

Hospitality Ideas for Returning Catholics

Hospitality for Returning Catholics centers around either regular instructional sessions with a Companion or a seasonal class. At Good Shepherd we are developing a curriculum called *Treasures* for this. It consists of eight sessions and targets those who are returning to the Church who drifted away because they did not realize the treasure of their Catholic faith and/or because they sought faith in strong community, which many evangelical churches provide. However, *Treasures* seems to work well with those who left the Church because of a hurt or because marriage outside the Church kept them away from the sacraments. At this point, *Treasures* is mostly outline and activity, rather than fully developed curriculum, but you are welcome to use it. It is described [here](#).

Christ the King uses *Catholics Returning Home*. This curriculum has stood the test of time and is described [here](#).

In addition to the curriculum, here are other hospitality activities which Good Shepherd has found to facilitate full integration into the parish community, so Returning Catholics become Commissioned Catholics:

In the beginning, sit with Returning Catholics at mass. Not only help them follow along with worship aids, let them sense your own worship. Hug them tightly at the sign of peace. Introduce them to the people around you after mass. Talk with them about the homily or liturgical decoration or music to give them the message that attending mass is NOT a passive experience. Weekday masses work even better than weekends for this. Meeting to attend daily mass together is also a wonderful way to encourage Returning Catholics to see their return as about doing more than the minimal.

Integrate Returning Catholics into active membership in small ways as soon as possible. Arrange for them to carry up the gifts at the offertory. You can't carry up the bread and wine without some sense of belonging, self-giving, and yearning for the Eucharist. **Let Returning Catholics lead the rosary or Stations of the Cross at times of parish devotion.** Last Lent Returning Catholics led the Friday Stations of the Cross, and several who did it are talking months later about how meaningful it was to do it. Find devotions that can be done by Returning Catholics, instruct them carefully on how to do them, then let them lead. **Make Returning Catholics a viable, active parish group.** Our recent graduates become part of the Returning Catholics team. As a ministry team, we can have a booth at the parish festival, take responsibility for certain times at Eucharistic Adoration, and help out other parish projects. This not only develops a sense of belonging and active ministry, it does this in a protected environment where you can ease any awkward moments. In the process, Returning Catholics get to know others in the parish and naturally move into other ministries and groups. **Encourage participation in other parish groups from the beginning.** A person does not have to be in full communion with the Catholic Church to be part of the PTO, Bereavement Luncheon team, or pray outside an abortion clinic.

Have frequent, personal, and visible information about Confession times. All that many people need to do to return to the Church is to go to Confession. Do what you can to encourage them to go. Have a large, friendly-looking visible sign in your gathering area. Have Confession aids visible. Talk about confession at times other than before Advent and Lent penance services. Many Sometimes Catholics

and Returning Catholics have had only a few or childhood experiences with Confession. While you can do a good job reducing fear in classes or Companion discussions, it is good to reduce the fear in more general ways, too, by normalizing Confession.

Invite all to mini-catechesis or Bible study programs. We have had several Returning Catholics who first went to a Bible study program. They were welcomed, engaged, and made the next step to Returning Catholics. For those who have been attending the Catholic Church sometimes and a Protestant Church sometimes, Bible study feels safe. Others who are considering returning are attracted to something like Fr. Barron's Word on Fire programs, Renew groups, or a marriage enrichment program. Wide advertising and warm welcoming by leaders and active Catholics in these programs encourage a full return to the Church.

Make your Returning Catholics a community. Pray for each other. Spend time together outside of class. Share joys and concerns. Show how Christians can love each other! We encourage graduates of our Returning Catholics program to return for the last night of each series as we have a pot luck and talk about community. This is a wonderful way to build up those who have graduated, motivate those who are graduating, and generally build a sense of Church as people of God.

Have a Returning Catholics email lists. During Returning Catholics classes, email participants and team members after each class and before each class as reminders and ways to build connection. Follow up occasionally in the months after a class, to encourage Returning Catholics to attend a parish event, to emphasize upcoming special liturgies, or simply to encourage ongoing participation. Once a class is finished, names go on an ongoing email list that sends a special reminder before Holy Days, special liturgies or devotions, or parish events. These reminders can include a little catechesis, as well as warm encouragement.

Maintain Companions. Small churches may work their entire Returning Catholics program through one-on-one instruction, invitation, and caring. Other parishes may use Companions as a supplement to class instruction for those returning. Not all of those who begin the Returning journey will jump back into the arms of Mother Church on schedule in the 8th week. Some have more praying, thinking, and aligning their lives to do. DON'T stop companioning them at the end of instruction. Match your pace of contact with what the Returning Catholic wishes. That may be to be let alone. That may be to check in every few weeks. That may be to continue the developing friendship. But don't stop praying for each Returning Catholic. Don't stop showing you care. To do so might be to send someone away again or delay their return. Some people who don't come fully home wish the Church would change her position on some issue. Don't be put off or feel awkward because of that. That struggle is between the person and God. It is not your job. Your job is to remain loving, while remaining faithful.