

# Inviting People to Mass

## What reasons do people give for not going to Church?

From a survey in the Diocese of Fall River (2022), non-practicing Catholics and non-Catholics chose one or more of the following reasons for not going to Church:

- 37% - I had a change in circumstances that made it harder to attend (work, health, family situations)
- 26% - I don't feel attending Church matters
- 17% - I moved away from the Church I had been attending
- 11% - My beliefs in God or religious practice changed
- 10% - I do not believe in the views of my Church

Additionally, the top reasons nationally provided for not attending Church include:

- They deem the church irrelevant
- They cite the hypocrisy and moral failures of church leaders
- They feel God is missing in the church
- They feel that legitimate doubt is prohibited
- They don't learn about God or Jesus
- They don't gain any significant or new insights about faith
- They have trouble finding a community

Overall, these responses can be broken up into two main categories: those who stopped, or lessened, going to Mass because they either:

1. Had life transitions and lost the habit
2. Have perceived incongruencies between Church beliefs and their personal beliefs

Of importance to both of these is the effect of the pandemic on Church attendance. Not only did it interrupt the habit of Sunday Mass, but it also caused individuals - especially those not well connected to the Church - to question their "why" for attending at all.

## What steps do we take?

As Catholics, we need to become good at two main things before trying to get people back into the pews:

1. Be able to articulate our own "why" for believing in Jesus and going to Church.
2. Help individuals who have fallen away come to know Jesus. This is because among nonpracticing Catholics and non-Catholics, 54% said they don't believe that Jesus is God, with 16% sharing they don't believe Jesus existed. (Diocese of Fall River, Perceptions Study, 2022)

A "why" moves people more than a "what". A person who does not believe in Jesus, nor has a relationship with Him to some degree, will be ill-pressed to see the importance of Mass beyond a communal or obligatory function (if at all), neither of which are compelling enough reasons for those who have fallen away to attend Church again on a consistent basis. Rather, those who see attending Mass regularly as important tend to also first have, and freely desire, a strong relationship with Jesus.

## Jesus and the Art of Conversation

Most often, when discerning who to invite to Mass, we think of family who have stepped away. But how do we approach them? Read John Chapter 4 on Jesus and the Samaritan woman and use this passage as a guide. Consider, in short, the method Jesus used in their encounter:

1. Meet them where they are - he sought to talk to her at a time no one else wanted to.
2. Listen to their story - before offering correction, he asked her to share what's going on.
3. Identify God working in their lives - Jesus helps her understand what God is asking of her and how this is better than what she could ever imagine or desire for herself.
4. Invite them to respond to God's goodness - Jesus invites her to accept God's call for her life and, thus, start on a new life-giving path

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## Imagine This

Imagine that you are asked to spend all your time to simply make one, life-long disciple of Jesus Christ. What would you do?

In his book "One Disciple At A Time" (2022) author and speaker Everett Fritz discusses the importance of focusing on smaller, more intentional attempts to bring individuals to the faith rather than large programs. The efforts of focusing on one to a few individuals and cultivating close relationships with them prove more fruitful in building life-long disciples.

To this end, Fritz invites Catholics to consider several first steps when trying to build a relationship with someone and share the faith with them. Part of this means accepting that it will take time and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

### 1 - Personal Invitation

Fritz writes: "Because it is personal, a one-to-one invitation becomes the seed to start and develop a relationship. Most people want to be in relationship with others. An invitation communicated through a bulletin announcement doesn't meet that desire most of the time, but a person invitation does."

Consider this: when was the last time someone personally reached out to you to invite you to something? How did that make you feel? Were you more or less likely to attend because someone personally reached out? Do you find the same is, or is not, done at your Church?

### 2 - Get to Know Others

Fritz writes: "I have had many in-depth conversations regarding faith with my extended family members, but I don't start these conversations. Because my family members realize that I am approachable and

because I have invested in relationships with them, several of them approached me with questions or seeking guidance."

Do we take the time to first get to know someone and built initial trust before sharing the faith with them? How can we engage in a "lived apologetics", whereby we share the faith first and foremost through our lives and through sharing our personal testimony before sharing prepared answers to faith topics?

### 3 - The Importance of a Comfortable Environment

Fritz writes: "Take time to consider and note the most comfortable environment available for you to meet. A coffee shop, a living room, a restaurant, or a local diner are all examples that you may wish to consider. When you extended a personal invitation, invite the person to join you in your comfortable environment."

When we try to build a relationship or have conversations - especially sensitive ones - where is the best time and place to do so? Environment affects disposition, which in turn affects someone's response to your invitation.

### Effective Evangelization also includes:

- Witness the Gospel with your life.
- Share experiences and immerse the person into the life of the Church
- Be sensitive to the person's wounds that may have been caused by hypocrisy
- Be faithful to Jesus' teachings as passed down and protected by the Catholic Church
- Seek greater understanding when you don't understand the teachings of the Church
- Do not be afraid to share your own struggles to witness to how God works in your life
- Have a regular habit of prayer, and pray for the person you are discipling by name