

Dear Friends,

Another one of the CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EVANGELIZING PARISH says, **“An Evangelizing Parish reaches out to and welcomes all who are inactive.”** The Catholics Come Home Campaign has proven that people have been looking for opportunities to come back to the Church, but they need to know our doors are open to them. Inactive Catholics need to be welcomed joyfully, and with enthusiasm.

People who have been away from the Church often feel a reluctance to come back, though, because they might be afraid they are going to be judged harshly. Sometimes they feel like they are being condemned because of certain laws in the Church. Furthermore, there are some who feel like they are getting looks from parishioners, or the cold shoulder. Some people who have wanted to come back to the Church have even reached the point in which they are willing to do whatever it takes only to find that maybe one of the priests, a staff person, or maybe even a parishioner says something that is perceived to be a judgmental.

We have to remember, though, that the Gospel is good news. Some people who have been away from the Church have heard a hopeful message from the commercials which aired during the Catholics Come Home campaign. The Holy Spirit has been stirring within them, and that can be both an exciting and fearful moment. It is exciting because they begin to see the Church as a spiritual home, a place they may have been missing for many years. It can be a fearful experience for those who are coming back to the Church because they don't know how they will be received. Will they be loved as they come back? Or, will they perceive that they are being judged. We can't always do much about what other people perceive, but we welcome them joyfully. Hospitality speaks volumes to the world outside our doors.

An evangelizing parish reaches out those who have been away from the Church. We can and should encourage family members, neighbors and friends to make a return. However, we also have to make sure that our parish a place that is welcomes those who have been away graciously, generously, and, most of all, joyfully. If we do not, why would those who have been away want to come back?

For your information, I have heard from many of those who have registered in our parish that we are a welcoming community. That is music to my ears. I know what it is like to move. I know what it is like to be a stranger in a new community. I echo what some of the newer members of our parish have said to me. I love how gracious, generous and joyful our community is when new members move in. We truly are an evangelizing community.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel