

 “*Dear children . . .*”

In every message given to the visionaries at Medjugorje, the Blessed Virgin Mary begins with these words: “*Dear Children . . .*”

This greeting by the “Gospa of Medjugorje” (*Gospa* is the Croatian expression for “Our Lady”) is not addressed to the visionaries alone, but to all who hear, read, or are touched by the messages. All of us are the “Dear children.”

Yet, there is special emphasis in the Virgin’s messages directed toward the young in age. Never have there been so many snares to distract young people from true belief in God. Alcohol, drugs, and sex top the list, followed closely by family dysfunction. These acute problems of today’s youth are a primary motivation for the Catholic Church’s intense focus on young people through the late Pope John Paul II’s world-wide program of annual youth rallies, which, in all likelihood, will continue under Pope Benedict XVI.

The heart of the Medjugorje message given by the Blessed Virgin Mary is threefold: prayer, fasting, and penance. These are the foundation stones of the Virgin’s call to her children in following the path of spiritual conversion. Prayer is the constant she asks for in almost every message. Fasting is to teach and condition us to allow the spirit to rule over the flesh. Penance is the daily call to truly love one another and to help those who are put in our path. In almost every story recorded here these three foundation stones play a key role.



A strong example of the role these elements play in conversion occurred early in my speaking missions. It underlined for me the power of these foundation stones in the conversion of the hardest cases of young people gone wrong.

In October 1985, while watching a videotape about the apparitions of Medjugorje, I felt a strong, personal call by the Blessed Virgin Mary to spread the Medjugorje message. That message is none other than a strong reiteration of the gospel message of Jesus. The mission, if I chose to accept it, would be to speak about the messages and my own conversion through them.

Several years later, I was speaking in a small church located in a suburban community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was jammed with people who had come to hear about Medjugorje. By all measures it was a successful evening. People crowded around after the talk, filled with questions. I could see on a majority of the faces a happy sense of awe and wonderment.

Suddenly, a woman pushed through the crowd and grabbed me by the arm. In stark contrast to the others, her facial expression was anxious and stressful. "Please," she said, "you've got to promise me you'll pray for my son. Please ask Our Lady to heal him from drug addiction!"

I assured her I would pray for her son and for her and her entire family, adding that she should pray without ceasing for him as well. "God knows I have," she said tearfully. "I've been praying for him for years and years, but it isn't helping!"

Before I could reply, a young man stepped forward: "Lady, listen to me! You can't give up! I was addicted to drugs and

alcohol for more than ten years. My mom prayed and prayed for me and she never gave up. Because of her prayers, I was finally healed, and now here I am in this church listening to a religious talk!”

There was nothing for me to add.



“Dear children, today I invite you to decide for God once again and to choose Him before everything, so that He may work miracles in your life and that day by day your life may become joy with Him. Therefore, little children, pray and do not permit Satan to work in your life through misunderstandings, not understanding and not accepting one another. Pray that you may be able to comprehend the greatness and the beauty of the gift of life. Thank you for having responded to my call.”

Monthly message given to the visionary Marija,
January 25, 1990.

TWO



Geraldine: A child's courage

People have asked over the years what is the most memorable moment or event in my mission of spreading the Medjugorje message. There have been many, but one in particular comes to mind immediately. It is the story of Geraldine Loftus.

I have never been so touched emotionally as I have been by Geraldine's story, not just from my Medjugorje experience, but in my entire life. Hers is one of two major stories that prompted the writing of this book.

I met Geraldine and her family in Wales, on the first stop of a speaking tour through the United Kingdom in the summer of 1989. She was just ten years old and was suffering from terminal cancer. . . .



Rose Walsch, my hostess, paused after cutting several slices of pie. She had just served us a delicious English meal, and we were about to enjoy dessert and coffee, with plenty of time before my talk that evening. She turned to me and said, "I'm sure this happens everywhere you go, but there is a family here who is in desperate need of special prayers. . . ."

