

THE COSTA CONCORDIA & JESUS

It's GROUP's 40th anniversary—a perfect moment to pause and consider “the state of the union.” Here's one thing I know: the heart of youth ministry is buried somewhere inside the wrecked hull of the Costa Concordia...

In January of 2012, the massive cruise ship Costa Concordia ran into a submerged rock off the western coast of Italy, ripping a 50-meter gash in its side and filling the engine room with water. The flooding cut power to the ship, and the 1000-foot, skyscraper-tall behemoth drifted and ran aground near Giglio Island. There were more than four thousand people on board, and it took an agonizing six hours to evacuate the ship, even though it sat half-sunk in shallow water just 500 yards from land.

Because of the chaotic and prolonged rescue operation, 32 people lost their lives. And now, two years later, after a \$1.5 billion salvage operation successfully re-floated the boat and towed it to a salvage yard in Genoa, all but one of the dead has been recovered.

That man's name is Russel Rebello, a 33-year-old waiter from India—he's the one man among more than 4,200 passengers and crew on board who remains lost. And, for two years, his brother Kevin has traveled back and forth from his home in Milan to the coast, where he talks to salvage operators and local residents about the search for his brother's body. “I've not lost hope,” he says. “I know the official search stopped a long time ago but I will continue to look for my brother's body. I watch every news bulletin or program on the Concordia in the hope of finding some piece of information that will help me find my brother.”

If you are not the brother of Russel Rebello, then your assessment of the Costa Concordia debacle is cut-and-dry—4,200 people have been accounted-for, and the body of an Indian waiter you've never heard of before remains missing and probably lost forever. *But if you are the brother of Russel Rebello, then you are living in the momentum and the reality of the Good Shepherd, who is Jesus...*

The brother of Russel Rebello will not rest until he finds his beloved, even though there is no hope

he'll be found alive. “No hope” is not a deal-breaker, if the depth of your love and your commitment to the beloved goes deep. And Jesus of Nazareth, who exactly mirrors the heart of God, will not rest until he tracks down and offers rescue to every single “sheep” who has strayed from the herd: “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray” (Matthew 18:12-14).

Every one of us—which, of course, includes every one of your students—fits the “strayed from the herd” description, by the way.

None of us is among the “ninety-nine on the mountains.” We have all been cut off from the safety of the herd by sin. And so, if we are propelled in ministry by the heart of Jesus, we will...

- Never see youth ministry through the lens of the crowd—we will only see youth ministry through the lens of the individual.
- Give the treasure of our determined hope to kids who've been given-up on by others.
- Pursue the individual when it is inconvenient and costly and even dangerous.
- Act like owners, not mere caretakers of our “sheep”—we do not leave their cares and their wellbeing at the door of the sheep pen when our “shift” is over. Sometimes, we are wakened in the night by the unacceptable “lost-ness” of a sheep, and we reawaken our pursuit.
- Determine to live in the wartime cry of Winston Churchill: “Never give up. Never, never, never give up.”
- See the unique value of every single sheep, and refuse to let one stray because the whole would suffer in its absence.
- Lay down our life for the one who can never repay such a gift, and may not ever acknowledge the cost of it. ●



Kevin Milan