

The Story of my Conversion through Our Lady of Medjugorje

By George Day (aka Stefano)

My childhood and early life in London

My Italian Family - My name is Stefano but I am also known as George. I was born on 3 April 1975 in Italy in a family of unbelievers. My father, Guerrino, was a professed communist and my mother, Angela, hated the Church. My parents were arguing and fighting all the time and I cannot recall a period of tranquility in my entire family life. My mother was always in and out of the household, having extra-marital relationships with several men. She would disappear for a while, and then come back home. My father was a very violent man and he used to beat up both my mother and us. I had another sister, Francesca, who was four years younger than me. I remember being terrified by my father.

For some time I lived with my mother and her partner at the time, Giuseppe, in France and in Northern Italy; he was a professed witch. So at the age of nine I was introduced to the Ouija board and other occult practices.

My Foster Family - At my eleventh year of age, my sister and I were given into fostering to the Fiori family who used to go to Mass every Sunday. Although this was a devout Catholic family, they were also incredibly horrible and dishonest. It came out later, through investigations I carried out with the help of an employee of the Social Services, that they only took us into fostering for the money they were making. The fostering was actually illegal and they finally even bought a house with the money they got from my father and the Social Services. Not only, but they also made us undergo the most unspeakable treatments in that house, things that have marked my personality for the rest of my life.

It was, nevertheless, in this family that I was “properly” introduced to the practice of the Catholic faith. This lasted until the sudden death of my father, when I was seventeen. It was then that my sister and I went to live with my mother and her new partner, Franco, who had another daughter, Cristina. By now certain terms of our fostering had been declared illegal but I never understood why they still kept the money.

Living with My Mother - I lived with my mother and her new partner, my sister and half-sister for six years, until other problems arose between my mother and her partner. My mother moved out and it was in the middle of this turmoil that I began to come to terms with my homosexuality. I had shared about these feelings before, when my uncle found out I was keeping a secret diary. In it I had described myself feeling like a “female trapped in the body of a male” at the tender age of nine. He read that without my permission and so I became the object of mockery of my entire family! Then the thing died out until I got into fostering, where I shared this with a few school friends in confidence. That was in the eighties, when there was the boom of the AIDS epidemic and everyone was talking about it. I was twelve years old and according to what I was following on TV, I came to understand that I was homosexual. Hard to believe, it was a liberation because I had had these feelings all along but I had never been able to define them. However, it didn’t take me long to also realize the position of the Church on the morality of these acts, and the homophobic attitude of society towards people like me. I actually experienced homophobic bullying first-hand from peers at

school and it was very traumatic at that tender age! So I decided to make it go away and I began to practice my faith very seriously. By the time I got to High School, I was no longer gay... or so I thought.

Homosexual Lifestyle - But now, at the age of 21, with my mother going “mad” again, this thing came back and it fell on me as an unbearable dilemma, beside all my other family issues. I now, therefore, decided to fully embrace the gay life style despite my moral beliefs. I could not go again through the struggle to make it go away, when in fact it wouldn’t go away. So I started to attend gay bars, sex clubs and places of homosexual acting out. I also made many good friends whom I still cherish deeply. And in all this I never lost my faith, although I lived the experience in deep internal conflict. It therefore helped me a great deal to find out about a group of “gay Catholics” that used to meet in Bologna once a month, as I read in a gay magazine. Bologna was a city near where I used to live so I decided to contact the group and I attended my first meeting at Christmas 1996. Without knowing it, that day I began a journey of conversion in relation to my homosexuality where Jesus would lead me in a way I could never have imagined! However, right now this journey was only in its embryonic phase, and I still wasn’t aware of the great suffering I still had to undergo. This group was part of an unofficial network of the Catholic Church in Italy that provided “unapproved” pastoral care for homosexual persons. The Holy See knew about it, but no official position was taken. The morality of homosexual acts was left to the judgment of the individual.

This group was good for me in its own time but it didn’t bring true conversion in my life. It made me understand that I was not the only one struggling to reconcile my homosexual condition with my Catholic faith. Sadly, however, the acting out of my homosexual condition very much took over, to the point that I reached a nervous breakdown. I was looking for love through sex and, besides, I also could no longer cope with my family situation, so I had to move out. I moved with my gay friends because only there I felt welcomed. My church community was very hostile towards me since I had come out as a gay man, and to these days I have been carrying very much resentment towards many of them. The process of forgiveness is still ongoing. Today I accept the limitations of ordinary members of the Church in trying to understand this issue. But back then, I couldn’t.

Moving away to England - Work was good, and my job was bringing some comfort. I used to work in mental health and I had a good working community where I felt accepted. However, it was unbalanced because I was relying too much on my job to cover my emotional needs. This inevitably brought disappointments that led to dissention, retaliation and divisions, which also affected the work field. So at some point everything became unbearable! I reached a point where I could only do one thing right: *run away, as far as I could!!!*

So I moved to England where I decided to build a new life, mainly based on my homosexual identity. So I became 100% involved in the gay life style. I found a job in an agency run by homosexual activists and I also joined an organization called Quest that is a gay lobby disguised as a “Catholic” group whose members are committed to change the Magisterial teaching of the Church on human sexuality. By doing this, they hope to adapt Catholic morality to the gay life style, making it equal to heterosexual marriage. I became more and more involved in this organization until I reached the position of leadership of the “gay youth program.” Meanwhile, I also became more and more hooked in the darkest sides of the gay life style in London, including deeper and deeper promiscuity and drug addiction. I got in a relationship with a man, Michael, who suffered from alcoholism. As I was also a drug user, our initial passion was very much based on our “highs.” Nevertheless, I really fell in love with this man, which nearly killed me when things started to go bad between us. Michael visited my family in Italy and they really bonded. Then my mother visited us in England, and that was when I truly hit rock bottom!

My Downward Spiral - My mother and Michael were really getting on with each other to the point that my mother was neglecting how ill he made me feel. My mother was probably driven or affected by her own lack of stability. She showed no concern on the fact that he would constantly humiliate me in front of others, not to mention the fact that he would kick me out at unspeakable hours of the night after an argument, on an

average of three or four times a week. My mother showed no concern whatsoever, to my dismay but not to my surprise, even though she saw me going back and forward to the hospital for emotional breakdowns. And it didn't take me long to realize why... my mother was actually after him! Michael would flirt with my mother, and she would let him... completely careless of me and how this made me feel!!

Out of respect for my mother, I will not add anything on how the story developed, other than that I finally got worse and worse health wise. I got more and more hooked on drugs, since I was taking them trying to change my feelings. But I then realized that the only way to make a change was to actually break up my relationship with Michael. I really don't know where I found the strength. Michael was the only man I had really loved, and I felt I would never find anyone else willing to love me. I felt I wasn't worth being loved. I also felt I could never again fall in love with anyone else. And I was angry at my mother for destroying my relationship, the only one I'd ever had; and so I stopped any communication with her too. This all happened in September 2003. To this day, my position with my mother hasn't changed.

Hitting Bottom - My emotional state was such that I was literally a living dead! I had reached a level of unhappiness I had never before thought possible. Nothing, absolutely nothing could make me happy. All I could see far ahead was darkness. Death was the only thing to look forward to. I wanted to die. I really wanted death. And I tried to kill myself a few times, but the only thing that stopped me was the fear of going to hell. By God's grace I still had that sense of fear.

