

The devil is always trying to separate us from God. Keeping holy the Lord's Day is a Commandment that was given to us for our sake. He does not command us to worship Him because He needs to be worshipped. Keeping His day Holy refreshes our immortal souls. — Gene M. Van Son

Fr. Perozich comments —

I found this interesting with good tips for discussion and addressing in different ways the common excuses people give for not going to Holy Mass.

Here are the 15 parts.

<https://catholicstand.com/bring-em-back-part-15/>

Bring 'Em Back! Part 1

By Gene M. Van Son
19 February AD 2024



Do you have a Catholic loved one or friend who is no longer a 'practicing' Catholic? This is the first in a series of 15 articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved going to Church again and once again practicing his or her Catholic Faith. In 2017, according to various surveys, some 56 million out of 70 million Catholics in the U.S. were not going to Mass every week. And this was prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Flip those numbers. Just 14 million out of 70 million U.S. Catholics were regularly attending Mass on Saturday/Sunday prior to COVID.

Thanks to the outbreak, however, our churches were pretty much closed and our Bishops dispensed Catholics from attending Mass altogether. The more devout Catholics took to watching live streamed Masses online during the outbreak. But for the millions of 'lapsed Catholics,' the other activities they had already chosen over keeping the Lord's Day holy just continued as usual. So what happened post-COVID?

Villanova University's Center for Church Management, [projected](#) that post-Covid regular attendance at Saturday/Sunday Mass could fall to just 12 percent of U.S. Catholics. So instead of 14 million U.S. Catholics regularly going to Mass each week, just 8.4 million U.S. Catholics would be going to Mass every week. More Lapsed Catholics

The Archdiocese of Detroit lifted Mass dispensations on March 13, 2021. Yet from what I've seen in my parish, a sizeable number of Catholics still have not returned to Mass. I estimate that Mass attendance at the Saturday evening and Sunday Masses in my parish is easily off by at least one-third, post-Covid.

If the Villanova projections are correct, and it looks like they may be, this would mean 61.6 million out of 70 million Catholics in the U.S. are no longer going to Mass on Saturday/Sunday. (So instead of 14 million Catholics regularly attending Mass on

Saturday/Sunday, only 8.4 million may now be regularly attending Mass.)

And if 61.6 million Catholics are voluntarily breaking the Third Commandment every week, it's a pretty safe bet that that are no longer practicing other tenets of their Faith. The devil must be doing handsprings and jumping for joy.

We need to get our lapsed Catholic friends and loved ones going to Mass again as the first step in bringing them back into the Church. Their immortal souls are in jeopardy.

We need to help all the lapsed Catholics out there to realize that going to Mass every week is not just a suggestion. It is how we keep the third Commandment. It is how we keep the Lord's day Holy.

But what these lapsed Catholics may not realize is that by not going to Mass they may also be breaking the first Commandment. When someone chooses to sleep in, go golfing, go shopping, etc., instead of going to Mass they may be creating a false god. They are making that activity (or their own desires) more important than worshipping God.

Bring 'Em Back

The chances are pretty good that you have a Catholic friend or family member (probably more than one) who has stopped going to Mass on Sunday. Perhaps you have a son or daughter who has stopped going to Mass. You may even have aunts, uncles, cousins, daughters-in-law or sons-in-law who no longer go to Mass. You may be praying for them, but **you may also be wondering if there is anything you can do to get them to go to Mass again. There is.**

Prayer and setting a good example are always good practices. But a talk, or even a series of talks with your lapsed Catholic loved one may be just the ticket to getting them turned around.

An old truism is ‘never discuss religion or politics at family gatherings.’ And there’s a good reason for this. Such discussions at family gatherings can easily turn into heated disagreements. People take sides, feelings get hurt, and family members sometimes end up not talking to one another. **But this does not mean ‘never discuss religion or politics one-on-one.’**

Some people, however, may stress over the thought of having a one-on-one talk with a lapsed Catholic loved one or friend. But it does not have to be a stressful experience. **All it takes is preparation.** Preparation enables charitable responses to the different excuses offered up as ‘reasons’ why your friend or loved one has stopped going to Mass.

A Plan

This article is the **first in a series of 15 articles.** The goal of the articles is to help you have a discussion, or a series of discussions with your lapsed Catholic loved one(s) and friends. The articles will offer a strategy – a plan for making the conversations non-stressful, non-threatening conversations. Hopefully the conversations will result in your friend or loved one deciding to start going to Mass regularly and living his or her faith once more.

This series of articles will run every Monday for the next 14 weeks. Copying and pasting the articles will give you a free eBook that just may be the roadmap for helping your lapsed-Catholic friends and loved ones find their way back to practicing their faith.



GENE M. VAN SON

Gene M. Van Son is retired after spending 35 years in the automobile business working for two of the Big 3 Automakers as a writer and editor, and then as a project manager in the areas of satellite communications and wireless technology. Originally from

the Chicago area he has now resided in the Detroit area for more than half his life. He is a cradle Catholic who attended a Catholic grade school, high school and university. He has been married for 49 years to the love of his life, and he and his wife have three sons. Both he and his wife are Certified Catechists in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Since retiring he has been putting his BA in Journalism to use researching and writing about topics and issues that interest him. In addition to writing for Catholic Stand, he has also had articles and essays published at www.AmericanThinker.com and at www.CrisesMagazine.com.

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 2

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By Gene M. Van Son
26 February AD 2024



This is the **second** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

What caused your lapsed Catholic loved one to lapse?

Catholics leaving the Church is always disheartening. But just as disheartening is the fact that millions of Catholics have simply stopped going to Mass on Sundays. They have also pretty much stopped practicing their faith. Yet many of them still profess to be Catholics.

Priest, author, and lecturer Fr. Dwight Longenecker [wrote fairly recently](#):

“When I’m out leading missions or speaking at a conference, in the meet and greet session afterwards, the most common conversation I have is with middle aged women who say, “Father, what can I do, my children have stopped practicing the faith!” or they tell me how their children have married Mormons or Methodists or Baptists and left the Catholic Church.”

Catholics who are no longer living their Faith or going to Mass are often called ‘fallen away’ Catholics. The term ‘lapsed Catholics’ may be more fitting. A person who has ‘lapsed’ has ceased to be ‘active.’ When someone is inactive, he/she just needs to be re-activated.

The New Evangelization

Mention “Vatican II” and you may get the attention of every Catholic within hearing distance. Mention the “New Evangelization” and not so many ears will perk up. But there is an intrinsic connection between the two.

The major reason Pope John XXIII called Vatican II was to address the growing problem of Modernism. The Church needed a renewal to effectively evangelize a world that was slowly giving in to modernism and becoming more and more secularized.

As Dr. Scott Hahn [noted](#) on EWTN’s “Catholic Answers Live” program a couple years ago, “the culture is awash in secularism and it’s not getting better but worse.”

Jimmy Akin was a little more blunt. “Now we find ourselves in the awkward situation of needing to evangelize the Baptized,

needing to re-evangelize the sacramentalized, as well as – and this is where apologetics comes in – sacramentalizing those who were evangelized.”

In short, there are a lot of lapsed Catholics out there. We need to bring them back to the Faith. Getting them going to Mass again is the critical first step.

In 1965 more than 55% of Catholics in the U.S. [went to Mass on Sunday](#). Nowadays (post-COVID) it’s probably around about 12% of Catholics attending Mass every week. And [according to Pew Research](#) roughly 20% of Catholics go to church “no more than a few times a year.”

So why have so many Catholics apparently decided they don’t have to go to Mass on Sunday?

Some Specifics

Most lapsed Catholics did not just wake up one morning and decide they would no longer go to Mass on Sundays. For many of them it was probably a gradual process. A missed Mass one month, then a couple more the following month, and over time, they just stopped going to Mass altogether. Eventually Mass on Sunday, the sacraments, and the teachings of their faith became distant memories.

Over that same period of time numerous influences were fostering the notion that going to Mass on Sunday was really not that important – even though it is the single most important thing we do each week.

Protestantism

The United States has always been a mostly Protestant country. And Protestantism has not been a good influence on many Catholics.

The result of an individualized Protestant system of belief is shown in a chart in an [article](#) entitled “The U.S. Is Retreating from Religion.” The chart projects that by 2035 the number of Protestants in the U.S. will drop to under 40% of the population from almost 70% in 1970.

Catholics are certainly leaving the Catholic Church (the green line in the chart), but Protestants are leaving their respective churches in droves (the orange line in the chart).

This makes sense since Protestants don’t have to belong to an organized church to be Protestants. But this kind of thinking is also rubbing off on Catholics. It’s also leading to the rise of the ‘Nones’ (no religious affiliation; the red line).

The Rise of the Nones

Many ‘Nones’ are practitioners of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” a term coined by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in their 2005 book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.

As [summarized](#) by Smith the creed of this religion is something like:

- “1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.”

It stands to reason that the outgrowth of Protestantism would be something like Moral Therapeutic Deism. If we don’t

need a Magisterium to guide us, we can just listen to our own poorly formed consciences and do whatever we choose.

The ‘Sexual Revolution’

Some have argued that the Anglican Church’s approval of artificial birth control for married couples at the 1930 Lambeth Council began society’s downhill slide. If the slide did begin then, the pill and the sexual revolution of the 1960s made the slide faster and slipperier!

Numerous experts have addressed the impact of the sexual revolution on religion and society. There’s no need to say more here.

Vatican II, Progressivism, Confusion

Vatican II (VII) gets slammed by progressive and traditional Catholics alike. For some progressives VII did not go far enough. For some traditionalists V2 went too far.

VII could not and did not change any first or second level truths/doctrines taught by the Magisterium. But some “common teachings” did get “updated,” and some traditional practices got changed.

Most older Catholics, however, remember VII as the Council that gave us the Novus Ordo Mass – the “New Mass.” But **VII did not mandate many of the changes to the Mass celebrated in many parishes. Progressive clerics and laypersons introduced these unapproved ‘innovations.’** Many traditionalists contend the New Mass is a big reason why so many Catholics stopped going to Mass on Sunday.

But in 1968, Pope Paul VI dropped a bomb. He issued his Encyclical on artificial birth control, *Humanae vitae* (HV). Many lay Catholics, clerics, and theologians disagreed with HV quite openly.

According to a 2016 Pew Poll only 8% of U.S. Catholics think artificial birth control is “morally wrong.”

In much the same way that HV was problematic, Pope Francis’ 2016 Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) has become a stumbling block. It, too, has created controversy. Once again Catholics are choosing sides.

The “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” published in 1992, clearly spells out Church Teaching. But there still exists today a great deal of confusion, uncertainty, and dissidence regarding Catholic teaching.

Poor Catechesis

Much of the confusion that exists today may also be due to poor catechesis. Many essays have been written over the last 50 years supporting the contention that Catechesis has not been passing muster. I added my two cents in a 2-part CS article (Part 1 [here](#), and Part 2 [here](#).)

Poor Leadership

During the 70s, 80s and 90s, and even today, many priests and bishops seemed to be more concerned with social issues than doctrine. Worse still, far too many parish priests delivered ‘feel good’ homilies instead of talking about the sanctity of marriage, abortion, the immorality of sex outside of marriage, and sin.

In more recent years, many clerics have failed to speak out against the sinfulness of homosexual acts, same sex-marriage, and transgenderism.

In 2017, [according](#) to a Pew Survey a whopping 67% of Catholics approved of same sex marriage. Yet Catholic Doctrine clearly teaches homosexuality is an “objectively disordered” behavior (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2357) and the Bible tells us that sodomy is a perversity (Romans 1:24-27).

Dr. Neil E. Whitehead, a research scientist from New Zealand, reviewed all the scientific research on homosexuality in his book “My Genes Made Me Do it! Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence” (the title is intentionally facetious). According to the Whitehead, “the more recent the research the more it strengthened the book’s original conclusions” that homosexuality is not genetic.

So, both science and the Church say homosexuality is a disordered behavior. Gender dysphoria is also a psychological problem. But today society says the abnormal is normal.

The Sexual Abuse Scandal

The sexual abuse scandal that came to light in 2002 certainly did not do the Church any favors.

While there is no question that some Catholic clerics were guilty of Pedophilia (the sexual abuse of a prepubescent child), the real problem was homosexual priests. Over 80% of the reported cases involved homosexual priests and adolescent and teenaged boys. The mainstream media greatly exaggerated the scandal. It was only too happy to ‘stick it’ to the Catholic Church by focusing on pedophilia rather than homosexuality.

Relativism, Secularism, Scientism, Modernism

Today there are no longer any moral truths because moral truths are not facts – they are opinions. This is “relativism” and it is what our children have been hearing in school for many years now.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) warned the world about the dangers of relativism in May 1996, and again in his “dictatorship of relativism” homily given at the Vatican Basilica on April 18, 2005.

Ask most people what ‘secularism’ is, and the response will probably be something like ‘separation of church and state.’ But a secularist society just doesn’t separate religion from politics; it emphatically rejects or excludes religion from all social systems altogether.

