

# Catholic Caregivers

*'Caregiving is pro-life!'*

## Returning to the Church

People leave the Catholic Church for a variety of reasons. Some storm out. Others drift away.

Returning to the Church may be something you or your care-receiver wants to look into now but neither of you is sure how to go about it.

A first step would be talking to a local priest. How do you find him? Check the phone directory and call the parish in your area or your loved one's area. Or contact the central office of your diocese and based on your care-receiver's address you will be referred to the correct parish. You may want to attend Mass there a few times and introduce yourself to the priest in person.

In most parishes, the days of visiting a priest by simply knocking on the rectory door have passed. The current shortage of priests means parishes that used to have two, three or even more priests assigned to them may now have only one. Or may not even have a priest in residence.

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Don't be surprised if you get an answering service if you're calling at some time other than business hours (yes, business hours). Most likely you will be asked to leave your name and number and a brief message. Even during the day, you may need to leave a message with the parish office secretary.

This can feel very awkward, especially if you're not really sure why you're calling in the first place. If you're not really sure this is something you want to pursue.

It's enough to simply say, "My name is . . . I'm interested (or "my care-receiver is interested") in finding out about returning to the Church." Or "I have ("my loved one has") some questions and would like to talk to a priest." You might also add what time of day it's easiest to reach you.

What can you expect when the priest returns

your call? Someone who wants to help you. Someone who would like to warmly welcome you back.

What *won't* you get? Accusations designed to make you feel guilty. A scolding. A cold shoulder. A sales pitch for a monetary contribution to the parish. A demand that you—on the spot—make a firm commitment to return to the Church.

If your loved one is homebound or in a hospital or nursing home, the priest (or pastoral minister) will come visit her there. He'll answer her questions and, if it's been a while since she's been an active Catholic, he may briefly explain what changes have taken place in the Church and why they've happened.

Maybe your care-receiver just wants to talk. That's fine. If he wants to go to confession (and it's a priest who has come to visit), he'll be given the opportunity to do that and to receive the Anointing of the Sick. A priest or an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist can give your loved one Holy Communion.

It's understandable if your care-receiver is (or you are) nervous about this. But there's no need to be afraid. It may help to remember the priest is there to help you and your loved one. Certainly one of the great joys of his vocation, his ministry, is this very thing: Welcoming back someone who has been away for a time. It's helping that person better prepare for an eternal homecoming. □

### Two Saints' Advice

*"Start by doing what's necessary, then what's possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible."*

--St. Francis of Assisi

*"Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections, but instantly set about remedying them -- every day begin the task anew."*

--St. Francis de Sales

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