



# Missing Pieces

## REACHING OUT TO INACTIVE CATHOLICS

AND ANYONE ELSE

INTERVIEW WITH FR. MCKEE BY CATHOLIC VIEW



Commercial break in progress. CNNgo will resume momentarily.

# REACHING OUT TO INACTIVE CATHOLICS



- **Statistics** show that there are approximately 45 million active Catholics in the United States today and another 17 million who are not practicing their Catholic faith. For a variety of reasons many have fallen away from the Church. Some have left because of loss of faith, moral decline in society, church laws, laziness, indifference, neglect by priests and nuns, or changes within the Church. This group of inactive Catholics represents over one third of the population



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- **What do you feel is one of the main reasons Catholics become inactive?**
- There are about as many reasons for Catholics to drop out of the Church as there are dropouts in any situation. Each one has his/her own story. But in spite of all that I heard I think the main reason they dropped out is because life had not turned out the way they wanted it to. They were disappointed with God. They thought that He should have done a better job with them and for them. They felt they deserved better.

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- **QUESTION:** Often a Catholic may leave the Church when he or she feels they are breaking a stringent rule of the Church and therefore cannot be a member in good standing. How can we reach those individuals to reverse the feelings of guilt and abandonment, offering hope and assurance?

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- **RESPONSE:** We can help these individuals by reaching out to them, gathering them together, listening to their stories, not criticizing nor even correcting them, but listening. By extending a loving hand and a warm smile. Self-deprecating humor on the part of the leaders of the sessions can be very effective. In all the work for the inactives it is good to remember an old principle: "You would never buy a car from a salesman you don't like".



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- **Do you think parents are directly to blame for their children's disinterest in the Church?**
- Parents might be somewhat responsible but ultimately it is a personal responsibility. Young folks who leave the Church during their early years tend to come back fast when they get married and have that first baby. Babies are the best apostles I know of.

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- **QUESTION:** Some say the Church is cold and uncaring and does not bring a feeling of cohesiveness and family so they lose interest in attending. What do you think about this?



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- RESPONSE by FATHER McKee: *I think that many of our priests are cold and distant. Our training in the seminary is totally in objectivity - philosophy, theology, canon law and Scripture. The subjective is hardly touched upon. I have given workshops for all the priests in 28 dioceses and mentioned that we should have courses in the seminary on "How to Win Friends and Influence People", that feelings and emotions are most important, that most decisions are made in the heart, not in the head. I won no friends with this kind of "heresy".*

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- *Is there a specific way to locate those individuals who have left the Church?*
- *You can start an outreach by beginning in a parish. Advertising in all forms should be used such as titling an advertisement with "Would you like to come and take another look at the Church?".*

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- *Do you think fear of judgement or condemnation for actions or lifestyles make inactives reluctant to return?*
- *Yes. That is why warmth and loving is so important.*



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- *How can we as active Catholics encourage others to come back and take another look at their faith?*

You have to be very careful in issuing invitations to come back. The best invitation we can use is the joy and the love we find in Jesus, especially the Jesus of the Eucharistic. Anyone who has received Holy Communion more than once will always have a hunger for the Eucharist. **This hunger brings more people back to the Church more than anything else.**

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- *It has been said that many people feel they are "invisible" at Mass and that attending Church is a solitary thing with no personal feedback from other parishioners. Is this true?*
- *This complaint is valid in many parishes. The liturgies are cold and unrelating to human warmth. Many ex-Catholics stay in the Protestant Churches because of the friendliness and acceptance they find there.*

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- *Some inactive Catholics feel they were hurt in some way by either other Catholics or the clergy and nothing was ever resolved. What can we do about this?*
- *We start by reaching out to them, showing them a loving hand, and total acceptance. Most of their hostility melts in the face of warmth and acceptance.*



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- *What do we do about those who are in conflict with the Church's teachings, the major changes wrought by Vatican II, and other doctrine? How do you handle this issue?*

I take them to the Gospels. I let them see Jesus at work with saints and sinners. I base my action on the principle that the more they know Jesus, the more they will love Him and do things His way. Love does that, as you well know.

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- ***Father McKee, what is the responsibility parents must assume when grown children fall away from the faith and do not want to return?***
- ***Love them, love them, love them and let them go. DO NOT argue, fight, threaten, dispute or try to convince.***

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- *There are those who leave the Church permanently and go to another denomination because they feel they are not getting enough out of the Church. What do you say to those people if you encountered them?*
- *That they have the obligation under God to follow their informed conscience. Some ex-Catholics are better off as practicing Protestants than as inactive Catholics. But remember what I said about Holy Communion.*



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- *CATHOLICVIEW: We have heard, Father, that sometimes the best way to approach someone who has left the Church is to listen and adopt a sympathetic attitude. Is this an effective and viable way to do this?*
- *FATHER McKee: Yes, Yes, and yes. It's the only way.*

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- *CATHOLICVIEW: In summary, how can we, as laity, encourage a return to the Church?*
- *FATHER McKee: We can encourage a return by being good practicing Catholics and trying to love everyone who comes into close contact. It is a tough life out there and people have a lot of problems because human beings are very complex and we are getting more complex by the day. So people need the Lord more than they ever did before. I talked a lot about love in this interview. As you well know, love is hard work. Jesus on the cross is convincing proof of this. **Love often involves sacrifice. We must be willing to sacrifice for Jesus' beloved strays. It is a good and holy thing to seek out the lost sheep so precious to Jesus and it has been my experience that anyone who gets involved in this work will never be the same.***

