Action -- reaching out to others to share the gift of God's love and grace. We can not be satisfied with living in grace for its own sake. We have a mission to share Him with others. (Luke 10:1)
- C. Each person is called to a personal conversion, a relationship with God that produces a fundamental change in the direction of his/her life. Christianity is more than:
 1. An individual relationship with God (Piety).
 2. A series of truths to be learned (Study).
 3. A program to better mankind's place in the world.
 4. A program to "preach" the Gospel.
- D. Christianity is the whole of life.
 1. Accepting God's love radically changes a person's life and affects every community to which that person belongs.
 2. All relationships with others are summed up in God's words to Cain: "Where is your brother? What have you done to your brother?" (Genesis 4:9)

II. WHAT IS APOSTOLIC ACTION?

- A. Apostolic Action is anything we do with the sole purpose of influencing others to develop a relationship with Christ.
- B. It is more than:
 - 1. Human actions motivated by friendship, brotherhood, and neighborliness.
 - 2. Christian actions motivated by Jesus' love within the person.
- C. Apostolic action is motivated by the desire to share Christ with the person in order that s/he desires a relationship with Jesus Christ. It reflects Christ living in us.
- D. Apostolic action is tied into God's plan of salvation. (Use Moses or Abraham as an example.)

III. FALSE CONCEPTS OF APOSTOLIC ACTION

Apostolic Action is not:

- A. Participation in church or civic organizations.
- B. Normal civilized good behavior.
- C. Practiced only when moved by the spirit.
- D. A desire to be in the spotlight.
- E. An option. It is an essential of Christian life.
Apostolic action is not an option.

IV. AUTHENTIC APOSTOLIC ACTION

- A. An apostolic Christian is empowered by God's love. His/her action is rooted in love of God and love of neighbor.
 - 1. What is Love? – God's love is the motivating power. (I John 4:10- 12,19) We are to be "living Christs" to those around us.
 - 2. We are being called to a change of heart. This will create a fundamental change in the direction of our lives and in all our relationships.
 - 3. Love is more than:
 - a. Showing affection.
 - b. An emotional expression.
 - c. Giving of things.
 - d. Manipulation of others, even in the guise of helping them.
 - 4. Love is treating others as Jesus treats me:
 - a. Jesus treats me as a person, a unique individual.
 - b. Jesus gives Himself to me despite my limitations.
 - c. Jesus gives Himself to me, as I know myself to be, all that I am.
 - d. Jesus gives Himself faithfully, passionately, constantly, and completely.

The total giving of oneself to another as a response to God's love is an indication of a person's human and spiritual development.

- B. Apostolic action is bringing God's love to the world.

God's love compels us to share it with others and to make it real to those we touch. We cannot be satisfied with living in God's love; we must be witnesses so that others may also live in that love.

 - 1. Every apostolic action flows from two conditions:
 - a. My encounter with Christ -- joyfully experiencing Jesus' love. It is self-giving, not self-centered.
 - b. My encounter with my brothers and sisters:
 - 1) Who are each uniquely different.

- 2) Who are called to develop their own potential.
- 3) Who live their own lifestyle.
2. Apostolic action is a result of being Christian.
 - a. Because we are united to Christ by grace.
 - b. Because we are motivated by love of God and of others.
 - c. Because it is normal, using our unique gifts and talents.
3. Apostolic Action is vital for us and for others.
 - a. We need it. Life grows through action. Where there is no action, there is no life. All vital power, if not used, withers and dies. There is no Christian life without apostolic action. We need to be doing apostolic action in order to grow spiritually.
 - b. Others need it. We must make Christ the example and guide for a profoundly sick world. Just as it takes only a little yeast to make the dough rise, so it only takes a few Christians to revitalize the world if those Christians are living apostolic lives. We are the Church. (John 15:16)
4. The Gospels are clear: Christianity is founded in love. (Matthew 22:37-39, John 14:12, John 13:35)
 - a. Love that lets us give ourselves to others is the ultimate freedom for humanity. (Galatians 5:1)
 - b. Sharing the Christian message transforms people who, in turn, change their environments.
 - c. The sign of true apostolic action is the response of those around him/her. (Matthew 7:16-20)
5. The will of God for each of us is lived out in our individual way of life.
6. True love fulfills the call of the cross. (Matthew 16:24-25)

V. QUALITIES OF APOSTOLIC ACTION

They are all motivated by God's love.

