

For Catholics

Who Have Been “Away” from the Church

You can always “come home” to *your* Church. You can start going to Mass again (find a parish), and become a part of a parish community that is ready to welcome you with open arms. God invites each of us to “dive into our faith” in a deeper way than we ever have before. You may already be feeling an inner pull to look at the Church again—it might be God drawing you back to Himself. He never forces; He only invites. He leaves the decision to return to the Church up to you. Here are ten reasons by Lorene Hanley Duqin of *Our Sunday Visitor* that influenced the decision of many to return to the practice of their faith:

Number 10: Because we want meaning in life.

In the hustle of today's busy lifestyles, many of us suddenly realize that our lives have lost a sense of meaning or purpose. We begin to ask ourselves, “What is my life all about? Why do I do what I do?” There is widespread confusion in our culture with regard to morality and truth. The Catholic Church offers a beacon of light that gives meaning to our existence and leads to eternal life if we persevere.

Number 9: Because childhood memories surface.

Some people say childhood memories of feeling connected to God surface in later life. We begin to ask ourselves, “Is it possible to recapture that simplicity of faith? Can I ever really believe that God is watching out for me?” The secularization of our society leads people away from the spiritual side of themselves. The Church offers both religious and mystical experiences that feed the heart, the mind, the body and the soul and an array of active lay ministries that interface and interact with the world in order to make it a better world in which to live.

Number 8: Because we made mistakes.

Some of us become burdened with the weight of accumulated sin. We want to get rid of the guilt of having hurt others. We begin to ask ourselves, “Will God ever forgive me? Is there any way I can start over with a clean slate?” You can always tell God that you're sorry, but through the Sacrament of Reconciliation you have a *complete assurance* of God's forgiveness. In addition, you are reconciled not only with God, but with all the members in the Church, the Body of Christ and given the grace to start all over again.

Number 7: Because we need to forgive others.

Sometimes we hold on to anger and resentment toward individuals who have hurt us deeply. Maybe it was a family member or friend. Perhaps it was someone, (a sister or a priest), or someone on the church staff. Our modern culture condones and encourages anger and revenge. But they are spiritual cancers that eat at the heart. The Church provides the opportunity to seek God's help in forgiving others, even when the other person does not ask for forgiveness or does not deserve it. The ability to forgive is a gift that opens a person's heart more fully to God's love and peace.

Number 6: Because we want to be healed.

Some of us carry deep spiritual wounds. We struggle with anger at God over bad things that happen—a terminal illness, a debilitating injury, a broken relationship, mental or emotional problems, an act of violence against an innocent person, an unexplainable accident, some natural disaster, the death of a loved one or some other deep disappointment. The Church cannot change these situations or explain why they happened, but there are people in the Church who can assist in the process of spiritual healing and help you get on with your life.

Number 5: Because the Catholic Church has the fullness of truth and grace.

Many who leave the Church start worshiping in another Christian denomination. But some people come back when they realize that Catholicism has the fullness of truth and grace. The Church was not founded by a single reformer or historical movement. It is not fragmented by individual interpretations of Scripture. There are thousands of Christian denominations, but only one Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit and protected from teaching error on issues of faith and morals from generation to generation for over 2,000, as Jesus promised while living on earth.

Number 4: Because we want our children to have a faith foundation.

Some of us return to the Church because we recognize that raising children in a culture that promotes "doing your own thing" can lead to disaster. Children need to experience the spiritual dimensions of life. They need a structured system of belief and a firm moral foundation that goes beyond human logic and reasoning. We return because we want a solid foundation upon which our children can build their lives.

Number 3: Because we want to be part of a Faith Community.

Many of us seek a sense of belonging. But community is more than just friendly people, good sermons and interesting activities. A Catholic Community is a group of people who gather around the person of Jesus Christ to worship God and live in the light of the Holy Spirit. We come together at Mass, in the other Sacraments, and in parish activities to pray, to celebrate joys, to mourn losses, to serve others, to provide support and to receive strength for daily life. A Catholic parish offers all of this, and much more, to people who recognize the importance of walking with others toward union with God.

Number 2: Because we want to help other people.

There are lots of opportunities within the secular world to volunteer. What's missing is the *spiritual dimension* that service within the Church provides. It's more than just a "feel good" activity. It's part of the *Great Commandment* "to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself." In reaching out to others, Catholic volunteers become "instruments of God's peace." The Church offers opportunities to touch the lives of people at home or around the world.

Number 1: Because we hunger for the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the number one reason for people come back to the Church. Many people come back to the Church because they feel an intense longing for the Holy Communion. Sometimes it happens at a wedding, a funeral, a baptism, a First Communion or a Confirmation. Sometimes it happens when people are alone or facing difficulties in life. They describe it as a deep hunger for the spiritual nourishment that comes when they receive the Eucharist. This hunger for the Eucharist triggers recognition of the Presence of Christ in other sacraments, which draws them even more deeply into the practice of their faith.

Most people discover that coming back to the Church is not an event as much as it is a process that involves a little pain, a little laughter, some thinking, some prayer, some discernment and a lot of letting go. One person admitted, "My actual return to full participation in a parish took about three years after I felt the first longing!"

And what do we get in return? The Catholic Church offers union with Jesus Christ: in Scripture, in prayer, in the community of believers, in the Gospel, in the Eucharist, in the other sacraments, and in the common work for justice.

Come home! We all could use the special gifts God has given uniquely to you. Imagine what it will do for you and those you love!