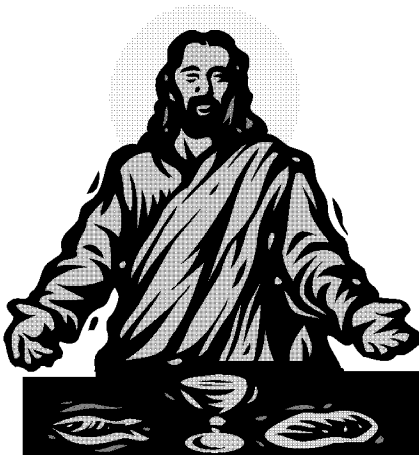


Reaching Out to Catholics

- *Did you know that the largest body of Christian believers in America today is the Roman Catholic Church?*
- *The second largest body, some 18 million, consist of those Roman Catholics who no longer practice their faith.*



Reasons Catholics become inactive (and how you can help)

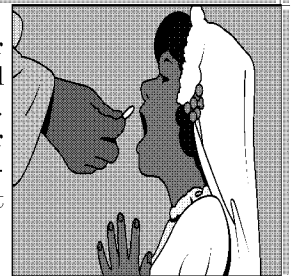


Our Baptism calls us personally to seek a deeper level of conversion in our own lives. At the same time, it becomes our obligation to be signs of hope and a gentle invitation to our inactive Catholic brothers and sisters. As disciples of Christ we need to find ways to draw people back to an active practice of our Faith.

Like many of us, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wondered "Why Catholics Become Inactive?" Bishop Michael Saltarelli of Wilmington, Delaware presents nine points from research of the Bishops' Evangelization Committee (2000) to stimulate concern and creativity, and to persuade each of us to approach anyone we know who is not practicing their faith.

Reason 1 "Some people did not experience the power or presence of God in Catholicism or in the Catholic community of which they were once a part."

Too many Catholics learned ABOUT Christ from their religious education as children, but had not translated their knowledge into a personal relationship with Him. Their practice of Catholicism continued to be a matter of going through the motions year after year. The futility of this pattern has resulted in a stunted faith that ceased to ask the important spiritual questions.



What can we do?

We who participate weekly, need to demonstrate, by our words, actions, friendships and welcoming, that Jesus Christ is alive in us. The vibrancy of our lives is evidence that the Catholic Church is a place to befriend the Lord and each other.

✂ The following prayer can be cut out and given to someone you wish to invite to Mass:

Dear God,
Give me the courage to begin again, to overlook the difficulties, to overcome the obstacles and to stay open to the moment as best I can. Help me to be patient enough to know it takes time to start over, and wise enough to ask for help from family, friends, and church when I need it. As I look to the future, may I reflect on the past and remember the lessons it taught me. And, God, may I always look to you for strength and guidance. AMEN.

Reason 2 - “Some people have not experienced warm, caring relationships in their encounters with Catholics, or did not find the liturgies engaging.”

Our Eucharistic celebrations follow a certain order, but this comforting familiarity can easily turn into a boring habit, devoid of enthusiasm. Once a Catholic allows himself/herself to sit back and become a “pew potato”, Christian warmth becomes the self-centered coolness that chases away caring. Paulist Father John Hurley says, “Many people drop away with the hope that someone will notice....”



WHAT CAN WE DO? Be personally on guard against the deadening effects of routine in our own worship. Challenge ourselves. Try going to Mass at a different time or sitting in a different seat. Each of us needs to be seriously attentive and active at Sunday worship, so when a Catholic returns, he or she will find a community alive in Christ.

Reason 3 - “ Some people experienced the religious system as complex and lacking relatedness to their lives, or not appreciative of their language or culture.”

“Each week as we worship, we pray together the Nicene Creed, crafted by the fathers of the Church at Nicea. We say, “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”. The word “catholic” means “universal”. Too often the parish church became the inactive Catholic’s only experience of Church.”



WHAT CAN WE DO? Accepting liturgy change within our parishes as well as making a personal effort to learn about the Church beyond our parish will broaden our understanding. Each of us needs to support the church in all its contexts.

Reason 4 - “ Some people were hurt in some way by Catholics - laity, religious, or clergy have not been reconciled.

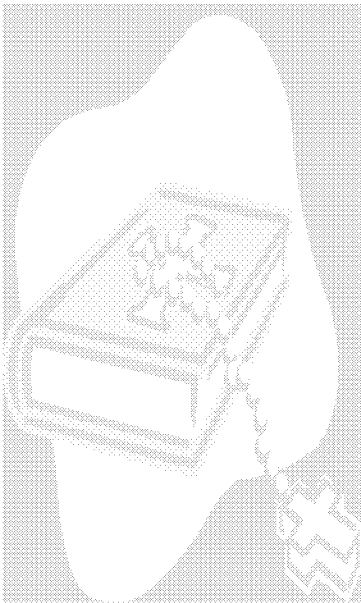
A difficult school experience, insensitivity at the administrative level, disillusionment with the behavior of a Catholic lay person that went so deep, that healing initially was impossible. However now, years later, the person may be ready to face the situation and the church again.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

“Listen with the love of Christ. . . Your simple listening, your gentle apology on behalf of the church, is part of the reconciling ministry of Christ. You become an instrument of grace. Such a moment can result in the person moving closer to the Catholic Community.”