Scientism can be summed up in one sentence: Science has all the answers.

Taken together, Relativism, Secularism, and Scientism add up to modernism.

Pope St. Pius X warned the faithful about the evils of modernism in 1907, in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. In short, modernism is taking the spiritual out of religion and replacing it with ‘humanism.’

Father Longenecker summed up modernist thinking in an [article](#) at Patheos:

“[People] concluded that if religion was really only about peace and justice and social work, then why did one have to get up early and go to church and sing dreary hymns and listen to a long, badly prepared homily by an uncomfortably over fed windbag? Why go to church anyway? If it was really only about social work, then why the early weekend pep talk with music? Why not sleep in?”

The Root Cause

In December 2017, I received an email from a local golf course announcing its annual New Year’s Eve Party. The theme for 2017 was “7 Deadly Sins.” At the bottom of the announcement it said:

OPTIONAL PARTY TIP: DRESS IN THE COLOR OF THE SIN YOU ARE MOST LIKELY TO COMMIT TONIGHT:

SILVER FOR GLUTTONY, PURPLE FOR PRIDE, HOT PINK FOR LUST, BLUE FOR SLOTH, GOLD FOR GREED, RED FOR WRATH, GREEN FOR ENVY, OR BLACK FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE!!

That's quite a comment on what society values these days. For quite some time now **the devil has been hard at work turning Western culture into an increasingly secular one. And he is the root cause of the problems we are dealing with today. The devil is why there are so many lapsed Catholics today.**

Bring 'Em Back! Part 3

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By Gene M. Van Son
4 March AD 2024



This is the third in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Understanding the Excuses and What to do

If you have a lapsed Catholic loved one or friend, the chances are pretty good that the person is somewhat confused. One or all of the factors mentioned in Parts 1 and 2 are the cause of the confusion. And now that someone has lapsed and has stopped going to Mass.

Should you just pray for that person and continue to set a good example by practicing the Faith making sure you attend Mass every week? Or is there something more you can do?

We know prayer can and does work miracles. St. Monica's prayers turned her son St. Augustine's life around big time. So

absolutely pray and even fast for your lapsed Catholic loved one(s). But have a talk with him or her as well.

Talking is Good

As Catholics we are called to evangelize. But with our lapsed Catholic loved ones we are in “the awkward situation of needing to evangelize the Baptized, needing to re-evangelize the sacramentalized, as well as – and this is where apologetics comes in – sacramentalizing those who were evangelized” as Jimmy Akin said.

Having a heart-to-heart talk with that someone you care about on the importance of going to Mass may well be the starting point to getting them back to living their Faith.

Love and truth go hand in hand, and the truth is that your lapsed Catholic loved one is putting his or her immortal soul in jeopardy. But you have to express this truth in a caring and loving way.

Many these days have bought into the idea that correcting a sinner is being judgmental. **But this is not so.** In fact, Scripture tells us to correct the sinner. So don't buy into the ‘don't be judgmental’ claptrap. Trying to save a soul from eternal damnation is a Christian's duty.

Have a Plan

Before you try to have a talk, however, you need a plan. You need to know how you're going to start the conversation, and **how you are going to respond to statements like “I don't want to talk about it.”** Additionally, you'll need to be prepared to counter statements like “That's just what I think,” and “Your truth is not my truth.”

You may also need to brush up on Catholic teaching and the ‘why's’ behind it so you can explain to your friend or loved one why their thinking is wrong or ‘muddled,’ or at least know where to go for answers.

You also should be aware of the reasons (i.e., excuses) lapsed Catholic give for not going to Mass.

Surveys say . . .

In February 2008, CARA surveyed 1,007 self-identified adult Catholics in the U.S. The survey was aimed at finding out about participation in the sacramental life of the Church and beliefs about the sacraments. Some of the ‘reasons’ Catholics gave for not going every to Mass every week were: “Among Catholics who attend Mass less than weekly but at least once a month, a busy schedule or lack of time (51 percent), family responsibilities (48 percent), or health problems or a disability (41 percent) are the most frequently cited reasons that at least “somewhat” explain why they miss Mass. Among Catholics attending Mass a few times a year or less often, the most common reasons cited that explain at least “somewhat” their missing Mass are that they don’t believe “missing Mass is a sin” (64 percent) and that they are “not a very religious person” (50 percent).”

Villanova Survey

A 2011 survey conducted by the Villanova University Center for the Study of Church Management for the Diocese of Trenton NJ, had a more focused aim: find out why many Catholics in the Diocese had stopped going to Mass. Some 300 lapsed Catholics responded to the surveyors. The “reasons” they offered for not attending Mass were all over the place.

According to the surveyors:

- “There were many complaints about the quality of homilies as well as about poor music at Mass.”
- “The scandal surrounding the sexual abuse of minors by clergy was mentioned often.”

- “About half of the respondents, however, were not enthusiastically supportive of their pastors. . . . Words like “arrogant,” “distant,” “aloof” and “insensitive” appeared often enough to suggest that attention must be paid to evidence of “clericalism” in the diocese.”

Perhaps not too surprisingly, two responses point to the role that politics now plays in our lives:

- “Change the liberal-progressive political slant to a more conservative, work-ethic atmosphere.”
- “. . . eliminate the extreme conservative haranguing.”

However, when respondents were asked “Are there any changes your parish might make that would prompt you to return?” the surveyors “found no easily discernible trend in their replies.”

I tend to think that the reason the researchers “found no easily discernible trend in their replies” is because the respondents were simply offering up excuses for not going to Mass. **They have been deceived by the devil into thinking going to Mass is not that important.**

Pew Survey

A [Pew Survey](#) conducted in 2018, sheds more light on the problem. Catholics who do not attend Mass with any regularity cited the following reasons for not attending Mass:

- 47% said ‘I practice my faith in other ways’
- 19% said ‘I haven’t found a church I like’
- 19% said ‘I don’t have the time’
- 19% cited poor health or difficulty getting around
- 14% said ‘I don’t feel welcome’

- 10% said “There isn’t a church in my area”
- Sad.

The ‘Big 7’ Excuses

There are only a couple valid reasons for not attending mass on Sunday. All the other reasons people give for not attending Mass are excuses, plain and simple. And all the excuses might be **boiled down into these seven:**

1. I don’t get anything out of Mass; it’s boring, the homilies are dull / uninspiring, and besides, I’m too busy to go to Mass.
2. I don’t feel welcome at the church in my parish; our parish is too liberal/conservative to suit my tastes.
3. I don’t have to go to church to keep the Lord’s Day holy.
4. Going to church is just a man-made rule to fill the collection plate.
5. I don’t agree with the Church’s teachings on sex / contraception / marriage / divorce / homosexuality.
6. The sex abuse scandal was disgusting. I don’t go to church now because every time I see a priest today I can’t help but wonder if he is just another a pedophile pretending to be holy.
7. Organized religion is hogwash; it’s full of hypocrites.

None of these excuses are valid reasons for breaking the Third Commandment and possibly the First Commandment as well. **They are all just another way of saying, ‘I don’t feel like going to church,’ or ‘I don’t want to go to church.’**

Time for a Talk

So how do you talk to someone who offers one of these excuses? It depends. If the individual is fairly easy-going, start by asking a simple question in a sincere and non-attacking way:

“Hey Sam (or Samantha), I’ve been wondering, how come you’ve stopped going to church on Sunday?”

If the answer you get is, “I’m not really sure why I stopped going to church. I should probably start going again” you can relax. The discussion just got a lot easier.

If Sam or Samantha is single you could reply, “Great! How about coming to Mass with me on Sunday. I can pick you up and we’ll go together.”

If he or she balks at the invite, don’t push it. You’ve planted a seed. With some additional love and nurturing the seed may yet bear fruit.

If Sam/Samantha is married, you might suggest meeting up with him and his wife (or her and her husband) at mass and going to breakfast or brunch afterwards.

At some point you’ll want to bring up the subject of Confession\Reconciliation, but that’s down the road. You’ve at least gotten the person to take or think about taking the first step.

The Worry Alarm

On the other hand, if the person tends to be a bit more intense or opinionated, or tends to always be busy, your approach may have to take a different tack. Asking when he or she has some time for a conversation might be the way to start.

You could say: “Sam (or Samantha) I’ve wanted to talk to you about something for some time now. When would be a good time to have a serious conversation?”

Of course, this may set off the person’s worry alarm. Many people do not like serious conversations. He or she may say, “Uh oh, that sounds a bit ominous! Are you okay? You don’t have a serious illness or something, do you?”

The response to this question is, “No, I am fine, but what I want to talk about is a touchy subject for some people.” This may then evoke a response like:

“What is it that you want to talk about?” This response is just an attempt to get you to ‘tip your hand.’

The reply to this question is, “Do you have some time to talk now? I do want to have a serious discussion with you. I don’t want you to just blow me off and not get to talk to you about this.”

Some possible responses to this may be, “Okay, what did I do or not do now?” Or, “What? Did I hurt your feelings somehow?” Or, “What? Did I say something that offended you?”

These responses are more attempts to get you to tip your hand. Simply reply with a variation of your initial reply. You have to quell the person’s worry alarm and gently pull the individual in to having the conversation.

Easy Does It

One way to put the person at ease is to say: “I just want to understand your thoughts and your point of view on something. Isn’t that what having a conversation is? Exchanging thoughts and ideas?”

Another way to put the person at ease is to say:

“Sam (or Samantha) you know I love you, don’t you? I’m not mad at you. But I do want to hear your thoughts on something. Then I want to be able to offer my thoughts if we are not on the same page. And I don’t think the conversation is one that can be had in two minutes. So when would you have some time to talk?” If you’ve put the person at ease, he or she may say, “Okay, let’s talk now. I’ve got some time.”

But if the person is the suspicious type, he or she may try to put off the talk in another attempt to find out what you want to talk about. That’s fine. Give the person all the time he/she wants. Be patient. Eventually curiosity should get the better of

the person and he or she will say, “Okay, let’s have that conversation you wanted to have.” But if the person does not bring it up, gently remind the person when you see him or her again that you are still waiting to talk.

Timing is Everything

Remember the old adage – timing is everything. Recognize that while you may be ready to talk, your loved one or friend may just not be in the mood right now for a serious conversation. So be patient.

When you do sit down to talk, realize that the discussion may turn into a number of discussions. These discussions may continue over the next few weeks, over the next few months, or even over the next couple of years. Don’t try to rush things. Be patient.

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 4

By Gene M. Van Son
11 March AD 2024



This is the **fourth** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Conversation Prep

What kind of Catholic has your lapsed Catholic loved one been for most of his or her life? Taking some time to think about this is time well spent. Consider it “Conversation Prep.”

Was Sam or Samantha a devout Catholic or a ‘lukewarm’ Catholic before lapsing? Or has he/she always been a ‘Catholic in Name Only’ (CINO) – the kind of Catholic who skipped Mass often and/or who openly disagrees with a number of Church Teachings?

For devout Catholics, the Mass, and the miracle of transubstantiation that takes place during Mass, is a wondrous, uplifting, awe-inspiring experience. Mass is the highlight of their week.

But for **'lukewarm' Catholics, Sunday Mass is a more of a duty**. It only becomes a transformative experience once they are finally at Mass. Once at Mass they realize that it really does refresh their souls. Once in a while they do miss Mass, but for the most part they try to be good Catholics.

Sadly, however, there are some Catholics – the CINOs – who have never really lived their faith.

When CINOs go to Mass (if they bother to go to Mass at all) they're probably thinking about the work they have waiting for them at home, or the ballgame they are missing, or any of the other things they would rather be doing.

They also have probably not been to Confession in quite some time. And when they do go to Mass they may still be going to Holy Communion, even though they are not in a state of grace.

So what kind of Catholic Sam or Samantha is will help you determine how to steer the conversation.

Age & Education

Age and education also matter. Is the individual a 20- or 30-something, or is the person in his or her 40s, 50s, or 60s? Did the person attend parochial schools or go to public schools? Is the person a college graduate?

Age and education help give the problem some context. A 30- or 40-something individual, who attended only public schools, **may not have been well catechized**. The person may just not have a very good understanding of what Catholic teaching says or why.

On the other hand, someone who attended a parochial grade school and high school, but then went to a public college, may be experiencing an **overwhelming sense of relativism**.

The [experience](#) of Catholic blogger Matt Nelson sheds some light on why this matters. He became “spiritually indifferent” while in college.

“When I was in my early twenties, I suffered from a wicked bout of **spiritual restlessness**. After a couple years of university, my Catholic upbringing had lost much of its hold on me.”

So having some idea of how much the person knows (and understands) about the Catholic Faith is helpful. If the individual was poorly catechized, you may have to explain not only what the Church teaches but the ‘why’ behind Church teaching.

Listen – DO NOT Lecture

When the conversation gets underway, DO NOT turn it into a lecture. **A conversation is two people exchanging thoughts and ideas**. You don’t want the person you are talking with to think you are admonishing, criticizing, or telling him or her what to do.