One day I found myself walking down the streets of Soho without even realizing how I had gotten there. I remembered from what I'd heard in my gay organization that there used to be a meeting in Soho where some homosexual activists were doing eastern meditation. I decided to give it a try. I went along and afterwards I felt an incredible sense of peace. So I decided to go back again the following week. It was then that I realized that after that meditation meeting there was a Twelve-Step program, and they were meeting after our meditation. That is how I was first introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA then became a strong pillar of my recovery from drug addiction, but as good as this program was, it would not help me deal with what was really causing my depression. AA was helping me to control and then stop my drug use, but I had been diagnosed with severe depression, and they even prescribed me medications. However, I never took my medications because I feared a relapse on drugs, and the doctor told me I could not afford that as it would seriously unbalance me. However I did some counseling and psychotherapy with an Augustinian priest based in Hammersmith. I also decided to work the program of Alcoholics Anonymous properly, so I got a sponsor, as the program suggests, that is something like a mentor who helps you work the Twelve Steps. He was also gay and he took me through the Steps.

Learning about Medjugorje - I was trying any means to feel better, and I can tell you that even if someone had told me that a UFO had been reported coming down from the sky, I would have gone even there seeking and hoping to find relief. So one day, at the church near the venue where AA used to meet, I read a notice that Marija, the visionary from Medjugorje, was coming to London and that she would be hosted at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Kilburn. I was aware of what Medjugorje was all about, although I had not really been following it. I certainly would not know that Marija was still having daily apparitions of the Blessed Mother and that she would also have the apparition on that very day. So I decided to try this, again seeking and hoping to find some relief.

It was the end of March or the beginning of April 2004, as I remember it was around my birthday, and I went along. It took me a while to find the Church of the Sacred Heart, and I even ended up in the wrong part of Kilburn; but I did get there eventually, although not on time. And when I got there, I found the church packed. I actually just managed to get passed through the entrance door. Marija was giving a talk in Italian, and I could understand everything she was saying with no need of translation because I am Italian. This made me feel really at home to begin with. At some point they began to pray the rosary, and I just went along with them. I then, all of a sudden, noticed silence in the church, and as I noticed that, I also felt an inner urge to move towards Marija. However, the church being packed, I could not move much further from where I was positioned, but the little that I managed to move, I felt water touching my face! As I was moving a little, I was actually "moving in the water." My face was touching water! I also felt an inner peace that I had not felt for a very long time, as if a gentle touch had reached my heart. I cannot explain it by words but I knew Our Lady was present. I then heard that Marija had just had the apparition because she said that she

had entrusted to Her all those who were ill and that Our Lady had given Her blessing to them. I certainly didn't know that while I was feeling the water and that inner peace!!

Finding Inner Peace - I couldn't believe it! I had truly felt her presence, and I knew I was one of those ill persons Our Lady had blessed. And so, as the day was over, I went to the statue of Our Lady and I lit a candle for my mother there. And as I did that, I began to feel hope! The kind of hope I knew from my Catholic faith... the hope for heaven! They closed the day with a song to the Holy Spirit and I began to pray again, after many years, to the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in my heart.

That day marked the true beginning of my conversion, and I began to say the rosary every day from that afternoon in Kilburn, and to this day I still haven't stopped. My rosaries today amount to three a day!

After that day in Kilburn, I knew something had been put in motion in my heart that I simply could not explain. My mind was brought back to my initial unresolved dilemma of being Catholic and homosexual, and I honestly felt that as a gay man I could not live according to the moral requirements of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, I also felt it deep in my heart that that was the right thing to do to become holy. I was fought interiorly by the knowledge of what I knew was right and the inability to go along with it.

Matched with my involvement with Quest as a gay activist, this was to me a real blockage to that interior motion that had been begun by Our Lady in Kilburn. I therefore decided to get in touch with Marija, the visionary that had visited London that day. I heard that she lived in Italy and that she was married to a man called Paolo Lunetti. So I dialed the number for the International Directory and enquired about everyone called Paolo Lunetti in Italy. As I found three of them, I called them all. I found out straight away that two of the telephone numbers I had been given were wrong, and from the third number all I got was the answer machine. So I decided to leave a voice message honestly thinking that this was ultimately the right number. I knew that at some point Marija would pick up the message. And in my voice message I told my entire story in just a few minutes, touching all the salient points, including what happened in Kilburn. I needed to reach Marija because I needed to hear direction from Our Lady about my issues concerning my relationship with my mother and my homosexuality.

I called again, a few days later, the number where I had left that voice message, but that also ended up being the wrong number! My heavens!!! Only God knows what they thought of me from what they heard in that voice message!!

Turning My Life Around - Meanwhile, I continued my recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous as normal, and I remember my sponsor asking me whether I would consider it worthwhile to actually leave the Catholic Church and find my own concept of God since the Church does not accept gay people and this was obviously adding more burden to my inner conflicts – so he said. But my response to him was straight, that should I leave the Church, I would certainly lose my peace of mind. That much did I know well, so I allowed this conversion to continue to take place inside my heart; yet, not knowing what to expect, nor what to do about it.

I therefore surrendered almost in desperation to Our Lady, opening my heart to Her in prayer several times, asking Her to grant me a Catholic group for homosexuals after the model of Alcoholics Anonymous, a Catholic sponsor and a message through Marija from Medjugorje as a confirm that, should all that be granted, such would be the path in which She was putting me for my conversion. And I also asked that, if it was Her Son's wish, She may send me a companion willing to grow in holiness with me in the way the Church calls us to. I prayed this prayer many times after my vain attempts to contact the visionary.

Cenacolo Prayer Group - In May 2005, about a year after that experience, I was offered a free ticket to come to Medjugorje. I had, by then, joined a Cenacolo prayer group in London that used to meet on Mondays at St Patrick's Church in Soho. I came to Medjugorje with them and again I attended an apparition, now with Mirijana. At the time she used to have the apparitions in the Cenacolo community here in Medjugorje, and I remember very well that the room was closed. There was no opening to the outside either from the windows or the ceiling. Nor was there any air conditioning in the room. But as the apparition began, at some point I felt a strong draft of wind coming from the ceiling hitting me three times. I recalled my first experience with the water touching my face at the first apparition I attended in Kilburn, London. Now I was feeling the wind, and there was no way that wind could come from any opening to the outside! I suddenly remembered something I'd read in one of Wayne Weible's books that Our Lady had said, "*My Son is on the*

Cross and I am in the wind.” And I had always been unable to make any sense of that assertion... but now I was truly feeling the wind! And it fell on me, with full strength, three times!

The Power of the Holy Spirit - Others in the room also stated afterwards that they had also felt the wind. I so understood what Our Lady had meant with her assertion, “My Son is on the Cross and I am in the wind.” She is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the “wind.” The early disciples had also received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost thanks to the intercession of Our Lady, who was present with them in the upper room. I was also receiving the Spirit of Pentecost, Our Lady’s Spouse, the third person of the Holy Trinity, *at* and *through* the presence of Our Lady, just like the first disciples did in the upper room. I understood that straight away, and that day my healing from my clinical depression began to take place – remember that I had been diagnosed with the disease of depression, but I had also neglected taking my medications! I *never* took my medications. But I was healed from depression.

