

CASE Press Release

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Sarah* wrote last January, ?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 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?.



Another enquirer wrote: ?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 and 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.

One couple who received an invitation letter said: 'It was sleeping beauty waking up.' Someone who received a home visit said: 'Now for the first time, I feel that I really belong to the parish.'

These are just some of the responses the Catholic Enquiry Office received as a result of last year's first 'Come Home For Christmas' initiative, which was launched to equip parishes to warmly welcome those baptised who for many different reasons no longer attend church. Tailor-made posters, invitation cards, leaflets, welcome packs and a website were made available in support of this work of evangelisation. Parishes and individuals distributed around 100 000 leaflets and new materials are now available for Advent 2008 and January 2009. See: www.caseresources.org.uk and www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk

St Hilda's Parish in Sunderland was one of last year's participating parishes. Parish Priest, Fr Noel Colahan said: 'Parishioners seemed delighted to have something specific to hand to people. Having a physical resource made it easier to issue an invitation without appearing to pile on the pressure too much.'

Sheila Keefe, who is a parishioner at St Joseph's in Romsey and promoter of the Portsmouth Diocesan KIT (Keeping In Touch) programme said: 'So many church-going Catholics are concerned about their children and grandchildren who don't seem to have any links with their local parish. We've found 'Come Home For Christmas' to be a real source of hope and, as a follow up to the initial Christmas invitations, the KIT programme offers home visits and small group meetings where people can share their stories and learn a little about today's Church. In fact our meetings went down so well that we continued to meet in the local pub during the summer months.'

The Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE) is resourcing this year's initiative and the theme of the outreach materials is '...something missing?' Also being offered is a free information pack from the Catholic Enquiry Office and a text featuring a message of welcome from Cardinal Cormac-Murphy O'Connor.

Clare Ward from CASE said: 'We were overwhelmed by the response from parishes last year and are hoping for an even greater one this year. A variety of materials are available in recognition of the fact that 'no one size fits all' in a Catholic understanding of evangelisation. Do contact us. We'd be delighted to support and resource you and your parish.'

Bishop Malcolm McMahon, Chair of the Bishops' Conference Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, said: "The star of Bethlehem clearly guided the three kings on their long and arduous journey from a distant place to the wondrous reality of Jesus' birth. In the months leading up to this extraordinary event, let's seriously consider in our families, parishes, in our lives, how we can serve as stars, as beacons, leading those baptised who are no longer church-goers to 'come home', to attend Mass. Be bold and courageous. I encourage you to respectfully reach out and 'shine'."

For more information and resources please e-mail: info@comehomeforchristmas.co.uk

Notes

For more information please contact CASE on tel: 020 7 901 4863; mobile: 0770 939 1998; e-

mail: info@comehomeforchristmas.co.uk

Alternatively, contact CCN on tel: 020 7901 4800; e-mail: ccn@cbcew.org.uk

For more information about ~~Kit~~ please see: www.kit4catholics.org.uk
enquiries@kit4catholics.org.uk

Also see: www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk

Print quality pdf files of this year's resources are available on request.

*Sarah is not the real name of this enquirer. It was changed to protect her privacy.