- A. Reasonable and balanced. Using one's head.
- B. Constant. Love is an act of the will.
- C. Enthusiastic. The joy of the Lord fills our hearts.
- D. Supernatural. Comes from our relationship with God. Talk to God about your friend before talking to your friend about God (on your knees).

In discussing these qualities, try to use a short story from your own experience that illustrates them. Point out how this was rooted in God's love and led by His Spirit.

VI. THE METHOD OF APOSTOLIC ACTION

Use personal examples in this section.

- A. Pray first, last and always. The first step is always prayer.
- B. Make a friend. Decide to take the first step. Don't wait for him/her to come to you. Ask for guidance from God. Be available to the person.
- C. Be a friend. Take the time.
 1. Be authentic. Live the truth you are proclaiming.
 2. Take an interest in him/her.
 3. Listen. Be tolerant and understanding.
 4. Be happy and optimistic.
 5. Love supernaturally, loving even the unlovable through the Holy Spirit's

capacity to love.

D. Bring Your Friend to Christ.

1. Christian faith is friendship with Christ. Apostolic action is making friends with others to make them friends of Christ. (I Corinthians 10:31)
2. Make a conscious effort to bring your friend to know Christ better. Share what Jesus means to you and what He has done in your life. (I John 4:16)
3. We share Jesus with our friends:
 - a. For Christ. We are not doing this for ourselves, but for Christ. We do not want them to love us, but to love Him.
 - b. With Christ. Living in God's grace, praying and trusting in His help.
 - c. In Christ. Relying on Christ and His presence, realizing He is working in the other person. (Ephesians 1:7)
 - d. Like Christ. Christ is constantly working to bring others to Himself, making the most of circumstances, acting naturally with tact and kindness and taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves.
4. Our life is the answer to God's question, "What have you done to your brother?" Have you accepted the responsibility Jesus gave you?

Close on a positive note so that the participants feel they have some solid direction in their apostolic lives. Am I sharing my faith with others? Are my actions showing Christ in me? Are others drawing closer to Jesus? (James 2:14)

CLARIFICATION OF THE APOSTOLIC ACTION OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Human maturity.

Apostolic Action flows from two concepts from the Ideal talk: Harmony and balance in the emotional, intellectual and spiritual areas of life mark human maturity, and self-giving is an indication of a person's human maturity.

B. Christian maturity.

Apostolic action is a talk on the giving of self to others -- a specific type and direction of self-giving. The introduction places the call for human relationships as a primary requirement for living the Christian commitment.

Christian maturity is marked by harmony and balance in piety, study and apostolic action. Apostolic action is the third leg of the tripod of a balanced Christian life. A tripod will not stand unless all three are present, functional and equal. We need to balance our piety, study and apostolic action.

1. Piety, directing our whole life to God, adds vibrancy to life that could not be achieved any other way. Our friendship with God cannot be duplicated in any other friendship, since this special friendship relies not on human fickleness but on His constancy and steadfastness. It creates a feeling of security in us that cannot be equaled by any human friendship, since we know we will never lose His love. We experience personal renewal as we grow in piety. It is the motivation for our apostolic action.
2. As we study God's word, we get closer to Him and deepen our understanding of His will for our life. We gain knowledge and discernment of His will. The result is a continuous growth in our relationship with God that changes our

outlook on life. We see how God is working in our world and how He constantly offers us opportunities to know Him better and to share Him with others, even those far from God in their beliefs and lifestyle. This is the solid foundation from which we are able to witness to others.