Ideally you want the person to come to the conclusion that his or her thinking is in error all by him or herself. To accomplish this you will have to ask questions like “Why do you think that?” or “What has led you to believe that?” You will also have to be able to counter erroneous statements. (In the world of sales this is called ‘overcoming objections.’)

Remember that not going to Mass has become a habit, albeit a bad habit, for your loved one or friend. And **people like to rationalize their behavior, even when that behavior is misguided**. It may take time to get your friend or loved to ‘see the light!’

You may have to re-evangelize your sacramentalized loved one.

Evangelizing

Most Catholics do not have a lot of experience evangelizing, so here's some expert advice.

In 1985, Father Bob Bedard founded the order of the Companions of the Cross (CC), a priestly order dedicated to renewing the Church through Evangelization.

Father John Vandenakker, CC, is one of the original members of the Companions of the Cross. He is currently Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of Graduate Pastoral Formation at Sacred Heart Major Seminary (SHMS) in Detroit. In addition to teaching other courses, he teaches seminarians how to evangelize.

A 3-Step Process

Fr. Vandenakker says that Fr. Bedard describes evangelization as being a 3- step process:

- 1: **Our responsibility** is to share the good news of Salvation through Jesus Christ.
- 2: **God is responsible** for convicting the hearer of the good news to the truth.
- 3: **The hearer of the good news is responsible** for responding to the truth.

Keep this in mind. **Your responsibility is to make the effort.** God is responsible for “convicting the hearer of the good news to the truth.” This will likely be done in God’s time, according to His plan, not yours.

Fr. Vandenakker also offers 8 tips for evangelizing, or, in this case, re-evangelizing.

Tip #1: Prepare in prayer

Put the Blessed Mother and Pope St. John Paul II to work. Ask them for help.

Tip #2: Prepare the soil

Show interest, love, and concern. We never know when someone is going to open up to us.

If the relationship between you and your lapsed Catholic loved one is 'strained,' before you try to re-evangelize the individual, you should first work on repairing the relationship. On the other hand, if you have a good, caring, loving relationship with the person, you've already crossed this bridge.

Tip #3: Be yourself

Some people have a special charism for evangelization, but all Catholics are called to evangelize. Even if you are a quiet person by nature, that's okay! Grace builds on nature, so just be your natural self.

Tip #4: Trust in the Lord

Trust that the Holy Spirit will give you the words.

Tip #5: Look for Natural Openings

Empathize. Show them you are a person of faith, but don't hit them over the head with your faith.

Natural openings come much easier with a loved one, especially if you and your loved one are in the habit of sharing the ups and downs of your lives. Be ready for the opening when it comes!

Tip #6: Be Bold, be Courageous

Be a witness for your faith. God uses us in amazing ways so let our light shine. People are more apt to listen to testimony or witness than they are to a theologian. More important than sharing words when evangelizing (or re-evangelizing) is to share your joy and be a witness for your faith.

Tip #7: What to say?

Fr. Vandenaeker believes in the KISS principle – Keep It Simple Stupid!

Most people, he says, have an existential sense that something is wrong inside. We're yearning for something more and nothing earthly will satisfy that, as St. Augustine said. You can zone in on that by saying 'are you really happy?' 'Are you really fulfilled?'

Tip #8: Don't be afraid of rejection

LEAVE THE RESULTS TO GOD. Don't be afraid of a little negative feedback or even a hostile response.

In re-evangelizing your friend or loved one, at the very least you are planting seeds. Who can know what might happen in the middle of the night when the person is restless or upset. The Holy Spirit may remind them about something you said about God, prayer, or the importance of going to Mass.

And realize that the hardest people to evangelize/re-evangelize are your own family members. They know you and all your faults. So be humble.

Zig Zagging

Also before you start the conversation realize **your loved may try to zig zag!** The individual may start off offering Excuse #1, and realize that you are countering that excuse with some excellent points. So the individual may suddenly throw Excuse #4 at you, and if that doesn't work, Excuse #2 may get offered.

Remember that your lapsed Catholic loved one or friend has become comfortable with his or her decision to not go to Mass on Sunday. The discussion is going to make that comfort zone a not so comfortable place.

The 5 P's

Be patient. It may take hours of conversation to make the individual realize that he or she has simply bought into to a modernistic way of thinking influenced by the devil.

In each conversation you have you will be **planting seeds**. With God's help, these seeds will blossom.

Pray that the Gifts and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit will be re-awakened in your lapsed Catholic loved one. And pray to the Holy Spirit for the wisdom to say what your lapsed Catholic loved one needs to hear.

Persevere, but don't be pushy. Be polite and understanding. The truth can be hard for some people to hear. They may get defensive. Don't get argumentative.

Be prepared to go the distance. Have a plan and do your homework. Think about how you will respond to irrational statements. Have answers and/or resources at the ready.

Bring 'Em Back! Part 5

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By Gene M. Van Son
18 March AD 2024



This is the **fifth** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

The Third Commandment

The third Commandment is clear: “Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.” **When a Catholic does not go to Mass on Saturday Evening or Sunday that person is breaking the third Commandment and committing a mortal sin.**

But it’s possible the person is breaking the First Commandment as well – making sports, shopping, sleeping in, other activities, or even their own hubris (pride in their own mistaken ideas) into gods that are more important than God.

God's Words

God explains the third commandment to Moses in Exodus 20:8-11:

“Remember the Sabbath day—keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your work animal, or the resident alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

But notice that **God did not tell Moses to let everyone, individually, decide how to “Remember the Sabbath day.**

“ God left it up to Moses and the priests to decide how His Chosen People would keep holy the Sabbath. Moses and the priests decided the **Sabbath would be a day of rest, prayer, worship, and spiritual enrichment** – studying the Torah.

Back in 1,400 BC this was quite a novel idea. People usually worked all day, every day just to stay alive. Only the wealthy had leisure time. So strange was the idea of a day off every week that **the Greeks thought** the Hebrews were lazy!

The Sabbath, however, was more than a day of rest and prayer for the Hebrews. It was also a day of remembrance – remembering both creation and their delivery from slavery. So, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday, the Hebrews kept the Lord's Day holy.

Our Obligation

Catholics have it a lot easier. The Catholic Church says our obligation to keep holy the Sabbath is fulfilled by attending Mass on Sunday. The Sabbath itself is still Saturday, but our obligation to worship God is now on Sunday,

the Lord's Day. This is in commemoration of Jesus' Resurrection on Easter Sunday. It is also in keeping with the establishment of the New Covenant with all of mankind.

As the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (CCC) states:

1166 "By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday." The day of Christ's Resurrection is both the first day of the week, the memorial of the first day of creation, and the "eighth day," on which Christ after his "rest" on the great sabbath inaugurates the "day that the Lord has made," the "day that knows no evening." The Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet."

So going to Mass on Sunday is not an 'if you feel like it' suggestion. It is HOW Catholics 'keep Holy the Lord's Day.'

False gods

There are, of course, valid reasons for missing Mass on Sunday. If you are sick in bed, for instance, you do not have to go to Mass.

But remember, too, the First Commandment: I am the LORD your God, you shall not have other gods beside me. The First Commandment makes it clear that God expects us to keep Him first in our lives, above everything and everyone else.

Sleeping in on Sunday, playing golf, going shopping, or taking the kid to his or her soccer match instead of going to Mass, is putting something else – a false god – before God. So in such instances not going to Mass on Sunday is breaking two

Commandments instead of just one. We are making our own wants and ourselves into gods.

Sin

Every Catholic should know that breaking any of the Commandments is a sin. More to the point, it is a mortal sin.

The word sin is not used much these days. But at some point during your discussion with your lapsed Catholic loved you may have to revisit the concept of 'sin.'

The CCC explains what sin is:

“1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.” More importantly, “Sin is an offense against God” (CCC 1850). And a mortal sin is a grievous sin.

“1855 Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law” whereas venial sin “allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.”

The Consequences of Mortal Sin

Catholic Doctrine is clear about what happens if someone dies in a state of mortal sin:

“1033 . . . To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell.”

The point here is simple. **Habitually not going to Mass on Sunday is committing mortal sin over and over.** If we

die in a state of unrepentant mortal sin we go to hell. There are no do-overs and no appeals.

Yes, **God is merciful, but He is also just.** In fact, justice and mercy are perfect in Him. But assuming His justice will take a back seat to His mercy and His love for us is probably not a good gamble.

Fortunately for all of us, even though we are all sinners God forgives our sins if we go to Confession. So even if someone has not been to Mass on Sunday for 10 or 20 years, he or she can wipe the slate clean and cleanse his or her soul by going to Confession.

A Key Question

A really good question to have at the ready in discussing any of the seven excuses is one that philosophers have been asking for millennia: **Why we are here?** As Catholics we know the answer to that question: **God made us and put us on this planet for one reason only – to know, love and serve Him. That is why we are here.** Everything else is secondary.

But what some Catholics do not seem to understand is that we do not go to Mass to worship God because He commands us to worship Him. As Jesus tells the Pharisees in [Mark 2:27](#): “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

God gave us the Third Commandment for our sake, not because God is commanding us to worship Him. In all probability, He had Jesus’ Death and Resurrection in mind.

The Eucharist

Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, when He and His Apostles commemorated the Passover before his arrest and crucifixion. “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body,

which will be given for you; do this in memory of me” [Luke 22:19].

Jesus had already told His Apostles that His Flesh was real food in [John 6:55-58](#): “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” Protestants tend to either ignore this verse or say, ‘Jesus was talking symbolically,’ but Catholics know better – or at least they should know better. (If your lapsed Catholic loved one thinks differently, you might want to refer to my April 17, 2021 CS article “[Science has Proven the Real Presence.](#)”)

The Eucharist is the focal point of the Mass. As Pope Paul VI says in [Lumen Gentium \(11\)](#) the **Eucharist is “the font and apex of the whole Christian life.”**

So, Catholics keep the Lord’s Day holy by going to Mass on Sunday, and, providing we are in a state of grace, by entering into communion with our Savior Jesus Christ. We receive Him into our own bodies.

And even if we are unable to receive Communion, we can still thank God for everything He has given us and commemorate the Pascal Mystery. We can tell God that we are sorry for our sins and to ask Him to help us keep Him first in everything we do.

Nothing Else Comes Close

Even if we don’t care for the hymns, and the homilies are less than memorable, and even if we are unable to receive the Eucharist, going to Mass on Saturday evening or Sunday is the most important thing we do each week. I reiterate –

GOING TO MASS ON SATURDAY EVENING OR SUNDAY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE DO EACH WEEK.

Nothing else comes close to the importance of going to Mass because at Mass Jesus Christ is physically present there with us. **We go to Mass to be in Jesus’ presence, and hopefully, to unite ourselves with Him through the Eucharist.**

As the Catechism [tells us](#), Jesus command to “Do this in memory of Me” is directed toward the Eucharist AND the celebration of the Mass.

WE GO TO MASS TO REFRESH OUR SOULS AND TO WORSHIP GOD.

Final Note

There is a wonderful video that you might want to watch with your lapsed Catholic loved one about what happens at Mass. The video is The Veil Removed and it can be viewed [here](#). Check it out!

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 6

[By Gene M. Van Son](#)

[25 March AD 2024](#)



This is the **sixth** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #1

So you've asked the question, "Sam (or Samantha), I've been wondering, how come you've stopped going to Mass on Sunday?" And Sam or Samantha responds with **Excuse #1**.

"I don't get anything out of Mass; it's boring, the homilies are dull/uninspiring, and besides, I'm too busy to go to Mass."

A student in a Catechism class my wife and I were teaching a few years ago actually volunteered that the 'reason' his family does not go to Mass is because they're **lives are just too busy**. They just did not have the time to go to Mass!

There is one good thing about this excuse. At least the person offering it is being honest. He or she does think going to Mass is all that important. It's the same for the 'Mass is boring' excuse.

If a person does not like Opera that person does not go to the Opera. A person who does not like musical stage plays, baseball, football, or horror movies does not attend these venues either.

The downside here is that getting Sam or Samantha **interested in going to Mass again is probably not going to be an easy, carefree, stroll in the park.**

More Variations

On the other hand, you may get lucky! It may just be that Sam or Samantha finds Mass boring because he or she has

somehow come to the misguided conclusion that Mass is all about the Homily. You may get a response like –

▶ ‘Father is not an interesting or inspiring speaker. He puts me to sleep.’

▶ ‘All Father talks about is how things were back in Jesus’ day. He never makes the readings relevant to today.’

▶ ‘All Father ever talks about is how much God loves us and how we should love our neighbor, and take care of the poor. I want to yell out ‘things are going downhill really fast out here in the real world Father!’ Millions of babies are being murdered every year, people are getting divorced right and left, and now homosexuals are getting married. How come you never talk about any of this?’ The dull, uninspiring, and non-topical Homilies problem is not new. In all my years on this planet I’ve heard maybe two dozen inspiring, meaningful, or impactful Homilies.

Sadly, many priests are just not great speakers. In their defense, however, the purpose of the Homily is to explain the Epistle and Gospel readings. Even so, some priests (and deacons) are just not adept at making the readings relevant.

