

# restored stories of encounter





INTRODUCTION:

# restoration

# > > > > > THE PROCESS OF RETURNING SOMETHING TO ITS ORIGINAL CONDITION

his word implies that there was something better before. The connotation is that you are improving something by returning it to its original, and therefore, better state. In so doing, you bring it back to its intended purpose.

Think of a flea market or a junkyard. Both places contain items that were once new, perfect, and useful. A rusted bumper used to fit nicely onto the front carriage of a brand new car to protect it. A tattered chair used to match seven others around a stately dining room table. Underneath the bumps and bruises lies the original piece. Restoration is what brings that piece back to life.

In similar fashion, humanity had an original state: naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). Man and woman lived in harmony and right relationship with our Creator. We could talk with God and hear God unhindered. We could love God and worship him without reservation and in complete vulnerability. We could clearly and correctly discern his will for each day and carry it out with total joy. **This** was our original state—holiness and justice in harmony with God.

Take a minute or two to imagine what that might have been like. Living in peace without shame. No weak inner voice challenging what you know is right. No frustration or disappointment when you sin... again. The ability to hear God's voice clearly. The ability to sense God's presence all the time. Clarity. Peace.

# **RESTORATION. DON'T YOU LONG FOR THAT?**

The Catechism teaches us that God created us to know Him, love Him and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him forever in the next. This was God's original intent. This is our purpose. Our restoration, worked through Jesus, and manifested in the Sacraments brings us back to this place of knowing, loving and serving God here on earth.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE KNOW GOD?

 What is the difference between knowing God and knowing about God?

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE LOVE GOD?

- · What does that look like?
- How is it connected to/influenced by knowing God?

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE SERVE GOD?

- · What does that look like?
- How is it connected to knowing and loving God?

Each of us can apply this original intent personally. Where have I gone astray of this originality? What is my reaction to this? How do I respond when I go astray? How can I be restored? Why would I want to be restored? Why would God want to restore me?

We don't sin in a vacuum. Our sin doesn't affect us alone. It affects those around us as well. Likewise, our restoration doesn't occur in a vacuum. God restores us and there is an outward expression of that restoration in how we live, speak and interact with people and how we respond to situations. The short films you will be watching are about just that: God's restoration and its ripple effect.

At the end of this study, it is our hope that five things will have happened:

- 1. You will be encouraged to strive for Sainthood.
- 2. You will be inspired to take on works of mercy.
- **3.** You will reject the feelings of helplessness that often accompany us when we wrestle with the enormous needs of the world around us.
- **4.** You will have a new or renewed understanding of the dignity of every human being regardless of his choices or her situation.
- **5.** You will have a new or renewed commitment to restoring your own faith.

Additionally, at the top of each chapter you will notice a list of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy present in each film. For an extended study on *Restored* using the Works of Mercy as a backdrop, see the appendix beginning on page 41. The appendix contains a brief overview of Catholic social teaching themes and a description of each work of mercy with some practical examples.

### **CHAPTER 1**

# **Episode 1: Connie McEldowney**

Rustic Hope



# "I asked God to use me to be a better option."

-Connie McEldowney

# **WORKS OF MERCY:**

**Corporal:** Feed the Hungry, Give Drink to the Thirsty, Shelter the Homeless, Give Alms to the Poor

**Spiritual:** Counsel the Doubtful, Instruct the Ignorant, Admonish the Sinner, Comfort the Sorrowful, Forgive Injuries, Bear Wrongs Patiently, Pray for the Living and the Dead

# **CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING:**

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

# STRIVING FOR SAINTHOOD

Saints make themselves available to God. They are at his disposal. Fr. Mike Schmitz, director of the Newman Center at University of Minnesota Duluth and popular conference speaker says, "If you do this one thing you will become a saint. If you don't, you never will. The one thing is this: Let Jesus interrupt your life."

Connie's whole life is one big interrupt-able moment, and she chooses for it to be that way.

It's clear, as you listen to Connie speak, that God created her with a tenacious and fiery personality. There were two significant moments in her life where she "let go of herself" and allowed God to mold that personality for His Glory and the service of others. What were they?

At both those moments she made one distinct commitment. She said, "Use me. Whatever you want me to do, I'm willing."

- How has God created you? What are your gifts and strengths? What are your passions? What are the parts of your personality that need to be molded to conform better to God's will?
- Can you pray what Connie prayed? "Use me. Whatever you want me to do, I'm willing." What about that prayer makes you nervous? What about that prayer makes you anticipatory?
- What do you see as your greatest obstacle(s) to this kind of total surrender to God? How can you address this?

# **INSPIRING WORKS OF MERCY**

Through the Prophet Isaiah, God sets down a very clear description of the kind of mercy he seeks:

"Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of wickedness,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to set the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover him,

and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

-Isaiah 58: 6-7

- What words come to mind after reading this passage? Pressure?
   Inspiration? Ultimatum? Suggestion? Burden? Responsibility? Privilege?
- · Why?
- On a previous page you reflected on your gifts, personality traits, and passions. Keeping your reflection in mind, how do these verses apply specifically and uniquely to you?
- How did you see Connie and Rustic Hope accomplishing the things Isaiah prophesied about?
- Identify all the "smaller" acts of mercy that Connie's big "yes" inspired.
- Can you see a specific way that your gifts and personality can be used to accomplish these things? If so, what are they?
- How did Connie meet with resistance and what was her reaction to it?
- What outcomes did she experience? How did her determination affect those around her?
- Have you been in Connie's position? How did you handle it?
- · Have you been a resistor? What came of that?

# **CHALLENGING THE FEELING OF HELPLESSNESS**

- What was Connie's very first response to the need she saw?
- What was Connie's reaction to the need for roof supplies?
- Based on how Connie has lived out her passion to help single moms, how much do you think she relies on her own ability to plan and prepare?
- At the close of the film, Connie said these words, "He's going to use you every day that you're willing." Have you known this to be true?
   Share some experiences.
- Based on this statement, what is God's responsibility? What is ours?
- How does this statement help alleviate some of the helplessness you might feel in the face of great need?

# **COUNTERING ASSUMPTIONS**

Read the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:4–26.

- What are some assumptions people may have made about this woman?
- How would these assumptions have affected her connection to and participation in the community?
- · How does Jesus see her?
- How does her current situation, as well as her past, influence his treatment of her? Or does it?
- At what point in Connie's life were her assumptions about women seeking abortion challenged?
- What was her reaction? Do you remember what she said she realized about them? How did this affect her?
- Recall other people's initial reactions to what Connie was choosing to do (her mom, her husband). What assumptions influenced their initial reactions?
- What happened when they got involved and got to know the women?
- Take a minute to be honest with yourself. How do you view the kind of women Connie is helping?
- Consider what her husband said about her: "I see moms just screaming at her... and a week later their kids are back here and she's watching them or taking that mom somewhere. If she had thrown in the towel and said, 'I ain't helpin' you no more' then where would they be?" How does Connie's view of their dignity influence her reaction to them?
- In what ways has Connie's story countered or changed some assumptions you may have had?