



Make Your Flock Whole

It's a familiar story: the family you used to see at Mass every week slowly stopped showing up when "life got busy." Or maybe there's an elderly parishioner you haven't seen since the COVID-19 pandemic a few years ago. Noticeable or not, we all have holes in our pews.

A 2014 PEW study found that 13% of all U.S. adults are former Catholics—and that was ten years ago! That means for every convert to the faith, there are at least 6.5 fallen-away Catholics. COVID-19 amplified this problem. A 2022 CARA study showed a 7% decline in Sunday Mass attendance compared with pre-COVID data. This significant portion of Catholics lost connection with their local parish during the shutdowns, and just never came back.

It's time to bring them home.

In this Year of Parish Revival, we are inviting clergy and parish leaders to pursue each lapsed member of their flock. Just like the Good Shepherd, we will call each of the lost sheep home as a part of the Invite One Back initiative. This campaign begins now in anticipation of the upcoming Year of Mission, when the wider Church will be sent out to win new souls for Christ. Returning fallen-away members to the fold will set the groundwork for this new missionary chapter.

The goal of this initiative is to guide people to intimate encounters with Jesus Christ and lead souls to salvation, allowing them to experience God's love, mercy, and goodness. To do that, we all need to invite back everyone who has left in a way that makes sure they feel seen and desired as an individual member of your parish family. Whom are you called to invite home?

Why Invite One Back?

Let's take a look at some important research presented in the CARA Study and where things stand since COVID-19:

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 24% of adult Catholics attended Mass at least once a week. That number has fallen to 17% post-pandemic. This represents a roughly 30% decline in Mass attendance.

- <1% of adult Catholics are homebound, shut-in, sick, or simply unable to come to Mass.
- 5% of adult Catholics are still watching Mass online or on television, in addition to the <1% of Catholics who are unable to come to Mass.
- If we assume that those 5% attended Mass at least once a week pre-pandemic, this would imply that 2% of adult Catholics have completely fallen away since COVID-19.

75% of those watching Mass online due to the COVID-19 pandemic state that they believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

In other words, a large portion of our communities believe in the Eucharist but are not physically encountering the Eucharist or their fellow parishioners.

The recent CARA study reflects a 7% drop in Mass attendees between pre- and post-pandemic, 5% of whom continue to watch Mass online. Less than 1% of adult Catholics are homebound, shut-in, sick, or simply unable to come to Mass; this population is not included in the 5% of people who watch Mass online due to COVID-19. Statistically, the people we are trying to invite back are people who still believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and aren't remaining at home because of a disability or dire health need.

Not every parish was affected in the same way by COVID-19. Some parishes changed drastically, while other parishes might not have seen much of a difference. On the surface, these statistics may not seem reflective of how significant of a problem Mass attendance has become since the pandemic—especially for those parishes that were severely affected. On the other hand, these statistics can seem small and insignificant—especially for parishes that never noticed any changes. But we know that statistics do not tell the full story. Behind these numbers lies the very real pain of grandparents, parents, and children who have witnessed their loved ones no longer practicing the Catholic faith. This pain is present in all corners of our Church.

As time continues, we can forget what our parishes looked like in 2019. We can be encouraged by seeing more people gradually trickling into our parish month after month (which is indeed something to celebrate!). Some of us might even be tempted to think that our parishes are, for the most part, back to what they used to be before COVID-19.

With the Invite One Back campaign, we are asking you to identify which parishioners haven't returned to your parish since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and to invite them back to Mass. Jesus challenges us: "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost" (Mt 18:12-14). Just so, you are invited to go out and find the 5% in your parish. Invite them back to worship with you on Sundays. Let them know that they are missed, desired, and appreciated. This is hard to do but necessary.

Every parish is composed of people who are but a conversation or an invitation away from returning to the practice of their Catholic faith. There are people down the street from you (or maybe even next door or in your own home) who are missing out on Catholic community—an essential part of our spiritual lives. There are souls who are aching to be nourished by the Bread of Life. May we seek them out and invite them back. May they return to a community that desires to welcome them.

And may we be reminded that if this entire Eucharistic Revival was for just one soul to return to God, then it would all be worth it.