Father Jozo - And on that same pilgrimage another amazing thing took place. We all went to hear Fr Jozo in Siroki Brijeg, and I remember that the talk was very long. At some point I noticed that he began to pray, laying hands on people, and they would all fall on the floor, finding – *so they say* - “rest in the Spirit.” I must admit that I have always felt quite uncomfortable with these “charismatic” manifestations. I was determined that as Fr Jozo came to lay hands on me, I would *not* fall on the floor like all the others! And Fr Jozo *did* come to lay hands on me. And I did *not* fall on the floor as I had planned, but something did happen to me. As he prayed on me, I felt an energy passing through my body.

It was indeed my resistance that made me not “rest in the Spirit,” but as I looked up, I saw a picture! I do not actually recall if that picture was really hanging on the wall of the church, but I saw it... and it was breathing. It became alive, and it was the picture of the Pieta, where Mary offers her dead Son, taken down from the Cross, to the Father... uncomplaining... not accusing anyone... in silence! I felt and understood her *suffering*! I understood what she suffered because of what I was suffering with my own mother. It is a pain that cannot be described in words. And all of a sudden I understood that the key to healing was in what I was seeing in that breathing image. Only by offering my grief I could find true healing! Only through offering my pain, like Mary had done in the Pieta, could I truly find healing from my depression. That was the only way out; no psychotherapy could do it, and no medication could do it.

Then as I looked to the right, I saw Fr Jozo praying over my mother!!! Yes, he was praying and laying hands on my mother! Of course my mother wasn’t really there, but that vision, by extension of the Pieta, made me realize that my suffering, if offered like Our Lady did at the foot of the Cross, would become co-redemptive and would benefit my mother’s soul too! Little did I know at the time, lost as I was in my own grief, about Col. 1:24! Little did I know of the call of Fatima to offer our suffering for the salvation of sinners! I knew nothing of all that, but this is what I understood out of that picture and its extension to my mother.

Growing in Holiness - I came back from that pilgrimage knowing in my heart that my conversion had truly begun there, again fully unaware of what was to come next. I then prayed again for what I had first requested after Marija’s visit to London in 2004: a Catholic group for homosexuals after the model of Alcoholics Anonymous, a Catholic sponsor and a message through Marija from Medjugorje as a confirm that, should all that be granted, such would be the path in which She was putting me for my conversion. And I also asked that, if it was Her Son’s wish, She may send me a companion willing to grow in holiness with me in the way the Church calls us to.

And now I added one more request: a new job where I could actually grow spiritually.

To my amazement, it wasn’t long after my pilgrimage that I was offered a new job as a housekeeper in a Catholic church in Central London by a priest, friend of mine. That was an opportunity for me to make some healthy changes in my life, including moving to a new accommodation downtown. A friend of mine from Alcoholics Anonymous offered me a cheap place near my new job, so I accepted his offer. Then one day, on the last Sunday of February 2006, I went to Confession to Fr Martin McAnanny for the first time, seeking proper guidance. He used to be the Rector of the Church of Notre Dame De France in Leicester Square, next door to my new accommodation. I truly opened up with him, explaining detail by detail what had happened to me and how Our Lady was bringing me healing. I also added that I was still in conflict because I was very

actively involved in Quest as a gay activist but in my heart I knew the Church's teaching was the authentic way to holiness. On the other hand, I also added that I didn't feel ready to accept that, nor could I tell if I ever would. So Fr Martin asked me if I had ever heard of an Apostolate based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous which is an authentic Catholic response to the condition of homosexuality and is also endorsed by the Holy See. The name of the group he was referring to was **Courage** (known as "EnCourage" in the United Kingdom). He added that this was a group like Alcoholics Anonymous helping homosexual persons live according to the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. They were actually meeting that same afternoon, so I decided to give it a try, and I called the leader of the group straight away.

Now, do you remember exactly what my request to Our Lady had been? A Catholic group for homosexuals after the model of Alcoholics Anonymous, a Catholic sponsor and a message through Marija from Medjugorje as a confirm that, should all that be granted, such would be the path in which She was putting me for my conversion. And I also asked that, if it was Her Son's wish, She may send me a companion willing to grow in holiness with me in the way the Church calls us to. And I also asked a new job where I could grow spiritually.

Finding Courage - Having made this request several times to Our Lady, I knew its content by heart. And I knew that the new job was indeed an initial sign of disclosing events, or at least I wanted to think of that in this way. But I truly was uncomfortable with the whole moral issue of homosexual acts. But I decided to keep an open mind.

So I went to my first Courage meeting (again on the last Sunday of February 2006) and my initial impact with the group – I have to admit – wasn't that great! They were all rejecting the gay identity to the point that they would replace the word "gay" with the tag SSA (Same Sex Attracted). Then I saw how everyone was going around the group round Robin saying how they were doing in their struggle to be chaste. *Chaste!!!* That's the word they used! I really couldn't swallow all that. I was actually the last to share, and I remember very well how I reacted to all that. I said that I'd had a great conversion through Medjugorje and that I was there just to investigate if that was the group where Our Lady was calling me after a request I'd made in prayer. But I also added that I had a huge problem with the whole "*we're-not-gay, -we're-SSA*" thing and, especially, with "celibacy" – and that's the word I used instead of "chastity." If Courage was all about celibacy and self-hatred, I simply would not be back! And I was determined not to join such "homophobic" group.

A New Direction - Little did I need to understand that that was the group where Our Lady was calling me. Do you remember what was the sign I'd asked as a confirm that, should all that be granted, such would be the path in which She was putting me for my conversion? A message through Marija from Medjugorje. Now remember! My first Courage meeting took place at the end of February 2006. Our Lady gives a message for the world each 25th of the month through Marija of Medjugorje. The 25th of the month following from my first Courage meeting was 25 March 2006. And what was the message for the world on that day?

"Courage Little Children! I decided to lead you on the way of holiness. Renounce sin and set out on the way of salvation, the way which my Son has chosen. Through each of your tribulations and sufferings God will find the way of joy for you. Therefore, little children, pray. We are close to you with our love. Thank you for having responded to my call."

Our Lady had *never* used the word "Courage" addressing her children in any of her messages before!! And also the content of this message was about renouncing sin and deciding for salvation and holiness, offering our suffering as a way of joy!! All this was a mirror of the way she had been speaking to me! And not only, but all I had asked for had been granted. Courage is a Catholic Apostolate endorsed by the Holy See for

persons who struggle with same sex attraction based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (<http://www.couragerc.net/>). And that was just what I'd asked for! Fr Martin then became my spiritual director, which is the equivalent of a sponsor in AA, and I dumped my gay sponsor. And that was just what I'd asked for! And the message through Marija from Medjugorje as a confirm that, should all that be granted, such would be the path in which She was putting me for my conversion had also been given! It came straight after that first Courage meeting that I attended.

WOW !! Our Lady truly takes us to the letter! Be very careful what you ask Her!

I knew I was called to go back to Courage, and indeed I went back!

My life after the Courage Message of 25 March 2006

The Long Road Ahead - My life now was truly taking a new direction, in a way that almost scared me. I didn't know what would come after that but I knew I had to obey and go back to Courage. And remember that I was still a gay activist, with my mind deeply soaked in gay politics!

