

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2018 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

C1808A

Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.

AUGUST 2018

Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

The Joy of the Sacraments

REAWAKENING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE FAITH

KATHLEEN M. BASI



THE EXODUS FROM MASS NEEDS THE ATTENTION OF THE FAITHFUL—NOW!



TUOMAS LEHTINEN/SHUTTERSTOCK

The bad news about church attendance is probably worse than you thought. Attending Mass is a thing of the past for six of every ten Catholics, according to a 2018 Gallup Poll. In any given week, only four in ten Catholics follow the bells hailing them to church. The poll also shows church attendance sank six percentage points in the last decade. For the faithful, the poll means the tolling from their parish home should set off alarms in their hearts.

Common explanations for the downhill slide? Some leave because their cultures aren't reflected in the worship. Some turn their backs because they disagree with certain Church teachings. Some feel alienated or excluded because of gender, gender identity, or the Church's position on gender matters. Others have trouble seeing a connection between faith and the world. Still others feel their parish liturgies lack luster and the church community is unwelcoming. And finally, there are those who simply choose to make other things a priority.

Although there are nearly as many opinions on where to place the blame as there are active members in the Church, two things are clear: Many are leaving the Catholic Church, and while this issue may be considered "old news," it still needs attention. What we've done so far to address the dilemma has not worked.

The sacramental preparation process offers a real opportunity to reach out to people who have drifted away. It's a time when lukewarm Catholics are focused on the faith. And it's a time when fallen-away Catholics often visit in support of loved ones receiving the sacraments.

Enter Pope Francis. In a January 2017 speech on marriage and annulment, he acknowledged that many people seeking the sacrament of marriage lack adequate formation in the faith and in their understanding of marriage and family life. If the Church focuses on that, as well as on continuing support after the wedding, he said, sacramental preparation can become an opportunity to draw people back to the Church.

The pope's comments resonate across the full spectrum of the sacraments, but marriage provides a good jumping-off point. Preparation can't start with a diamond ring, and the celebration can't stop at the conclusion of the wedding recessional. The pope's vision presupposes that young people are

formed in a vibrant faith throughout childhood and that, after the wedding, couples have ongoing opportunities for fellowship and formation.

Preparation, celebration, and ongoing formation. Does that structure sound familiar? It should. It's the basis for the crown jewel of Catholic faith formation: the RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. New Catholics tend to be on fire for their faith, and not just for a few weeks or months after joining.

Preparation

What would marriage preparation modeled after the RCIA look like? It would begin with an invitation to couples to discern why they want to be married in the Church. If they're lukewarm about the practice of the faith, why come to the Church? Suzanne Lewis, adult education and marriage ministry coordinator for the Church of the Epiphany in Coon Rapids, MN, notes that priests and parishes often bend over backward to accommodate couples out of a fear of alienating them. Lewis instead asks couples to consider what hosting their wedding in the Church asks of them. Not all couples are willing to dig deeper into their faith, but when they do, inevitably it changes their lives and strengthens their relationship with Christ and his Church.