Inviting One Back: The Spirituality of Invitation

Do you remember the last time that you were invited somewhere? It may have been a wedding, a lunch date, or a cup of coffee. But invitations mean something. They say something: "I want to be with you"; "I enjoy your presence"; "I want you to be a part of my life."

Invitations are uniquely powerful. An invitation is not forceful nor aggressive, yet, by nature, it expects a response. Jesus used invitations all the time! He invited people to worship and glorify God, he invited people to follow him, he invited people to dine with him, and he invited people to repent and believe in the Gospel. We should do the same today.

Though there are many reasons why Catholics stop attending Mass, it is safe to assume the majority will only come back if personally invited. No matter where individuals are or what decisions they have made, the Church remains a spiritual home and community of people in need of God's love and mercy. An invitation reminds them that they belong within our community and that their presence is missing.

If even one person is missing from our parish, their absence matters! In the words of the great Christian writer, C.S. Lewis: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal." Every person we have encountered has an eternal destiny. Every person who has ever been a parishioner at our church is a person with an immortal soul and, therefore, an infinite amount of value. Whether our parish is missing just a single soul, or five souls, or five hundred souls, we are incomplete without one another.

As we strive to do our part for the Eucharistic Revival, we need to not only bring people into deeper encounters with the physical Body of Christ, veiled in the Eucharist, but we also need to bring people into deeper encounters with the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. We need to bring people back into our parishes. We need to remind people that they belong to something bigger than all of us. Our parish families, our Eucharistic communities, need each of their individual members. Every single parishioner is a vital organ to their parishes because every single person is a vital organ to the Mystical Body of Christ at large. Every single one of us has a seat at the table of our Lord. It's difficult to have Eucharistic Revival in our parishes if some of our members are missing!



For this reason, we are asking that each parish's invitation be covered and saturated with prayer. This campaign is not simply about inviting people back but praying people back into the arms of the Church, and the only way that we can be successful in these invitations is by allowing God to work in and through our invitations.

Personal prayer is tremendously important. So, too, is communal prayer. Intercession allows the entire Church community to partake in this initiative. Lifting up this campaign as an intention at a Sunday Liturgy or including a petition during the Intercessions of the Faithful at Mass is a simple yet powerful way to pray collectively as a Church. Consider publishing a prayer in your bulletin such as:

God our Father,

You never cease to seek out your children—the lonely, the frightened, the hurt, and the lost. We pray for all our parishioners who have been missing from our parish community and Eucharistic celebrations since COVID.

Through the intercession of Mary, please pave the way for conversations and invitations that welcome them back to the Catholic Church and our [insert parish name] Parish community. We trust in your love and mercy for every one of your children.

Amen.

Furthermore, we are asking that parish small groups and church ministries take unique ownership of this portion of the campaign. For example, groups that meet to pray the Rosary could offer up prayers for those who will be invited back to Mass. Parish team members could offer a weekly Holy Hour for the outreach initiative. Or men's and women's ministries could pray for the men and women, respectively, who have drifted away from the Church.

For a full toolkit of resources including letters, postcards, and phone scripts with conversation tips, please visit [eucharisticrevival.org/invite-one-back](https://www.eucharisticrevival.org/invite-one-back). Resources are available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Whom to Invite

Before you begin outreach, the clergy, staff, and leadership team at your parish will need to discern the following:

- Who will receive these invitations? Make a list of parishioners you haven't seen in a while or people who used to be members of your parish, and start praying for them now. Discern how you can best reach each member of that group, and make a plan to contact each one of them in whatever way would be most meaningful.
- Who will intercede for this initiative? Put together a team of prayer warriors dedicated to covering every fallen-away member of your parish in prayer. This is a great way to involve the whole parish in this meaningful campaign!

Your Tool Kit

Once you've discerned the right people to contact and enlisted intercessors for your campaign, it's time to pursue the lost sheep! We've created a variety of resources you can use to re-engage lapsed members of your parish. Each community is a little different, so choose the methods of communication you believe will be the most personal and effective for the people you serve. If you feel inspired to "invite one back" in a different way, that works too! There is plenty of room for creativity in this campaign. Know that we are praying for you on this journey.

For more information:

<https://www.eucharisticrevival.org/invite-one-back>

