

Don't be embarrassed to invite the lapsed back to our broken Church



In 2006, after midweek evening Mass I found myself - through a chance conversation - attending an evening to introduce parishioners to the parish Landings group, whose aim is to welcome back those who have been 'away' for a time and want to return.

My relationship with the Church had been a troubled one. I had left and returned in 1988, dragged to confession by my young children, and lapsed again but I had never stopped believing in a God of creation. The hymn, 'How Great Thou Art' which begins 'Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand has made' resonated with me.

Prior to slipping away again, I had been active in the children's liturgy group, RCIA and attended weekly and daily Mass and for a time felt alive in faith. But then, in 2002, my husband died in tragic circumstances. In life's natural progress, my children left home. I was coming to terms with issues surrounding sexual abuse perpetrated against me when I was a child. I was drinking too much. Parish involvements waned, new parish priests came and went: I was 'between a rock and a hard place'.

My first impression of Landings was of welcome and acceptance. The opportunity to pray reflectively with others was special. Each group member in turn led prayer and meditation and their varied ways of doing so brought home to me the different ways in which individuals approach God.

Listening to others' faith stories led to an unexpected sense of compassion for and grateful awareness of others' journeys.

Confidentiality, fundamental to the ethos of the group, gave people the confidence to share their

feelings, thoughts and experiences, not what they thought others wanted to hear. I began to recognise in others the God who is working in our daily lives.

I welcome the initiative Bishop Kieran has unveiled called 'Crossing the Threshold', and hope it is instrumental in revealing to people that within this broken and hurting Church lies a great strength. 'Crossing the Threshold' will involve setting up a national core group to spearhead home mission, and a scheme to be piloted in Nottingham in which an evangelist team will be trained to speak to lapsed Catholics about their faith.

I will be forever thankful for the faith and determination of my infant 'evangelists' that day in 1988 and the total transformation of my negative perception of God and the Church since - aided by the new methods of evangelisation exemplified by Landings - the hospitality, the confidentiality, the sharing of faith stories and the small-group format.

Being accepted by a small number of others, and accepting them in the same way, gives me confidence to keep serving the parish and attending Mass. If I reject the Church because of its perceived flaws I reject the support its broken family offers. To what other community would I turn? God's love made evident to me through others is what gets me through each day, clinging to Christ crucified. I pray that this richness reaches many who are searching, like I continue to do, in the new ways offered by 'Crossing the Threshold'.

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