



What is life like if you and those you live with share life and love but not faith in God? And what can your parish do to make a difference?

What is Life Like?

“I’m not alone at home, but I feel alone at church.”

“Although they didn’t convert with me, my family supported me when I decided to become Catholic. I’m happy to come to Church on my own, but sometimes parish expectations make me feel guilty that my family aren’t with me.”

“Why should I go to Mass when my dad doesn’t?”

“Other parishioners say, ‘You never come to any of our things,’ but when I tell them that I don’t want to go alone and my husband wouldn’t be comfortable, they just look blank, and I feel like screaming!”

“My children no longer believe; I feel that I have failed.”

“My wife’s not Catholic but she really supports me in my faith and my work in the parish. However, in 25 years of marriage, she’s never been invited to so much as a single Church social. It’s as if she doesn’t exist.”

“If I go with you on Sunday, I might lose my place on the team. Church is your thing, I don’t know if I believe anymore!”

“How can I persuade my children to come to Mass with me when they and my wife want a lie-in?”

“We’re really sad that our own children don’t go to Church now. We’d love to share our faith with our grandchildren, but don’t know how to do it without being seen as interfering.”

“I feel like church always assumes two committed parents; it’s not my fault I’m on my own.”

Challenges for the Parish

Invite, include, involve

- Affirm that the non-believer matters by knowing them by name, answering questions etc
- Encourage without putting pressure on - if non-believers come to church don’t look for signs of conversion. Respect difference.
- Allow young people to contribute to parish life: belonging banishes boredom!
- Recognise non-Churchgoing family members - treat everyone with respect

- Get to know people, build relationships so that people's different situations can be discerned.
- Support lone parents with their children at Mass - be available if they need extra help with their children during Mass.
- Avoid jargon and "them and us" attitudes
- Meet people where they are comfortable. Think about physical environment, eg meetings at home?
- Make full use of opportunities for contact presented by the liturgical year and sacramental preparation programmes.

It's especially vital to remember that families who don't share faith in God have, like all families, much to offer the church. There is thus a challenge, not only in serving their needs, but in enabling each family member to contribute to the life and mission of the parish as full members of the Body of Christ.

Prayer and Liturgical Opportunities

Prayer is vitally important, both for families who are involved in the Church, and for those who aren't.

For those who do not believe in God:

"Let us pray for those who do not believe in God, that they may find Him by sincerely following all that is right." [From the 'General Intercessions for Good Friday']

For those who do not attend Church:

God, I am not sure if you really exist. Accept me with all my doubts and fears and show yourself to me in such a way that I can somehow move forward. Show yourself to me as love, forgiveness, new life, as the promise of a new beginning. Help me in my weakness and doubt as I open my heart to you, to know your love for me.

Reflecting on Scripture:

"Be tactful with those who are not Christians and be sure you make the best use of your time with them. Talk to them agreeably and with a flavour of wit, and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one." Col 3:5-6

"For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband." 1Cor 7: 14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still... there are many rooms in My Father's house." Jn 14:1-2

Remember too:

- Christmas, Easter, Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals are excellent opportunities for welcoming those who only attend Church occasionally.
 - Offer opportunities such as healing services or renewal of marriage vows at times when people who don't usually go to Church feel more comfortable about attending.
 - Make sensitive use of Prayers of the Faithful: eg "We pray for all our family members not here with us. We thank God for those who support us in our faith."
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Helpful Resources

[How to Survive Being Married to a Catholic](#), Redemptorist Publications, 2004.

Parish Family Groups offer a social meeting point for all family members, so that friendships can develop as well as a sense of belonging. www.pfgm.org

See Familiaris Consortio (especially section 78), Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes. Available online from www.vatican.va or from Catholic booksellers

This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive.

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