

This article lists various actions that you can take, right now, to begin transforming your life. We'd be happy to take suggestions for additions to the list! In each section (Community, Faith, Culture, Poverty) the suggestions are roughly ordered by ease of implementation.

Community

Walk instead of driving when you can. Exercise is good for you. And you'll notice more about the area . . . maybe you'll even meet somebody!

Take a stay at home vacation! Instead of spending a short time in an exotic local, wasting resources and time in the process, spend vacation time getting to know the local area and community, building friendships, volunteering with local organizations, improving your home's sustainability and resilience, and, of course, getting to know your family!

Start volunteering with a local organization helping the poor.

Introduce yourself to one of your neighbors.

Introduce yourself to one of your fellow parishioners.

Own something in common. Maybe you could buy a lawnmower or snowblower with a neighbor instead of buy one for yourself.

Join or start a prayer or study group at your local parish.

Invite somebody to dinner who can't return the favor.

If you are a young adult, (or are parents of a young adult), consider whether "staying at home" wouldn't be better than renting an apartment. Financially and socially, living with other people is beneficial. Of course, it can be challenging, but that makes is

spiritually beneficial as well!

Have another Christian move in with you!

Faith

Cultivate a spirit of gratitude for what you have!

Pray together as a family every day, for at least a few minutes. If there is never a time of day when your whole family is together and available, reexamine your priorities. If you're not part of a family, find somebody else to pray with regularly . . . even if only by setting a time when you'll both be praying.

Rethink your definition of "success." What really matters in life?

Read the Bible every day. The Bible, particularly the Gospels, give us our blueprint for following Christ. The values displayed in the Gospels and Epistles are a 180 degree turn from the values of suburban America.

Read through *The Catechism of The Catholic Church*. Sure, it is a large book: over six hundred pages, not counting appendixes and index. Reading just two pages a day, however, would allow one to finish it in under a year. It is a great introduction to the whole teaching and belief of the Church.

Start praying at least one of the liturgical hours each day. This is a great way to pray with the Church.

Start attending daily Mass at least once a week!

Start Tithing if you are not doing so.

Culture

Make gifts for other instead of buying them.

Create some of your own entertainment. Singing, reading aloud, etc.

Leave some unscripted time in your life! And in your children's life! Don't succumb to "overload."

Periodically turn off all electronic devices for a day.

Start a small garden, even just a few tomato plants. It won't really cut much off your food bill at first. But it will be a lot of fun, particularly for children, will give you some practice in growing things, and will give you a whole different level of attention to the weather and the natural world.

Get rid of your TV set. The average American spends almost 4 hours a day watching TV; time that could be spend interacting with family, praying, doing productive work: all the things that everyone would "like to do but doesn't have time for."

Get rid of your social media!

Learn a new skill that is both culturally beneficial and economically useful.

Poverty/Justice/Charity

Carry or display pictures of the poor, to remind yourself of those in greater need than you are.

Utilize the library. Do you really need to buy a copy of every book that comes out? Maybe you'll only want to read it once! Maybe you won't even want to read it once! And if you want to read it again . . . well . . . you can check it out again!

Make sandwiches for the homeless.

Declutter and give others all the things you are not really using.

Wait a week before making any unnecessary purchase. Who knows, by the end of the week you might not want it anymore!

Slowly pay down your debt.

Cancel a subscription, particularly if you don't really have time for it anyway.

Turn down your thermostat . . . just a little bit.

Drink water instead of soft drinks; probably better for you, and much cheaper.

Fast, or fast from some food item or other unnecessary activity: talking, for instance.

Reduce the number of times you eat out. Restaurant meals are vastly more expensive than a comparable meal eaten at home, and the extra money can be given to the poor. If we were starving, we'd obviously avoid eating out to maximize the amount of food we could obtain. Since we're called to love the starving people around the globe as ourselves, we should do the same for them. And meals eaten at home or with friends are better for building community in any case.

Reduce your alcohol consumption by 50%.

Wear things out! If something isn't broken, don't replace it. Don't "upgrade."

Learn to repair things when they do break! Even if they don't look as good, if they can be returned to functional condition, they still be

used.

Buy used clothes (and other items). The textile industry is highly destructive both socially and environmentally, and it is easy to find used clothing in good condition. This is not only environmentally and socially just, but also is more in line with the values of Christian poverty. There is no room for fashion consciousness in the Christian life.

Don't buy luxuries. What is a luxury? Well, that's not a clear cut question; maybe something you could pray about.

Set a limit on family gift-giving.

Limit the number of outfits you wear to seven, the number of days in the week. Why would anyone need more than that? "The coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it." (Basil the Great.)

Don't buy any goods from countries that use sweatshop labor. (In practice, this means only buying goods made in the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and Europe, or buying goods used. It does not matter if used goods are made in sweatshops, as this has very little relevance to their current price, and money spent on a used good does not flow to the exploiters.) William T. Cavanaugh, in *"Being Consumed"* pointed out that no Christian would knowingly kill somebody to get a cheaper shirt. But we are all killing people in sweatshops so that we can get cheaper clothes and other goods. These cheaper goods allow us to possess more goods than our incomes would actually allow if all prices were fair, and thus our "savings" on cheap goods fall under the condemnation in the Epistle of James, 5:4. "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts." This practice also helps to destroy a consumer mentality. When shopping, one has to put item after item back on the shelves, thus putting us in solidarity with the poor.

Try to do without air-conditioning . . . particularly if you live in a reasonable climate.

Stop watering and fertilizing your lawn! Perfect lawns are merely a status symbol. Does it really matter if your lawn is green in midsummer? If you don't water and fertilize so much, you won't have to mow so often. (Do keep watering trees, however, to avoid expensive and painful removal problems!) The time and money saved from maintaining a lawn can be used to grow a productive garden, spend time with friends, and feed the poor. Not to mention that lawn-care is environmentally unsustainable.

Don't buy, own, or wear expensive jewelry! St. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 condemns this practice. Why would we prioritize expensive display when our fellow human beings are wanting basic necessities?

Travel 50% less than you did in a normal year.

Reconsider how much money you spend on haircuts, cosmetics, etc. Is it really important that you have a professional haircut? When you get to the judgement seat, will Christ complement you on your nice hair? Or will it be more important to have used your wealth to feed your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Consider whether you really need your RV, jet-ski, snowmobile, ATV, second (third, fourth) vehicle, boat, or other expensive "toy."

Consider whether you really need your cabin, vacation property, timeshare, etc. Lots of Third Worlders can't afford even one home.

Buy a smaller house! Over the last 100 years, the square footage of new single family homes has gone up by 74%, or 1000 square feet, while during the same amount of time, average family size has shrunk. What are we doing with that extra space? Of course, decluttering (see above) would make this possible. Or, you could

just find another person or two to share the house you have . . .
You'd still have to declutter, though.