

## Brief Testimonies from New Leaven Experience

*As Presented at the New Leaven Discipleship Conference*

*Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit*

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***Jack & Anna Serge***

*Our Lady of Good  
Counsel Parish,  
Plymouth, MI*

After attending one Alpha and serving in the next, we were searching for the next steps to take in our relationship with Our Lord. Although New Leaven was a commitment of almost two years, we wanted the transformation for becoming better disciples of our Lord and opening up our hearts regarding how he was directing us.

As the weeks went by, it was as if a filter or some kind of spiritual blindness was being slowly removed

to give a better understanding of how we should live our lives in holiness and in accordance with Gods Will. In the past, we would never think about raising our hands in the air to singing praises to the Lord, which was way out of our comfort zone, nor would we have opened up during group discussions. New Leaven opened us up to the Holy Spirit and gave us courage to step out in faith, to help others come closer to our Lord. Since New Leaven we love going to Praise and Worship. We have taken on a Leadership role at our Parish as Discipleship Leaders and have invited 10 people into our home weekly for almost two years. We enjoy a meal together, we lead praise and worship, have a study in Catholic teaching, and have group discussions. We have learned to let go and let God lead us and feel his presence and love.

Participating in the New Leaven was one of the best decisions we've ever made. It's exciting to walk with other disciples in the love of the Father. The teachings on how God is present in everything we do were magnified. We love to see how God is unfolding His Plan in our lives. He continues to pour out graces upon us and our family. It's transforming and His love is addicting!

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**Margaret  
Brannigan**  
*(on the right...)*

*Our Lady of Good  
Counsel Parish,  
Plymouth, MI*

Although I had previously attended many other Catholic programs, it seemed that, in New Leaven, the Lord was saying: "Let me be the Lord of your whole life."

For me, the topic of RELATIONSHIPS had the biggest impact. Because my husband had chosen to ignore his faith, it was a sticking point between us. Starting out with a small group of strangers in New Leaven, it was initially uncomfortable to share these things. But those uncomfortable

moments revealed the most & produced the most fruit. Along the way, I became less timid about sharing the zeal for my faith with my husband. It was a very powerful experience. New Leaven has given me great friends in Christ, and ***my husband has returned to the church.***

New Leaven has helped me to realize that if I'm not being authentic in my everyday life, then I'm not witnessing to my faith and I'm not helping others to grow in theirs.

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**Alan & Angie  
Wegienka**

*Our Lady of Good  
Counsel Parish,  
Plymouth, MI*

We were involved in the New Leaven pilot (2011 & 2012) and later as pastoral guides in the full-scale launch of New Leaven (2013 & 2014). Since then, we have participated in various roles on the New Leaven Team.

**Angie Says:**

What have I learned from New Leaven? I am more open to Praise and Worship and I am more comfortable praying with

people in a small group. I have increased my own time with personal prayer. We are more aware of our stewardship responsibility. NL gave me an opportunity to take stock of my daily life. Simply put, it is practical. We continue to address the several areas of New Leaven teaching that are important in our lives. We know that some areas require more work than others but we are open to God's balance in our present lives. There is still much to do but we feel confident that we are heading in the right direction.

**Alan Says:**

The 5 years prior to starting New Leaven had been a period of tremendous growth in the faith for me. I had become a daily communicant, learned a lot about what the Catholic Church actually teaches, and began conforming my life more to Christ. The premise of New Leaven, learning how to live the Gospel, was very appealing to me.

I can say that New Leaven put flesh on the bones of my faith. Catholic Teaching went from being a bit academic to a set of concrete principals that I could apply to my daily life. Many of us wished we had known the things raised in New Leaven when we were young and just starting out. Although our boys were 12 and 18 when we started with New Leaven, I know that the young men that they have now become has been influenced by what Angie and I encountered in New Leaven.