But the **Homily is NOT the focal point of the Mass**. If this is not registering with Sam or Samantha, remember Part 5. Also have him or her watch the video mentioned at the end of Part 5.

But also be ready for a zig zag.

A Crisis of Faith?

If the person has been either a devout or even a lukewarm Catholic up until recently, it’s possible the person is experiencing a crisis of faith.

To find out, your response to Excuse #1 should be something along the lines of, “How long has this been going on?” or “When did this start?”

A crisis of faith can occur as the result of the loss of a loved one, a divorce, or some other tragic experience that makes the individual begin to doubt God’s love for him or her, or even God’s very presence in our lives.

But it can also gradually occur over time as a result of secular influences. Once doubt takes hold, the individual’s faith begins to waiver and the devil really goes to work.

When encountering a crisis of faith, patience, prayer and compassion are key.

Patience is needed because there may be no ‘quick fix.’ Getting the person back to Mass and living his/her faith again will first require dealing with whatever it is that has caused the crisis of faith.

Pray for the individual, and pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the right words to help you help the person. Remember St. Monica and St. Augustine.

Compassion for the person and what he or she is going through is also required.

Answering the ‘I don’t know’ Response

The response you get to the ‘how long’ question dictates the approach you need to take.

The response may be something like, “Oh, I don’t know. For a while.” Or it may be more specific response, like “Ever since _____ died, I just haven’t been getting anything out of going to Mass.”

If the response is of the “for a while or “ever since” variety, you are going to have to ‘drill down.’

Your response should be something like, “Well Sam/Samantha, is it that you really do find the Mass boring, or is there

something more going on? Do you still believe in the teachings of our Faith?”

If the person answers, “I still believe all the teachings of our faith, but I just haven’t been getting anything out of Mass for a while now,” you can relax a bit. The person is probably not having a crisis of faith.

The Right Mass

It’s possible that the individual may be finding the Novus Ordo (Ordinary Rite) Mass a bit too ‘happy-happy, Kumbaya’ to be meaningful. If this is the case, finding and attending a Traditional Latin Mass (TLM – the Extraordinary Rite) may be just the ticket.

Or it could be that the modern architecture of the church he or she attends does not evoke a sense of reverence. Maybe attending Mass at an older, more traditionally architected church that evokes a more pious, reverent feeling is the answer.

Conversely, if the person has always attended Traditional Latin Masses, suggest that he or she attend a Novus Ordo mass. Maybe it’s time to change things up.

Re-examining the Mass might also be called for. There are a number of good books that may be helpful:

A Devotional Journey into the Mass, by Christopher Carstens

A Biblical Walk through the Mass, by Edward Sri

The Lamb’s Supper, by Scott Hahn

The Mass, by Cardinal Donald Wuerl and Mike Aquilina

Calvary and the Mass, by the Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

The Prayers and Ceremonies of the Most Holy Mass, by Dom Prosper Gueranger

(Note that the last two are books on the TLM.)

Also find out when the individual last went to Confession. Perhaps the underlying problem is that the individual feels a sense of guilt for receiving Holy Communion even though he or she may not be in a state of grace. If so, making a good Confession is the only solution.

If it turns out that the problem is deeper than just a boredom problem, you may have to play 20 Questions to zero in on the real problem.

Answering a Specific Response

If the individual responds saying something like, “Ever since my divorce . . .” or “Ever since _____ died so suddenly . . .” you now know what has probably caused the person’s crisis of faith.

In the case of the death of a loved one, grief counseling may be called for. Contact your local Catholic Services Office and also find out what kind of literature your parish has available about the grieving process. Maybe pick Peter Kreeft’s book “Making Sense Out of Suffering.” Also, find out if there is a grief support group at your parish.

Two excellent online articles about the grief process are: “[Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One](#)” by Father Eamon Tobin, and

“[Grief: The Journey Takes Time](#)” by John Mallon.

Similarly, if the crisis of faith is due to a divorce, professional help is usually available through the local Catholic Services Office. Most parishes or dioceses also have support groups for divorced Catholics.

Also check out divorcedcatholic.com, a website that offers programs, books, workshops and even daily inspirational emails for divorced persons. Another good online source is the website [Catholic Divorced Ministry](#).

Addictions

Addictions – alcoholism, drugs, gambling, pornography, and so on – can also cause one to lapse in his or her faith.

An addiction is a sickness that is also a ‘false god’ that can really grab hold of a person. Loosening that grip is not easy. Addicts do not become addicts instantaneously and they are not going to overcome an addiction instantaneously. It takes time.

Getting an addict to recognize that he or she needs help is step one, and quite often it’s a big one. Getting the individual to seek professional counseling or help from support groups like AA or Gamblers Anonymous can be difficult, but it is a rare individual who can overcome an addiction without help.

Addictions don’t result in a sudden crisis of faith, but they can weaken a person’s faith over time. When someone forgets ‘why we are here’ going to Mass is no longer important – it just gets in the way of the addiction.

Re-centering a Catholic or any addict’s life on God is not a quick and easy task.

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 7

By Gene M. Van Son

1 April AD 2024



This is the **seventh** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #1 and Catholics in Name Only (CINOs)

If you get Excuse #1 and you've determined the person offering the excuse is a CINO, it's a whole different ballgame.

With a CINO, the response to "I don't get anything out of Mass; it's boring" is still "How long have you felt this way about Mass"? But when you ask this question don't be shocked if the response you get is "Oh, for a really long time." If this is the response, you may have to re-catechize him or her.

Start From the Beginning

Start your discussion by asking him or her, “Why do we exist Sam/Samantha? Why are we here?”

Some years ago, I asked the kids in the eighth grade Faith Formation class I co-teach with my wife these very questions. They should have learned the answers to these questions in their very first Faith Formation class, seven years prior. But I got 17 blank stares. None of the kids knew the answer to these questions. **Their indoctrination into the secular world was already in full swing by the time they were in eighth grade.**

If the answer your loved one or friend gives is some mumbo jumbo about science or evolution, you’ll know that the person is somewhat befuddled. Step one is to find out exactly where his or her head is at in regard to God and the Faith.

Start with the obvious question, **“Do you still believe in God?”** If the answer is ‘yes’ or even a qualified ‘yes,’ work your way through the basics. Do you believe:

- that the Bible is the inspired word of God;
- in the Trinity;
- that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Word Made Flesh;
- that He was crucified, died, and rose from the dead to save us from sin and purchase our salvation;
- when we receive Communion we are receiving the real Body and Blood of Jesus Christ into our own bodies;
- the Catholic Church is the one true Church instituted by Jesus Himself?

If the answers to these questions are ‘yes’ you can ask, “So, what is it about the Catholic Faith that you are having a problem with?” and go from there.

A 'no' answer or an 'I'm not sure' answer to any of these questions, however, provides a starting point for further exploration.

A Teacher or A Guide?

Understand, too, that you do not have to take on the role of 'teacher.' It may be easier and less threatening to the person if you become more of a 'guide' in helping the person to explore the Catholic Faith.

If you are asked a question about, say, the Trinity, you could answer "You know, I don't know if I can explain the Trinity in a way that makes perfect sense. Let's see what Catholic Answers says."

If you are not familiar with the Catholic Answers website, get familiar with it! It is your 'ace in the hole'. The website's address is: <https://www.catholic.com/>

Typing a word or phrase into the "Find" box brings up a wealth of information on it. It's a great starting point to finding the answers to any questions your friend or loved one has.

Once you have a starting point, you're on your way. As the old saying goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single footstep. Now it's a matter of patience and helping the person to see the light.

High Self-Esteem = Pride = Stubbornness

Far too many people today seem to be suffering from severe cases of high self-esteem.

In 2017 [an article](#) headline in Education Week was "Why Are Schools Still Peddling the Self-Esteem Hoax?" The headline says it all.

The idea that fostering high self-esteem in kids would boost academic achievement swept the country in the 1980s and 1990s.

It turned out that this was not so. But schools kept right on pushing programs aimed at increasing students' self-esteem.

Self-esteem can easily turn into pride, one of the seven deadly sins. Catholics, however, should be practicing the virtue of temperance which encourages humility. **Humility restrains us from having a false sense of our own excellence.** Just as Jesus was humble, so, too, should we be humble.

A comedian I heard once quipped, today **we've got a lot of adults walking around who are dumb as rocks, but they don't realize it because they have such high self-esteem.** Many people today may have become lapsed Catholics because of a false sense of pride in their own opinions. And [pride](#) is the devil's favorite sin.

If your lapsed Catholic loved one is a product of public schools, he or she may be suffering from an inflated sense of self-esteem. He or she has probably also been fed a steady diet of relativism for 12 or 16 years. Your friend or loved one may have convinced him/herself (with the devil's help) that Mass is a complete waste of time and may now think that his or her opinions about not going to Mass are perfectly sound.

You may hear rebuttals such as "Well that's your opinion" or "We're just going to have to agree to disagree on this."

Don't Give Up

If you get one of the above responses don't be discouraged! You may not have upset the apple cart, but you've caused it to wobble. You can easily re-open the conversation a week or two later with questions like:

- “Sam/Samantha, are you still convinced that you don’t have to go to Mass on Sunday? I’m still trying to understand why you think this. Can you explain it to me?”
- “Sam/Samantha, do still believe that the devil exists and that he’s always trying to turn us away from God? Do you think it just might be possible that he’s managed to convince you that you don’t have to go to Mass on Sundays?”

Any response from Sam or Samantha that is an attempt to answer the question enables you to re-ignite the conversation.

But if Sam or Samantha comes back with a “**Hey, I said I don’t want to talk about this**” you can still gently reply “Sam/Samantha, I love you. **If, God forbid, you suddenly die of a heart attack without a chance to say an Act of Contrition or ask God for mercy, your soul is doomed. God’s mercy is for the living. Once you die it may be too late to ask for mercy. And the thought of not seeing you in heaven is on my mind every day. Can you tell me why you don’t think it’s necessary to keep holy the Lord’s day?**”

Don’t Let Sam or Samantha off the hook! Your long-term strategy – because **you are playing ‘the long game’ now – is simple: you want to understand Sam or Samantha’s thinking and you are asking him or her to help you. In doing so you’re getting Sam or Samantha to actually think about his/her beliefs and the why’s behind them.**

Some Additional Suggestions

Every time Sam or Samantha **offers an irrational or nonsensical reason as to why he or she doesn’t think going to Mass is necessary, you will have to charitably offer a logical/rational reason (in the form of a question)**

for why his or her thinking is goofy! Remember that you are planting seeds.

The website “[Catholics Come Home](#)” can also be of help. It was set up specifically to help fallen away Catholics find their way back to the Catholic Church.

Somewhere along the line it may be necessary to re-explain the meaning of the Mass. If this is the case, a 17-minute YouTube video explaining the Mass might be helpful. The video can be found [here](#).

Another good source of material on the Mass is Jimmy Aiken’s book, “Mass Revision – How the Liturgy Is Changing and What It Means for You.”

Specific to the ‘I don’t get anything out of the Mass’ excuse is a wonderful book by Christopher Carstens entitled, “Devotional Journey into the Mass” subtitled, How Mass Can Become a Time of Grace, Nourishment, and Devotion. Carstens offers eight simple ways to make the Mass a “joyful time of piety and intense devotion.”

The gift of a St. Joseph’s Sunday Missal may also help the person get more in touch with the Mass.

Final Note

Remember the video mentioned at the end of Part 5. It is a powerful video that you might want to watch with your lapsed Catholic loved one. The video can be viewed [here](#). As of this writing over 1.8 million people have watched it. Check it out! It is fantastic!

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 8

By Gene M. Van Son
8 April AD 2024



This is the **eighth** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #2

If someone you love is not going to Mass on Sunday because he or she **‘doesn’t feel welcome,’ there is an obvious, common sense solution: change parishes.** But if the individual balks at this suggestion there may be more going on than meets the eye.

Excuse number two (I don’t really feel welcome at the church in my parish; our parish is too liberal/conservative to suit my tastes) is an excuse, like the other six excuses. But to be fair, there

are valid reasons why someone might not ‘feel welcome’ in a parish.

Our country is, for instance, strongly divided politically. A [fairly recently published paper](#) revealed that Catholic clergy are no exception: one-third are Democrats, one-third are Independents, and one-third are Republicans.

Since parishes usually take on the personality of the pastor, some parishes may lean left, some may be moderate, and some may lean right. A liberal in a conservative parish, or vice versa, may indeed feel a bit unwelcome!

Consider, however, that there are over 17,500 Catholic parishes in the U.S. It should not be that difficult to find a parish in which your friend or loved one feels comfortable.

So when this excuse is offered, it’s really just a matter of identifying why the person feels unwelcome – if that truly is the case. The obvious question in response to I don’t feel welcome is, “What is it that makes you feel unwelcome there?”

Appearances

We should all be trying to follow Jesus’ command to love our neighbors, but sometimes we have a hard time with this teaching. Some people let a person’s appearance dictate how they treat that person. They just can’t get past an unkempt or slovenly appearance! And for others it’s tattoos or piercings that are a turnoff.

