

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Inspiring Ideas and Practical Suggestions for
Parish Communities and Individual Catholics to
'Reach Out and Welcome Home'





'A new survey by the Christian charity TEAR Fund has found that while one in ten of the population professes to attend Churches of different denominations every week, another 3,000,000 would attend if they received the right invitation,' from *The Tablet*, 7th April, 2007.

Many of us know Catholics who don't currently come to Church; this booklet is one of a collection of resources being offered by the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE) to help us reach out to such people.

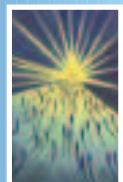
Contents

This booklet covers:

1. Where are they now?
2. Facing the facts - why people lapse
3. Seeking out the lost sheep - an imperative for reaching out
4. Will I be welcome? The Prodigal returns
5. Listening to people's stories - some examples
6. What can I do? Learning from what others are doing
7. What can we do? Parish ideas for remembering and praying for those who have lapsed
8. Come home for Christmas
9. Send out the invitation
10. CASE Resources: what's on offer to help you reach out

What is CASE?

CASE is an Agency of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Through a wide variety of resources and training, its remit is to enthuse, engage and equip all tiers of the Church in the urgent task of evangelisation.



This booklet was written by Fr Martin Ganeri OP, CASE Team Member; with thanks to the KIT Team for many practical suggestions.

Where are they now?

Seek out the lost...



PROFILE: Mary Jones, 42 years old.*
Last seen at St Anthony's Church, Cardiff, on Sunday 28th May, 2000. A trained nurse. Used to read at Mass. Was married to Peter Jones. Last heard of in a relationship with man called Andrew.

PROFILE: John Roberts, 28 years old.
Last seen at St Luke's Church, Wigan, on Sunday 14th September, 1997. Used to serve at Mass. Had thought of becoming a priest. Last heard of as a first-year student at Leeds University.



PROFILE: Sean Fernandez, 31 years old.
Last seen at St Michael the Archangel, Middlesbrough, on Sunday 29th March, 1998. Attended with his mother and brother. His brother is also reported as lapsed. Sean was training to be a doctor.

PROFILE: Rebekah Oloyede, 19 years old.
Last seen at St Joseph's Church, Harpenden, on Sunday 31st October, 2004. Attended with her father and sister. Liked to help with the Children's Liturgy. Last heard of living with her boyfriend, Joe.



PROFILE: Timothy Black, 57 years old.
Last seen at St Francis Xavier's Church, Stafford, on Sunday 22nd December, 1996. Used to attend with his wife, Sheila. Was reported as depressed after separating from Sheila earlier that year.



Do you know why they left?

Do you know if they want to come back?

Do you know what they believe?



...and so many thousands more. Lapsed but not found. This is the story of our Catholic community. This is a story of the generations who have left the Church.

Do we know where they are? Do we want to find them and bring them back?

LANGUAGE USE: Throughout this booklet, various terms are used to describe Catholics who do not currently practise their faith by attending Mass regularly. Although some people are uncomfortable with the word 'lapsed', on consultation with experts, CASE was told that this is the way such Catholics choose to describe themselves.

* The people in the examples above are fictitious. The names, parishes and photographs have been used for the purpose of illustration only.



We have to be honest. It is estimated that two out of every three Catholics no longer come to Church or take part actively in their faith. The Catholic Church is thought to be one of the fastest declining religious communities in Britain. This fact is sometimes obscured by the large number of new Catholics who come to England and Wales, but the reality is that most Catholics don't practise their faith.



People lapse for many reasons:

- Some never really started attending Mass; they may have been Baptised and even made their First Holy Communion, but they never really felt part of the Church. Maybe their parents rarely came to Mass so they didn't either.
- Young people often stop as they get into their teens or when they leave home. They want to resist continuing what they did as children and face considerable peer pressure not to practise.
- Others can have 'bad experiences' of priests or of others in the Church community. A chance word may be all that's needed to turn someone away.
- Others find their marriages break down and then they get remarried. They feel unable to take part in Church life, especially in places where they are known.
- Others move because of work or family and just don't get around to finding a new parish.



Any number of factors can make it difficult to practise or even to believe. Our faith is part of the whole of who we are. It doesn't have to be a problem with doctrine or religious practice; it can be an experience, a relationship, anything, that can make people feel unable to come to Church, unable to pray, unable to receive the Sacraments.

We live in a society where people often go missing. The fragmented nature of families and communities encourages people to lose contact with each other. Often people can disappear and be lost track of. This is reflected in the state of our Church community.

Will they ever come back? Will we ever celebrate our faith with them again?

