

Come Home For Christmas News Sheet

Issue 1: Pentecost 2008

A new seasonal initiative to reach out to Catholics who for different reasons no longer or rarely attend Mass.



Invitation Essential



The only way to describe the response to the launch of Come Home For Christmas is 'overwhelming'. So many parishes contacted us for further materials that we were often unable to have them printed quickly enough. One priest, typical of many, rang in to say: **'The Come Home for Christmas campaign is brilliant! Your attractive resources will assist me enormously in the ongoing task of inviting people back to Church.'** One aspect that especially captured people's imagination was the use of new technology such as text messaging and video testimonies.

It's very hard to measure how successful a project of this kind is. We have been extremely encouraged by what people have told us so far, and there will be many more who return quietly and anonymously. What's essential is that people receive the invitation to come home.

The reasons why people stop coming to Church are complex. They vary from having had a negative Church experience, to feelings of shame because of some life failure. For others, boredom has been a major factor, or simply drifting away. We hope that this campaign has put these needs firmly on the parish agenda. Reaching out is not an easy task, but as we celebrate the Pentecost festival, let's consider afresh how we can reach out to the lost sheep and lead them to an encounter with the Good Shepherd, the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Do contact us if you'd like information about how to get involved in Advent 2008.

Mgr Keith Barltrop,
Campaign Director

The Story So Far

Here are some highlights from year one of the campaign:

Launch of a dedicated website at www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk

Creation of tailor-made outreach materials including leaflets, posters and invitation cards

Liaison with various partners including 'Back To Church Sunday' which is run by the Church of England

Six-part BBC radio series featuring 'returners' and various local and national media coverage

100,000 'Catholic and lost touch?' leaflets distributed

120 unique daily web visitors during the two month campaign period

350 plus parishes and groups asked for secondary resources

Free welcome back text message offered from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

'At a basic level the aim of the campaign is to bring people to a greater awareness of God's love and mercy in their lives, and to a place where they can rediscover that these priceless treasures can be found in their fullness in Catholicism.'



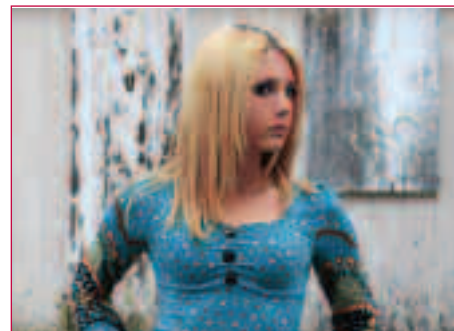
*Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon OP,
Bishop of Nottingham and
Chair of the Bishops' Conference
Department for Evangelisation
and Catechesis (England and Wales).*



Interested?

Do contact us if you'd like information about how to get involved in Advent 2008 and New Year 2009. A wide range of resources are available from:

[www.caseresources.org.uk/resources/
resources_downloads.htm](http://www.caseresources.org.uk/resources/resources_downloads.htm)



Returners' Stories

I do not know if you are still there now that Christmas has passed, but I would like to let you know that shortly after my e-mail to you my local church had a penitential service. This helped me to go to Confession. I have been going to Mass and Communion ever since, including on Christmas Day and most of the Octave of Christmas, as I was off work at that time.

It takes quite a lot of courage to go to Confession after 34 years. Thank you for your encouragement. The Christmas season was very joyful for me. I hope lots of other people have been helped through Come Home For Christmas.

Signed: Sarah

I am a lapsed Catholic who recently moved to a new area and returned to the Catholic community... I am completely unfamiliar with Mass/ Catholic law and am feeling lost/ alienated. Finding help to answer questions when you return to the fold is proving difficult, unless I prefer having the whole parish know I and my spouse are "prodigals". The most difficult thing in my life was to admit to myself that I had made a terrible, wrong decision in abandoning my faith.

I am too embarrassed to ask anyone in the parish for help as only the Father/ priest knows that I stopped going to Mass 18 years ago aged 15. I sincerely pray that you are able to help answer some of my questions/worries.