Like it or not, there really are ‘church ladies’ amongst us. They look down their noses at anyone they deem unfit to share a pew with them. And there are likely ‘church gents’ who think guys with long hair are a ‘hippies’ and make their disdain for them clear. But such people are not ‘walking the walk’ when it comes to Catholic Teaching.

It may be easier said than done, but the trick to dealing with such people is to just not let them bother you. Saying a quick

prayer for them is a good idea: “God, please open this person’s heart to Your unconditional love. Help him/her to love everyone the way You love everyone.”

Consider, too, that a man dressed in jeans and a tee shirt attending Mass at a Church where the other men are all wearing suits or sports coats and ties might feel out of place. A senior citizen at a Mass where most of the rest of the congregation are 30-somethings (or vice-versa) might also feel a bit out of place. So step one is to identify the cause of the unwelcome feeling. If the cause can be identified, it can most likely be remedied.

Strangers

If your lapsed Catholic loved one likes the parish he or she belongs to, there’s another possible solution to ‘not feeling welcome.’ Suggest the person **pick a Mass, and then a spot, and then sit in or close to that same spot every time he or she goes to Mass.**

My wife and I have been members of a large parish for 30 years. One Sunday we attended a different Mass than we usually attend. To our surprise we did not feel all that welcome! In all likelihood it was because we were strangers to the people who normally sit in this section of the church at that Mass. Sometimes people are just wary of strangers – even in church!

Regular Mass goers tend to go to a specific Mass each week and even sit in the same pew. So when all of a sudden they see a new face their antennae may go up. Who’s this new person?

In small or medium sized parishes, parishioners tend to know or at least recognize other parishioners. So a new face does stand out. But even in large parishes this can sometimes be the case. Once a new face gets to be a familiar face, however ‘the regulars’ may become friendlier. So maybe after a month or so of attending the same Mass each week, and sitting in the same area, the unwelcome feeling will go away.

But there are other reasons someone might not feel welcome or comfortable somewhere. And this where things can get a bit dicey.

What's going on in his or her head?

Most people are familiar with Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge had a pretty low opinion mankind. His views turned him into a miserable person.

It's possible that something similar is going on with your friend or loved one. If he or she has become disenchanted with the culture or society and is starting to develop a low opinion of mankind, such an opinion may be affecting his or her whole outlook on life.

Such an individual may only feel comfortable around friends and family. 'Strangers' make the person uncomfortable. Believe it or not, fear or distrust of strangers is a real phobia! And it has probably become a more real concern for some since the tragic events of 911.

Anthropophobia is a fear of other people, while Social Anxiety Disorder is a fear of various social situations. So just to play it safe, it might not hurt to rule out either of these phobias as the cause for not feeling welcome!

At the same time, **a person who is 'not happy' with himself or herself also tends to feel uncomfortable around other people.** The individual may be self-conscious about a real (or an imagined) character flaw or a physical characteristic. But it could also be that the person is carrying around a sense of guilt about something that he or she is ashamed of.

Perhaps the individual feels an overwhelming sense of guilt over some past sin(s). Guilt can be a powerful emotion that can cause a lot of angst in a person. The person's feelings of dread,

anxiety, and depression may be what are behind the individual's 'not feeling welcome.'

Talk to a Priest

For instance, maybe the person has been using artificial contraception for many years knowing this is a sin, but has not been confessing it because the person's poorly formed conscience won't let him or her accept it as a sin. On top of this the person continued to receive Communion.

Perhaps the person is a male who had a vasectomy. Of if your friend or loved one is female, maybe she had an abortion when she was younger and still carries the burden of this terrible decision around with her.

If one of these scenarios, or something similar, is behind the feeling of 'not feeling welcome,' it may be difficult to get the person to open up to you. But if you are able to get the person to open up, suggest to the person that he or she make an appointment to talk to a priest privately. (Confession is not really the place for lengthy discussions.)

Gently remind the person that God is merciful. God will forgive them.

More Reasons for feeling Unwelcome

It's also possible that the person has been swayed by the false prophets of modernism and relativism and now disagrees with one or more Church Teachings. The person may now feel alienated from the Church.

It's quite common these days to hear some Catholics say, 'the Church's teachings are outdated.' Such people have allowed themselves to be swayed by relativistic arguments and the lies of the devil. Now they want the Church to change and affirm their thinking and their less than virtuous or even immoral behavior.

The Sexual Revolution of the 60s was all about justifying immoral behavior. But promiscuity ignores the fact that God gave us sexual organs for procreation. Church Doctrine says sexual intercourse is only licit behavior between a man and a woman joined in Holy Matrimony.

Homosexuals have also tried a number of different approaches in their attempts to justify same-sex sexual relationships. Initially it was, "I'm a product of my upbringing." Then it was, "Homosexuality is a lifestyle choice." Then it was "It's genetic." Now it's "God made me this way." All of these 'arguments,' however, are attempts to justify a behavior that is intrinsically disordered and immoral.

Too many human beings are self-indulgent and don't care to practice self-control. They think Church teaching should change to allow 'free sex,' artificial contraception, co-habitation, and even sodomy.

So it's possible that your friend or loved one is uncomfortable going to Mass because his or her views on sexuality have diverged from Church Doctrine.

But it's also possible that the opposite has occurred!

Just Change Parishes

For example, in December 2017, just before Christmas, Fr. Gregory Greiten, the pastor of Catholic St. Bernadette Parish in Milwaukee, WI, told his congregation that he is homosexual. If the news reports are credible, his congregation gave him a standing ovation.

In an [article](#) shortly after his announcement, Fr. Greiten wrote: "I promise to be my authentically gay self. I will embrace the person that God created me to be."

If he used similar words in his announcement to the congregation, a traditional, orthodox Catholic attending Mass at

St. Bernadette's on the day Fr. Greiten made the announcement, may have felt pretty uncomfortable there.

So, if your friend or loved one is a traditional-minded, orthodox Catholic in a progressive parish, maybe it's time to change parishes.

Summing Up

If the individual who is not feeling welcome balks at the suggestion of attending Mass at a different parish, or sitting in a different spot, it's a good indication that there may be more going on than the individual wants to share. Trying to determine why the individual doesn't feel welcome is key.

Ask questions and listen to the answers, but be ready for a zig zag. It could just be that "not feeling welcome" is only a ready excuse for why the individual is not going to Mass.

And, once again, remind the person that the devil is always trying to separate us from God. Keeping holy the Lord's Day is a Commandment that was given to us for our sake. He does not command us to worship Him because He needs to be worshipped. Keeping His day Holy refreshes our immortal souls. And if we are able to receive Communion we can become one with Him. How great is that!

Bring 'Em Back! Part 9

By Gene M. Van Son
15 April AD 2024

This is the ninth in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #3

Excuse #3 (“I don’t have to go to church to keep the Lord’s Day holy”) is, to put it bluntly, wrong-headed. The Mass has been the method by which Catholics have kept the Lord’s Day holy for over 2,000 years. It is not some clever method cooked up to fill the collection plate.

Mass

The basic form of the Mass has been in place for a really, really long time! St. Justin Martyr wrote to Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius around 155 AD, explaining how Christians worship (CCC 1345):

“On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place.

“The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.

“When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.

“Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . . and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.

“When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

“Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.

“He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts.

“When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: ‘Amen.’

“When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the “eucharisted” bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.”

(More information on how Sunday replaced “the Sabbath” can be found in an excellent article entitled “From Sabbath to Sunday” by James P. Guzek at Catholic Answers.)

It’s Obligatory

The individual that employs Excuse #3 needs to be helped to understand that as Catholics we are obligated to go to Mass on Sunday. And **because the Church obligates us, so too does God.** When we willfully miss Mass on Sunday we commit a mortal sin.

Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:19, “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” [Emphasis added].

So just like God let Moses and the priests decide how the Hebrews would keep holy the Sabbath, the Magisterium – the successors of Peter and the Apostles – binds us to go to Mass. And so, God also binds us to go to Mass. Regardless of what one’s poorly formed conscience may be saying, we have to go to church to keep the Lord’s Day Holy.

Not a good choice

When the church is just a few blocks or even only a couple miles away, choosing not to go to Mass each week by offering up Excuse #3 not very smart. God will render judgement of course, but Jesus' words to Peter are clear.

You should also point out that only by attending mass can we participate in the Paschal Mystery and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. As the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" says: 1323 "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. **This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again**, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us'."

God is indeed present everywhere throughout His creation, but He is physically present at Mass in the Eucharist. And only at Mass can we receive Christ Himself into our bodies!

Pig-Headedness

If the person still insists, "It's a man-made rule, and it's hogwash," you are probably dealing with someone who is pig-headed!

Ask the individual, "So just how do you keep the Lord's Day Holy?" Chances are the person may stammer a bit before mumbling something about taking time to think about God and what He has given us.

Then ask him or her a simple question: "Where in the Bible does it say we are each allowed to decide how to keep holy the Lord's Day?"

If the individual is quick-witted, he or she may respond with something like, "Nowhere, but it also does not say in the Bible that we have to go to Mass on Sunday."

If this is the response you get, you could point out to the person that he or she is thinking like a Protestant! You could also point out that **Scripture is not the only source of God's teachings.**

Apostolic Succession

As Catholics we believe in the precept of Apostolic Succession. This is clearly affirmed not just once but twice in the Gospel of Mathew: in Mathew 16:19 (as already noted) and again in Mathew 18:18.

It may also be worth pointing out that Jesus was pretty clear that those who reject what His Apostles say reject Him as well:

“Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

The Church has been given the power by Jesus to decide how to fulfill the Third Commandment.

The Eucharist

Also remind the person that **Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist for us, and if we are not going to Mass, we cannot partake of what is the greatest of all the Sacraments – the gift to us of Jesus Himself.**

There's actually a logical progression at work here. There are more than a dozen references in the New Testament to Jesus being the bread of life.

Jesus tells the Apostles in John 6:35, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” Then a little later in John 6:53-56 Jesus is even more emphatic:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

Protestants have cut themselves off from the Bread of Life. Only Catholics are able to partake of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Jesus intended for us to be nourished by His Body and Blood, and we can only do that at Mass. Not going to Mass cuts us off from Him, His nourishment, and the tremendous graces we receive from the Eucharist.

You Can Lead a Horse to Water . . .

If the person still insists the obligation to go to Mass is a man-made rule that can be ignored, **you have still planted a seed**. With any luck the individual will continue to think about the points you made and may come to realize that his or her thinking is wrong.

But **don't let the seed go dormant**. Make the seed grow over the course of the next few weeks. Maybe ask the person if he or she has given any more thought to the conversation you had.

You might also say, “If you're right and it's just a man-made rule, I've only spent an hour per week in church worshipping God. But if I'm right, you are breaking the Third Commandment, and possibly the First Commandment as well, you're in big trouble. Do you want to take that chance? An hour per week versus eternity in pain and anguish. Think about it.”

While this may not be a very theological argument for going to Mass, it may get the individual thinking! in American public life, culture, and law. Those lamenting it care nothing about Christian claims for the Triune God, the Virgin Birth, or the Resurrection. They fix their disdain on Christian moral teachings that oppose their creed of expressive individualism, which enshrines the Sexual Revolution as the first article.

Bring 'Em Back! Part 10

By Gene M. Van Son

<https://catholicstand.com/bring-em-back-part-10/>



This is the tenth in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #4

You can almost anticipate someone who offers Excuse #3 jumping to excuse #4 if the discussion is not going his or her way. (Sometimes it's just the opposite.) But Excuse #4 – “Going to

church is just a man-made rule to fill the collection plate” – is the weakest of all seven excuses.

While some parishes do expect parishioners to tithe – to give a fixed amount (a percentage of yearly income) to the parish – it is certainly not a rule.

A single income, young or even middle-aged, middle-class couple with three or four (or more) children attending parochial schools in other parishes, for instance, might be hard pressed to tithe 10 percent of their income to the parish in which they are members, especially if they also support various charities.

But there’s an easy work-around to the “we are a tithing parish” statement.

Friends of mine moved into a new parish in a fairly upscale area and went to the parish office to register. The priest told them straight out ‘We are a tithing parish.’ After some strained but polite conversation my friend and his wife left without registering. They simply joined a different, neighboring parish.

So, if you are in a position to be able to tithe, great! But if you are not, it should not be a big concern – providing you are making a true effort to financially support your parish.

My wife and I have been members of six different parishes due to (mainly job-related) moves, but we’ve never encountered a tithing parish. We have, however, heard our fair share of homilies about the need for parishioners to support the parish. Usually there was a good reason for such homilies.

Yesterday vs. Today

Some 60 years ago the administrative staff at a parish with 400-500 families and no parish school, may have consisted of a pastor, an assistant pastor, a secretary, and a part time accountant. Today such a small staff would be an anomaly.

