

## **CONNECTING YOUTH TO CHURCH**

10 reasons why church-less Catholicism just doesn't work, and how you can lay a foundation for a lifelong church commitment in your teenagers.

"Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than going to a garage makes you a car!" Well, you *don't* have to be in a church to connect with God. But there are vital reasons why churchgoing is a must, not an option.

### **10 best arguments. . . .**

#### **1. It's about the giving, not the receiving.**

All of us, at least once, have said to ourselves: "Mass is boring and long and irrelevant- what am I really getting out of it?" So it's no surprise our kids are asking the same question. But it's the *wrong* question. A better one is: "What am I really *adding* to the mass -am I *helping others* get something out of this?" We can reflect, meditate, pray, and even study the Bible alone. But we can't function as Christ's body alone. Church is not about meeting personal needs, it's about what we're offering God as a community of Catholics. It's not just someone's good idea; it's *God's* good idea.

#### **2. It's all about relationship-building.**

Jesus promised that whenever two or three of us gather, he'd be in our midst. Of course, we can experience God's presence when we're alone--Jesus often went off by himself. But he made a special point to encourage us to gather in his name- it's always dumb to ignore something Jesus told us to do.

#### **3. We must learn to live with differences & unify around our common commitments.**

The subtle and overlooked message of the "Wherever two or three of you are gathered. . . " passage is the directive to simply love one another through our differences by *gathering*. In this disconnected culture, teenagers have few opportunities to live and love with people who are radically different in age, interest, and perspective than them. Church offers them a chance to connect with others around a common set of desires and commitments.

#### **4. God is in the audience, not us**

Before they reach adulthood, our teenagers must learn that God is the audience, not them. The choir, the priest, deacons, ushers, lectors, Eucharistic ministers and the people sitting in the pews are *all* part of the mass, for which God is the point. The best way is to get our teenagers deeply involved in the service. If they own it, they'll participate. Once they see God as the audience, the purpose for gathering changes.

#### **5. Mass creates opportunities for connections with God.**

Our teenagers crave a relationship with God. But they need opportunities for clear, open lines of communication so they can open up to God. And a good mass creates those opportunities.

#### **6. We need others who can share our load.**

Central to the Christian life is "bearing one another's burdens" . If our teenagers are to grow into the image of God, they must move toward others whether they're broken or blessed, through tears and through laughter. No joke is worth telling when you're alone. And we need others to help us lift our concerns to God.

#### **7. The church offers powerful mentors.**

You're a role model for the teenagers in your group, and so is every other adult in your congregation. Your students are always watching and studying you -they're literally looking for others to model what it means to follow Christ into adulthood. Your church is full of mentors. Use them. Train them. Your teenagers will show up when they're getting the kind of affirmation and advice adult mentors can give them.

#### **8. People at church have gifts you need.**

Everybody has a gift. We meet together as a church so we can combine our gifts and use them for God. If your kids say "I'm a Catholic," they're also saying they're an inseparable and necessary part of a working body. We find answers to our prayers in the people of our church community, and *we are the answer* to another's prayers.

#### **9. Our impact is multiplied when we're part of a church community.**

Catholics who are looking to coast through life will avoid church; Catholics who want to swim upstream toward the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus" will gravitate to the church. There are two kinds of people: those who are influencing the world for Christ, and those who are following the crowd down the "broad way that leads to destruction". It's impossible to run toward the gospel, counter to the world's current, in isolation. That kind of bravery happens only in Christian community. As we grow closer to God, so does the church. As we seek advice and mentor those who follow us, so does the church. As we become a part of the body of Christ in the church, so the church becomes a part of the worldwide Christian body.

#### **10. Our commitments define us.**

If we believe nothing and support nothing, we're a part of nothing. If we commit ourselves to the church, we define ourselves as part of the body of Christ. There, we can feel loved, supported, and part of something much bigger than ourselves. .