

Men's Conference speaker to tell how lukewarm faith was fanned into a flame

Editor's Note: Next weekend conferences designed to inspire zeal in Catholic men and women are scheduled to take place at Conte Forum at Boston College in Chestnut Hill. The second annual Boston Catholic Women's Conference is scheduled for 5 to 9:30 p.m. on April 18. The fourth annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference is scheduled for April 19 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

By **MATT McDONALD**
ANCHOR STAFF

CHESTNUT HILL — Could you get rid of your TV?

Tarek Saab did, about four-and-a-half years ago, as part of a life makeover in his mid-20s that brought him closer to God.

To that point, everything seemed to be going great. At 24 he had a good job making \$135,000 a year, was renting a nice condo in California's Silicon Valley, dated

beautiful women, wore designer clothes, and drove a fully loaded four-wheel drive Nissan Pathfinder with leather interior.

"Everything that really embodies the bachelor dream," he said in an interview.

At 25, Saab decided he didn't have that much after all.



TAREK SAAB

"And sadly over time I realized I wasn't happy. I was insatiable," Saab said.

He started thinking that maybe all the investments he had made in education, work, and money were short-term, and that he should be thinking more about his future.

"I ultimately came to the conclusion that success in life and business begins by focusing on death," Saab said. "There's no question that forms a man's identity more than the answer to the question, 'What happens when I die?'"

Saab, now 29, grew up in New Bedford. Of Lebanese ancestry, he grew up attending Our Lady of Purgatory, a Maronite Catholic church in New Bedford.

As he describes it, as a young adult he was the kind of Catholic familiar to many — believing in the Church and to some extent follow-

ing it, but listless.

"I had a lukewarm Catholic belief. I never had an extended period of time without going to church on Sunday. But going to church was like checking a box on a laundry list of items," Saab said.

Examining his life from the perspective of preparing for heaven led him to take stock of how he was spending his time.

He realized that between watching professional games on television, watching highlights on sports shows, and participating in fantasy leagues, he was devoting about 20 hours a week of his life to sports. He also noted that while watching mainstream networks he was being hit constantly with invitations to lust, largely through commercials.

It was around that time he jettisoned his television, and began filling up the time reading about his faith instead.

Reading about Catholicism intensified his commitment to it. Among the influences he cites from those early days are St. Augustine's "Confessions," "The Spiritual Combat" by Lawrence Scupoli, "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis, and "Introduction to the Devout Life" by St. Francis de Sales.

He volunteered in youth ministry at his parish. The kids looked up to him, and he started longing to be the sort of person that the kids imagined he was.

While he made a commitment to change, getting rid of his television didn't mean dropping out of the culture.

In 2006 Saab participated in "The Apprentice," the NBC television show in which ambitious young adults in business competed to work for Donald Trump. Each episode of the so-called reality show famously

ended with Trump firing one of the contestants.

Saab lasted about 10 weeks before hearing "You're fired." It hurt, but not as much as he expected, because he was feeling a sense of detachment from the world and its concerns.

Saab writes about his experiences and the conclusions he draws from them in his new book "Gut Check: Confronting Love, Work, and Manhood in Your Twenties," which was released March 1 by Spence Publishing. (The book can be purchased online at www.BuyGutCheck.com.)

In an interview, he emphasized that his own experience has been a journey, not an immediate about-face. But it starts with making a commitment to God.

"Once you make the decision to make your spiritual life the priority, you don't become a saint overnight. You have to make some changes that hurt," Saab said.

Saab, who now lives near Fort Worth, Texas, married in May 2006. He and his wife are expecting a baby in August.

He and a partner now run a line of Christian men's apparel, including symbols from early Christianity. Saab is one of the featured speakers at the Boston Catholic Men's Conference, which is scheduled for 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., April 19 at Boston College's Conte Forum.

Saab is also scheduled to speak at 7 p.m., April 17 at St. Anthony of Padua Church in New Bedford.

He also plans to speak the morning of April 17 at Tabor Academy in Marion, from which he graduated in 1996.

He is scheduled to give a talk at Boston College at 4 p.m., April 18 and to sign books at the Boston Catholic Women's Conference later that day.