I decided to go and give the Courage Apostolate a try, but I would still continue to also operate in Quest as a gay leader. I would do my best to keep my mind quiet, but, to my dismay, I really didn't succeed in that. I soon became known in Courage as an "angry pro-gay character." This is how James, the London leader, described me after the big trouble I caused:

Stefano has, by his own admission (and mine) been a "delicate" and "vivacious" character to say the least throughout his time attending the London chapter of *(En)Courage*. His outspoken nature has caused some grief for most of us at different times. *However*, this is not intentional and his desire has been to stand up for what he has believed at the time to be true – which I admire. He is a great witness to the pursuit of chastity and to the teachings of Mother Church. In all honesty, **I cannot find any other man who has moved further forward in his spiritual journey and become "The Shining Light" of London's EnCourage chapter like Stefano has**, and I do not say this lightly!! His story and journey are a witness to *all* in *Courage* across the globe, in my opinion.

Making Mistakes - I believe what James refers to here, when he says "delicate" and "vivacious" character, is the way I really damaged this Apostolate in the first year of my attendance. As I mentioned above, I had also joined, at some point of my recovery from drug addiction, one of Cenacolo prayer groups in London. I really grew spiritually with them and I also felt welcome as a homosexual man as far as the prayer group was concerned. But I really encountered serious problems once a friend of mine asked to join one of their residential communities. The problem was that he had been referred to them by me, and my friend being obviously effeminate in his mannerism, it was pretty clear to them that he was also homosexual. Their impact with this request was one that came unexpected to both of us. I don't need to enter the details of what was said and what words and arguments were used to fire back at each other, but it isn't hard to understand that they really had a big problem with addicts or alcoholics joining their residential communities who were also openly homosexual.

The Battle Began - As a good gay activist, it didn't take me long to stand up for our legal rights, and so I began a law suit against the Cenacolo Community that ended up in much damage and suffering to all parties involved. I never actually started any court proceedings, but the lawyer who accepted to represent our case was a barrister, so we were well equipped!

James tried to act as a mediator in the matter, trying to lead us to change our mind and forgive the leaders of Cenacolo who had hurt us in this way. But for me that simply wasn't good enough and I formally asked him to speak to my lawyer as far as this matter was concerned. This, understandably, led to the closing down of the Courage chapter in London, whereas Cenacolo still continued to operate in London despite this war. I also had some unpleasant correspondence with Sr Elvira regarding this matter, but I have to say that she never lacked charity in the e-mails she sent me. I was the angry one! And I was determined to bring them down, unless they changed their policies on homosexuality!

So here I was, in the middle of a war and now completely deprived of the Courage support system where Our Lady had put me. That message with the “Courage” word was still impressed in my mind, so I knew that, despite what was going on, Our Lady wanted me there. Therefore I decided to join Courage Online, an on-line group of the Courage Apostolate. I had read about this group in the website and I had also had some exchanges with its founder David Morrison. He was also a former gay activist and the author of the book *Beyond Gay*.

I joined the on-line group with my real name (Stefano V.), but it wasn’t long before many members of the group recognized who I was. By then, as was the case with Saul in the book of Acts, I had reached the worldwide reputation of the worst enemy of Courage, having “infiltrated” the Apostolate with the intent of destroying it. That’s how I was known after the Cenacolo law suit, and they were all scared of me, just like the early Christians were scared of Saul who was out to kill them. So I had to leave the group and rejoin with a different name, *George Day*.

A New Name - Ironically, George Day began to have a great success in Courage Online, and no one truly realized who I really was. By that time, though, I had gotten into a new relationship with another man who was also taking part to Quest meetings with me, all while I was having great success in Courage Online! Since he had previously had no Christian upbringing of any sort, Derrick, my new partner, who’d started to come to church with me, decided to be baptized into the Catholic Church. We chose to do this through the dissenting “pastoral” program for the gay community that was going on at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament in Kings Cross at the time. And so Fr Jim Kennedy, who was the priest in charge of this dissenting “pastoral” program, decided to baptize and confirm Derrick without any initial catechesis. I was asked to be his sponsor, and he charged me with the task of “teaching” him the Catholic faith.

Nothing could have been more inappropriate and confusing, obviously to be expected of a dissenting program of so-called pastoral outreach to homosexual persons! Yet, we all know that God works in mysterious ways, and his Christian initiation, although inappropriate, was fully valid. So Derrick did become a Catholic, and I did become his God-father!

Anger and Confusion - While all this took place, I also decided to get in touch with the Central Office of the Courage Apostolate which at the time was based in New York. I wanted to let them know what had truly happened with Cenacolo and why I had taken legal action. I was on fire with anger, especially when I realized that no affirmation was coming my way even from them! So I became very angry with the Central Office too, especially with Fr John Harvey, the founder of Courage. But the response from Fr Harvey, as had also been the case with Sr Elvira, was one of *unconditional* love, despite my actions. At a time of the year where the details of the Annual Courage Conference were still not available on the official website, Fr Harvey told me the dates and location and invited me to book for the upcoming Conference. I chose to try this one too, but on one condition: that they register me not as Stefano V., but as George Day. I reiterate that Stefano had the reputation of Saul, the persecutor, and George was by now through Courage Online, and because of his gifted knowledge and experience, gaining the reputation of St Paul, the “defender of the faith”!! So I asked to be registered at the Conference as George Day. The Conference that year was taking place in Boston.

Prayer from the Heart - Again I prayed to Our Lady. Remember that in the middle of all this turmoil, my inner conflicts continued to persist. My spiritual journey through Our Lady, with that message in 2006, had begun a motion in my heart, and no outside noise could stop it; not even the law suit. And besides that, my grief caused by the distance I’d had to maintain from my mother was also still troubling me deeply. I was reading Our Lady’s messages calling us to reconciliation; and yet, I could not reconcile with my own mother.

Back to Medjugorje - Since by then I had been made redundant and I had some savings, I decided that I would go to the Conference, but I would also go to Medjugorje first one more time, and this time on my own, to seek guidance from Our Lady. Meanwhile I had also joined the International Internet Prayer Group, Queen of Peace which was an extension of the group Our Lady had started here in Medjugorje and that was run by Ivan, one of the visionaries. So I booked for three weeks in Medjugorje and ten days in Boston in the month of July into August 2008, with only a three-day break in London in-between.

I bargained with the Blessed Mother again. Remembering what St Faustina says in her Diary, that Jesus speaks to us through the mouth of the priest (<http://www.saint-faustina.com/Diary/DMIMS13.shtml>), I said to Our Lady that I would spend three weeks in Medjugorje in complete *silence*, only keeping in touch with the Internet prayer group –which I did – and Courage Online –which I also did. But what I would ask of her was to ask her Son to speak to me with clarity through the mouth of one of the Franciscans of St James' parish in Medjugorje. The Franciscan I would go to for Confession would have to give me clear guidance and direction on what to do concerning my relationship with my mother and my relationship with Derrick, in the context of my homosexual condition.

The time came to come to Medjugorje, and I did come on my own for the first time. I did not join any activities or any groups, but only the daily program at the church, only keeping in touch through the internet with IIPG Queen of Peace and Courage Online.

Silent Reflection - This time in Medjugorje was meant to be for me a moment of self-examination and guidance. As I said that I had asked Our Lady to get her Son to speak to me through one of the Franciscans, I decided to go to Confession to one of the local priests; and I got a very nice lad, I think younger than me, who told me the importance of maintaining peace in my heart and patience with my mother and family, who are not believers and follow wrong paths. However, I did not feel that "certainty," although the Franciscan guy was very loving and reassuring. But I felt the word needed to come from some deeper source, such was the nature of my issues which I needed to address with God's direction, reassurance and ...inner healing.

