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Lord, help us to grow in your ways, to be upright and faithful in following your paths so that we will reach eternal happiness with you. Amen.

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**Our Faith *In Action***®

CONNECTING FAITH TO CURRENT EVENTS

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MAKING SOMETHING

*Beautiful*



Photographs courtesy of Metanoia Films

Sometimes beauty comes from pain. This is a story of something beautiful coming out of the emptiness that one man felt, and what he and his friends are doing to make a difference in the world.

At age twenty-eight, Mexican actor Eduardo Verastegui had it all: fame, looks, and success. At seventeen, he had started out on his dream to become a performer and was accepted into the prestigious acting school of top Mexican company Televisa. At nineteen, he became the lead singer of the successful pop group Kairos and traveled the world. At twenty-two, he went solo, and even though he sang for sold-out crowds he felt his career needed something else. He returned to acting and became a Mexican soap opera star. He then moved to the United States to seek opportunities in the American entertainment industry, landing an important role in a U.S. movie. After appearing in a music video with Jennifer Lopez, he began receiving offers for even bigger film roles. Yet he felt empty; happiness eluded him.

Sometimes we can think that happiness comes from having lots of excitement and money, having lots of fans and admirers. Eduardo had all that, but it all began to seem like a puff of smoke, disappearing in a few seconds, leaving nothing meaningful in his heart and his life.

Real happiness is deeper. It is something that comes from living for others. It comes from living true values. It comes from a strong relationship with God – as Eduardo was about to discover.

While preparing for a major film role, his English tutor, a fervent Catholic woman, reminded him of the faith he had grown up with, a faith he had largely abandoned. His heart was pierced with the awareness that he was shunning Christ’s love. Tears came. During the next three months, he reevaluated his life. He decided he would live his faith seriously. He decided he wouldn’t accept any more degrading roles. Instead, he would become a missionary in a faraway country. He went to talk to a Catholic priest. The priest helped him go deeper in his conversion, but told Eduardo that he was not called to be a missionary in the jungles. He was to be a missionary to the same culture that had pulled him away from Christ, the world of entertainment.

Eduardo went on a retreat. He thought about the



## Bible Blurbs

“For godly sorrow produces a salutary repentance without regret ... For behold what earnestness this godly sorrow has produced for you.”

**2 Cor 7:10-11**

“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”

**2 Cor 5:17**

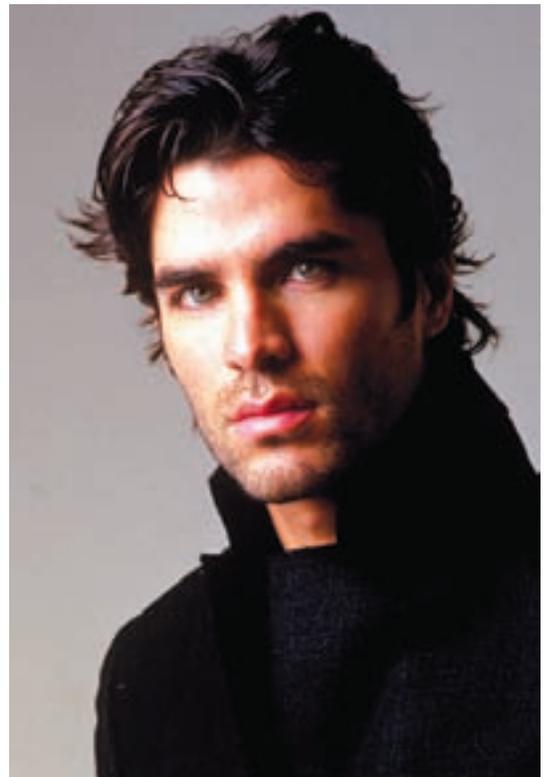
“But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance.”

**Luke 8:15**

roles he was being offered. He had been called the “Brad Pitt of Latin America,” yet all the roles offered him only showed the Latino man in a bad light: a drug trafficker, a killer, a lying womanizer, etc. But the Latino families he knew were honest, hardworking, faithful, loving.

“So I made two promises to myself: first, that I would not work on any project that went against my moral values; and second, that I would not do anything that misrepresented my people,” said Verastegui. He began to dream of movies that would make a positive impact on people’s lives and hearts.

Eduardo had a friend, Alejandro Monteverde, who had come from Mexico to the United States at the age of seventeen with the dream of becoming a film director. After several failed attempts, he was finally accepted into the film school at the University of Texas where he began winning numerous awards as a student filmmaker. Although he received some very promising offers from large companies, like Eduardo Verastegui, Alejandro Monteverde wanted to create a different type of movie. He, too, had



a deep relationship with Christ. He and Eduardo quickly realized that their strong personal faith was pushing them into a new adventure. Thus, Metanoia Films was born.

