Just misplaced

Our parish Altar Society placed a table at the back of church one weekend. On it, they placed a collection of items that yearned to find an owner. There were several pairs of reading glasses; several pairs of sunglasses; an assorted collection of jewelry; some clothing, including scarves, hats, caps, sweats; a collection of ties; a few purses; a few digital camera bags; sets of keys and some other sundry items.

In their wisdom, the ladies decided not to display the jewelry. Instead they took pictures of the various pieces to display so that a rightful owner could be reunited with his or her own jewelry.

The display was the result of several months of cleaning up the church after regular Masses, weddings, First Communions and other events. Even though the display took place in the fall, it resulted in several spring cleaning adventures.

I was surprised that more people did not stop by the table and claim a misplaced item. Some found items of clothing and others came searching in vain, realizing that they had misplaced their treasure somewhere else.

I was surprised that there was only one umbrella in the collection. Usually, churches end up with quite a few misplaced umbrellas. I have often found them handy myself when I was caught in a downpour going from the church to the rectory.

When the Altar Society ladies asked about having the table with the collection of items placed in the back of church, I told them not to name it a "Lost and Found" table. Rather, it should be called a table with "Misplaced" items.

In all honesty, especially men, we don't want to admit we lost something. We never really lose something, we always misplace it and can't remember where we left it.

The same is true about men and directions. Men always know the right way and how to get to some place they are going to. If, by some remote chance, that they miss the exit or turn-off, they are not really "lost." They still are in control and know how to get to their final destination. Instead of getting "lost" on the way, they usually take a different route.

I find it interesting when people leave items in church and they return later to retrieve them. They usually preface their request to check out the church by saying, "I left…" If they do not find what they "left" in church in church, then they say, "I must have left it in…."

All this reminds me of the many parables Jesus told about being lost and found. In Luke 15, we find stories of how sheep wander off; silver coins are lost; prodigal son loses inheritance on wayward adventures. In order to find the lost, the shepherd searches in the wasteland; the widow sweeps the house; the forgiving father waits for the prodigal son to return.

Some months ago, internationally known Australian Catholic speaker, Matthew Kelly, and his movement, DynamicCatholics, sent a CD titled "The 7 Pillars of Catholic Spirituality" to parishes. In the inside jacket, the following caught my attention: "Is it worth your investment? You decide… From a spiritual perspective, our Lord was willing to leave all the rest to go in search of the lost sheep. And all this does not even begin to take into account the hundreds of faithful parishioners who will have their faith taken to a new level as a result of this initiative."

What is this initiative? Purchase X number of copies of his book, "Rediscovering Catholicism" at $2 each and pass them out to people attending Christmas Masses. Even if one person comes back as a result of reading the book, then the initiative was worthwhile. He concludes by saying that "when 70% of Catholics don't go to Church on Sunday, isn't it time we did something?"

As a parish, we decided to purchase 500 copies of the book and pass them out at our Christmas Masses. Now, we wait and watch and see if there are any "lost" people in church who have been "misplaced" all these months and years. After all, if we have been "misplaced," it is probably because they have been "misguided" and if they have been "found," then there is room to celebrate their misadventures..