There's always hope!

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

'Possibly the most urgent matter Europe faces is a growing need for hope, a hope which will enable us to give meaning to life and history and to continue on our way together.'

Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 2003

2

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Reflect on and pray about why people might have left your parish. Visit www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk for resources on becoming a more welcoming community.



In the Gospel Jesus made a point of seeking out those who were marginalised, those who were lost. One of the most striking parables He told was of the lost sheep.

Luke 15: 1-7 The Parable of the Lost Sheep

‘What man among you, with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours? “Rejoice with me,” he would say, “I have found my sheep that was lost.” In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous people who need no repentance.’

The love of the shepherd for the one sheep which was lost tells us that God is not content even if the vast majority of His flock is still practising. He yearns for each one of those who have lapsed to come back. He calls on us to be like the shepherd – to go and seek out those who are lost – to seek them out, not just expect them to come back.

The Gospel in our times:

The version of this parable that we should tell today is far more terrible than the version told by Jesus. Today so many are lapsing that we should talk of the sixty-six or even the ninety-nine who are lost...

St Luke's, Wigan: The Parable of the Lost Flock

Now the Church community was rapidly declining and those who did come began to get worried and wondered what could be done. The Spirit of Jesus made them rethink the Parable of the Lost Sheep in this way: ‘Why don't we do anything about all those who have lapsed? We must go out and seek those who are lost to us, find out where they have gone and encourage them to come back.’ So a few got together and found out what had happened to those who no longer came to Church. They sent out letters and paid them a visit. They invited them back. To their amazement, some welcomed them and as a result started to practise again. The parish organised a series of social events, just to provide a relaxing space in which people could meet and get to know each other again. The numbers were never great, but they were steady, and the joy of all who took part revitalised the whole parish. ***It's up to us to live out this parable in our communities.***



PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

‘Fervour demands that we should know how to put aside the excuses which would impede evangelisation’ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 80



Lapsed Catholics do sometimes want to come back. Often people come into contact with the Church again at some one-off event. It may be a wedding. It may be a funeral. It may be Midnight Mass at Christmas. These are times when the grace of God's Spirit is present calling them back. And the door must be open, the welcome must be there. It's so easy for people to be put off, be it by the style of the liturgy or by the type of reception they get. When people who have lapsed come back to Church, it is very often a vulnerable and difficult time for them, as they remember when they were practising Catholics before and why they stopped coming.

The Story of the Prodigal Son – a Story of Welcome

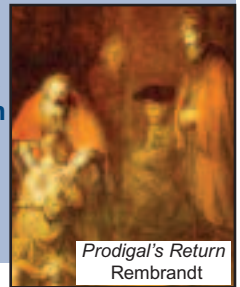
This story is a good way for us to think about the loss and about the return of those who form our Church community. When the money is spent, the younger son comes to think that going home might be better than the plight he finds himself in:

Luke 15: 17-24 The Return of the Prodigal Son

'Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, but here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.'



Prodigal's Return
Rembrandt

We should be careful not to think that those who have lapsed are reckless as the younger son was. Often they are not. People lapse for many reasons, just as families break up for many reasons. People also have many reasons for coming back.



4

Are we like the father, who cannot contain his joy when he sees the younger son returning? Or are we like the elder brother, who begrudges the welcome given to one who has not remained faithful and obedient as he has?



Do we know why members of our families, our friends or members of our parish communities lapse? Have we listened to what they have to say?

It makes an enormous difference just to listen to people's stories. We need to give people an opportunity to express their reasons without fear that they are immediately going to be judged or put down in some way.

Mary's Story

I used to go to Mass every Sunday with my mother and sisters. I continued when I finished school and became a nurse. When I was twenty-two I met Peter and fell deeply in love. We got married in Church after less than a year. But the marriage did not last. Peter and I had less in common than we thought.



We might have loved each other once, but we never really became friends. In the end we split up. A few years later I met Andrew, a really kind man. We both wanted to get married, so I got a civil divorce and married him in a registry office.

I started to drift away from the Church after I met Andrew. I felt awkward with being at Mass and soon stopped receiving Holy Communion. I knew that getting married again would put me in a difficult situation, but I loved Andrew and did not want to be alone. When you spend all day caring for other people, you need someone to care for you. After we had got married I just felt it was easier to stop going to Mass altogether and that's how things have remained. It's not that I don't believe. It's not that I would not like to go. I just feel I would not be welcome.

