

Welcoming the Disaffiliated into Greater Communion

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In the Visitation, we hear of Mary going out to give witness to the grace unfolding within her life—seeking out someone with whom to share the Good News. And we hear of Elizabeth welcoming her cousin with great joy—recognizing the grace at work within her life as her own child—one who wasn't expected—leaps in recognition of the presence of the Christ. This two-fold mission with the disaffiliated—both a seeking out while also welcoming in is at the heart of how we approach those who have left the church, for whatever reason, and strive to invite them back into the communion of believers in the Body of Christ. A key factor in how our parishes minister to those who are disaffiliated is getting in touch with our own attitudes towards those who have left the Catholic Church, for whatever reason. Do we paint them with broad brush strokes or do we recognize that every person has their own unique journey of faith? Some may have taken a more circuitous route of experimentation or questioning, some may have suffered trauma or harm, some may be facing insurmountable challenges that they don't see the Church responding to, some may have just lost sight of the beauty and gift of a relationship with God within a community of believers in the Church. How will we know why they disaffiliated and how will we know how best to draw them back? To ask. And then really listen. Those people who have disaffiliated from the Catholic Church are not a problem to be solved. They are members of the Body of Christ who are missing from the communion of love and fellowship and whose absence affects us all. If we approach them as a commodity to “win back” then we lose the essential dynamic of a relationship grounded in freedom. We propose an approach that mirrors Elizabeth's welcome of Mary—to allow ourselves to receive the person with hospitality, openness to the unexpected, and a desire to learn more about them and their journey. Humanity is not whole without all members of the Body of Christ. We are less without the whole. Our ministry to those who are disaffiliated is to draw them back into our fundamental unity with God—to heal the sins of division and reestablish a communion of believers.





REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is my attitude toward those who are disaffiliated?
 2. What is the ultimate goal of outreach to the disaffiliated?
 3. What/who do we have in the parish that evokes beauty and curiosity? that is compelling, drawing people to a greater sense of communion?
 4. What do we as a parish need to do? What are our starting points?
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SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATION

Luke 1:39-56

“During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord* should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed* that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.’ And Mary said: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’ Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.”



RESOURCES

- [BOOK] [Catholic Catalogue: A Field Guide to the Daily Acts That Make up a Catholic Life](#) by Melissa Musick and Anna Keating
- [ARTICLE] [Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church"](#) from the Vatican
- [COURSE] [Liturgical Theology](#) taught by David W. Fagerberg, Ph.D.
- [COURSE] [Christian Doctrine for Catechists I](#) taught by John C. Cavadini, Ph.D.
- [COURSE] [Christian Doctrine for Catechists II](#) taught by John C. Cavadini, Ph.D.
- [COURSE] [Christian Doctrine for Catechists III](#) taught by John C. Cavadini, Ph.D.
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