Reason 5 -“Some people are in conflict with the teachings of the church....matters of faith and morality.



Being an Apostolic church means that our beliefs are founded upon the words and witness Jesus Christ left with his apostles. We cannot spin these truths to satisfy polls or cultural myopia..... Catholic truth will always find a home in a heart that is sincerely searching for the truth.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

“Each of us needs to work on understanding the faith and being able to give a reason for the faith that is within us... so that we may be able to comfortably reveal our deepest convictions about life, as well as share natural friendship with one who has fallen away.”

- ***Christ made it very clear that we are to go out and tell the GOOD NEWS!***
- ***This is the mission of all Baptized Christians.***

Reason 6 -Some people never knew their faith well and were ignorant of the basics...they were easily misled and exploited by those who attack Catholic beliefs and practices.

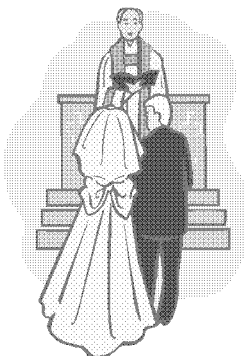
Often our secular education far surpasses our Catholic faith knowledge. The joy of discovering the way that each mystery of Catholic faith is grounded in Scripture, centered in Christ and proclaimed in the liturgy has never been experienced. This lack of integral faith formation leaves a vacuum.



WHAT CAN WE DO? We ourselves, need to attend parish and regional Catholic faith formation programs and invite others (especially the inactive) to attend with us. Especially during holydays we need to be attentive to each opportunity to reach out and welcome. We want “ashes and palm” Catholics to become “eucharistic” Catholics every week.

Reason 7 -“Some people have been kept from full communion with the church because of a marriage outside of the church.”

One of the doctrinal treasures of the church is the indissolubility of marriage. In some cases it is possible to seek an annulment. Many times, misunderstanding about the churches’ view of marriage or misinformation about the annulment process causes the person to feel disenfranchised.



WHAT CAN WE DO? We need to be sensitive to those whose marriages are “*out of sync*” with the Church. Encourage them to come to church even if they cannot receive communion. Vatican II defined Christ’s presence at Mass; in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, in the Word of God, in the person of the priest and in the community. With this understanding, all Catholics are welcome and can find among us, strength for their journey.

] have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing.....
Luke 1:49

Reason 8

"A significant number of people have simply gotten lazy and stopped going. In a survey (2000) of young adult Catholics published in *America* magazine, 35% of the inactive simply got too busy and didn't find the time."

"Faith is never static, it is growing or fading. The culture tells us that we must work harder and play harder - -but nowhere does it acknowledge that, for the same of human development, we must rest better and pray better. The reasoning continues to the point where church attendance is no longer an issue."

What we can do.

Through friendship and casual conversation we can help our friends and family members to revitalize their faith again. Never stop looking for creative, ingenious ways to invite.

Reason 9

"Some people moved to new locations and never got around to finding a church in their new city or neighborhood. The *America* survey mentioned that 19% of inactive young adults fell into this category."

"I just did not get around to it" or "I'm too busy" seems to be two of the most used phrases in our culture today. In our context, both statements hint of priorities that don't include weekly attendance at Mass or participation in the Catholic community's activities.

What can we do. These people work with us. We can easily work into our conversations information and enthusiasm about local parish life. Eucharistic adoration has a part to play here too. Holding up before the "Real Presence" the physical and spiritual needs of our family and friends is sure to effect changes greater than we can imagine.

IN CLOSING: A Special word to parents of Inactive Catholics:

Bishop Saltarelli continues, "I know how painful it can be for you when your children stop practicing their faith. You wonder where you went wrong, what you failed to emphasize, what you failed to explain. Instead of dwelling on what went wrong, take that energy and apply it to your prayer life.

Often your adult child's inactive faith can be difficult for you to approach. Defensive reactions can be quick. You may have the tendency to lecture or nag. Often the issue of Catholic practice may be tied up in the emotional issues between you and your children.

Still never give up. Pray for your inactive children and model more vibrantly your own Catholic Faith for them. There can be opportunities for you to talk to them about the benefits of returning to Church. It requires a great deal of emotional calm, a supernatural spirit, and an intuitive sense of diplomacy and timing.

Remember St. Monica who never gave up for St. Augustine. She prayed for Augustine for more than 30 years. During this period, he restlessly tried a number of intellectual philosophies and engaged in self-centered, manipulative relationships. How painful it must have been for Monica to watch her talented son walk this self-destructive path.

It was through Monica's prayer that Augustine came home. We lift up our sons, daughters, (friends and relatives) to the unconditional love of God.

WE NEVER GIVE UP ON THEM!!!!

"So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them.....

Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread." Luke 20:33-35