3. Apostolic action is our faith response, which grows out of our piety and study and is the living out of our baptismal covenant. We cannot keep this good news to ourselves, but want to share it with others. Apostolic action becomes a method of growth that concentrates on our relationships with other people. Apostolic Action allows us to have an impact on others because of Jesus' love and provides the opportunity for self giving as mentioned in the Ideal talk. The Apostolic Action talk also includes the vision of God's love described in the rest of the talks up to this point.
- C. This section contains a call for the participant to come to Christ. It is the last direct call in the talks urging the participants to develop a relationship with Christ. Christianity involves all of life. Christianity is more than:
1. Piety, developing and maintaining a personal relationship with God.
 2. Study, learning from God's Word and finding His direction for our lives.
 3. A plan to better people's place in the world.
 4. A call to preach or share the Gospel.
- There is no need to elaborate further on these points.
- D. Christianity involves all parts of our life. The answer to this call affects not only the participants but also all the people with whom they come in contact. It also affects all the groups or communities of which they are members. This section is a preliminary statement of The Study and Evangelization of the Environment talk on the third day.
1. Accepting God's love and allowing it to permeate our souls results in changes within us. It affects us so radically that we impact those around us. Jesus' love shines through us. Since all of our contacts with others impact our Christian life, our Christian life should impact all our relationships with other people.
 2. God's call is in His words to Cain. It reminds us of our responsibility to our brothers and sisters and is repeated as the closing remark in the talk. It is the task left in our hands by God the Father "Where is your brother? What have you done to your brother?" (Genesis 4:9)

II. WHAT IS APOSTOLIC ACTION?

- A. The definition of apostolic action is in the outline. It is the result of a conscious planned effort, as opposed to spontaneous acts.
- B. This section stresses the difference between human action and Christ-motivated action.
 1. The action of a person that is the result of human sympathy or compassion (such as bringing food to a shut-in or visiting a person in prison) can be called a good human act, a good deed.
 2. This same act becomes a Christian act if the person is motivated by Jesus' love within them.
- C. Christian acts become apostolic action when the motivation includes the desire to introduce the person to Christ. Thus, the same act becomes three different types of action depending upon the motivating force within.

- D. God works through people. God's design was that He would not complete His plan on His own, but would rely on the cooperation of people. We must do our share of the work. It is awesome to ponder the patience of God when we see how seldom people truly respond to His call. Even though God knew this about us, He decided to rely on us anyway. In our roles as parents, leaders, and friends, we are charged with the responsibility for our households and our environments.

Use the example of Abraham or Moses here.

ABRAHAM -- After the fall of Adam and Eve, God started all over again with Abraham. God made a covenant with him, calling him to be the father of a new beginning - the father of a chosen people. Abraham was a very ordinary layperson. He obviously did not know much theology. He did many stupid and wrong things. He did not attend a Via de Cristo weekend. But God was willing to start with Abraham because Abraham believed in Him. Abraham was special because of his faith and trust in God. God said to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation, I will bless you...and you will be a blessing. Through you every family on earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3)

MOSES -- God used Moses to re-establish a people who would recognize Him as their God and live accordingly. Actually, it is probably more true to say that God began with Moses' mother. The story is very clear that it was the mother of Moses who saved her baby boy from Pharaoh's decree of death. She managed to raise him in his very early years, and gave him a powerful early childhood education in justice. All the brainwashing he got later in the Pharaoh's palace was unable to turn him away from his identification with those who were oppressed, those who needed help. Moses came to be a believer. He understood that when God reveals His name to us, He also reveals His longing to change human history for the sake of those who are oppressed. This is a beautiful insight in the book of Exodus that is repeated in all the rest of Scripture.

III. FALSE CONCEPTS OF APOSTOLIC ACTION

There are many different concepts of apostolic action. This section takes some of the more common concepts and explains that they are not the result of Christ-motivated action.

