

Hospitality Outreach for Disconnected Catholics

How do you reach out to people who are truly disconnected—they have no active ties to the parish at all? General outreach to the broad community is one way. Targeted outreach through people who are connected to the parish is another. The outreach activities across Worship, Moral Life, Creed, and Community use both these means.

List special liturgies (Ash Wednesday, Christmas, Easter, special events) in local newspapers, on local cable television, or local radio. These kinds of “advertising” are often free in small towns, and are often well read by the community. They get the message out there that you are an active faith community. They may not be a direct link to disconnected Catholics, but, if they read the activities, they are likely to remember, “I once was Catholic.” It might be a small, small seed, but even tiny seeds sprout.

Have a website and keep it up to date. Many disconnected Catholics are under 35. The under 35 generation depends on the web for information. Make it possible for them to find information about you any time there is a passing thought about going to church. Keep your mass and confession times posted on the website in easy to find places.

Send parish bulletins to the homebound. Many disconnected Catholics are related to the elderly and homebound. If you send a copy of the bulletin to their grandmother, they just might see it when they go visit her. She just might use it to gently (or not) inquire about their church attendance. Again, it can be a tiny seed. All activities to the homebound have possibilities of reaching disconnected Catholics, because they love this person you are caring for. When you reach out with regular visits and communion, bulletins, artwork from school children or ANY activity, you are reminding disconnected Catholics that the Catholic Church cares for all her members.

Have an outreach box. In one of the diocesan deanery visits, the suggestion was offered to have a box in the back of church where parishioners can put the names of family members and friends who are absent. An active member “commissioned” for outreach might then visit or call this person. Father might send a note of “we miss you.” You might start sending bulletins or a letter before Christmas or Lent. You can decide how to follow up with a name. The idea is to reach out.

Make special times and campaigns for confession a part of Lent. All that is required for many disconnected Catholics is the Sacrament of Penance and returning to the community. The Archdiocese of Washington, DC has a campaign each Lent, literally advertising special extended confession times on Wednesday night throughout the diocese. Have a similar local campaign.

Stand up for Catholic teaching. We think of “being a prophet” as some special calling, but any time anyone expresses Catholic teaching on morals, that person is calling out to conversion, just as the prophets did. You might do street preaching like Father Beiting or you might quietly explain why the Church is compromised by current Healthcare reform. You don’t know the faith-life of those who hear you. They may be disconnected Catholics, and your witness may stir a breath of Spirit within them.

Connect with graduates of your school. Is there a facebook page or e-newsletter where graduates of your Catholic school can connect? Are there alumni events? Many parishes have alumni events for graduates of long ago when there was a high school, but what about the graduates of your elementary school now? People who leave their faith don't necessarily leave their friends. Having a parish forum for school-kids-now-grown to connect gives you access to them and perhaps an extra incentive to connect with your parish when they come home. You might trigger something that makes them a returning Catholic in a distant city, but it's all the same faith.

Use your website as an outreach tool. Include information of interest to disconnected Catholics. This can include nuts and bolts things like Father's email address and parish liturgy times. It can also include a section aimed at Catholics not actively practicing their faith with links to national websites that focus on their issues and concerns.

Make a phone call. Formal phone programs are described [here](#) as part of our Evangelization project. You can also simply call someone you know personally who no longer goes to church. Catch up with how life is going. Talk about a particular upcoming church event or season. Invite them to come. Express your caring.

Distribute parish 6-packs. (This was in Mike's presentation, so I assume it's somewhere in the toolkit) Create packets of six "invitation" cards for parishioners to give out to six friends or family members, inviting them back to church. Most people in the parish know at least six disconnected members. This makes it easy for them to bring up the topic of "come home."

Be ready to Companion. Include in your outreach activities the information that your parish has "companions" ready to accompany each person on their exploration of finding a way home. These companions should be non-judgmental, good listeners, and knowledgeable of the Faith and available to anyone who inquires about returning to the Church.