Rose told me about the Loftus family, a devout local family that had suddenly been confronted with the tragic medical diagnosis of terminal cancer in their ten-year-old daughter Geraldine. "To make matters worse," she continued, "they

adopted a little two-year-old boy who is mentally handicapped. They purposely adopted him, knowing of his condition, fully prepared to take care of him. And now, this tragic news. Could you please just take the time to pray with the mother, who will be at the talk this evening?”

I never got used to hearing such stories, especially involving children. Assuring Rose that I would definitely pray with the mother, I asked if the little girl would also be at the talk. “Oh, no, she’s far too ill,” Rose answered, as she set a steaming mug of coffee before me. “Her father is staying home to care for her and the little boy.”

I suddenly felt an inner urge that I was to pray over this child. I asked Rose, “Is the Loftus home along the way to the site of the talk?”

Rose stopped in the middle of serving the pie. “It’s not on the route, but then, it’s not too far away. Why do you ask?”

“Could we stop by on the way? I need to pray over Geraldine and her little brother.”

Rose’s eyes lit up. “Would you do that?” Before I could answer, she dashed for the telephone and called the Loftus home. Flushed and beaming with happiness, she quickly hung up the receiver. “They would be absolutely thrilled if you came by! I’m sorry, but we’ll have to leave right now!” With that, coffee and dessert were left on the table; we piled into the car and headed for the Loftus home.

A grateful father greeted us at the door. “Just last night, we watched a video in which you spoke about Medjugorje, and now you’re here!” Terry Loftus was beaming. That was another amazing part of what was happening. The video and the information from Rose and her husband, John, were the first knowledge the Loftus family had of the apparitions at Medjugorje.

Terry led us into his living room. “This is my little Geraldine,” he said with fatherly pride. Geraldine got up from where she was sitting on the floor watching television and extended a thin little hand. She was pale and emaciated, and wore a red beanie cap to cover her baldness caused by chemotherapy treatments. She shyly smiled, and her eyes shone with a special brightness. We were immediately friends.

In the twenty minutes we were there, I fell in love with this little girl. Wrapping my arms around her, I asked with all my soul for God to grant a healing, asking primarily that her family would have the peace to accept whatever would happen. As I prayed, I knew Geraldine needed to go to Medjugorje.

At the gentle urging of Rose reminding us of the time, we prepared to leave. I wanted to stay with this child, to spend more time with her. I could only promise her that I would see her again. I knew in my heart that she would be healed. Her healing was initiated with our prayers, but would have to be completed at Medjugorje. I did not know why—only that she had to go.

As we drove in silence, I remembered Our Lady’s special message about healing: “*I cannot heal—only God heals.*” I also recalled her saying more than once that she needs our prayers and our efforts. To a desperate family, prayer may seem a generic answer by sympathizers. But as is pointed out so often in Our Lady’s messages at Medjugorje, prayer serves as the powerful vehicle for the Holy Spirit to do His work.

After the talk, an overwhelmed mother could hardly believe that we had stopped to see her daughter. Through tears of happiness and desperation, Pat Loftus told me of Geraldine’s having had two operations for this cruel disease, first diagnosed when she was four years old. “We knew she was seriously ill, but never thought of it as cancer or something fatal.”

I promised Pat that somehow, I would arrange for Geraldine and at least one parent to visit Medjugorje as soon as possible.

The following morning, before we left Wales, arrangements were made to get not only Geraldine to Medjugorje, but also her entire family. I was going with a group of kids from our local Catholic school in Myrtle Beach in April, and hoped to get her there at that time.

Of course, the best-laid plans don't always work out. But we come to learn that the Holy Spirit has His way. As it turned out, that was the case with getting Geraldine to Medjugorje at the same time my group was to be there. I would miss connecting with her and her family by a matter of hours. Due to previous speaking commitments, I had to depart for my flight home the morning of their arrival.

Knowing this, I told members of my group who were staying for another day, and other pilgrims, about Geraldine at the talks I gave while there. "I was hoping to pray over Geraldine here in Medjugorje," I told them, "but now I am asking each one of you who see her to pray over her." I emphasized that the Holy Spirit gift of healing is there for all who believe.

