

Hospitality Outreach to Sometimes Catholics

Have a real person answer the phone before Christmas and Easter. “Creasters” is a name we give to Sometimes Catholics. They often come to Christmas and Easter services. They often call to ask questions like, “What time is midnight mass?” These are typically very busy times in a parish office, so Creasters tend to get a recorded message. Sometimes the phone message doesn’t even sound welcoming! Have a parishioner with a warm, cheery voice answer the parish phone right before Christmas and Easter. The warmth of a real person might make the difference in whether the person who calls will come. It might make a difference in the attitude with which he or she comes. And—it can portray the spirit of the season.

Provide extra hospitality at weddings, funerals, First Communion, Confirmation, and Baptisms. Sometimes Catholics have relationships with people who are active members. They attend their special celebrations. Welcome them at the door with literal open arms.

Include “perhaps you are returning home to the Catholic Church” in the welcoming statement at every weekend mass. Many parishes today include a welcoming statement by the priest or lector before mass begins. This sets a welcoming tone. As you welcome visitors and members, include those who might be returning to the Church. They are not likely to raise their hand for special recognition, but they will notice that your parish is open to them. It is also a gentle way to remind all those present to include prayers for those they love who are absent as they worship through the mass.

Have a Welcome to Our Parish brochure by your door. Create a brochure that says “welcome” and gives basic information about your parish for visitors and returning Catholics. A sample copy can be found [here](#). (Put copy of Good Shepherd’s brochure)

Welcome youth back from college or military service. Parishes often send their youth off with blessings, but make return celebrations matters of family or friends. Youth do come back for midnight mass as Christmas. Can there be a get-together over Christmas break at the parish or the home of one of the youth where they can visit with each other AND teachers, youth leaders, and parish staff who have helped form them? Youth often get out of the habit of going to mass while away at school. Have a welcome back get together and mass for them in the spring when many return for the summer to remind them they can get back into the habit. Recognize all youth returning home for visits from military service. Celebrate their safe return!

Give Communion blessings. Communion can be an awkward time for non-Catholics and those unable to receive the Eucharist. Help ease the awkwardness (and perhaps increase the yearning for our Lord) with encouraging people to come forth at communion time with their arms crossed for a blessing. Train Eucharistic ministers to provide this blessing.

Provide Welcome envelopes for visitors. Provide envelopes with “welcome” on them in pews for all visitors. You may want to also mention that you encourage all who attend to contribute of themselves as part of the Offertory.

When you notice someone missing, say “We missed you.” While people can come and go from large parishes without being missed, their absence is still recognized by family or friends. In small parishes, absence can be noted by many. Have “We missed you” cards available. Parishioners may address them and drop them in the offering basket. Pastor or Evangelization team members can then write a personal note and send them.

Display information about mass times, confession times, parish website information, and returning Catholics programs at parish fish fries, festivals, and other activities. Place information where it is easy to see and take home.

Give personal invitations at parish events. Parish events often attract Sometimes Catholics. Train parishioners to recognize and give invitations to come again, come often, come and stay to those who are newcomers, Sometimes Catholics, or members of the parish considering a greater involvement.

Have post-liturgy discussions on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, and Good Friday. Research shows that Sometimes Catholics often come to these services—even when they don’t come on Christmas or Easter. Sacramentals pull them, even if sacraments don’t. While these are all VERY BUSY times in parishes, they are also not usually times which are followed by family celebrations. Sometimes Catholics have come to church. Having a post-liturgy “discussion” gives them an opportunity to come a little closer to the church and gives the parish an opportunity to connect.

Provide adult religious education during child sacrament preparation. You can expand parent education programs around First Penance, First Communion, and Confirmation to include as much education for the parents as for the children. Many parents who send their children to religious education classes only the years when children receive a sacrament are likely to be “Sometimes Catholics.” If you capture them for catechesis during those years when their children receive sacraments, you might stir up grace in them to move toward a fuller life in the faith.

Give Christmas or Easter gift books. Giving parishioners, including Creasters, a book at Easter and Christmas invites everyone to look more deeply into faith. This evangelization tool is described elsewhere.

Host Theology on Tap. Theology on Tap mixes faith and libation. It is theological discussion over a cold beer. It’s informal format is often appealing to young adults, a primary source of Catholics who need to return. (Don’t we have this listed elsewhere in the toolkit?)

Put Greeters at the door. Have greeters at the door as people enter for mass each weekend. They welcome everyone! While this may not seem to be a tool to help Catholics return, those who try out other denominations report the friendliness of other faiths is a big attraction. It can set the stage for all parishioners to remember that we worship as community, and community is a group of people who are connected and care about each other. Hospitality is a ministry.

Send “glad you were here” cards. If you identify visitors with special offering envelopes, you can follow up with a note or card that says “Glad you came.” This extension of welcome encourages the Sometimes Catholic to return again...and again...until they’re fully active members of the community.

Leave cards when you go visiting. Priests typically leave a calling card when they visit the sick or homebound. This helps family members know their loved one was visited by the priest. Sometimes those visited don’t remember! Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion or parishioners visiting the homebound can also leave a card. The card represents the presence of caring community, reaching out to care for all its members. These remembrances can also make the return to church for a loved one’s funeral a little more welcoming, too.

Companions. Sometimes Catholics have different Companion needs from those who have been absent altogether. Their faith is often piecemeal. They just need friends at church whose faith is alive. It is good for on-fire Catholics to notice those who come sometimes to gradually bring them more fully into the believing, worshipping, loving community.