- A. Apostolic action is more than service in the church. It is more than teaching Sunday School, serving on the church council, or other church-related activities. As Christians we need to be active in our church, but apostolic action is not limited to church or religious activities or community organizations. These organizations could be church-centered or worthwhile civic organizations, but they are only a part of daily life. While church activities are a part of a Christian life, the church is normally only a small part of daily life. The majority of our relationships are in the world, in our many other environments (family, work, school, etc.).
- B. Normal civilized behavior is not apostolic action. This has been discussed earlier in the section concerning the difference between human action and apostolic action.
- C. Many believe that a person should do something only when moved by the spirit. Apostolic action is a response to a need in the world. God expects a person to use his/her intellect to recognize the need and then respond to it. Action should be a deliberate, planned effort. It is not something that can be done only when a person has time or when they feel like it. However, there are times that the Holy Spirit calls us to pray or do something that was not in our plan. Listen to those nudges.
- D. There are people who do things that create a big display. The result is an ego boost for the person who does the work (either consciously or unconsciously) or a sense

of pride in the accomplishment. Apostolic action should not be limited to ego trips if a person is to fulfill the task that God has given them.

- E. Apostolic action is a not an option, but a way of life. It is not only the responsibility of pastors, paid church staff, or church committees. God expects us to act. At the time of our baptism, God called each of us to go into all the world to make disciples, baptize and teach. This is our “response-ability;” we respond with our abilities and our talents to obey the Lord’s will for us. (Matthew 25:31-46)

IV. AUTHENTIC APOSTOLIC ACTION

This section is a precursor to The Study and Evangelization of the Environment talk. Bringing God’s love to the world must be clearly stated to set the stage for Sunday’s presentation. It is important to make this point, for it is the heart of Via de Cristo strategy. As people’s hearts are changed, the effort must continue into the person’s environments until the tone of the environment itself is shifted to reflect a more Christ-like attitude. The strategy must be made clear, since it is very different from what most people have heard. If the strategy is not given until Sunday, there is a possibility it could be missed. Thus this point, ‘bringing God’s love to our environments’ should be made several times over the extent of the talk.

- A. This section must be presented clearly, as it answers many questions concerning Christian apostolic action and its relationship to human compassion and sympathy. It is easy for a person to become confused when trying to separate human action and Christian action from apostolic action. Christian action adds the ingredient of God’s love within the giver. This creates a desire to bring God’s love to the receiver. Apostolic action, then, contains all aspects of good human and Christian action, but adds a desire to bring the person to a relationship with God. (I John 4:10-12, 19)
 - 1. Christian love is based on God’s love for us. God loved us first. (I John 4:10-12, 19)
 - 2. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are filled with the love of God. As we seek His will in our lives, the direction of our lives changes. The center of our lives is no longer self, but the mission that God has given us - to share His love with all people in our environments.
 - 3. Now the question before us is: What is love?
 - a. The term “love” has been misused in our culture, to the point that the most common interpretation varies from hugs and kisses to sex. Rarely is it used in the broadest sense of self-giving interpersonal relationships that is meant by Christian love. It is necessary to lay a clear foundation for the term “love” as it is used when describing the love of a Christian for another person.
 - b. Love is more than an emotion, a “high.” While it will include emotion, the emotion forms a background and rises out of the empathy and sensitivity of the Christian for another person. A Christ-like love is not dependent on our emotions. Jesus loves us regardless of our feelings at any given time. He loves us whether we are feeling happy and close to Him or if we are depressed and sad and feel far away from Him. God’s love is constant regardless of how we feel.
 - c. Love is not giving of things to others. While a gift can be an expression of

love (interest or concern for another), it is often an empty expression used instead of personal self-giving. It is far easier to give an object to another than to give time, attention and loving care.

- d. The most insidious of all forms of false love is the love that tries to manipulate others to fill a need of the giver. When this form of false love creeps in, a person tries to mold others in ways that usually enhance or benefit themselves. False or manipulative love uses others, attempts to change them, and is not based on the needs of the receiver. This is not the kind of love Christ had for those around Him, and this cannot be the love Christians have for others. St. Paul described Christian love well in I Corinthians 13, pointing out that love is not possessive, exploitive, or manipulative.