Days later when my group returned, I received a telephone call from one man who had taken a special interest in Geraldine. "You can't believe what happened," he said excitedly. "Several of us saw Geraldine shortly after you had left for your flight. She was wearing that little red beanie cap, and her dad was pushing her in a wheelchair. People rushed up to them and began praying over her, telling her that you asked us to do it." He went on to tell me that the visionaries Vicka and Marija had also prayed over her.

I later telephoned Geraldine's father, Terry Loftus, anxious to learn how she was doing. He gave me the news that I was

waiting to hear: “We’ve taken her to her doctors, and the cancer is in total regression!”



It would be the summer of 1991 before I would see Geraldine again. Once again, I was in Wales on a speaking tour. In truth, I had accepted the invitation to return primarily to be able to visit with Geraldine and her family. During the second week of the tour, I arrived at an ancient Franciscan church for Sunday Mass. I was to speak following Mass and was assured by John and Rose Walsch, my hosts for both visits to Wales, that Geraldine and her family would be there.

Entering the overcrowded church, we discovered the only seating room left was in the choir section. I smiled as I began making my way through the crowd, happy that so many had come. As I approached the choir, I heard my name called softly. Turning around, I caught sight of Geraldine and her father standing there. She ran into my arms, and the tears began to flow.

What a joy to see this healthy little girl, now eleven years old, with long, beautiful brown hair and rosy cheeks. I could hardly contain my emotions or take my eyes off of her throughout the Mass.

During the talk, I asked Geraldine to come forward. Having promised her in advance that she wouldn't have to say anything, I told the audience that this is what Medjugorje was really all about. “Here in your midst in the healing of this child is living proof that God loves us, and that if we believe as a child and listen to His messages given us at Medjugorje through the Blessed Virgin Mary, wonderful graces are given!”

I pointed out that Geraldine's healing was a reward for a family that had accepted its crosses, having also adopted a mentally retarded little boy just prior to Geraldine's diagnosis of terminal cancer. They accepted God's will but never stopped asking for a healing of Geraldine or her little brother; he was now also progressing far beyond expectations. This was the living message of Medjugorje, and the result of thousands of prayers from those who knew of Geraldine's illness.

That afternoon, we returned to John and Rose's home, along with Geraldine and her family. I still could not take my eyes off of her and wanted this time to last forever. Like others, I needed confirmations along the way to bolster my conversion journey. This was one of the best.

Rose approached as I sat on her couch talking with Geraldine. "Excuse me, Wayne, I was wondering, would you like that coffee and dessert now?"

I burst out laughing. "Yes, I think it's a bit overdue!"

As Rose served us, I thought of that trip nearly two years ago when we had rushed from her home following dinner for our unplanned visit to pray over Geraldine, leaving coffee and dessert on the table. It was indeed time to have that dessert in happy thanksgiving for the healing of the beautiful young girl sitting next to me.



"Dear children, today also I am calling you to a complete surrender to God. You, dear children, are not conscious of how God loves you with such a great love. Because of it, He permits me to be with you so I can instruct you and help you to find the way of peace. That way,

however, you cannot discover if you do not pray. Therefore, dear children, forsake everything and consecrate your time to God and then God will bestow gifts upon you and bless you. Little children, do not forget that your life is fleeting like the spring flower which today is wondrously beautiful, but tomorrow has vanished. Therefore, pray in such a way that your prayer, your surrender to God may become like a road sign. That way, your witness will not only have value for yourselves, but for all of eternity. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Monthly message given to the visionary Marija,
March 25, 1988.

Some may ask how it is that a child who is prayed over and seems to be healed, suddenly is struck again with a terminal disease. Some may question whether she was healed at all. I do not; neither does Geraldine's family.

In 1996, the miracle of Geraldine's healing seemed to be nearing an end. I was back in the United Kingdom on another speaking tour and was privileged to spend time with her and her family at their home in Wales. Strong feelings of awe and joy filled me as I marveled at the little girl, now sixteen, who was celebrating life with all the enthusiasm of her teenage years.