Most medium and large-sized suburban and urban parishes today have sizable staffs and a variety of parish ministries. Many ministries are comprised of volunteers, but a number of positions

are usually paid positions. And if there is a school that is part of the parish the parish's financial obligations increase accordingly.

Reading a State of the Parish Report these days can be an eye opener. For instance, in the fairly large suburban parish my wife and I are members of (without a parish school), the 2017 operating budget was \$1,485,200. Over \$843,000 of this was designated for salaries and benefits for more than 27 full and part time positions.

Almost \$300,000 was also budgeted for office expenses, utilities, insurance, and maintenance. Additionally, our parish donates money to the local Catholic high school, Abigayle Ministries, Right to Life, and other worthy causes.

So, it does take money to keep a Catholic parish going. And a parish does need its parishioners to contribute to the cost of running the parish. Even so, I've yet to hear anyone say, "You must put some money in the collection basket or you cannot attend Mass." So, the 'they just want money' excuse is a pretty lame one.

The Bottom Line

The Catechism says very plainly:

2181 The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.

More often than not a lapsed Catholic who offers Excuse #4 (or even any of the other excuses for that matter) is putting worldly concerns ahead of God. They are just being selfish.

A variation of Excuses #3 and #4 is "I'm too busy" or "I don't have time to go to Mass." But this too is putting earthly concerns above God.

We keep time with a clock and a calendar, but God does not. Our **average time** here on earth is around 79 years, so the concept of eternity may be hard for some to grasp. But consider this – the soul of someone who died 1,000 years ago in a state of unrepentant mortal sin has already been suffering in hell for 1,000 years. And there will be no end to that suffering.

You might suggest to the lapsed Catholic who uses Excuse #3 or #4 to think about the most painful physical thing he or she has ever had to endure and then try to imagine living in that agony forever. It's a pretty sobering thought!
Sober Them Up!

The person who is drunk on earthly living needs to sober up. Going to Mass on Sunday to refresh the soul is part of the prescription for the cure. Regular Confession, receiving the Eucharist, daily prayer, and always remembering why we are here enhances the cure.

This is part 12 of a 15 part series

Bring 'Em Back! Part 11

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By Gene M. Van Son
29 April AD 2024



This is the **eleventh** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #5

Excuse #5 is “I don’t agree with the Church’s teachings on sex / contraception / marriage / divorce / homosexuality.” And as an excuse for not going to Mass it really does not make a lot of sense. It’s like a U.S. citizen saying, ‘I’m not going to file an income tax return anymore because I think the 17th Amendment to the Constitution is dumb.’

Of course, not paying your taxes will only bring the IRS down on you. But not keeping the Lord’s Day Holy has consequences that are far direr.

Another variation of Excuse #5 is “I stopped going to Mass because the Church is anti-women.” This variation is every bit as

poor as the others. None of these variations abrogate the Third Commandment. This is what you need to make clear to someone who offers up Excuse #5.

A Possible Conversation

So, let's say you ask Sam, your 26-year-old son, how come he's stopped going to Mass. And Sam offers up excuse #5:

"I've stopped going to Mass because I'm having sex with my girlfriend, and I felt funny sitting there when everyone else is going to Communion. I felt like everyone was looking at me and thinking "SINNER!"

"But on top of that, I don't think pre-marital sex is a sin. And if I went to Confession and confessed it, I wouldn't be sorry for it, so I guess my Confession would be invalid. And I'd probably have sex with my girlfriend again before the next Sunday, so why even bother going to Confession!"

Your first reaction to such a statement might be "YIKES! I've opened a can of worms!" But take heart; it's not that bad. Your response, however, does require some tact.

Remember that your immediate goal is to get Sam to start going to Mass again, not to get into a lengthy discussion about Church Teaching on sexuality.

If you can get Sam going to Mass again and praying and opening his heart to Jesus while he's at Mass, there's a real good possibility that Jesus will take it from there. Just maybe Sam will come to realize his thinking on pre-marital sex is in error. And this would also hold true if Sam was disagreeing with Church teaching on contraception, marriage, divorce, or homosexuality.

Remember Your Goal

So, let's say Sam is in his mid-20s and has been a fairly devout Catholic or even just a lukewarm Catholic all his life. And

say he has a college degree, earned at a state-run university. More than likely Sam's 'beliefs' about pre-marital sex are the result of strong secular influences. You could say to him:

"Well Sam, even though you say you don't think sex outside of marriage is a sin, it sounds like you are still feeling some guilt because you are not going to Communion. Could it really be that in your heart you know premarital sex is a sin? What it comes down to Sam, is that we don't get to pick and choose which teachings we think are unimportant or incorrect. Catholic teachings are God's truths.

"Let's just say for a minute that what the Church, the Bible, St. Paul, and all the Church Fathers say about sex outside of marriage is wrong. Do you still believe that the 10 Commandments came directly from God and that He wants us to keep His Commandments?"

Since virtually every Christian on the planet endorses the 10 Commandments, Sam will most likely say "yes." At the same time Sam may reply with a "yes, but . . ." But the 'but' is irrelevant. Sam has admitted the 10 Commandments are non-negotiable.

You could then say, "So why are you committing a mortal sin over and over by not going to Mass on Sunday just because you disagree with Catholic Teaching on sexuality? That doesn't make a lot of sense, does it?"

Tread Carefully

Note that you'll need to 'tread carefully' at this point. You want to avoid any urge to get into a discussion on Catholic teaching on sexuality. Sam is certainly sinning in more ways than one, but **you need to take things one step at a time. Your intention is to get Sam going to Mass again.**

Follow with something like:

“Sam, do you agree that God knows your thoughts? Do you think that just maybe God knows you are having doubts about Catholic Teaching on sex outside of marriage?”

[This same line of reasoning can be used if Sam or Samantha is having problems with other Catholic Teachings.]

If Sam is any kind of honest individual at all, he will answer “yes.” So follow up with:

“Well Sam, God is our Father and He is the best, most loving, most caring, parent there is. In fact, He is the perfect parent. Do you think it just might be possible that it makes Him sad knowing that you are having a problem with one of His teachings and because of this you’re disobeying one of His Commandments? Don’t you think it might make more sense to go to Mass and ask Him for help in figuring out if you are right about whether or not pre-marital sex is wrong?”

“Even if you can’t go to Communion, Jesus is physically right there with us in the Eucharist at every Mass. Sit in the back of the Church if you really think people are judging you. But you know what? I bet anyone who notices you there intently praying during Communion is going to have compassion for you. Someone may even be inclined to say a short pray asking Jesus to ‘help that guy intently praying who seems to be troubled about something!’”

Don’t Rest on Your Laurels

If Sam gives you any kind of an opening, like, “Ya, that does kind of make sense,” give yourself a pat on the back. But don’t rest on your laurels.

As soon as Sam leaves the room the devil is going to go to work on Sam, so help Sam to be prepared. You might say:

“Just remember, Sam, **the devil does not want you to go to Mass. He wants to keep you as far away from God as possible. He’s going to start whispering all kinds of lies to you as soon as our conversation is over.** He’s going to

try to weaken your resolve to go to Mass. He'll also try to stop you from discovering the truth of God's teaching. Don't listen to him. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Look to Jesus for the answers to your questions."

Urge Sam to read the Bible and the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" for more understanding of God's teaching on sexuality. You could also suggest that he read *Humanae Vitae* and/or Pope St. John Paul II's teachings on the "Theology of the Body."

Once Sam is going to Mass again, ask him how his search for truth is going and offer to assist him in any way you can.

Don't Let the Confusion become Confusing

Far too many Catholics today are sadly ignorant about many Church Teachings. Confusion following Vatican II, poor Catechesis, and the anti-Catholic/anti-Christian relativistic secularism being espoused by the media, in the education system, and in the entertainment industry are all contributing factors.

Today far too many Catholics disagree with Church teaching on abortion, euthanasia, contraception, fornication, cohabitation, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and the newest stupidity – transgenderism. But none of these teachings can be changed. They are either dogma or definitively proposed doctrines.

Priests like Fr. James Martin and prelates like Cardinals Cupich only add to the confusion. Even Pope Francis sometimes adds to the confusion when he expresses an off-handed personal opinion.

Monsignor Charles Pope provided [a parish priest's perspective](#) on such confusion in regard to Pope Francis' comments on civil unions.

"As a priest, I can say his remarks here, and in the past, make my work of teaching and preaching a lot harder. Dissenters are emboldened and the faithful are discouraged. It is also very

awkward to have to “popesplain” and remind people that private opinions of the pope can be ignored and do not bind.”

The main point is that Dogma – first level truths revealed to us by God – are not open for debate. And when it comes to dogma, The 10 Commandments were given to us by God himself.

It's Not Optional

Keeping Holy the Lord's Day is not optional. It's not an 'if you feel like it' kind of Commandment. And it does not say 'keep Holy the Lord's Day in whatever way suits you.'

Similarly, the Third Commandment does not say, 'if you are confused about Church teaching or disagree with some aspect of Church Doctrine, it's okay to not go to Mass.'

Next Monday, Part 12: Excuse #6.

Part 1 is here; Part 2 here; Part 3 here; Part 4 here; Part 5 here; Part 6 here; Part 7 here; Part 8 here; Part 9 here; Part 10 is here.

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GENE M. VAN SON

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Bring 'Em Back! Part 12

• By Gene M. Van Son
6 May AD 2024



This is the **twelfth** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #6

While excuses one through four are really bad, and Excuse #5 does not make much sense, Excuse #6 is irrational.

Excuse number six is “The sex abuse scandal was disgusting. I don’t go to church now because every time I see a priest today I can’t help but wonder if he is just another a pedophile pretending to be holy.”

Excuse #6 is like saying:

- “I’m never going to allow my children to go outside because there are perverts out there,” or
- “I’ll never swim in the ocean because people are sometimes attacked by sharks,” or
- “I’ll never fly in an airplane because sometimes airplanes crash.”

These are all illogical, and highly emotional statements. And it is difficult rationally discussing such statements with an emotionally charged individual, if in fact, the individual truly feels this way.

If you are on real good terms with the person that offers up this excuse, you could say something like, “Sam/Samantha listen to yourself. You are saying because that guy might be a pedophile, I’m going to commit a mortal sin every week. Does that make sense?”

Realize, however, this excuse may be just that – an excuse. If you start digging deeper, you may get the zig zag.

But if the person insists that this is the reason he or she is not going to Mass, be empathetic. Acknowledge that a sense of revulsion over the thought of someone sexually abusing a child is normal. Such an action is truly revolting.

Fallacious = Illogical

But then explain that worrying that all priests are child molesters because a very small number of priests have been child molesters is fallacious reasoning.

It’s like saying:

- all politicians are crooks (because there have been instances of politicians being crooked);

- all police are corrupt (because some law enforcement personnel have, sadly, taken bribes);
- all husbands cheat on their wives (because some husbands have committed adultery).

Such thinking is not rationale, reasonable or logical.

Logic

In the discipline of logic and reason, such statements are “induction fallacies.” For instance, saying that because some politicians are crooks, all politicians are crooks is a ‘hasty generalization.’ It is giving the attributes of a small sample to the entire group. It’s easy to see how ridiculous such thinking is when you stop and think about it and analyze it.

If the individual still insists this is the “real reason” he or she no longer goes to Mass, it’s possible that the media’s sensationalizing of the scandal overly influenced your friend or loved one. Perhaps putting things into perspective for him or her will be helpful.

The Scandal in Perspective

There’s no question that the sexual abuse scandal was scandalous. Popes St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have all apologized to those who suffered such abuse, and to rest of the world as well. At the same time, the media has been on a feeding frenzy over the scandal for the last 20+ years.

But what the media has not reported is that the real numbers are actually very small. Only about 4% of all Catholic priests in the U.S. were accused of sexual misconduct. And only about 2% were likely guilty of molesting minors. Also, most of the abuse took place between 1965 and 1985, and a significant majority of the accused priests are now deceased.

While 2% is still unacceptable, the media would have everyone believing that the Church is chock full of active pedophile clergy. And organizations like SNAP (the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) did not want to scandal to go away because they were making big money off it.

More Perspective

The [John Jay Reports](#) provide a lot of missing perspective.

The USCCB commissioned four different reports on the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons between 1950 and 2002 (two reports in 2004, one in 2011, one in 2015). The Department of Criminal Justice at John Jay College compiled three of the reports. A National Review Board team of prominent Catholic lawyers, judges, businesspeople, and other professionals put together the fourth report.

Wikipedia actually did a decent job of [summing up](#) the John Jay reports:

“In summary, over a 50-year period, out of more than 100,000 priests, deacons and religious order clergy, 4,392 (~4.4%) were accused of sexual abuse, 252 (<0.26%) were convicted and 100 (<0.1%) sentenced to prison.” [Emphasis added.]

So out of 100,000 priests, just 252 (less than .26%) were found guilty of sexual abuse.

Additionally, As Karen J. Terry, a professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at John Jay College, and the lead researcher on the 2011 report [stated](#), “Few abusers were primarily sexually attracted to children; a very small percentage of priests were clinically diagnosed with pedophilia (by clinicians, using standard guidelines of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).” [Emphasis added.]

