

THE REASON FOR HAVING CHURCHES AT ALL

The church is all about saving souls. If your church is not helping you get to heaven, please run, do not walk, away from such a church as fast as you can! The supreme law of the church is the salvation of souls.

How does a church help you get to heaven? It leads you into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior. It prays with you and teaches you what you need to know to get to heaven. Finally, it is a spiritual home.

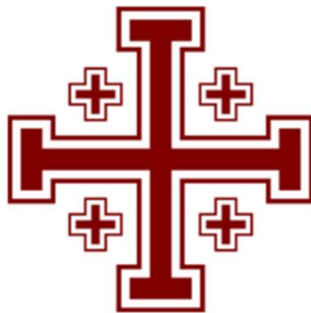
The word “parish” basically means a “half-way house.” A parish is where spiritual homelessness is overcome in Christian community. It supports us on our journey to our ultimate spiritual home in heaven with Jesus.

There are certain benefits to being part of a church. It is usually a quite lovely place, especially at Christmas and Easter. But more importantly, it is a place to make friends with other people who want to go to heaven too.

Other special events of parish communities include Baptisms, First Communion, Confirmations, Weddings, and Funerals, etc. Be it ever so humble, there is no place like your spiritual home for these events!

Sometimes we hear the question: “Why rent when you can buy!” Think about this! People who buy in to something have a stake in their local residential community. There is a parallel here to church communities.

There will be a more fulfilling spiritual experience for those who have a personal connection to their parish community. It is a foundational part of the spiritual culture of Christian community. If you have not experienced this already, this is a great time to be freed from spiritual homelessness!



SPIRITUAL HOMECOMING

Spiritual Homelessness is a big problem today. People may identify with a particular religious tradition, but they do not always have a spiritual place to call home, such as a parish community. It doesn't have to be that way!

Our culture today emphasizes individualism and commercialism like never before. As a result, we have a too much loneliness and not enough satisfaction in life. We feel isolated, and nothing seems to be good enough.

In this context, well-intentioned people are perplexed when they approach a church for something, and the parish does not share their cultural assumptions about meeting their request in the ways that they expect.

What is more, some of the messaging from churches seems to imply a consumer approach to religious services that can be quite misleading to people of good will who are approaching a church for something good.

How do we shed some light on this situation? This pamphlet is just one attempt, but it cannot replace a personal conversation between a priest whom you know and a priest who knows you or recognizes you from Mass.

Spiritual homelessness can be resolved in many ways. The church can be more welcoming in this regard, and people of good will can benefit from becoming more involved in the spiritual life of a local parish community.

Let us look at three key issues in order to address the problem at hand. Then let us consider an invitation to spiritually come home. Finally, let us go over some practical hints about reconciling our mutual expectations.



Issue One: Is the church in the religious business? Should it be?

If the church is a business, then the customer is always right. Consumers of religious goods and services expect quality products at competitive prices from accommodating salespersons who want repeat customers.

But what if the church is not a business but a spiritual family? You can only be born into a family or be married into it. Oh, yes, there is adoption too. Of course, friends are most welcome as invited guests to the family home.

Once we start thinking about the church as a spiritual family, the consumer dynamics of religious commercialism don't make any sense. This is a first step toward understanding why the church business model does not work.

Issue Two: Is each parish really a branch office of the bigger church?

At any franchise of most store chains, anonymous customers can expect the same goods and services at the same prices as at all other branches. It does not matter which store you go to; the brand identity is all the same.

If the church is a spiritual family, as noted above, can there really be any such thing as anonymous parish members? Parishioners need to know one another to become the spiritual friends that they are expected to be.

It is true that there is an amazing consistency of doctrine, morals, and sacraments at parishes, but each parish family has its own personality, and this is what makes parish relationships so affirming and helpful.

Issue Three: Are Religious Services suitably provided On-Demand?

Today, many business services are conveniently provided by a few clicks on a computer or cell phone screen, and prompt delivery is often assured. Should churches "deliver" religious goods on such terms as businesses?

When parishes engage in preparations for celebrating sacraments, they form relationships that draw people closer into the community life of the church. Instead of just being requirements, these are really ministries!

One thing that most family members know quite well is that demands are not well received from other family members, let alone guests or people with whom they have no real relationship. Churches are more like families! That makes all the difference in our mutual expectations of one another!

AN OPEN INVITATION TO SPIRITUALLY COME HOME!

First, it's not about the rules, it's about the Ruler! In Christianity, it's all about relationships – between you and God and all his people. The rules are just the details of our beneficial relationships, like the way you gladly remind yourself to honor your loved ones' birthdays and anniversaries.

Second, just join your local parish church! They will welcome you! It's the right thing to do! Get to know the people there by attending Mass each week and participating in parish activities. Invest in the future of your parish community, and many blessings will come into your life. Church people may be some of the best friends that you could ever make.

Third, sacramental preparations are great! They are an opportunity for you to grow closer to God, your church, and your fellow parish members. If you are celebrating a sacrament in a church community, then let these teachings enlighten your mind and warm your heart. There is so much loneliness in today's world, but the parish community can heal that.

PRACTICAL TIPS IN REGARD TO MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

- Attend Mass regularly there to get a feel for the parish. Feel free to shop around. Parishes have their own personalities. Join one!
- Always start by becoming a regular parish member by registering and getting on the parish mailing list. Participate in church events, too.
- Sit in the same pew each week, so that when you ask the priest for something, you will look familiar to him. This is a great start!
- Like everything else in life, expect things to take longer than expected, just like making doctor's appointments, waiting for deliveries, etc.
- Always reserve the wedding date with the church first, before signing a contract with a wedding reception hall. This is really important!
- Churches are not-for-profit organizations because they could not make a profit even if they tried. Hint: they really are not trying at all!
- Become part of the church as your spiritual family and home. Please do not treat it like a business or a pray-for-pay religious enterprise.
- The primary mission of the Church is to save souls. Are you living a life worthy of heaven? Let your parish church help you get to heaven!
- Just like everyone else, the church is always a work-in-progress. Be patient with the church and it surely will be patient with you. Smile!