John's Story

I used to serve at Mass every Sunday. I even thought at one time I would like to become a priest. I kept on going to Church right until I went to Leeds University to do engineering. It was such an exciting time. I soon got a great group of mates none of whom were religious at all. We would hang out together and have a laugh. I did go to the Chaplaincy at first. I went to a lot of the Freshers' Week events and intended to go back. But I didn't get around to it. It just didn't fit in with all the other things I was doing. I also felt a bit awkward about it with my mates. After all, who goes to Church these days?



When I finished at university, I got a job in Sheffield and have been here every since. I do sometimes go to Mass when I go home. I don't feel bad about the Church, but it just doesn't feature in my life any more. My girlfriend is also a Catholic and she still likes to go to Mass sometimes. We're pretty relaxed about things. I suppose I could go with her. But I do think the services are a bit boring, and I don't like the way people shake your hand and are all smiles, but you know that they don't really care who you are and wouldn't like that you don't conform.

You won't be able to solve all the problems that John and Mary have, but you can listen to what they have to say. Do you know other people like them?



There are already many groups and initiatives that have recognised the need to welcome back those who have lapsed. We can learn from what they are doing as we try to develop our own ministries of welcome. These include:

KIT (Keeping in Touch)

Keeping in Touch is a resource being developed by the Diocese of Portsmouth which is causing great interest in parishes across England and Wales. It aims to serve as a tool through which Catholics can reach out to adults who are either non Church-going or who are on the fringes of Church life. The programme includes home visiting by members of trained teams and weekly sessions held either in someone's house or in the Church hall. As part of its promotional activity, each parishioner is asked to take away a flier or two and to invite people to an information evening. In this way they serve as frontline evangelists.

www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/kit



Landings

Landings was devised in the US during the 1980s by a Paulist priest Fr Jac Cambell and it has proved popular and successful there. It was introduced to the UK via Ealing Abbey in 2001, and by the end of 2005, parishes in many dioceses were running groups. A typical parish Landings group meets for one and a half hours per week and consists of parishioners who have been trained in this ministry (some of whom have themselves been away and have 'returned') and inactive Catholics who are exploring the possibility of coming back.

www.landingsuk.org.uk

CaFE (Catholic Faith Exploration)

CaFE is part of Catholic Evangelisation Services, set up in 1996 to help Catholics respond to the challenges of the New Evangelisation. CaFE makes use of modern media, particularly video and DVD resources. It has learnt much from the Alpha course. The resources are designed to be used in a 'café style' environment based on small groups around tables in an informal atmosphere. They are very easy to use and thousands of Catholic parishes have already successfully run CaFE courses to great effect. Some of their resources are particularly useful for welcoming back lapsed Catholics, especially the Baptism and First Holy Communion / Reconciliation Parents' Courses as these are often occasions when people consider returning to Church.



www.faithcafe.org

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

'It is not a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ Himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated... This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication... But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.' *Novo Millennio Ineunte 29*





To find out more about KIT, Landings, CaFE and a range of other groups, you could order a copy of the CASE *Evangelisation Directory*, or you can view a free online version at: www.caseresources.org.uk



In addition to running organised programmes, parishes can be ready to reach out in other ways. The *Everybody's Welcome* stage of the Bishops' response to their *Listening 2004* consultation has borne fruit in some wide-ranging, highly practical resources and suggestions for ensuring contemporary parish life is welcoming to all.

www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk



One effective way to remember those who have lapsed is for everyone to write down on a piece of paper the names of people who have lapsed in their families or friends and to leave those pieces of paper in baskets at the foot of a big cross. Alternatively, everyone might light a candle and place it before a picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Such acts can be very powerful and consoling. We keep alive the memory of those who have lapsed, and we pray for them and their needs.

Making contact

One of the biggest challenges is actually making contact with Catholics who don't come to Church. Some things your parish could try include:

- Going through parish records and visiting those not known.
- If cards are sent to all households at Christmas, Easter or Pentecost, insert a reply slip inviting people to name their religion or asking if they would like further contact.
- Asking parishioners to deliver invitation cards to Catholics they know who don't come to Church at the moment.
- Holding an information evening for parents whose children are at school or preparing to celebrate the Sacraments.

You don't have to solve all the problems.

You might not bring everyone back.

But there are many people who will respond well if only they receive an invitation.



OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

The groups mentioned here, and others like the Legion of Mary www.legionofmary.co.uk have lots of experience in the important area of home visits. However, there is no substitute for personal invitation. When was the last time you spoke to friends, family members, work colleagues or neighbours who used to go to Mass? Spend some time in prayer asking God to inspire you and to open up opportunities for fruitful conversations.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.'