But looks were deceiving. Once again, Geraldine was suffering from a bout with cancer. The disease had returned.

The ashen pallor was back along with the loss of hair. One would never know. She wore a beautiful brown wig that fooled me when I first saw her. Her eyes were still full of life, just as they had been when we first met.

Very evident was a bond of love between the child and her parents, a love of hope and confidence. There wasn't a trace of bitterness or pity. That bond was especially strong between daughter and father. Terry Loftus struggled with the condition of his daughter more openly than did his wife, Pat, whose strength was wrapped in her faith.

The Blessed Virgin tells us repeatedly to pray. She tells us to have confidence in God, to approach Him with the heart of a child, to accept *totally* the will of God. Pat was able to do this

more openly than Terry. Pat would constantly remind him to accept the will of God but to ask in confidence, to ask for healing, both spiritual and physical.

Outwardly, Geraldine was doing this. She asked me to pray for the young friends she had met in the hospital who were dying of the same deadly disease. She wasn't worried about herself. She knew she had received a special gift as did her parents. They would lean on their faith to carry them through it all.

I would return to see Geraldine in December 1998, this time taking with me my fourteen-year-old daughter, Rebecca. Terry Loftus had telephoned a few days earlier in great distress, as Geraldine had taken a turn for the worse. The purpose of the trip was simply to pray over Geraldine again.

This was an unexpected trip, but one I felt again, by that inner urge, that I was to make. Why Rebecca was supposed to come with me I did not know, but it was part of the same inner urge. We could only hope for a continuation of the miracle of prayer.

Once there, I was glad Rebecca was with me. And so was Geraldine. She was now almost unrecognizable, bloated horribly by the medicines and treatments. Her speech and movements were also altered. Yet, her courage and inner strength were still very much in play, as was the light in her eyes. She and Rebecca hit it off immediately. It was a phenomenal trip, and we returned home with high hopes that Geraldine would recover. Yet, in my heart, I sensed the end was near for my little friend.



Terry Loftus would call from time to time to keep me up to date on Geraldine's condition. It seems she would make

progress only to then return to the suffering. Poor Terry was at a loss; there was nothing he could do for her to make her well. After one particularly heavy telephone conversation with him, in which he simply poured out his soul to me, I enclosed myself in my office and cried for a long time.

Two years later, I returned to Wales for what would be my last visit with Geraldine and her family. The disease was still there, but one could not tell it from Geraldine's outward appearance and attitude. The bloating and disfigurement were gone, and she seemed very much at peace; she was enjoying every moment of life as a young woman. "Come on," she said to me as we sat talking in the family living room. "Let's go and have a little treat!"

We went into town, and as we were walking along the sidewalk, Geraldine quietly took my hand and said, "You know, I have a confession to make to you."

What on earth, I wondered, could she have to confess? I waited for her to continue. We walked in silence for a few moments, and then she began to speak: "I was so scared and upset when the cancer returned—and so tired of the constant sickness and pain and suffering! I just wanted to die and be out of this misery!"

"Geraldine, that's understandable under the circumstances—"

She gripped my hand a little harder, interrupting, "No, it was selfish of me. I thought of all of the suffering of my family, all that they had to go through for me. And I thought of you coming here and praying for me constantly and bringing Rebecca with you just for me—and of all the others who have done the same. And then I got mad—mad at myself. I decided if all of you could love me so much and do so much for me, I had to fight harder and to appreciate what was being done for me."

I realized we had stopped walking. Geraldine smiled. “Anyway, that’s it; that’s my confession. I’m going to continue fighting and appreciating every minute of life!”

My emotions were on edge, and I certainly didn’t want to cry in front of this brave young lady. Geraldine suddenly hugged me and exclaimed, “Now let’s go have an ice cream!”