It is important that this point be developed carefully, for one of the greatest dangers of a new apostle is an overabundance of zeal as they attempt to convince others to become a Christian, “more Christian,” or to attend a Via de Cristo by verbal “arm-twisting.” We must not forget the ingredients of Christian love as described by Paul in I Corinthians 13. Any change springing from a person reflects the spirit of God shown to them by Christians who radiate true redemptive love.

4. What is Christian love? The Ideal talk said that self-giving is a measure of a person’s human development. To this we add that self-giving is a measure of a person’s human and spiritual development. Christian love is the giving of yourself to others with the love of God. It is the gift of friendship. This form of giving leaves a person vulnerable, requiring an openness and sensitivity that attempts to parallel Christ’s openness and sensitivity, including the willingness to risk rejection and pain. The true giving of one’s self does not hold back, nor manipulate but tries to discover the depth and God-likeness of the other person. The terms Christian love and self-giving are interchangeable. Self-giving is the key element of Jesus’ teaching about human relationships and His plan of salvation. (See the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:1-12, and the last judgment, Matthew 25:31-46). The giving of self, modeled in Christ’s giving of Himself for our sins, is the measure of a person’s Christ-likeness in the human and spiritual sense. There is no other way a person can show his/her love for others. In Scripture, God describes Himself as a father who carries his child in his arms, and as a mother who never forgets her child. (Isaiah 40:11, 18, 49-15) Christ gives Himself to us faithfully, passionately, constantly, and completely. Jesus IS love. (John 15:9,12)

The gospel writers left us with full certainty that Christianity is founded on love. In Matthew 22:37-39, the two great commandments are love of God and of neighbor. (John 15:9) As the Father loves Jesus, Jesus loves us. (John 15:12) We are to love one another the same way Jesus loves us. (John 13:35) The mark of Jesus’ disciple is one’s love for one another.

- a. Jesus treats me as a person, a unique individual, put into real circumstances, with real personal needs, limitations and potentials.
- b. Jesus gives Himself to me, (*Speaker’s name*) with my limitations and talents. Despite my limitations, He loves me unconditionally. He will do the same for you.

- c. Jesus gives Himself to me as I know myself to be, with my doubts, my problems, my past history, my potential – all that I am. Jesus' love fills the innate hunger I have for love and acceptance that lies within me, no matter what my present life is like. He wants to do the same for you.
- d. Jesus loves you, even died for you. He knows that you were created to be a beautiful and responsive person who can learn to love and respond to others. But due to various circumstances and experiences in life, all of us fail to respond as well as we could. While many factors are to blame for these failures, many of us have never had an opportunity to respond to a truly loving person because we have never known one. Jesus, however, gives to us faithfully, regardless of our sins. He loves us passionately. (Palm Sunday is sometimes called Passion Sunday, indicative of the sacrifice He gave for us.) He loves us all the time, whether we feel close to Him at that particular moment or not. He loves us completely, warts and all. Jesus IS love.

B. Apostolic action is sharing God's love with the world.

This section continues to discuss self-giving as the ultimate measure of maturity for each person. Self-giving is apostolic when motivated by the love of God flowing through us to reach out to other people. This is the paradox: we find meaning and depth to life as we live to serve and be Christ-like for others.

1. As God's love fills a person, it is only natural that this love overflows to other people. The apostolic action of a Christian toward others should be as normal as eating. Since the Christian has been gifted with the vision of God's love for each person in the world, and since God loves each person, how can the Christian turn his/her back on anybody? This love not only reaches out to help others in need, but also reaches out to all people to help them discover the kingdom of God within them. Thus God's kingdom is built in each of us and in our environments.

Continuing from the previous section, this section zeros in on the relationship between self-giving and apostolic action. Self-giving is apostolic when it is motivated by the love of God flowing through us to reach out to other people. Each person finds meaning and depth to life as s/he lives to serve others and be as Christ to them. As God's love fills a person, it is only natural that this love overflows to other people.

