

Do we have it backwards?

Recently, Kathleen, our Pastoral Associate, dropped in on the First Communion CCD class. She began by asking them how many of them had been to Mass that Sunday. No one! Then she asked, how many of them had been to Mass in the last month. Only one!

I received a flyer the other day in the mail from well-known Australian guru, Matthew Kelly. We had given out five-hundred copies of his book, “Dynamic Catholicism” to all who attended our Christmas Masses. It was our hope that it might jumpstart the faith journey of those who grace the church at Christmas and Easter. During the following months, we did receive some positive feedback from the recipients.

Matthew Kelly’s flyer was about promoting a new approach to the sacrament of Confirmation. In large, bold letters, the flyer stated that “85% of kids who get confirmed will leave the church within 15 years of Confirmation. That means if you have a Confirmation class of 20 kids, 17 of these 20 kids will have left the church before the age of 30.”

Presently, our bishop is visiting various parishes around our diocese and administering the sacrament of Confirmation. How many of them will still be in the church when they reach the age of 30? Confirmation is promoted as an opportunity for young people to state publicly that they wish to be and continue to be treated as adults in the Catholic Church. How many of them will be back in church the Sunday after they have received the sacrament? Or how many of them will see this adult step in the faith as a statement that, now that I am an adult in the Catholic faith, then I am an expert. I don’t need to learn anything else about my faith and I have received all my sacraments, at least the sacraments of Initiation – if they are aware of that terminology.

Maybe we will see some of them back when they want to have a church wedding, especially if the church is a beautiful church and has a long aisle to facilitate a beaming bridal party.

Regarding First Communion, parents, siblings, grandparents gather in their finery to showcase their angelic ones who look so serene and holy on their special day. Of course, the children with their white rosary beads and white First Communion books, yearning to be blessed, enjoy the limelight. Possibly, they don’t mind enhancing their meager pocket money with all the financials that flow their way.

I wonder if many of these children making their First Holy Communion, will be back in Church the following Sunday to receive Jesus again. Maybe those in Catholic schools will be back during the week when they can receive Jesus again at a School Mass.

Of course, there are the local politicians who, when it is time for reelection, proudly include in their resume that they are members of a particular church or denomination. Obviously, such affirmation is used to give some added impetus to the outstanding character of the person seeking office. Some such politicians may have a different criteria as to what constitutes membership and participation in a particular parish or church.

In recent months, our parish presented the “Catholicism” series by Fr. Robert Barron. An average of sixty persons attended each week for the ten week program. Obviously, one was impressed by the dedication, commitment and hunger for knowledge that the participants exhibited. We noticed that none of the participants had children making their Confirmation or First Communion.

I wonder about the wisdom of George Bernard Shaw when he said “life is wasted on the young.” Is it because the young “know it all” seeing that they have made their “Little Communion” and “Big Communion?” Are their parents happy that they have fulfilled their obligation and now they and their kids are on “cruise control” as far as their faith journey is concerned?

I still wonder if our life’s energy is wasted on the young or do we have it all backwards?