Leo Severino, a native of Columbia, was working in the business department of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox when he met Eduardo and Alejandro. He was enthused by the talent and faith of these two artists and quickly agreed to join their team as business adviser. The three friends soon became known as “the three amigos.”

Living out of a true sense of faith, trusting in God’s plan, the three reviewed many movie scripts, looking for the type of story that would serve as their first project, but they did not find anything that satisfied them. Talking it over, they decided to have Alejandro write an original story. This required a leap of faith since he had never written a script before. Alejandro went to the mountains to write. He returned with *Bella*.

Now they had a company and a script, but no money to turn the script into a movie. They made the Hollywood rounds, meeting with indifference and skepticism. Despite continuous obstacles, they persevered, believing in their vision. At that point, Eduardo’s priest friend invited him on a pilgrimage to Rome. During the visit, Eduardo was given the chance to personally greet Pope John Paul II and tell him about Metanoia Films. A week later, back in Los Angeles, Eduardo and his two friends met Catholic businessman Sean Wolfington. He promised to help them financially.

Sean told his friend Steve McEveety (coproducer with Mel Gibson of *Braveheart*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *The Passion of The Christ*) about the new project. Steve was skeptical: a director with no credits, an actor for the most part unknown in the U.S., and a first-time writer. He told Wolfington, “Run for the hills.”



Photographs courtesy of Metanoia Films



## Pope Quotes

“Let us pray to Mary ... to help every Christian to rediscover the grandeur, I would even say the beauty, of conversion.”

**Benedict XVI,  
March 11, 2007**

“... because it is only in the light of God that the greatness of the human being and the beauty of the adventure of being human can fully appear.”

**Benedict XVI  
April 22, 2007**

“The gift of perseverance gives us joy, it gives us the certainty that we are loved by the Lord, and this love sustains us, helps us and does not abandon us in our weakness.”

**Benedict XVI  
February 17, 2007**

But something he had seen in these young men inspired Sean. They had vision. They had talent. Their script embraced the values that Sean wanted to promote. He thought the project deserved a chance. Sean kept his commitment and convinced his business partner Eustice Wolfington to help. They put up the money to produce the film and became personally involved. Once the filming was completed (on schedule, in just twenty-four days), the team asked Steve McEveety to look at an initial cut. Steve was amazed at what he saw. There was real talent here. He agreed to get involved with the project, giving them further editing advice.

In order to see how the movie competed with other films, they applied for entrance into one of the most renowned film festivals in the industry, the Toronto International Film Festival. Happily, the film was accepted. And then came a surprise that topped all their expectations: competing with over 350 films, many with much bigger budgets and featuring famous directors and actors, *Bella* won the most coveted prize of the festival, the People’s Choice Award!

Suddenly they were on the map. The People’s Choice Award is often an indication of future Oscar nominations. Oscar winning films such as *Hotel Rwanda*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *Life Is Beautiful* first won at the Toronto Film Festival.

However, there were more challenges ahead. They still did not have a distributor for their film. *Bella* did not promote the easy attitudes toward sex and violence that have become common in Hollywood products. It also had a pro-life message that went against the current. The distribution companies were uneasy about committing to something like this.

But the Metanoia team persevered, knowing that their film had an important message and trusting that God’s plan would continue to unfold. Following the grassroots model that had worked for *The Passion of The Christ*, they organized screenings for groups of community leaders around the country. Momentum grew, and finally, more than a year after finishing the movie, they were able to secure a distribution plan in partnership with two prestigious companies. To boost the buzz about the movie, they offered groups the chance to rent theaters for early showings of the movie. At this writing, these groups have already rented over a hundred theaters around the country to host the early showings, with more requests coming in every day.

*Bella* is due in theaters on October 26. Metanoia Films hopes to recover its initial investment and generate enough success to give them the chance to

continue producing movies with a positive message.

Metanoia is a Greek word for change or conversion. Eduardo Verastegui chose the name not only because the company is a result of the deep spiritual change he experienced but also because he wants to help change the hearts of others. True beauty – the kind that *Bella* displays – can change people. But making beautiful things, as Eduardo and his friends are showing us, takes passion, faith, and perseverance.



Photo courtesy of Metanoia Films

## Catechism Tips

**1431** Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart ... This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart).

**2820** ... Man's vocation to eternal life does not suppress, but actually reinforces, his duty to put into action in this world the energies and means received from the Creator to serve justice and peace.

