

Australian bishops urge lapsed Catholics to return

PERTH, Australia – The Australian bishops have undertaken a nationwide newspaper advertising blitz, inviting lapsed Catholics to return and asking for forgiveness for any hurt the church caused individuals in the past.

In the ad, run June 14-15, the bishops said they want to welcome people who have drifted away from the church “for whatever reason or people who have never really been a part of it.”

“The church is God’s family and, like any family, has its differences,” the bishops said in the ad. The campaign cost \$20,000 (US\$18,800).

“Sometimes people are hurt by other family members. We ask your forgiveness if you have been hurt in some way through the church,” the bishops said.

In the past, church leaders have asked forgiveness for their failures in dealing with such issues as church unity, care for Aborigines and sex abuse.

In the ad, the bishops acknowledged that some Catholics in Australia might have drifted away because of the pressures of life.

“Why not join us again? We need each other,” the bishops said. “We need your help in carrying on the mission of Jesus. Only with you can we be all that Jesus calls us to be as his church. You have a God-given gift which you alone can bring to the church. We need that gift.”

The ad encouraged people to connect with the church again simply by going to Mass, talking to a priest or calling a hot line, where trained staff help put people in touch with a local church community.

The bishops were to follow this with a pastoral letter distributed to all Australian parishes June 21-22, encouraging parishioners to make their parish “a place of true welcome for people who do respond to the invitation to return.”

The letter encourages parish communities to make use of two new resources developed by the bishops' National Office for Evangelization.

The first, called Reconnect, is a six-week parish program for people wishing to return to practice their faith. The second, called Rewired, is a similar program aimed at encouraging young people to engage in the life of the church.

In their pastoral letter, the bishops say World Youth Day, July 15-20, will be a "unique and powerful witness to Jesus Christ and to life in the church."

"World Youth Day will challenge all those who have Jesus in their heart to reflect more deeply on their relationship with him. It may well be the occasion for many to turn again to the family of the church," the bishops say in the pastoral letter.