Cardinal Newman



Christmas is a time when families get together. People go home, even if this means travelling long distances and going to considerable expense. They make the effort. In an age of ready meals and television suppers, this is one time of the year when we sit down as a family to have a meal together.



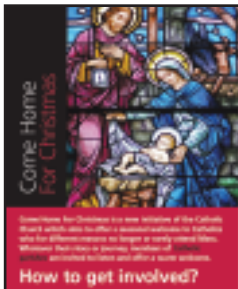
Coming home for Christmas is a time for catching up, for listening to the successes and failures that the members of our families have experienced. They can be times of great joy. They can also be times of great stress, exposing many problems that have never been resolved. People can change over time and often families can find it difficult to accept and accommodate that fact.

But sometimes there are empty places.

Not all people do make it home for Christmas. Families often have to face up to the fact that sons and daughters, or husbands and wives, have moved away and may not feel able or want to celebrate Christmas with the rest of the family. This is what it can feel like in our Churches as we think of all those who once were with us but are no longer.



Who is missing from your Eucharistic table this Christmas? Let us make this year a proper family Christmas for all our Catholic brothers and sisters.



From Advent onwards, CASE is running a special seasonal initiative called ***Come Home for Christmas*** aimed at encouraging and resourcing parishes to reach out to lapsed Catholics.

For full details of our campaign and the many other resources available to download, please visit: www.caseresources.org.uk

Please contact CASE for posters, leaflets, invitation card templates, flyers, details of a related BBC Radio series and much, much, more.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Why not hold a special 'Welcome Home' event? Or you could include words of welcome to occasional attenders who may be at a Carol Service or one of the Christmas Masses. A suggested format, training and PowerPoint resources are all available from CASE (contact details on back page).

Please let us know if you plan an event and we can help publicise it for free.



Send out the invitation

...for Christmas!

Christmas is an ideal time for us to remember, to reach out to and to welcome back our Christian brothers and sisters who have lapsed and are missing from our Church family.

Christmas is the time when we send out cards to all those people we want to get back in touch with, but might feel awkward to telephone or visit out of the blue.

Why not make this the time to let those who have lapsed know we care? All we have to do is to send them a card. You could include times of services and maybe the special leaflet CASE has produced to welcome back those who have lapsed. It is important that people feel they are welcome to return, and that they know how to act on that invitation.



To John,
HAPPY CHRISTMAS
Be great to see you again,
All at St Luke's



Find out where Mary, John and all of the others are living. Send them a card and invite them back. Make this a time to let them tell their story. Maybe this is a time when we can address the past hurts or reasons for moving away. We also must be open to how they've changed and how our Church communities must develop to accommodate them as they are.

Christmas won't be the same without them.

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO ARE LAPSED

Father,
send Your Holy Spirit into the hearts of
our brothers and sisters
who no longer practise their faith.
Guide them in the way of Your truth and love.
Call them once again to full participation
in the Mystical Body of Your Son.
Give us too a double share of that same Spirit
that with confidence we may seek out
all the sheep of Your flock and invite them back.
Together with the Father of the Prodigal Son,
let us always be ready to rejoice and be glad
as we welcome back our returning family.
AMEN

Please let people know about the special website for lapsed Catholics that will be launched in November. www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk is a brand new online resource for those wanting to explore returning to the practice of their Catholic faith.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Of course, it's not only at Christmas we can issue an invitation to 'come home'. Other occasions like Baptisms, weddings and funerals are ideal opportunities to reach out to occasional attenders and let them know they still belong.



www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk



CASE Resources

CASE has an expanding portfolio of resources which includes printed publications, online materials, training and a consultation service. Please see below for a snapshot. Space restricts us from showcasing more...

For the Come Home for Christmas Campaign



Posters, flyers, leaflets and online resources



For our Buildings Project



Leaflets and workshop

Why not order some of these items for your parish?

Free samples are available. For larger quantities, a small charge may be made to help cover printing costs; details are available from the CASE office.



New prayer cards for evangelisation

Evangelisation Overview

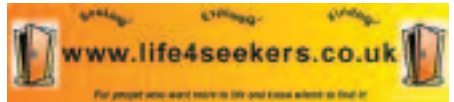


This brand new resource has been developed from materials CASE produced for an in-service session of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Get a free copy now!



Leaflets and Contact Cards
Everyday Evangelising

What is a Catholic?



Evangelistic car stickers and a free 70+ page website presentation of Catholic life and belief: www.life4seekers.co.uk



www.caseresources.org.uk

Monthly **free materials** are available on the CASE website including resources for Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.



Prayer cards for people who are searching

Plus Seekers' Weekends, recommended reading and much, much, more!

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