- a. When we encounter Jesus, we are filled with His unconditional love. This becomes the foundation of our apostolic action. Jesus is our model. We cannot be satisfied to belong to Jesus for our own sake. We need to let Him, the light of the world, shine through us to illumine our whole environment.
- b. It is good to love all people in theory, but love is only as real as it is practiced. We can give of ourselves only by touching other lives - lives that are different from ours.
 - 1) God made each person unique. Each difference is sacred. It is the mark of the individual.
 - 2) We were each created with different potential. Our differences are God's imprint on each of us and must be respected. We encourage others to seek God's will. We walk beside others, encouraging them

- to develop their potential in their own way as they discover God's love for themselves.
- 3) We respect differences. We each have our own life styles as we live in God's will. Our faith is lived out in different ways.
2. Our apostolic action of love unfolds as we live our lives with Christ. Apostolic action is part of, and the completion of, piety. Without using Jesus as their model for helping others, people tend to become more and more self-centered in their approach to helping others, no matter how altruistic they are when they start. If love becomes self-centered, it becomes manipulative and destructive.
 - a. If a person truly loves God and is filled with His love, it will overflow into his/her daily life.
 - b. A person filled with the love of God will do as Jesus did, giving all of him/herself to others. Thus apostolic action is a natural consequence of a person filled with the love of God.
 - c. This is the normal response of living our life in Christ. We bring all our talents, spiritual gifts and potential to serve God and share Him with others.
 3. Apostolic action is vital for us and for others.
 - a. Life grows through action. Our muscles grow through exercise or they will wither. If the heart is not beating, there is no life. If our lungs aren't working, there is no life. Life is put on a firm basis, develops and grows through action. Our faith does not grow unless we share it. There is no Christian life without apostolic action.
 - b. Apostolic action is vital if others are to know God's love. It is the answer to a sin-sick world. We are the Church, and we must reach out to those who do not know God. God works through us to bring others to Him. "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear much fruit." (John 15:16)
 4. The gospels are clear that Christianity is founded on love. Our apostolic actions of love unfold as we live our lives with Christ at the center. Apostolic action is part of, and completion of, piety. If a person truly loves God and is filled with His love, it will overflow into his/her daily life. A person filled with God's love will do as Jesus did -- give of him/herself to others and love them. Apostolic action is the natural consequence of a person filled with the love of God and saved by His grace. The Christian is fulfilling the teachings of Christ. The biblical quote from I Corinthians 13:4-7, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-48), or the last judgment (Matthew 25:40) as well as John 15:12, are only a few of the vast number of urgings by Jesus for His followers to love others.
 - a. Because Jesus first loved us, we respond to His love by giving ourselves to Him and by loving others in a genuine, self-giving way. This love will transform those who accept it. It will change their lives.
 - b. As stated in the Layperson as Church in the World talk, the vision of the Church is to love others and to introduce them to a relationship with God. A Christian evangelizer is an ordinary person using his/her God-given talents to share God's saving love. This, in turn, will change their environment. Our mission is not in some far-off land but in the everyday

world of each Christian. We are to transform that part of the world where we are. If each Christian would work with true selfless love in his/her own environment, Christ's mission would be much further toward its fulfillment. Through God's love we are His chosen people. It is only through God's love that we are set free. If each Christian would work with true selfless love in his/her own environment, Christ's mission would be much further toward its fulfillment.