The miracle lasted until the early summer of 2001. On June 17, Geraldine Anne Loftus finally succumbed to the disease that had plagued her for more than half her life. While I was expecting the news, it still caught me off guard. I grieved as if I had lost a daughter. A few weeks later, I received a special card of thanks from the Loftus family. In it was a memorial card passed out at her funeral that also contained a special poem of thanks Geraldine had composed two years beforehand, as if in acceptance of her fate. It was a precious gift to all who had helped her, a simple thank you:

Thank you for your generosity
From you to me
Thank you for your kindness
For all to see
Thank you for all your thoughts
It meant the world to me
Thank you for everything
It’s a wonderful thing you do
The happiness you brought to me
I hope will come to you!

Geraldine lived a wonderful ten years *more than she would have*, because of belief, confidence, and trust in the power of prayer by her family and friends. In those ten additional years granted through her healing, Geraldine Loftus fully accomplished her mission of life, touching thousands with

her courage and peace in the face of such suffering. She will forever be a personal inspiration.



“Dear children! Also today, I call you to prayer. Little children, prayer works miracles. When you are tired and sick and you do not know the meaning of your life, take the rosary and pray; pray until prayer becomes for you a joyful meeting with your Savior. I am with you, little children, and I intercede and pray for you. Thank you for having responded to my call.”

Monthly message given to the visionary Marija,
April 25, 2001.

FOUR

Mother to all God's children

From the beginning days Our Lady of Medjugorje made it abundantly clear that her messages from heaven are meant for all of the children of God. They are meant to be heard by every person of every faith. The very fact that I, a Lutheran Protestant, felt personally called to spread the messages underlined the reality of that meaning.

Two incidents occurred in the early days of the apparitions in Medjugorje to lend further proof that Our Lady had come for all of her children. A Catholic priest actually questioned the healing of an Orthodox child accomplished through the intercession of the Gospa of Medjugorje. In response, she told the visionaries, *“Tell that priest, tell all of the people, that those who are not Catholic are no less created in the image of God until they one day rejoin the Father’s house. . . .”*

Even more telling was this exchange between the Virgin and her visionaries as she instructed them on holiness. Our Lady actually named a Sarajevo neighbor of Mirjana, a woman named Pasha, telling the visionaries that they should imitate her humbleness and sincerity of faith. “But Gospa,” Mirjana exclaimed in wide-eyed wonder, “Pasha is a Muslim!”

“Yes, I know,” the Blessed Virgin answered gently, *“you are to convert your own hearts. The rest is for God to decide!”*



In the early days of spreading the Medjugorje messages, I spoke mostly in non-Catholic churches. To my surprise I was asked to speak in the local Catholic Church—that is, the Catholic Church where I regularly attended daily Mass even though I was still a Protestant and a member of a Lutheran church.

Remembering the Scripture about a prophet not being recognized in his own town, I expected little in the way of a response. It was a shock when I arrived that evening to find the church crammed to the hilt.

I was on fire, knowing that many in attendance for the talk were not Catholic. Not worrying about the make-up of the audience, I spoke of the Holy Rosary, telling them of how Our Lady asks us to pray—especially the Rosary—and that with prayer we can stop wars and alter the laws of nature.

Afterward, a young teenager near the back of the crowd came pushing forward, waving a rosary over her head and saying she had to speak to me. When she made her way through, she spoke quietly, her eyes glistening with happy tears. “A lady in the back of the church gave this to me while you were speaking,” she began. “Then I heard someone speaking to me, like it was inside of my head. It was a woman’s voice, and she was asking me to pray the rosary, but I don’t know how to pray it!”

Laughing, I answered. “Wow! That’s Our Lady asking you to pray her Rosary. Don’t worry. Someone in your family surely remembers how to pray the Rosary and they can teach you.”

The young girl shook her head vigorously. “No, no, you don’t understand. I’m not Catholic. My family goes to the Southern Baptist Church!”