Father Svet - Just by chance, I bumped into Fr Svet, who was one of the first eye-witnesses of the early events in Medjugorje. He is a very well-known personality connected with Medjugorje and I had never spoken to him before. I asked him if he could hear my Confession and he told me to be there the following day at 8.30am, same spot. Actually, I didn't need Confession, as I had already been; what I needed was "certainty," and so I thought, "This is a very busy man, with so many important commitments, who hardly finds the time for himself...what am I going to say to him tomorrow?"... But I gave it a try.

Well, he was half an hour late, but he came. And he did not hear my Confession, he heard my *tears*! I didn't know where to start from, but I had the impression that he already knew everything about me and my mother, and what I needed to say. I cannot put it into words, but I really felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in that room. He was speaking, and as he was speaking, the questions I was about to ask were being answered.

Hard Choices - He said to me the things I needed to hear, and kind of confirmed the choices I had been making all along concerning my mother. It is strange because I didn't really say much up until the end, when he had already advised me on how to go about issues I quickly disclosed... and the things he advised were the choices I had made... very hard, tough and painful... but the only way out to remain mentally and emotionally sane.

He even said something very harsh, which I was able to grasp in its full meaning, *"If you want to keep your inner peace, you need to reach a level where you are going to be fine whatever choices your mother makes. That means that if she decides to go to hell, you are still going to be at peace with God."*

Peace with My Mother - Remembering the past, where the pain of the separation from my mother literally broke my chest, this was something really hard to swallow. Then he said that this doesn't mean that I must not care about my mother, but I cannot allow her to make me vulnerable. I think the same works for anyone who has family members or close friends who are in very difficult situations; we are not the ones who can send the message, because we happen to be emotionally involved. We need to find that inner dimension where we are actually going to be fine whatever choices they make. If they decide to use drugs, stop going to church, make life choices that are against God... whatever that be, we are still going to be at peace (*not happy*, at peace), and we must be present not by preaching, but with our prayer and fasting. Let the preaching be for someone else. Like Fr Svet said to me, we should let them talk about whatever they want to talk about, but we should not make ourselves vulnerable, and leave the evangelization part to others.

Offering it All Up - I knew that this was fully in line with the initial experience I had here in Medjugorje when I saw that breathing image of the Pieta and, by extension, my mother being prayed over by Fr Jozo. I knew that the content of the message Our Lady had given on 25 March 2006 was about offering my suffering, like Mary had done in the Pieta, for the conversion and salvation of my mother. And I knew that by keeping a distance I was also not allowing her to make me vulnerable. This was painful, but the pain was offered in union with the Cross!

"Courage Little Children! I decided to lead you on the way of holiness. Renounce sin and set out on the way of salvation, the way which my Son has chosen. Through each of your tribulations and sufferings God will find the way of joy for you. Therefore, little children, pray. We are close to you with our love. Thank you for having responded to my call." 25 March 2006

The Rosary - To my astonishment, Fr Svet did not say a word on my homosexual situation! Not a word! No comment! No frowning! No compassion. No condemnation. Nothing!!! Complete silence on something that, beside my situation with my mother, truly constituted a primary life issue for me.

Fr Svet also gave me a rosary, which, once back, I hanged on the wall in my house. And as I came out of that room, I looked up to heaven, saying, "Blessed Mother, I understand about my situation with my mother and what you have been telling me is now clear. I have to continue to offer my grief for her in union with you and your Son on Calvary. But regarding my homosexuality and my relationship with Derrick, he hasn't said a word! Now I am even more confused!!!"

By the time I traveled to Medjugorje, I had already decided to drop the law suit against Cenacolo. But I have to be clear that my motivation was more to do with exhaustion rather than charity! I still had not forgiven Cenacolo, nor did I see a reason to be forgiven by them. After all, they were at fault for discriminating against addicts who happened to be homosexual. But even on this, Fr Svet made no comment!

My time at the Courage Conference in Boston

Back in London - I was back from Medjugorje to only spend three days in London. I felt deeply that something was been stirred inside me, so I was very clear with Derrick that I intended to remain sexually abstinent, at least for the time being, until I came back from Boston. Although I had not received a word of guidance on this issue from Fr Svet, I felt that something was taking place inside me. If I had broken my sexual abstinence, I would have broken the thread of what was taking place inside me. This I understood.

The Conference in America - So I went to Boston, which was also my first time in the United States. I had arranged to spend some time before the Conference with a friend of mine I met in Courage Online who was also very devoted to Medjugorje. We had a wonderful time together, and I opened up with him about everything to do with my situation. His unconditional welcome was just amazing, and we are still great friends to this day.

Then came the time of the Conference, and I felt a bit apprehensive given my background. I was amazed at realizing that the Conference was actually taking place in a Marian Center, which was not only dedicated to Our Lady of Medjugorje, but was also Ivan's community in Boston!! Do you remember that I had just become a member of his prayer group on-line?

How amazing was that! ...this was truly an extension of my previous three weeks in Medjugorje. I met wonderful people at the Conference, including a same-sex couple (who are living chastely) who invited me and Derrick to attend their chapter. They live in Pennsylvania and they said they have a big house. They were actually the first people I met at the Conference, a bit like God trying to tell me that there was actually a way to live my situation with Derrick that I had not considered before. Now, do you remember what I had asked from Our Lady among the many things to be granted? To send me a companion willing to grow in holiness with me *in the way the Church calls us to*. Here was the answer I had never considered: *a chaste*

relationship! David and Robert seemed to be doing quite well with that! And Our Lady knew I needed to see that, so she made sure they were the first people I met. To this day, we are still great friends.

Answer to Prayers - I found so many answers at my first Courage Conference that led me to understand why Jesus had kept quiet about my homosexuality when giving me guidance through Fr Svet's words in Medjugorje. The answer was coming from that Marian Center, again an extension of my time in Medjugorje!! If I had to go through the things I was given to understand just because of this connection arranged by the Blessed Mother, a book would simply not be enough. I know I am in the path to holiness today, despite my many weaknesses, and I do not mean just my homosexuality.

Father Harvey - Even the events with Cenacolo were fully understood by both Fr Harvey and Angelo of the Central Office. I certainly overreacted and my law suit was totally inappropriate. But they understood me, and that was enough for me. I also apologized to Fr Harvey for my reactions towards him, but he had already received me with a big smile and beckoning gestures proving unconditional love beyond my expectations. He died on 26 December 2010 and is now venerated by all Courage members as a saint in heaven. I even have a relic which touched his body at his funeral. It was sent to me from the US by a Courage member who attended the funeral.

Making Amends - Fr Harvey, founder of the Courage Apostolate, had a great love and a deep understanding for those directly affected by homosexuality. He was a man of strict orthodoxy but also with profound love for those who struggle with this condition. Even though my name had been stained in Courage because of how I sued Cenacolo, leading me to use Courage Online as my chapter using a different name (George Day), Angelo asked me if I would be willing to open a chapter in my diocese. But I didn't feel ready for that because I first needed to make amends – which I did once I got back. And so, like in St Paul's days, I now continue to be known in my Courage ministry as George Day, because Stefano V., like Saul, is dead, and George Day, like St Paul, has arisen as a new man through a personal encounter with Christ.

Stepping Out In Faith - I cannot tell you what a change this brought in my heart as I truly felt I was still in "Medjugorje." Our Lady was continuing to guide me through the Courage Conference in Boston, and I didn't know, at the time of booking, that it would take place in a Medjugorje Center! And I just went along because Fr Harvey made sure I felt his invitation by telling me the details of the Conference before it was actually sent out in the website. Now I could really die happy. I knew Our Lady was behind all this. It was really clear! I felt I had nothing to fear. So much clarity I received that month in the answers I got.

