

## **Reaching Out to Inactive Catholics—Will Anyone Come?**

By Rev. Frank DeSiano, CSP

One of the longest hours in my pastoral life has been when we've reached out to invite inactive Catholics to a program and we are wondering, just before the program time comes, if anyone will come. Will there be many? Will there be any? I felt like the effectiveness of my ministry was being tested.

Actually, what I found out was this: however many came, it was always very rewarding. Even if it was only two people!

That's no reason, though, not to cast our nets as wide as possible when we think about reaching out to inactive Catholics. There are things that we can do to enhance the likelihood that people will be drawn to an outreach. Here are five pointers I've developed.

**1) Get the word out not only to your local parish but to other nearby parishes and other neighborhood venues.** It's not likely that many neighboring parishes will be conducting an outreach to inactive Catholics—not many parishes even think about this kind of ministry—so sending your flier or notice to the six or twelve nearby parishes will not be a waste of time.

**2) Target your audience.** We know that inactive Catholics tend to be younger people—those between 20 and 50. People close to 20 may respond to a Young Adult appeal. As people move past 25 years of age, as they start thinking of settling down and having a family, there are many religious questions kicked up inside. Try to appeal to this 25-50 year-old group. Think of where they are in the parish; place your fliers and brochures there. Send letters that talk about the things that matter in their lives.

**3) Diversify your message.** Saying something like “All Inactive Catholics Are Welcome” speaks to very few. People do not

tag themselves as “inactive” Catholics; that's more a tag that WE place on them. But images like: reconnecting to your faith, renewing your faith, exploring your faith again, touching base with Christ—images like these have a chance to reach the mind of your target audience.

**4) Try to get as many people involved in the inviting process as you can.** Challenge your parishioners to take home invitations or brochures. Challenge them to talk with their friends. Give them language. “Our parish is offering a new program to help people reconnect more deeply with Jesus and their Catholic faith. If you'd be interested in this, I'd be happy to go along with you.” Words like this.

**5) Don't make it a judgment game.** Often our ministry can sound like: “We, good and practicing Catholics, are reaching out to you, less-than-good non-practicing Catholics.” Instead, talk about people being busy, or people having many priorities, or people needing time to develop their spiritual lives, or people wanting to deepen their faith for the sake of their children. Make your invitation positive. Make it an opportunity.

Nothing we do will guarantee that dozens of people come to our outreaches. We should not even begin to think like that—it is after all, a work of grace and divine love. Whatever we do may have effects we will never see.

If we try to do the sensible things that work in our areas, if we place our whole outreach ministry into the hands of Jesus and the love of the Spirit, and if we persist with our messages of welcome, invitation and acceptance—if we can do this, we can be sure that the Kingdom is being served. Jesus asks no more from us than that!

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