What’s more, the National Review Board report noted that more than 80 percent of the abuse was of a homosexual nature. It

speculates that the problem reflected an influx of homosexuals entering seminaries and becoming priests in the 40's, 50's and 60's. This speculation is based on figures noting the percentage of male victims rose from 64 percent in the 1950's, to 76 percent in the 1960's, to 86 percent in the 1980's.

Since 2002 the Church has put in place stringent guidelines for protecting children, and Pope Francis [has re-affirmed](#) Church practice against admitting gay men to seminaries.

And More Perspective

Consider, too, a 2006 [CBS News article](#) "Has Media Ignored Sex Abuse in School?" In 2002 the Department of Education carried out a nationwide study of sex abuse in the public school system. The article reports:

"Hofstra University researcher Charol Shakeshaft looked into the problem, and the first thing that came to her mind when Education Week reported on the study were the daily headlines about the Catholic Church.

"[T]hink the Catholic Church has a problem?" she said. "The physical sexual abuse of students in [public] schools is likely more than 100 times the abuse by priests."

The article goes on to ask why the media ignored this report while continuing to blast the Catholic Church.

None of this is meant to condone the abuse, excuse the cover ups by the Church hierarchy, or impugn the many good educators in public schools. But it does provide perspective. Any organization run by us very imperfect human beings is imperfect. We are all sinners.

And sometimes leaders just make bad decisions. In hindsight, many bishops made bad decisions.

"To be sure, bishops in the past consistently received astonishingly bad advice on handling abuse cases from chancery officials, lawyers, psychiatrists and psychologists, and others on

whom they relied” says [Russell Shaw](#), author of the book “Nothing To Hide: Secrecy, Communication, and Communion in the Catholic Church.”

The Lavender Mafia

At the same time, as the McCarrick scandal has shown, some bishops and clerics were/are part of the ‘lavender mafia.’

As Anne Hendershot, professor of sociology and director of the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life at Franciscan University of Steubenville [pointed out](#):

“In 2002, enamored with the alliterative phrase “pedophile priest,” some media outlets—like the Boston Globe—refused to acknowledge that that scandal, like the current scandal, was primarily a scandal surrounding homosexual predation. Those of us who tried to help people understand this scandal in 2002—by pointing out the demographics of the predation—were labeled homophobic.

“According to the John Jay Report, this was not a “pedophile priest” scandal, because the vast majority of cases involved post-pubescent males; it was a scandal of same-sex predation, though few wanted to acknowledge this.”

So, there is an active homosexual subculture in the Church that must be rooted out.

The Root Cause

[An article](#), “The theological roots of the present crisis” by Fr. D. Vincent Twomey, SVD, drilled down to the root of the problem. In the article Fr. Twomey explained that in the 70s

some theologians began offering up new views on sexual morality that became firmly entrenched in some seminaries.

“[I]n 1974, the Dominican theologian Donald J. Goergen published *The Sexual Celibate*. In it, he asserts, among other things, that “being celibate does not mean being asexual”; “chastity is not intended to lead one into a ‘no-touch’ style of life”; “when affectionate and genital feelings enter homosexual friendship, one should recognize and accept their presence. This does not mean the relationship is unhealthy.” It became “the reference book” on sexuality in the seminaries in the 1970s.

“How mainstream such ideas had become can be gleaned from the book *Human Sexuality: New Directions in Catholic Thought*, edited by A. Kosnik and others. The theological views (and especially the “pastoral guidelines”) of the report became a standard approach to the teaching of moral theology and to pastoral practice. “The book made excuses for masturbation, cohabitation, swinging, adultery, homosexuality, and even bestiality.”

Pope St. John Paul II spent much of his pontificate trying to ‘right the ship.’ But the damage was a lot to overcome.

Thankfully the majority of clerics did not buy in to this liberal thinking on sexuality. The vast majority of clerics are good, pious men, living celibate lives, and trying their best to be good shepherds.

Just an Excuse

The bottom line is that using ‘pedophile priests’ as an excuse to not go to Mass is not rationale. It’s saying, “Because that guy might be a sinner, I’m going to be a sinner.” That’s just dumb. I’d be pretty surprised if your lapsed Catholic loved one or friend held on to this excuse and didn’t zig zag. So be ready.

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 13

By [Gene M. Van Son](#)
[13 May AD 2024](#)



This is the thirteenth in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #7

So let's say your friend or loved one offers up Excuse #7: "Organized religion is hogwash; it's full of hypocrites." There is really only one way you can respond. **You have to ask to the person (nicely) for an explanation: "Can you explain to me how you came to that conclusion?"**

This may seem like a somewhat contentious response, but **you really need to understand the person's thinking before you enter into a discussion.** It's possible the person has joined the ranks of the 'unchurched' and become a deist or a 'None.'

But it's also possible that the person still thinks of him or herself as a Catholic! It may not be Catholicism the individual has a problem with but, rather, the institutional Catholic Church that is causing his or her angst.

Dealing with a deist requires a different tack than dealing with a Catholic who dislikes the institutional Church. But the deist may be the easier of the two nuts to crack (pun intended!).

Dealing with a deist

If the person has become a '**deist**' (a **practitioner of moral therapeutic deism as defined in Part 2**) you are not talking to a lapsed Catholic – you are talking to a person who has effectively left the Catholic Church. The good news is that at least the person has not become an atheist! The not so good news is that now you will have to re-evangelize him or her.

You first have to find out what the person now believes. In all likelihood, the person has not really thought all that deeply about what he or she believes or how those beliefs formed. The beliefs probably just kind of happened!

The person stopped going to Mass and stopped receiving Communion. **Over time, he or she succumbed to the influences of modernism, secularism, moral relativism and scientism – and the devil.**

Yet despite these bad influences, the individual still retains a belief in God. So the individual developed a superficial belief system that suits his or her lifestyle.

Re-Evangelizing

You are going to have to dismantle the person's newfound beliefs piece by piece and show why they are in error. This is not going to be an easy thing to do. It will be a true re-evangelization effort – assuming he or she is not just offering up a convenient excuse.

After Sam or Samantha gives you his or her statement of beliefs you might respond by saying:

“Those are interesting perspectives. Albert Einstein and Thomas Jefferson were deists, and it sounds like you are saying you have become a deist. Einstein, of course, did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior that God had promised to send. Jefferson, however, was a bit out there! Do you still believe Jesus is the second person in the Trinity and the Son of God, and that He was crucified and rose from the dead?”

If the individual still believes in the divinity of Jesus and His Resurrection, he or she is really confused! Sam or Samantha is a Catholic whose thinking has gotten really muddled.

If, however, Sam or Samantha offers some kind of waffling answer to the question about Jesus – like ‘kind of’ or ‘more or less,’ or ‘I’m not sure’ – you are going to have to dig a bit and get the person to explain his or her beliefs in regard to the divinity of Jesus.

Jesus Really Existed

Chances are that the person who waffles or says ‘no’ to the divinity of Jesus has been influenced by all the nonsensical posts on the internet saying, ‘Jesus was not a real person.’ These are easily refuted.

As Apologist Trent Horn [pointed out](#) at Catholic Answers, the mainstream position in academia is that Jesus definitely was a real person. He cites Dr. Bart Ehrman, a professor at the

University of North Carolina, who says “The view that Jesus existed is held by virtually every expert on the planet.”

Once you’ve established that Jesus was a real person, the next step is to establish that He is who He said He is – the Son of God. The Bible, the witness of His Apostles, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are all sources to turn to in this regard.

But instead of getting up on a soap box you have to become a guide. Ask Sam or Samantha **“What is it that makes you doubt or question Jesus’ divinity?”**

Let the person bring up his or her concerns one at a time and deal with the concerns one at a time.

Ideally you want the person to come to the conclusion all by him or herself that his or her thinking is in error. To accomplish this, you will have to ask, “why do you think that?” or “what’s led you to believe that?”

More than likely the response you’ll get will be “I read somewhere . . .” or “Someone told me . . . “ or even, “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking . . .” Hear Sam or Samantha out and then ask, **“Have you considered any of the evidence presented by the various authenticated miracles down through the ages?”**

Miracles

Teaching faith formation to a new group of eighth graders every year is always interesting, but one commonality my wife and I see from year to year is a lack of knowledge in regard to miracles.

It’s quite possible that Sam or Samantha is also unaware of the many miracles that many Catholics believe prove the divinity of Jesus Christ. Sharing some of this information with Sam or Samantha may help.

The Shroud of Turin

Most older Catholics know about the Shroud of Turin. It is believed to be the actual burial cloth that was used to wrap the body of Jesus Christ when He was laid in His tomb following the crucifixion. Almost anyone who has seen it or photos of it agrees that there is an image of man that is barely visible on the cloth.

The Vatican has never taken an official position on the Shroud but as a recent National Geographic [article](#) says, it is “a mystery wrapped in an enigma.” It continues to baffle scientists.

A visit to the website [Shroud.com](#) and reading about the Shroud should be an enlightening experience for your deist loved one or friend.

Eucharistic Miracles

Sometime between 700 and 800 A.D., in what is now the city of Frentanese, Italy, a miracle took place that is said to have been in response to a Basilian monk’s doubts about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

You can read about the results of the scientific analysis of “The Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano” [HERE](#). Spoiler alert: Science says that the Eucharist is real flesh and blood.

But this is not the only miracle that science has shown to provide proof of the Real Presence. (Yes, I know this is not actual proof of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. But if it is not, than how do you explain how bread and wine can have human characteristics present in them?) The modern-day Eucharistic Miracles of Argentina also provide such proof.

The story of the Eucharistic Miracles of Argentina is told on three PDFs at [therealpresence.org](#): [PDF #1](#), [PDF #2](#), and [PDF #3](#).

The scientific investigation in into the Eucharistic Miracle of Argentina turned the atheist investigator into a Catholic!

So what's the point?

It's a pretty good bet that there are hypocrites in every organized religion. But of all the organized religions only Catholicism can say that science has actually provided corroborating evidence that what it teaches is true.

Recall the Bread of Life Discourse ([John 6:32-58](#)). Science has affirmed the Eucharist is flesh and blood. And it is only in the organized religion called the Catholic Church that a person can partake of the Bread of Life.

Whether the person is 28 or 48, up until now he or she has probably managed to avoid looking for any information that might challenge his or her newfound personal belief system. You are going to have to change this.

If Sam or Samantha really has become a deist, you are not going to be able to magically make the new beliefs disappear. It is going to take time and effort on your part, and probably a number of discussions, to get Sam or Samantha back on the right track.

Dealing with the Anti-Institutional Individual

If the individual has formed a dislike for the institutional Catholic Church, he or she will probably respond to your request for an explanation by offering some combination of Excuses 3 through 6.

The 'anti-institutional Catholic' is kind of like a modern-day Martin Luther. He or she **thinks the Church has become a corrupt institution**. But unlike Luther, your loved one or friend may not be quite ready to abandon his or Catholic beliefs. So **in a misguided effort to protest the institutionalism and corruption, the individual has stopped going to Mass**.

You are going to have to overcome his or her “objections” to the institutional Church one by one.

So, let's say Sam or Samantha responds to your question by saying:

“The Catholic Church started out okay but over the last 2,000 years it's become one of the richest organizations on the planet. Bishops and Cardinals are living in luxurious mansions and jet-setting all over the place and all the poor shlubs in the pews are stuck picking up the tab.”

Excuse #4 Variation

This response is a variation of Excuse #4 – **the collection plate excuse**. It's even possible Sam or Samantha leans a bit toward socialism and also has ‘problems’ with the idea of a free market economy! He or she may even try quoting [Acts 2:44-45](#) to make his or her point –

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.”

This Scripture verse has been used by socialists and liberation theologians to support the claim that the early Christians were socialists. But this is hardly the case.

Theologian Antonio Fuentes refutes these notions in [an article](#) at Catholic Answers entitled simply “The Book of Acts.” Apologist Trent Horn takes the refutation further in [an article](#) entitled “No, the First Christians Were Not Socialists.”

No Organization is Perfect

You can certainly agree with Sam or Samantha that throughout the 2,000-year history of the Church **some members of the Church hierarchy have been corrupted**

by money or power. We have even had some really bad Popes. The sad fact is, all of us are sinners – even clerics.

But the Catholic Church is the over 1.2 Billion Catholics throughout the world. It is the people of God, the Body of Christ, the Communion of Saints, the Sacraments, the Holy Mass and the Eucharist. The Catholic Church is the Church instituted by Jesus Christ. It is far more than the institutional structure that has evolved over time.

It would be outstanding if every member of the clergy were immune to the snares of the devil, but, alas, clerics like Blessed Father Solanus Casey, St. Padre Pio, St. Francis, Pope St. Gregory the Great, and Pope St. John Paul II, are all too rare. But keep in mind that even these great clerics are not the Church. Even the many outstanding Catholic women like St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Joan of Arc, Mother Theresa, and Mother Angelica, are not the Church.