The Healing Love - Then Dale O'Leary gave a talk on the causes and origins of Same Sex Attraction at the Conference, and she talked about the extremely profound need of love children have and the sensitive perception they get even from looking at the frowning of their mother. If there is no smile from a mother's face towards the baby, that need of love will always remain unmet in their whole life.

This made me think of my own childhood and the lack of love I had experienced from my natural mother and the stern look of my foster mother, who always made me feel unwanted. She never failed to remind me that at any time she would kick me out of her house. And then I noticed that behind Dale O'Leary, while she was talking, there was an image of Our Blessed Mother from Medjugorje, the one where she smiles and says, *"If you knew how much I love you, you would cry of joy!"* It is such a beautiful smiling face!

Mary my Mother - I thought of that smile and those eyes of the Gospa in the picture I hanged in my room when I had depression, and how much healing during that time I received just from looking at her beautiful loving eyes in that picture, just opposite my bed, facing me. I remembered falling asleep looking at her loving smile. And it was the same picture that was now hanging behind Dale O'Leary and to which she was pointing us out! I said before that I never made use of anti-depressants. And everything made sense to me now, since I remembered so vividly the look of that holy image and the healing I received from it! And this powerful talk from Dale O'Leary was but a confirm of the work of Our Lady in my life beginning from that message in 2006...

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Forgiveness - Dale O'Leary said in her talk that after we go to Our Blessed Mother to receive that smile and her love, we can then forgive our parents and those who hurt us for rejecting and not loving us. Consequently, I felt that even that *heavy burden* of the anger I was feeling against Cenacolo was leaving me after this. It was that horrible feeling of rejection and the stern look of condemnation from Paula, the leader of Cenacolo in London, that hurt me most and made me react the way I did. So I thought of what Dale O'Leary said, and of the Last Seven Words of Jesus from the Cross. Jesus said, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." *I asked forgiveness for acting out my anger against them, and I also decided to forgive them.*

Living A New Life - Then I was wondering how I would explain all this to Derrick, my partner, in the context of my conversion. Since Courage is about *chastity*, I felt it would be better to be clear with Derrick about the direction my life was taking. Meeting David and Robert who are living by the Church's teachings was the answer I needed on how to turn my relationship with Derrick. What more than this could I have expected?! Derrick was the answer to my prayers, when I asked for a companion who would walk with me towards holiness. He was baptized and I really wanted to make this work. To this day, after I came back from the Conference, we have grown together spiritually and in *chaste love*! Derrick has also come with me to Medjugorje after that, and he is now his own journey of deep conversion with the Gospa! Now that we are chaste, we love each other even more than when we used to be sexual. In his own words, we even stopped arguing!

I am holding my tears remembering all this! No way could it have been orchestrated by my own mind! It was Our Lady guiding me and Derrick to the Truth, and the Truth is her Son Jesus!

I pray that my mother may also come to experience this indescribable unconditional love of Our Lady and Our Lord. If she knew how much they love her, she would also cry of joy. No sin is too great for God's Mercy.

The Risen Christ - But this is not all! Just before leaving the Conference, I was walking down the path towards Our Lady's Grotto, to finally realize that there was a double of the Risen Christ of Medjugorje which I still had not seen the previous days; so I decided to go and have a look the last hour before leaving. And a lady, who had not been at the Conference, suddenly approached me from behind. She had obviously been there but I can assure you that I had seen no trace of her either inside the Center or outside as I was walking towards the wood! It was as if she had appeared from nowhere! And she asked me if I had seen the Risen Christ, which was precisely where I was going. She asked me if I had been to Medjugorje, and you can imagine the follow up of the conversation. She was the one who told me of Ivan's membership to that Marian lay community. And as I was praying, after the lady had left me to go to Our Lady's Grotto, I saw her coming back with a rose petal in her hands. She said she saw it at the foot of Our Lady's Grotto, but she could not see any roses around the statue. She said it could have been the wind but it had been raining all the time the past days and it had not been windy. She said she'd felt an inner voice from Our Lady's statue to come and give it to me, telling me that she was granted to see the strong love Our Blessed Mother has for me.

Mercy and Love - I could not begin to tell you how this hit my heart and how it topped up everything that happened before! As it also happened in Fatima with a rain of rose petals from the sky which was witnessed by all present on 13 October 1917, roses are the favorite flowers of Our Lady and a strong sign of her love and affirmation. I kept that rose petal and put it in my Bible. As I was back to London, I resigned from my leadership in Quest as a gay activist and I began to work with all my efforts for the restoration of the Courage Apostolate in London!

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way of joy for you. Therefore, little children, pray. We are close to you with our love. Thank you for having responded to my call." 25 March 2006

Courage Reparation & the Theology of Weakness

"Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question." (Acts 15:2)

The Need for Reparation - Have you ever had a disagreement with another brother who, like you, claims to love and serve the Lord?

Anyone coming across this Bible passage cannot read this episode and not be moved. Nevertheless, there are some vital principles that one may learn from the dispute that developed between these Christian brothers. This dissension between Paul and Barnabas was not over a *doctrinal* issue. The rupture involved a personal dispute based upon a judgment call. To their credit, neither Paul nor Barnabas let the conflict distract them from their respective efforts of spreading the Gospel. Making application to Christians today, there will always be times when good brethren will disagree in matters of opinion. The important thing is to keep focused on doing the will of Christ. That is what Paul and Barnabas both did, and this is precisely what happened between me and the leader of Courage Online, regardless of who was right in the argument.

So we started a new group on-line affiliated with the Courage Apostolate called Courage Reparation Online. The idea was born out of something I'd read in the Courage website making reference to the Theology of Weakness as the Theology of the Body applied to Same Sex Attraction. This was also in connection with the Marian call of Reparation which was answered by Vera, a long-standing member of Courage, the first lady to have ever joined the Apostolate and, like me, with a deep experience of Medjugorje followed by a strong devotion to Our Lady.

The application of the Theology of Weakness falls within the Fatima call to offer our lives as a chaste sacrifice of reparation for the sins of the flesh, which are the sins that drive most souls to hell, as Our Lady said at Fatima on 13 July 1917. I therefore read in the argument that had caused a painful division with Courage Online a providential call to develop the concept of the Theology of Weakness in the context of Our Lady's call of Reparation as it appears from her recent Apparitions.

Look To Mary - As the Holy Father reminds us in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (11 October 2011), if we want to do the will of God, we must be Marian. We must therefore focus on the centrality of Mary in the Theology of Weakness in order to truly live out our vocations as SSA persons in the context of "chaste offering of self." This is what Reparation is all about, a ministry endorsed by the Courage Apostolate, a call to offering the total gift of self in union with the Cross of Christ in our homo-emotional suffering (Col. 1:24). It was my Medjugorje experience, reinforced by that message that Our Lady had given on 25 March 2006, that made me realize I had the call to extend on-line Vera's Reparational groups.