The topics of Family and Work stood out for me. It had always been easy to say that my priorities were God, Family, and Work in that order, and by the time New Leaven started I may have begun to put God first, but it was not clear what was second; Work or Family. New Leaven provided the opportunity and the framework to evaluate my priorities and put them in order. In summary if anyone is looking for a program that really demonstrates how to move the Catholic Faith from something more theoretical to something practical that can touch every area of your life, then New Leaven is that program. It will provide the tools and environment to foster transformation and to really "Weave the Gospel into Your Life".

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**Kurt & Mary  
Krueger and  
Family + extras**

*Church of the Holy  
Family, Novi, MI*

With a family of seven and both of us working outside the home, we were seeking a very intentional way to grow our faith together.

We are presently in our third complete round of New Leaven, hosting a new couples' group that meets twice a month. The regular meetings help us protect this time for the Lord and our growth. Our group age-span is from one couple who have a two-month-old all the way to a couple of empty-nesters.

Together the twelve of us ask for The Holy Spirit's help, guidance and wisdom for our marriages, children, families, and work. The fellowship, support, and prayers we bring to each other are priceless. What we find is no matter how tired we are, when going to a meeting, we always come home feeling better and energized. Presently our group is working through the New Leaven topic of WORK.

**Kurt says:** With the subject of WORK, two immediate impacts have happened for me. First, the teaching has helped me understand that God created work and it is "good." Work is a task to get into—not out of. Somehow work can be deeply satisfying even if you become exhausted in the process. This is part of God's great design. Secondly and personally, I've been prompted to respond more readily when it seems that Jesus wants to move through me to people at work.

**Mary says:** My favorite New Leaven topic is Prayer. When I started New Leaven, I prayed individually and occasionally at dinner with the family. In New Leaven, I learned that Jesus was in constant prayer with the Father and he taught us to pray. This challenged Kurt and me to change our habits. I am now able to carve out time in the morning and evening for prayer. As a family, we hold hands and pray at every meal – even when we are at a restaurant or with a non-Christian guest. As a couple, we often pray together to strengthen our marriage and become better parents. Finally, our kitchen now has a big prayer board on the wall that everyone in our family contributes to and for whom we pray throughout the day.

In summary, New Leaven provides Kurt and me with:

- Guidance on topics that are applicable to our daily life
- Homework to help us practice and grow on our faith journey
- Discussions that allow us to learn and share what has worked and not worked
- Close friendships within the small group setting.

We feel blessed to have been able to participate in New Leaven

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**Rev. Andrew Turner**  
*Director of Pastoral  
Field Education  
St. Mary Seminary,  
Diocese of Cleveland, OH*

One of the strategic initiatives of this diocesan Seminary is the formation of priests using the best tools and methods of the New Evangelization. After incorporating Alpha into the pastoral field education curriculum three years ago, the faculty are intending to use New Leaven as a “next-step” resource for leading the faithful into an ongoing encounter with Jesus Christ.

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***Doug & Sue  
Harrington***

*Church of the Holy  
Family, Novi, MI*

Our testimony begins with an embarrassing public confession: As a couple, we have always been sorely lacking in communicating about most topics, particularly those of any spiritual depth. We are a couple married 33 years, but operated solo much of the time. That being said, we've had a very full and fun life that includes four wonderful children, aged 16-28.

We find what New Leaven has done for us as a couple rather

remarkable. It offered us the opportunity to "see what we were missing" that we agreed would probably not have happened any other way. We would have typically avoided discussing the important and foundational topics that New Leaven addresses and organizes so well. Being able to share discussion about these relevant and often intimate topics with other couples, who have now become our closest friends, gave us encouragement, confidence and a true spiritual experience, which has served to transform our marriage, our goals, our friendships, how we view our role as parents and, ultimately, our purpose in God's kingdom.

We had never been exposed to the possibility that there was a deliberate, Gospel-centered direction our lives could and should be taking. New Leaven was our introduction to that reality. We were eager to learn about and incorporate every topic, as it offered the opportunity for new growth that became increasingly more spiritually-centered. This was particularly evident during the MONEY topic, and we have now devised a contribution plan with spiritual intent that was overdue and has relieved long-term feelings of guilt.