- c. We will know if our apostolic action is effective by the response of others. If God's kingdom is to be built, our world must change. The Christian's goal and the goal of Via de Cristo are to transform the world by proclaiming God's love and compassion for everyone. Only then will people turn toward the destiny God desires for them. If the people around me are growing and discovering their freedom in God as a result of my friendship and my giving of myself to them, then I know I am "loving others as Christ loves me." (Galatians 5:22-23) If I find myself lonely and others are avoiding me and are not giving and becoming freer, then my ego may have been put ahead of true love, and I may have manipulative love. On the other hand, a critical self-examination, perhaps with a spiritual director, is necessary to discern whether our love is manipulative or not. It may be that people are rejecting God's love and us.
5. The discovery of God's will is vitally important, and it is one of the more difficult tasks a person can hope to accomplish. God's will is that each person would open up his/her life in service to others. If a person is sensitive to God's presence in his/her life, follows the method presented in the Study talk, meditates on the happenings in his/her life, desires to do God's will and follow it with apostolic action, then s/he will be doing God's will to the best of his/her ability at that time. God's will for each person is not exotic or "elsewhere," but wrapped tightly with family, neighborhood and work. It is part of daily life. The task of the Christian is to provide that loving relationship to those people s/he meets. If Christ is to love a person, it must be through people who reflect Jesus' love. Telling someone that Jesus loves him/her is meaningless if that person has not experienced true, non-manipulative, caring love. Apostolic Christians share Jesus' love.
6. True love fulfills Christ's call. (Matthew 16:24-25) Loving others is not always easy. It requires learning to be sensitive to others, to understand their motives and ideals and to share their pains and joys. Loving others requires that we empty ourselves. If a person loves as Christ loves, s/he will have learned to love as God loves, totally without selfishness. The truly loving person will be joined to God as one, "for God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him." (I John 4:16) Suffering and pain are not part of God's will for people, especially suffering and pain that is the result of human interaction. A Christian cannot accept racism, prejudice, or poverty and still say s/he loves God. Only when all areas of life are integrated with the love of God can the Christian be sure of his/her response to God. In other words, we must give ourselves away. This can only happen by a continuous encounter with Christ (piety and study). Out of this comes a willingness to love other people, one's brothers and sisters. This type of love is truly divine love,

a friendship raised above the human level to the divine because it has the power of God's love for both the giver and the receiver.

V. QUALITIES OF APOSTOLIC ACTION

The four qualities of Apostolic Action are signs of the health of a person's apostolic action. When measured against these qualities, a person has a way to judge this portion of his/her life with God. These qualities cannot be "put-on;" they spring from a properly developed life of piety and study and a deep love of God and others.

- A. Apostolic Action is reasonable and balanced. If a person's apostolic action is to affect the quality of life around him/her, it must be more than a waiting game for "the proper moment." It requires a thoughtful approach, planning one's time adequately to affect the greatest number of people. It still requires a person to take advantage of nudges from the Spirit. We must learn to be sensitive to these moments, for they are often subtle. As Christians, we also learn to make the moments happen by what we say, act, and do. The building of love through friendship is not accidental, but is the result of time and effort to learn to know and understand other people.
- B. Apostolic Action requires constant effort and commitment. We learn by doing and by making a continuous effort to act on the opportunities to share Jesus' love with others. The focus of our lives changes as we seek to follow Christ's call to bring others to him. That change will become a natural part of us as we learn to follow His call. This results in a changed person and a new outlook on life.
- C. True dedication to sharing Jesus with others results in enthusiasm. The joy found in bringing Christ's message to our environments naturally spills over. We reflect the deep sense of Christ within us - a gentle, enticing joy.
- D. Apostolic action is supernatural, springing from our unity with God. This relationship is the "well" from which self-giving comes. It is only natural to bring concerns and cares back to God. Prayer and palanca (sacrifice) for friends are the springboard for our apostolic action. Without them, our efforts will not be effective and our actions become self-centered instead of Christ-centered. Prayer and sacrifice form the backbone of all apostolic efforts and many failures can be traced to little (if any) prayer on behalf of our apostolic goal. The result is that the effort becomes misdirected.

To remain true to Christ's call, pray first, last and always.

VI. THE METHOD OF APOSTOLIC ACTION

This last section is the most important. It summarizes the talk by putting the concepts and ideas into reality. Christian friendship is the key to apostolic action. This friendship is the relationship between two people that is centered in Jesus and is the result of giving of oneself to the other.

This is the place to share personal contact examples.

- A. Before you begin your apostolic action, pray about who God would have you befriend. Pray about the timing of the process and the method of making friends.
- B. Make a friend. The steps of apostolic friendship are outlined in the power phrase "Make a friend, be a friend, bring your friend to Christ." Apostolic Action is the gift of friendship enhanced by the love of Jesus. Christian friendship is more than human friendship because its center is the example of Christ. Friendship begins

with the decision of one person to get to know the other. It is a conscious decision, one made knowingly. You want to know another person, so you decide to spend time with him/her. Time is required to understand another person. It is God's gift to people as we reach out to touch another.