Signed: Mr and Mrs Jones

The real names of the above returners have been concealed to protect their privacy. The Come Home For Christmas team responded to both of these enquirers and numerous others.



Welsh Inspiration

A parish in South Wales, inspired by the Come Home for Christmas Campaign, decided to launch tailor-made outreach to the lapsed. Instead of using the invitation cards that CASE provided, a letter was written, and active parishioners were invited to pass it on to lapsed friends and family.

The letter was less of an invitation to the Christmas celebrations, which people may not be ready for, but rather an invitation to dialogue. People were asked if they would be willing to share with the parish priest their reasons for no longer attending Mass.

The response was really encouraging. There are now a number of non-practising Catholics in correspondence with the priest either by mail, or via friends and family. The process centred first and foremost on listening to people's stories.

In time, the aim is to invite those in correspondence to form a group to discuss some of the issues that they have faced. This group would ideally then be able to invite others to join them.

CASE is delighted to know that parishes have been able to adapt the campaign to their own situations. If you have similarly developed resources and would like to share them with others, please contact us; see our details below.



Sunderland Partnership

A healthy partnership between home, school and parish proved fruitful for a north-east parish who have continued their 'welcoming home' way beyond Christmas. Fr Noel Colahan of St Hilda's Parish in Sunderland was concerned that he had left it too late to get involved in Come Home for Christmas, but CASE rushed to send resources to him and the timing turned out to be just right.

Leaflets and invitation cards were made available at Masses just before Christmas and Fr Colahan preached about the importance of welcoming back those who don't attend church at the moment. He asked all his parishioners to think very seriously about who they could invite to 'come home.'

Fr Colahan said: 'They seemed delighted to have something specific to hand to people. Having a physical resource made it easier to issue an invitation without appearing to put too much pressure on.' This approach of offering a gentle invitation has resulted in several people returning to Church already.

Encouraged by the good response, the parish decided to continue the initiative after Christmas and leaflets were recently distributed through the local Catholic primary school. This led a non-Catholic parent to read the leaflet, ask to join the RCIA programme and be received into the Church.

What Next?

If you would like to get involved or build on what you did last year, there are various things that you can do.

Invitation To Dialogue

Consider writing a letter to the lapsed with a view to engaging them in dialogue (see the story above from South Wales). This letter could be distributed by active parishioners in the early autumn, with a view to it being followed up by an invitation to the Christmas services.

Visiting

As a precursor to the issuing of invitations, visiting is an excellent way to build relationships with people. Preparation for visiting would need to start some months before Christmas, possibly as early as August. A volunteer visiting team would need training and preparation time. Resources such as KIT, Landings, Roots and the Legion of Mary could be an invaluable part of this preparation. The group would need to decide who to visit – would it be everyone on the register, those registered but seemingly absent, or those individually recommended by parishioners? House visiting could then commence in the autumn term, perhaps in October or November.

Home Mission Sunday

Regardless of the specific theme, Home Mission Sunday could be used as an opportunity to remind the whole parish of the necessity and joy of reaching out to the lapsed. This year's Home Mission Sunday is on 21 September.

Preparing Follow-up

Around the time of Home Mission Sunday a working party could be formed to explore the options for follow-up for returning Catholics in January. For resource ideas see the CASE Evangelisation Directory: www.caseresources.org/case/Main.aspx



An Invitation And A Welcome

With these preparations under way, Advent would again be a time to pray for the lapsed, to issue invitations to Christmas celebrations and to prepare for seasonal hospitality.

Come Home For Christmas is an outreach initiative of the Catholic Enquiry Office which is under the direction of the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE).

For information, resources and consultation, please contact the team at: CHFC, 114 West Heath Road, London. NW3 7TX.

Tel: 020 8458 3316 E-mail: info@caseresources.org.uk Websites: www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk and www.caseresources.org.uk

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