We experience shared joy in seeing how our faith and our purpose, individually and as a couple, is moving in the direction that we now understand God intended. New Leaven has been a blessing to us and we pray for its continued development and growth. We are not alone in wishing that we had received the New Leaven opportunity at the beginning of our marriage, but we are extremely grateful for it now.

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Mary home-schools our children aged 7, 5, 3, and 1 and Jason is a Senior Software Developer for a company in Ann Arbor. We joined New Leaven when we had recently moved to the area from Saginaw. It helped us to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in many key areas of our life. Through New Leaven, we began the habit of asking, “What is the Spirit saying to me today? We learned that living in the Spirit means continually consulting the Truth and responding to it

by “...DOING SOMETHING VERY, VERY PRACTICAL.”

On the subject of TIME, we applied New Leaven’s inventory exercises and, with each thing that was regularly taking some time, we asked the question, “Is this activity in good order... does it serve the King?”. When we began to pray, “May we only give time to that which pleases you, Lord,” we found huge discrepancies. We were doing good things, but many were at the expense of spending quality time with our kids and with God in the ways that were fruitful. Through the module on TIME we gained a lot of peace, and began to take a more biblical perspective. For instance, the Bible teaches that some actions require finding an exceptional time to do them. We learned that if we wanted to be faithful to a daily prayer life, both individually and as a couple with four young children, we needed to commit to rising at 5:30AM—day in and day out—with little exception.

One New Leaven principle was: “Sometimes the right action calls for delay”, and another one states that “Sometimes we may intend an action that the Holy Spirit prevents.” As we prayed over these two principles and the corresponding Scriptures, God really convicted us that, as much as we really wanted to sell our house and buy a new one, He had a greater plan, and was asking us to wait and trust. We were also actively looking for another job, because Jason’s job was drawing a lot of time away from family, and yet God was saying, “be ready, I am working on it...but not yet.”

Another principle was “Sometimes we must act counter to the expectations of others.” There was immense pressure, at the time, from our family, friends, and even strangers for us to just go get a house—any house; to get a different job—any job, because they said it was simply up to us to make it happen. But God said wait on both of these, and eventually we did find a great job for Jason that doesn’t ask for many hours of overtime, is flexible to the needs of our family, and allows Jason to work some days at home, which aids family togetherness by saving the commute time. As for our house, God continues to say, wait on me. So, every time we feel like we want to give up, we come back to the same principles. This time of waiting has given us a closer, more intimate relationship with one another, and the Lord in our daily prayer time. That means more to us than a house, it is truly the greater gift.

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**Janet Diaz**

*Director of  
Evangelization  
Church of the Holy  
Family, Novi, MI*

My husband, Luis, and I are very committed to New Leaven because of the change it has made in our own lives. The practical nature of NL is like no other program we have seen. It really takes us into the “stuff” of everyday life—all of the areas that—depending on how we behave—either help us to grow in holiness or do just the opposite.

The themes in NL are comprehensive. When you’ve

gone through NL, you’ve subjected every part of your life to the Holy Spirit microscope, so to speak. It’s not always easy. There were times when we wanted to run the other way, crying out, “Please don’t make me subject this part of my life to the light.” But as we continued to submit to each aspect of the program, (even the 3<sup>rd</sup> time around, now...) we continue to grow as Jesus’ disciples.

As a couple, we went through the NL pilot that began in 2011 and then through the launch series that went through 2014. Since early 2017, we have hosted a large NL group in our home. This group has become a bunch of people that love one another and care deeply about each other’s walks with Jesus... it’s an ideal environment for growth.

We are convinced that NL is one of the key elements that the Catholic Church needs RIGHT NOW. As a Church, we are becoming better at evangelization, through programs like Alpha and Christlife. But what carries the growth afterward? There is nothing like NL for those who truly desire, as hard as it is sometimes, to give their entire lives to Jesus Christ.