- C. Be a friend. The way described here is gentle and slow, but long lasting and rich in fruits. Large preaching missions are spectacular and emotional, but studies have shown that such sudden, emotional impacts are not usually long lasting. When they are, it is because of the prayerful and often lengthy work of others who have moved the recipient to the point of readiness, then cared for and guided the person lovingly afterwards.
1. Be authentic. If you say one thing and do another, it is noticed. Walk the talk. Be genuine, sharing the truth with your friend. Follow through on what you say. Be who you claim to be.
 2. Be interested in your friend. Accept him/her where s/he is. Acceptance and trust are the keys of a gentle love described earlier. It is only in an atmosphere of acceptance that a person can let down his/her guard in order to grow and mature. Acceptance does not demand the other person become what we think s/he should be; it is truly non-manipulative.
 3. Brush up on your listening skills. True friends are ones who can be counted on to understand and care for each other. Unless you listen, you will not know when or how to care for your friend. Accept your friend where s/he is. This is essential for your friend to grow and mature.
 4. Happiness is contagious. No one likes to be around someone who is negative or critical. Share the joy of Jesus, not condemnation.
 5. Be willing to give yourself to others. That means giving your time, your talents and possibly your treasures. Allow the love of Jesus to shine through you to others, even those considered unlovable. God gives us the ability to love others in a supernatural way, being respectful, considerate and caring. Being a friend does not mean sitting still. A life of prayer and the witness of your life will usually result in a growing process for all.
- D. Bring your friend to Christ
1. Apostolic friendship is more than human friendship. Christ is the power behind Christian friendship. He works through us to bring people to Him. The Holy Spirit will reach out and call the friend to a fuller life. We are not to worry about the results. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be obedient, not successful.
 2. The most effective witness, one that cannot be disputed, is sharing what God has done in your own life. Once you have faith in Jesus in common, you share a bond that is very strong. We will want to share our friend, Jesus, with our friend.
 3. We share Christ not just for our friendship, but we are working with the Holy Spirit to complete the work in that person:
 - a. For Christ. We are doing this not for ourselves, but for our love of God. We do not want our friend to love us, but to love Him. We must live the scripture in John 3:30, "He must increase, while I must decrease." Thus, the Christian does not become a friend solely for his/her own satisfaction, even though the joy of friendship will come, but because Jesus loves your

friend and wants him/her to come to faith in Him. We are to be a source, probably not the only one, of God's love for our friend.

- b. With Christ. We are not alone. Jesus is beside us and sometimes carries us every step of the way. Everything that we do we should do for the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31) God permeates our lives. We are aware of His presence and power working in and through us.
- c. In Christ. Jesus died for all people. It is God's desire that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. (I Timothy 2:4) Each person has within them the longing to know God. Christians understand that Christ has redeemed them and wants all people to come to Him.
- d. Like Christ. A Christian acts with the qualities of Jesus. I show that I am trying to live the life that I am talking about. Do I really believe what I am telling them? Do I live what I believe? The witness of life becomes more than ever a condition for real effectiveness.

The main witness of the talk is in this section as the speaker shares how s/he brought someone to faith in Jesus through Christian friendship.

In Romans 10:13-15, Paul says, "As the scripture says, 'Everyone who calls out to the Lord for help will be saved. But how can they call to Him for help, if they have not believed? And how can they believe, if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear, if the message is not proclaimed? And how can the message be proclaimed, if the messengers are not sent out?'"

We are the messengers and proclaimers of the Good News. The way we live our lives will be the answer to God's question, "What have you done with your brother/sister?" What will your answer be? Are you willing to love all the people Christ is calling you to love?

Close on a positive note so that the participants feel they have some solid direction for their apostolic action. Am I sharing my faith with others? Are my actions showing Christ in me? Are others coming to know Jesus? (James 2:14)