

# **Catholics Come Home**

*Example provided by Our Lady of Mount Carmel*

**Easter Season:** We decided to initiate this program during the Easter season. What better time than the glory of the resurrection to invite new life into the hearts and lives of those who have been lost, dead in their faith. Easter also provides the opportunity to reach out to many Catholics who may only come to Church on Christmas and Easter. We showed a short video (also could be an announcement from the pulpit) at the close of all of the Easter Masses inviting those who have fallen away to come home. I was also outside after all of the masses to answer questions and personally invite people to join us. (We hope to implement this six week program every Christmas and Easter season from here on out).

**Video/Announcement:** *Happy Easter! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and on behalf of the whole staff here at \_\_\_\_\_, I would like to thank you for coming to celebrate the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I would like to tell you about a new program that we will be launching this Easter season. Catholics Come Home will meet every \_\_\_\_\_ starting \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ through the Easter Season until Pentecost.*

*As we welcomed new members into our church this Easter through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion, our hearts are so full of joy and yet we can't help but think of those fully initiated Catholics who are not here to celebrate with us on a regular basis. We miss you! So if you or someone you know has been hurt by the Catholic Church, have questions about why the Church teaches the things that it does or have been gone for so long that you don't even remember what you are supposed to believe as a Catholic anymore, COME HOME. Celebrate with us, find healing and answers to your questions.*

*In St. Luke's Gospel, the parable of the prodigal son speaks of a child who had been gone from the family for a long time. While he was still a long way off the Father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran to greet him, embraced him, put rings on his fingers and robe around his shoulders. He ordered his servants to kill the fattened calf and throw a great feast because this son of His was lost and had been found, had been dead and was brought back to life.*

*And so that is exactly what we are doing. We are throwing a feast in your honor because you are here with us. Look in the bulletin, check out the parish website or call the office for more information or to register. Again, we will meet for the first time on \_\_\_\_\_ I can't wait to see you there. God bless you and WELCOME HOME!*

**Additional Advertisement:** We put our ad on the front cover of the bulletin, had the pastor make weekly pulpit announcements, put the info. On the parish website and encouraged parishioners to make personal invites to neighbors, co-workers, family and friends and then to come with them!

**Dinner Party:** The first night, we provided a full home cooked dinner. We served pasta, garlic bread and salad family style at the tables, which were preset with cloth tablecloths, full place settings, candles and fresh flowers. We had lemonade, water, and coffee to drink and a table full of desserts including cookies, cheesecake and tiramisu. Music was playing and newly initiated Catholics from the RCIA program were there to help serve, waiting on our returning Catholics hand and foot. They got them refills on their drinks, cleared their places, took dessert orders and

just made everyone feel loved, appreciated and welcomed. After dinner, we had a few people share testimonies who had left the Church for varying reasons to come back years later. I also gave a short teaching on the love of the Father for those who return and explained the devotion of Divine Mercy since it was the Monday following Divine Mercy Sunday. We ended with the Father's Love Letter (see hand out or website with audio). Everyone was given rosaries and handouts on God the Father, Attributes of God, and Divine Mercy (from ACM's RCIA resources).

**Hospitality:** Hospitality is always important in ministry but especially for this group. I didn't want to hold anything back and aim at lavishing attention and resources upon those who are returning. Cloth tablecloths, art work, beautiful hand outs, lit candles, music playing, and lots of good food every night are essential! Even more importantly is the welcoming attitude of the team, there early to greet and engage participants in conversation.

After the first meeting, I spent an afternoon baking loaves of banana bread for all those who had the courage to attend out dinner on Monday night. They had filled out a sheet with their contact information so I had all of their addresses. Saturday morning another team member joined me in driving to their homes to hand deliver our gift and extend a thank you and continued invitation to come on Monday night. Everyone was shocked to see the effort we had gone to (in some cases to drive quite far) to make them feel welcome. They invited us in, shared their stories with us and began to form those relationships which are essential to any ministry and to feeling at home in the parish.

**Content of Catechesis:** I purposely did not plan the agenda of our meetings ahead of time so that the nights could be catered to the needs and questions of the individuals who attended. I handed out a questionnaire the first night asking their impression/experience of the Church up to this point and urged them to be honest. I reassured everyone that nothing they could say would shock me or offend me that we are here to address real hurts and confusion and we can't do that if we act that everything has always been fine. Obviously something happened to upset them to make them leave or something was missing that they needed and felt they needed to go somewhere else to receive. We want to help! It also asked what they hoped to get out of our time together. There was a list of possible topics to check off as well to help discern the order and content of this particular series.

**Resources and Gifts:** ACM handouts for different doctrines are reproduced and distributed to supplement the evenings topic. Everyone was also given a Catechism of the Catholic Church, New American Bible and rosary.

**Pentecost Rite of Reception:** Our time of recommitment and return to the Church culminates with a rite of welcoming back into the parish on Pentecost Sunday. This will be followed by a reception in the parish hall, cake and an invitation for the whole congregation to celebrate with us.



## Catholics Come Home

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What has been your experience of the Catholic Church?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### What would you like to get out of these weeks together in the "Catholics Come Home" program?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### What topics of discussion/teaching interest you?

- \_\_\_\_ Prayer and understanding the Mass
- \_\_\_\_ How to read and understand the Bible
- \_\_\_\_ Mary and the saints
- \_\_\_\_ Sin and Confession
- \_\_\_\_ Holy Communion as Jesus' True Presence
- \_\_\_\_ Heaven, Hell and Purgatory
- \_\_\_\_ The problem of pain and evil in the world
- \_\_\_\_ Divorce and annulments
- \_\_\_\_ Catholic teaching on contraception
- \_\_\_\_ The Holy Spirit and the importance of Confirmation
- \_\_\_\_ OTHER: Please explain...