**1808** Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

## SAINTS AND HEROES



Holy card of Saint Genesius, artist unknown

### Actor convert

#### ST. GENESIUS (DIED AROUND 300AD)

Genesius was an actor in ancient Rome. While performing a comedy which mocked Christian baptism he suddenly had a change of heart and began to criticize the emperor for persecuting Christians. The emperor Diocletian at first thought that Genesius' words were part of the act, but when he realized that the performer was serious he had him arrested, tortured, and executed. Genesius died crying he would never deny the Christian faith. His bones are preserved in a church in Rome. Devotion to St. Genesius remains strong in the contemporary theatrical community, especially in Manhattan's theater district where St. Malachy's Church has a side chapel dedicated to the martyred actor. ■



Painting by Giovanni Battista Piazzè

### Reformed mistress

#### ST. MARGARET OF CORTONA (1247-1297)

Margaret was born the daughter of a farmer in Italy. Her mother died when she was seven, and her stepmother did not like Margaret. When she was eighteen she left home and became the unmarried lover of a young nobleman and eventually bore him a son. When he was murdered nine years later Margaret resolved to change her lifestyle. She went back to her hometown and made public acknowledgement of her sins. She began to live a lifestyle of prayer and service to the poor and sick. Although people continued to gossip about her, she persevered in this new style of life and even helped many other sinners to conversion. Other women joined her. She founded a hospital in Cortona. Miracles also happened through her prayers, and many people came to her for advice. She was acclaimed a saint as soon as she died but was not formally canonized until 1728. ■

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## Instructor Resources

### LESSON GOALS:

- Show how a profound experience of conversion and faith can produce tangible fruit for the good of society
- Reflect briefly on the sources of true happiness
- Provide a model of Catholics working to have a positive influence on culture
- Draw attention to the need for perseverance in the midst of obstacles in order to accomplish worthy goals

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Eduardo Verastegui seemed to have all that was needed for happiness and yet he was not happy. Why do you think that was? What are the things that most make people happy?
2. Eduardo has been able to discern God's will for him and move his life to a level of deeper meaning and dedication. What sort of things helped Eduardo in his discernment? What sorts of things can help others to look deeper at their lives? How do you think his work will help others look more deeply at their lives?
3. Do you think the changes that Eduardo has made in his life are worth it? Why or why not?
4. What are some reasons people have conversions? What role can other people play in the conversion of others?
5. How much do you think movies affect people's way of thinking and their values? Can you give any examples of movies that have influenced people's way of thinking, their values, and/or attitudes?
6. Do you think that Eduardo and his friends ever had any serious doubts that their project would reach successful completion? How do you think they overcame these doubts? Do you think their movie will be successful?
7. What are some ways we can help each other when living our Christian values? Do you think Catholics do enough to promote their values in today's world?

Do you think that an increase in fervor of Catholics would have a positive impact on today's culture? How do you think society would be affected?

8. Are you doing anything to have a positive impact on your friends, family, and the community around you? What sorts of things would you suggest?
9. Conversion is important, but it is also important to persevere in the resolutions made during a conversion. What sort of helps can a committed Catholic use to persevere in a strong faith and good actions? What sorts of things have helped Eduardo Verastegui?

### JOURNAL WRITING

- We all have aspects of our Christian life where we know we need to improve (greater charity to family and friends, stronger prayer life, greater trust in God, more generosity to the poor, greater dedication to our responsibilities, more courageous witness to our faith and values, etc.). Pick one or two virtues that you would like to work on in order to become a better Christian. Make a simple program of the day-to-day circumstances in which you will work on this virtue in a particular way. Include a spiritual motivation to help you keep focused. Review this program for a moment before you go to bed each night this month and see if you are slowly improving.
- Pick a saint or hero that you admire for some particular virtue you would like to live better. Write a short letter to that to that person in your journal explaining what you admire about him or her, describing your own trials and asking for his or her prayers and companionship.

### ACTIVITIES

- Contact the *Bella* promotion website and investigate the possibility of having a showing of the movie in your area. [www.bellathemovie.com](http://www.bellathemovie.com)

- Write a short video skit about someone who has a conversion or serious change of heart. The story can be real or imaginary. Videotape it and submit it to YouTube.
- Read Pope John Paul II's Letter to Artists and discuss the role of Catholic artists can have in changing society. [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters)
- Divide the class into groups and have each group present someone or some organization that has had to weather many difficulties in order to reach their goals.
- Some people say that the bigger a culture gets the more people tend to lower moral standards. Have a debate about this question. Consideration should be given to the role the Christian faith has had in elevating many cultures and the possibilities of this today.

### RESOURCES:

- Two interviews about the movie [www.youtube.com/v/JYLmHb1Zsvc&rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/v/JYLmHb1Zsvc&rel=0) [www.youtube.com/v/GP\\_uMEoJySM&rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/v/GP_uMEoJySM&rel=0)
- Internet Movie DataBase <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0482463/>
- Interview with Robert Novak in the Washington Post [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/29/AR2006112901270\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/29/AR2006112901270_pf.html)
- Radio interview with Eduardo Verastegui on Al Kresta show [http://archive.avemariaradio.net/2007/06/kpm\\_20070601\\_2.mp3](http://archive.avemariaradio.net/2007/06/kpm_20070601_2.mp3)
- [www.moviemails.com/moh/moviemailview?buzzmailId=93664](http://www.moviemails.com/moh/moviemailview?buzzmailId=93664)