Ask the person if he or she still believes that breaking one of the 10 Commandments is a mortal sin. If the answer is yes, remember the statement in Part 11 – “So you are saying because the Church is corrupt you are going to commit a mortal sin every week. Does that make sense?”

His Mystical Body

Fr. Martin Fox, a priest at Saint Remy Parish in Russia, Ohio, [commented](#) on his blog that he left the Church “at 19 and came back at 29. I came back not because I thought the Church had especially holy bishops and priests; no, not even because I thought the ordinary person in the pew was especially holy. No, I chose to re-embrace my Catholic Faith for one very simple reason: **I became convinced that Jesus Christ founded the Catholic Church, and I wanted to be in the Church that is his mystical Body.**”

Fr. Fox’s words are also a good response to Excuse #7.

You might also remind your loved one or friend that even if the priest saying Mass is himself in a state of mortal sin the miracle of Transubstantiation still takes place. This is because it is not the priest who is changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, it is Jesus Christ Himself making this miracle happen.

Bring 'Em Back! Part 14

By Gene M. Van Son
20 May AD 2024



This is the fourteenth in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Excuse #7 and the Anti-Institutionalist

Excuse #7 is “Organized religion is hogwash; it’s full of hypocrites.” While this excuse is also hogwash, prudence is the watchword here.

Usually the lapsed Catholic who offers this excuse has become an un-churched individual, such as a Deist. It’s possible, however, the individual still thinks of him or herself as a Catholic. If so, he or she is a Catholic who has developed a strong dislike for the Institutional Church – how the Church is organized.

Part 13 of this series focused on re-evangelizing the un-churched/Deist. In Part 14 the focus is on dealing with an ‘anti-institutional Catholic.’

Just like with the Deist, the question you have to ask the individual who offers Excuse #7 is “Can you explain to me how you came to that conclusion?” **You need to understand the person’s thinking before you enter into a discussion.**

Dealing with the Anti-Institutional Individual

If your lapsed Catholic friend or loved one has formed a dislike for the institutional Catholic Church, he or she will probably respond to your request for an explanation by offering some combination of Excuses 1 through 6. Even so, your loved one or friend may not have abandoned all of his or Catholic beliefs. But in a misguided effort to protest perceived institutionalism and corruption, the individual has just stopped going to Mass.

You are going to have to overcome his or her “objections” to the institutional Church one by one.

So, let’s say Sam or Samantha responds to your question by saying:

“The Catholic Church started out okay but over the last 2,000 years it’s become one of the richest organizations on the

planet. Bishops and Cardinals are living in luxurious mansions and jet-setting all over the place and all the poor shlubs in the pews are stuck picking up the tab.”

This response is a variation of Excuse #4 – the collection plate excuse. It’s even possible Sam or Samantha leans a bit toward socialism and also has ‘problems’ with the idea of a free market economy! He or she may even try quoting [Acts 2:44-45](#) to make his or her point –

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No Organization is Perfect

You can certainly agree with Sam or Samantha that throughout the 2,000-year history of the Church some members of the Church hierarchy have been corrupted by money, power or lust. We have even had some really bad Popes. The sad fact is all of us are sinners – even clerics.

The good news, however, is that despite its human faults it is still the Church that Jesus Christ put in place on earth. Recall what Jesus told Peter in [Mathew 16:18](#):

“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.”

Jesus also makes it clear that He intends for His Church to be an organized community of believers.

Notice that He did not say ‘I will build my religion . . .’ And recall His instructions to His disciples on how to deal with “A Brother Who Sins” in [Mathew 18:17](#): “If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.”

Ya, sure, but . . .

When confronted with this evidence a hard-headed anti-institutional individual is still not likely to fold. The probable response to this will be, “Ya, but Jesus never intended His Church to become the wealthiest institution on the planet!”

Your reply to such a statement should be a two-parter. “So if I’m hearing you correctly, you actually agree that Jesus Christ instituted an organized Church. Your real beef is that you have problems with corruption and the wealth the Church has accumulated over 200 centuries.”

More than likely the response to this will be something along the lines of, “Ya, I guess so.”

If so, you’ve made an inroad. Now you have to put the Church’s wealth into perspective. You can start by pointing out that the Church is not the immensely rich organization some make it out to be.

Ask Sam or Samantha, “Who do think is richer, Michael Bloomberg or the Catholic Church?”

A 2023 [online article](#) at marketplace.org says the Catholic Church has “at least — and we’re putting a huge emphasis on “at least” — \$73 billion in assets.” It goes on to say, “That makes the church almost as rich as Michael Bloomberg, about as rich as the state of Rhode Island, and wealthier than Ivory Coast, Uzbekistan or Croatia.”

So after roughly 2,000 years the church has managed to accumulate almost as much wealth as Michael Bloomberg, who has [\\$96.3 billion](#). Yet Bloomberg has only been on the planet for 81 years. If the Catholic Church was a business, its performance would be considered pretty dismal. Wells Fargo, for instance, has only been in business since 1852, yet it has [\\$1.876 Trillion](#) in

assets. The Catholic Church doesn't even hold a candle to Wells Fargo.

The Church Doesn't Own Your church

Your lapsed Catholic friend or loved one might also be surprised to learn that “the Catholic Church” does not own all of the churches and properties around the world that are called Catholic. In the U.S., for instance all properties titled Catholic are, in some measure, under the local bishop's control.

The legal model in use by the Catholic Church in the U.S. is called Corporation Sole. Under this model the bishop of the diocese or archdiocese is the corporation from a legal standpoint. The bishop actually owns most of the Catholic properties in the diocese, not the Church. (Catholic high schools, colleges, and hospitals are usually independent entities not owned by the diocese/bishop.)

But this also means the bishop is legally responsible for all misconduct of clergy and employees of the diocese. He is also responsible for every possible liability on church property. (This is why, in the wake of the sex abuse scandal, a number of diocese's have filed for bankruptcy.)

In other countries, other legal models are in force. In France, for instance, as Steve Weidenkoph explains an article entitled “[The Wealth of the Church](#),” “Since the 1905 secularization laws were instituted in France, all churches built before 1905 are owned by the government.” This includes the famous Notre Dame Cathedral.

The Vatican

“Ya, but what about all the priceless works in the Vatican?” Sam or Samantha will probably respond.

Weidenkoph addresses this in the article already mentioned. “Even if the pope wanted to liquidate those assets and give them to the poor, he would be hard-pressed to do so.” How, for instance, could the Church sell the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? How could it sell the walls of buildings on which magnificent frescoes are painted?

And while the Vatican Museums houses many treasures, so too, does The Met in New York and the Louvre in Paris. And just like the Met and the Louvre, the Vatican sees itself not as the owner of priceless art but as the caretaker of the art.

But remember, too, that the Vatican is actually a city-state. It is the smallest country in the world at just over 100 acres in size. And the priceless art, buildings, and manuscripts housed in the Vatican, are part of the city state’s assets.

The Vatican functions much like any other country. It mints euros, prints stamps, and issues passports and license plates. But the Vatican also has no taxes, no restrictions on imports or exports and no customs fees. The Vatican is funded primarily by the sales of stamps, coins, souvenirs, and entry tickets.

The Catholic Church

But the Catholic Church is not the Vatican. It is the over 1.2 Billion Catholics throughout the world. It is the Body of Christ, the Communion of Saints, and the people of God. The Church is the Sacraments, the Holy Mass and the Eucharist. It is the Church instituted by Jesus Christ Himself.

It would be outstanding if every member of the clergy were immune to the snares of the devil, but, alas, clerics are only human. Clerics like Blessed Father Solanus Casey, St. Padre Pio, St. Francis, Pope St. Gregory the Great, and Pope St. John Paul II, are all too rare. But keep in mind that even these great clerics are not the Church. Even the many outstanding Catholic women like

St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Joan of Arc, Mother Theresa, and Mother Angelica, are not the Church.

Ask the person if he or she still believes that breaking one of the 10 Commandments is a mortal sin. If the answer is yes, remember the question in Part 11. “So you are saying because the Church is corrupt you are going to commit a mortal sin every week. Does that make sense?”

His Mystical Body

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Fr. Fox’s words are also a good response to Excuse #7.

You might also remind your loved one or friend that even if the priest saying Mass is himself in a state of mortal sin the miracle of Transubstantiation still takes place. This is because it is not the priest who is changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ making this miracle.

Bring ‘Em Back! Part 15

[By Gene M. Van Son](#)
[28 May AD 2024](#)



This is the **final article** in a series of articles aimed at helping you to get your lapsed Catholic loved one going to Church again and once again becoming a practicing Catholic.

Hell is Real

One of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit we receive at Baptism, which is increased and sealed in us at Confirmation, is **Fear of the Lord**.

The good Franciscan Sisters at the grade school I attended explained Fear of the Lord as being in awe of God's greatness and goodness while having a correct and proper disdain for sin. A correct and proper disdain for sin is needed because while God is great, all loving, and merciful, He is also just.

Following Vatican II, however, more emphasis was being placed on God's love and mercy than His justice. Sin got downplayed.

Since Vatican II, two basic theological schools of thought on Doctrine have existed: a conservative/traditional school and a progressive/liberal school.

Conservative theologians say doctrine is doctrine and Jesus' teachings are very clear. Doctrine cannot change. Progressive theologians, however, say Catholic teachings need to take into account current beliefs and attitudes 'of the culture' and priests need to be more pastoral.

The result of these two schools of thought has been 50 years of confusion.

Right now, as theologian, professor, and author Dr. Tracey Rowland points out in the forward of her book [Catholic Theology](#),

“The whole territory of Catholic theology is highly fragmented and there is little agreement about methodological principles and issues that are classified as central to the subject of ‘Fundamental Theology.’ The conflict at the Synods on the Family (2014 and 2015) was symptomatic of this. Foundational fault lines include the understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, faith and reason, history and dogma, logos and ethos and the correct principles to be applied to biblical hermeneutics.”

Fear of the Lord

Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI tried to clear up the confusion. But between the progressive theologians, bishops and priests, and the cultural changes taking place, it was kind of like trying to get toothpaste back into a tube and herding cats both at the same time.

Today we have a couple generations of Catholics walking around thinking, more like Protestants than Catholics. There seems to be no Fear of the Lord anymore.

Also, since Vatican II, **we've heard that “salvation is communitarian.” While there is some truth in this, it**

does not negate the fact every adult is solely responsible for his or her own actions and behaviors. And too many adults are just not acting like responsible adults.

The devil is real and he wants our souls with him in hell when we die. And he seems to have been putting in a lot of overtime for the last 100 years.

He has been, and still is, whispering in a lot of adult ears, telling people they do not really need God in their lives and that they don't have to go to Mass. And too many adults are listening to him.

But the Four Last Things have not changed: Death, Judgement, Heaven, or Hell.

Hell is Real

Jesus talks about hell in Matthew 8:12 and in Matthew 25:41. Peter also talks about hell (2 Peter 2:4) and so does Paul (2 Thessalonians 1:9). And Revelations 14:9-11 paints a pretty grim picture of hell.

The [vision of hell](#) Sr. Lucia received from the Blessed Virgin in 1917 at Fatima is also pretty scary.

“Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in a huge fire, without weight or equilibrium, and amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear.

“The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repulsive likeness to frightful and unknown animals, all black and transparent. This vision lasted but an instant. How can we ever be grateful enough to our kind heavenly Mother, who had already

prepared us by promising, in the first Apparition, to take us to heaven. Otherwise, I think we would have died of fear and terror.”

Our lapsed Catholic friends and loved ones need to be reminded that **while God is loving and merciful, He is also just.**

A 15-Part Guidebook

As Jesus told the Pharisees, the Greatest Commandment is “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” The first three Commandments all flow from this. **Nothing in our lives should be more important than God. Going to Mass on Saturday evening or Sunday is quite simply the most important thing any one of us will do each and every week.**

The 20,000 or so words in this 15-part series cannot cover every nuance of every conversation you may have with your lapsed Catholic loved one about the importance of going to Mass. But this series can serve as a pretty good guide in regard to how to have the conversations.

Remember Fr. Vandenkaker’s advice in Part 3 along with the **5 P’s – Patience, Prayer, Perseverance, Politeness, and Preparedness.** Don’t be confrontational, ask questions, and **be prepared to listen. Don’t lecture.** Your goal is to bring them back, not drive them further away.

Have the Conversation

Jesus tells us in John 15:5:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”

We cannot remain in Him and Him in us unless we receive him in the Eucharist at Mass.

As Fr. Richard M. Heilman, author and founder of the website Roman Catholic Man, [has stated](#):

“When we deny His divinity – and our actions can point to that – we are cut off from that supernatural power to bear the fruit of becoming great disciples, great husbands and wives, great parents, and great citizens. Without that divine life – state of grace – we are left to become base and savage ... merely [H]omo sapiens ... just another species, satisfying our base desires. THAT is why our world is the way it is today!”

It can be difficult having a conversation with someone you love about going to Mass again and once again seriously practicing his or her faith. But it’s a conversation worth having. You might save a soul