I will now start by describing what the Courage Reparational Groups are NOT. We are NOT about "reparative therapy." I hear many saying to me that they don't think that SSA is something to be "cured" of and therefore they "do not need Reparation." Actually, this is a gross misunderstanding of our ministry! Although we do not take a negative stand in relation to reparative therapy as such (that is, professional approaches to change one's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual), this is not what the Courage Reparational Groups (CRG) and Courage Reparation Online (CRO) are about! When we make use

of words like "Reparation" in the context of "human weakness," we actually refer to a Marian ministry fully endorsed by the Courage Apostolate - yet still not very much known, or rather "made known," as it should be. This ministry entails a personal answer to the call of Mary from Fatima to offer our lives as persons affected by the "homo-emotional" wound in union with her, the Co-Redemptrix standing at the foot of the Cross. Reparation is fully in line with our SSA weakness and our struggle to remain chaste in a way that, united in Christ's "Gift of Self" through Mary's intercession, acquires "co-redeeming merits"... not of itself, but in virtue of the merits of Christ.

Do you remember that this was exactly the understanding I received from my experience with Fr Jozo?!!

Healing the Wounds - Mary, being the First Disciple of Christ, who is Immaculate and fully participating in her Son's act of Redemption, extends this invitation to us, though we are struggling with same sex attraction and homo-emotional issues. Our desire to be chaste is more an occasion to grow in the Interior Life rather than a struggle per se.

We therefore understand ourselves as a "consecrated community" within the heart of Courage of members who feel called to move to a "deeper step" in the spiritual life of the Apostolate. This is what distinguishes our specific call as an endorsed ministry of the Courage Apostolate that tries to answer the call of Reparation to the best of our ability. So basically, CRG and CRO are not just part of a "variety" of Courage groups; CRG, with its "on-line extension" CRO, has its own unique purpose. In fact, in CRG we add to the Twelve Steps http://www.couragerc.net/Twelve_Steps_of_Courage.html and Five Goals of Courage http://www.couragerc.net/Our_Five_Goals.html our own Mission Statement which can be found in our webpage http://couragerc.net/Reparational_Groups.html.

A New Mission - Why is CRG then "different" from other Courage groups? Well, the answer is simple. All other Courage groups have received approval in an ordinary manner through the Courage Apostolate. The Courage Apostolate itself ministers to persons with same-sex attraction and their loved ones. We have been endorsed by the **Pontifical Council for the Family** and our beloved John Paul II said of this ministry, "*COURAGE is doing the work of God!*"

But the Courage Reparational Groups were formed, and thus formally approved, from their very "embryonic phase" as a result of a meeting between Vera, our founder, and Cardinal John O'Connor, in his residence at St. Patrick's Cathedral, on 8 September 1992 (Our Blessed Mother's Birthday) under the endorsement and blessing of our beloved Fr Harvey, founder of Courage. The peculiar purpose of this "new group" based on Reparation was thus established on that meeting! Following from that first meeting, on another Marian date, 21 November 1992 (feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple), the first gathering of the Courage Reparational Group took place on Staten Island, in New York. A number of Courage members, Fr. Frank Pavone (who then moved on as Director of "Priests for Life") and Vera, CRG founder and author of the Theology of Weakness, drew up our mission statement which again can be accessed on the website http://couragerc.net/Reparational_Groups.html. This journey began with the blessing and permission of Cardinal John O'Connor, Archbishop of New York, who gave Vera his wholehearted support and encouragement.

The realization of the feast day in which the first CRG meeting occurred (21 November) had profound meaning for this group. This was Mary's feast in which she consecrated herself to God as a young woman. Many Catholic religious, over the years, made their first vows on this day.

The Courage Ministry - It made Vera realize that God was giving us equal footing in this call and confirmed in her what she had felt deep in her heart that the Courage ministry had a "vocational call attached to it" for those who would respond to it... hence the reason why we refer to ourselves as a "deeper step" into a "growth in the Interior Life" or a "consecrated community" within the heart of the Courage Apostolate.

In fact, upon joining CRO and CRG we do not just join a group!! This is a call that we take very seriously! Therefore we also encourage our members to perform an individual act of formal consecration, of their own choosing and preference, as an "exterior sign" of our common consecration: something like the conferral into the Miraculous Medal or the enrollment into the Brown Scapular. But we also repeat every year our 33-Day Consecration to Our Lady as our CRO Approval Anniversary approaches.

God in His great Mercy and Goodness was acknowledging our dignity within our homo-emotional struggle, which we refer to a lot in parallel to the "physical struggle" of SSA. How much he desired to raise us up with His consecrated elect! This group would witness to the Theology of Weakness that in and through our weakness we can become whole and holy! Uniting this suffering within His Passion can bring Redemption to us and the whole world, not only those in the gay life style. This, we feel, is the authentic SSA application of the Theology of the Body which was developed by Bl. John Paul II. Of course, with this we do not, in any way, mean to diminish, denigrate or devalue any other study or interpretation of the Theology of the Body promoted by other groups and applied to same sex attraction. We do encourage every Courage group to find their application of the Theology of the Body to SSA as they see best. Nevertheless, that would be "another good" interpretation and NOT to be confused with, or "replacing," Vera's Theology of Weakness. This bears the "stamp" of the Courage Apostolate, so to speak, but it doesn't mean that other applications are not good!

Our Lady of Lourdes - Now a bit about *Courage Reparation Online*. CRO was also founded by me, and formally approved by Fr Check, International Director of Courage, on two Marian dates: 15 August 2010 (feast of the Assumption) and 13 October 2010 (feast of the Fatima Dance of the Sun). Needless to say, the falling of such events on Marian feast dates was NOT planned, but only later realized!! Despite my strong devotion to Our Lady of Medjugorje as Queen of Peace, I chose not to impose this when we wanted to adopt a Patron Saint for the group. We unanimously decided to take a Poll in CRO to vote by majority which Saint should be our Patron Saint. We also did our first formal 33-Day Consecration that - again UNPLANNED - ended with Fr Check's "unexpected" approval of our group!

WOW !! What a blessing that was!! We took this, matched with the Marian dates, as a sign that Our Lady was behind all this. So we took it easy and waited on Her. The Poll in fact voted Her by majority as our Patroness under her Lourdes title of "Immaculate Conception." It was then that I suddenly realized that the first time I felt called to formally join Courage was after Our Lady gave a message in Medjugorje which followed a direct prayer request from me after my conversion and which was given after my first Courage meeting! Our Lady always addresses her children as "Dear children" in Medjugorje, but that time she addressed them as "Courage, little children"!!

"Courage Little Children! I decided to lead you on the way of holiness. Renounce sin and set out on the way of salvation, the way which my Son has chosen. Through each of your tribulations and sufferings God will find the way of joy for you. Therefore, little children, pray. We are close to you with our love. Thank you for having responded to my call." 25 March 2006

That was the message after my first Courage meeting! To me the first words and the content of that message had meant a strong sign that Our Lady was telling me, "Courage is the way to go." And I, still as a gay activist at the time, chose to obey the call! But as I now, after the Poll, looked deeper in that message, I also realized something I had not noticed before. The content of that message was the same message of Reparation...

"... I decided to lead you on the way of holiness. Renounce sin and set out on the way of salvation, the way which my Son has chosen. Through each of your tribulations and sufferings God will find the way of joy for you..."

... and guess what! That message had also been given on a Marian feast date, the feast of the Annunciation! One more Marian founding date for CRG & CRO!!! And not only that! This date of the feast of the Annunciation was also the day when Our Lady revealed herself as "Immaculate Conception" in Lourdes in 1858!!! It really was NO COINCIDENCE that our CRO Poll had voted - again UNPLANNED - Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception as Patroness!