A powerful illustration of how the Blessed Virgin Mary wishes to reach all of her children with her messages came during a long 1988 speaking tour of the Caribbean island nation of Trinidad, known affectionately as the “Rainbow Nation” because of its large population mix of different races and religions. It had been a hectic tour, with my host Ronald Grosberg setting up more than forty individual talks and interviews. We had spoken at many schools during the day, reaching thousands of young people.

As we drove to the site of the last school talk early in the morning, I thought about one of the highlights of this tour, which had been a large, outdoor ecumenical prayer service in Port-of-Spain, the largest city in Trinidad. The archbishop of Trinidad, as well as leaders of most of the Protestant churches, participated. Thousands came and shared, and for those few precious hours, there were no denominational walls dividing the children of God.

“We’re here.” The brief statement by Ronald Grosberg, my host for the tour of Trinidad, brought me quickly back to the present as he wheeled his vehicle into a long gravel driveway that led to a large school building. My heart began to pound as I saw a vista of students massed together outside in a tree-shaded area with a makeshift platform near the front of the gathering. That is the way it always was when I was speaking to young people because of the enormous responsibility of affecting their young lives.

“Come on now, do your best. It’s the last one,” Ronald said with his now-familiar quick pat on the back.

There were several chaotic moments as the school principal tried to quiet the chatter and constant movement of approximately 1,600 young girls. A short introduction brought quiet and I began to speak.

As always, the intimidation quickly vanished as I told of the beautiful events taking place in Medjugorje. I never planned my talks in advance. There were no notes. I simply began, and felt that whatever came was meant for that particular group at that time. It was the Holy Spirit. I was merely an instrument, a microphone for a personalized message to each of the young people, directly from the mother of Jesus.

On this day, I compared the young Medjugorje visionaries to the listening students. I pointed out that at Medjugorje as well as other reported apparition sites the Virgin Mary chose to appear to young people. She chose those young in spirit and age, I told them, to give this all-important message to the people of the world.

For just under an hour they listened raptly. Drawing the talk to a close, I told the girls about Tanya (see chapter 7). I related how this young girl had become hooked on drugs at the tender age of thirteen. She somehow learned of Medjugorje and, feeling drawn to go, begged her mother to take her there in place of having to stay longer in an institution.

There was now a nearly impossible stillness from the 1,600 students as they listened to the story of one of their peers. I continued, telling them that Tanya, like many young people who had come to Medjugorje with a drug problem, had received special attention from the priests. She had met and befriended all of the visionaries and had been allowed to go into the apparition room many times during the actual time of Mary's mystical appearances.

"Yet, this girl was not healed," I related. "Sadly, she became immersed in the drug scene again. Going to Medjugorje, meeting the visionaries, getting into the apparition room—none of these incredible gifts can bring Tanya or you into

conversion to God unless *you* accept it.” I paused a moment for effect. “Unless *you* say yes to Jesus as Mary said yes to God!”

As the girls remained in a state of unmoving silence, I did something that I had done with young people in Ireland on a tour there two months earlier. It was inspired by what I felt was a special request by the Virgin Mary. I took from my pocket five medals that had been blessed by her at Medjugorje during the time of an apparition, and holding them up I told the girls I was going to pass them out to five students selected at random.

As I moved through the now highly charged crowd of girls, I told them that it was Mary, not me, who decided who was to receive a medal. I began to pass them out to excited and surprised squeals from the recipients, pointing out that receiving a medal did not mean the person was good or bad, and that they were to pray for the entire student body of the school.

After handing the last of the five medals to a girl in the very back of the crowd, I started to make my way back to the platform. After a few steps a girl stopped me and exclaimed excitedly, “You gave that last medal to a girl who is a Pentecostal! She won’t know what to do with it!”

“I’m sorry, but Our Lady does the selecting, not me,” I answered, smiling, as I kept moving toward the platform. Still, I could not help wondering what would be the reaction of the Pentecostal girl.

As we closed the meeting to thunderous applause, many of the girls immediately surrounded us and began firing questions at us from all directions. It took a good fifteen minutes to make our way to the car.

As I opened the car door, two young girls came running toward us, one of them in tears but smiling broadly. “Oh,