Our Lady Leads Us - I therefore was so astounded by Her signs of guidance in this ministry - despite the struggles and quarrels we were facing - that I humbly decided to hand over to Mary my title of "Head Moderator" of CRO, because this ministry belongs to Her, and we now refer to Mary as "Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, CRO Patroness & Head Moderator (Calling us to Reparation for Sins against Human Sexuality & Growth in the Interior Life)."

This is, as it were, her full extended title in Courage Reparation Online, which is also the name of the Meditations I periodically send out as an act of honor and love towards Our Blessed Lady. In line with all the above information, we have a virtual chapel with the Medjugorje live-streamed program. Here we hold prayer vigils beside following daily Mass and Adoration from St James. Although this does not, in any way, substitute Mass and Adoration at our local parishes, we take this call very seriously and strictly monitor our participation in the chapel.

This is why the chapel can only be entered through a password by joining Courage Reparation Online.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CourageReparationOnline/?vm=r>

In the chapel we hold six prayer meetings a month and four a year, in coincidence with our four Marian Anniversaries. On the Last Saturday of every month we have chosen to pray for priests who struggle with SSA and homo-emotionally. But mind you!! It must be very clear, to again avoid "misconceptions," that we do NOT neglect to also pray for the victims of sexual abuse! We feel that for each space and time there is a purpose.

Prayer for Priests - Therefore, the Last Saturday of the month is for healing of priests! Not for judgment and condemnation towards those who have abused anyone, nor for apologies or excuses of any kind, and not even as a means to disregard the hurt they have caused. To state any of such things would be fairly unjust in regard to the sacredness of our ministry! We pray for ALL our priests who struggle with sexual sins, both those who have committed crimes and those who have so far been able to handle their struggle; those who are still active in the priesthood and those who have been suspended a divinis or laicized; because by praying for them we help ourselves and the whole Church, using Mirijana's own words. And to understand why that is so, we just need to think in terms of "foundations."

The priesthood today is severely under satanic attack. The devil knows well that by misleading the priests, the Eucharist will be best attacked. Without priests, we would have NO SACRAMENTAL CHURCH. We would also not have the First Friday and First Saturday devotions of Reparation which have long been established in Catholic Tradition, because there would be no Mass and no Confession to be offered! So this is why we place our Vigil of Reparation for SSA struggling priests on the Saturday that "precedes" these devotions of Reparation.

Moving Forward - So where am I going from now? Well, I think my story of conversion is like the book of Acts... it remains ongoing! In fact, as I am writing this testimony for the Vatican Commission, here's an example of another work of God that happened here during my stay in Medjugorje just a few days ago. It is in the form of a post because I shared it with Courage Reparation Online. The person I mention in my post below is one of those I quoted above when I said, *"My church community was very hostile towards me since I had come out as a gay man, and to these days I have been carrying very much resentment towards many of them. The process of forgiveness is still ongoing. Today I accept the limitations of ordinary members of the Church in understanding this issue. But back then, I couldn't."*

A Lesson on Forgiveness

Wed, 7 Mar 2012

Dear Courage Reparation Online,

I would like to share something amazing that happened here in Medjugorje yesterday.

I'm sure we all have persons in our life that we still struggle to forgive. And I'm also sure that some of us have not been very sweet and kind with these persons in our past resentment.

Well, upon starting the Leaders Conference here in Medjugorje, I saw here a girl at whom in the past I was really resentful and also nasty, and I really felt it would truly disturb my time here.

So at the start of the morning Adoration yesterday I opened the Gospel and I got Mt 18:22 ("*Forgive seventy times seven*"). I therefore chose to make a decision to forgive Elisabetta although I felt no desire in my heart!

To my amazement, it was Elisabetta who made the first approach at me during the break. She came to the English speaking area to ask me to stop hating her! I couldn't believe how timely that was after the Gospel passage I had just received in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Well, it was pretty evident from past messages to her Facebook account that I was very resentful at her. She had really hurt me in the past! But I had also been far beyond "defensive" towards her. I was rude to her several times simply acting out my anger! So it would have been more appropriate for her to forgive me rather than me forgive her! But I said, "I forgive you!"

Indeed, she felt I had nothing to forgive her for, so we had a chat about why I felt hurt and why I acted out my anger on her. Now I decided to forgive her because it was evident from that Gospel passage that I was given at the Adoration that Jesus was asking me to.

However, I felt she didn't really get the message of how I felt hurt by her in the past... so the whole day I had the voice playing in my head - even though I had decided to forgive her - that I should now insult her even more because of her hard heart! And to let go of that voice was really hard and painful throughout the whole day!

We went up Apparition Hill with the group to pray the rosary, and she was behind me. Part of me wanted to kill her! Part of me said, "Just ignore she's here!"... and all this just after my decision to forgive her!

Until we went to the evening program in the church. After Mass we had the healing prayer, and you know what? Elisabetta just happened to be sitting on the pew next to mine! That also hadn't been planned!

I could not - and I mean it... I could not! - follow the prayer! My head ached at her presence there!

The last words from the Franciscan priest leading the healing prayer were these (I am not making up anything, guys!!!!)

"She has truly hurt you in the past. Now you are both standing next to each other before Jesus. Forgive her because Jesus loves both of you"

I could not believe my ears!!! That Gospel passage in the morning, which I received by random opening!!! And then her approaching me!!! Then her being around all the time next to me!! And now these words! What a God-incidence!!! These things only happen in Medjugorje!!!

I burst into tears, and all the people around me could see! She came to me and asked me to forgive her!!! And I couldn't say a word! I just hugged her and cried!

I also felt affirmed in my grief. If someone hurts me, I have a right to feel hurt. But Jesus also felt hurt. Yet, he did not retaliate. It was easy for me to forgive because I felt Jesus affirming me in my grief, which I have been uniting to his grief on the Cross. The way they treat SSA persons is not right, but we have a choice. As the Catechism tells us at par. 2358:

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, **to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.** (*Emphasis added*)

It is incredible how Jesus works wonders here in Medjugorje! It all so seemed "orchestrated"!! It was like directed, and Jesus was saying those affirming words to me!

I'd always viewed forgiveness as an effort of the will... but now it came from Jesus' affirmation of my grief... a shared grief... and it so made it easier for me to forgive Elisabetta!

I feel free now from this resentment, and I find that it has helped me unlock other resentments too.

Conclusion

I hope my story can help the work of the Vatican Commission come to a positive conclusion for the glory of God, who out of his Mercy for us sent his Mother here in Medjugorje to call the world to conversion. Because of the dynamics of my – still ongoing – story of conversion, I am convinced that Medjugorje is authentic, as many others are too. This place and all that is happening here is bringing about incredible conversions to a sector of the world that has just about lost its soul! This is not something to be viewed lightly! My own conversion that I have described could not have happened without Medjugorje.

For many Catholics to put down or dismiss Medjugorje is to be culturally blind to much of what God is clearly doing among the Catholic family here in Europe and in the whole world. However, I also understand the wisdom that Mother Church expresses before accepting the authenticity of any apparitions. Whether they are true or not, we are experiencing massive fruits for the building of God's kingdom and we need to celebrate this work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Time alone will judge whether the fruit borne is permanent or not.

Ave Maria

MIR

George Day (aka Stefano V.)

Testimony of my conversion, given in Medjugorje for the Vatican Commission, on 11 March 2012