

# Campaign invites inactive Catholics to reconnect with their faith

WASHINGTON – This Lent and Easter “thousands of inactive Catholics” will go to church “and some will be open to an invitation to reconnect with their Catholic faith,” said a Paulist priest who is a leader in evangelization.

Extending that invitation are the Paulist Fathers through a new nationwide campaign, said Father Frank DeSiano, president of the Washington-based Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association.

The campaign, titled “Awakening Faith: Reconnecting With Your Catholic Faith,” has its own Web site: [www.awakeningfaith.org](http://www.awakeningfaith.org).

Through the site a number of tools are available for parishes to use to connect with inactive Catholics and invite them to participate in parish life. Those tools include invitation fliers, letters, newspaper ads and Web site ads.

According to a news release announcing the campaign, the “heart” of the initiative is a small-group process. Groups meet once a week for six weeks of social interaction as well as conversation based on short essays about spirituality, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God’s mercy, the Mass and the church.

The goal of the meetings is to foster reflection, prayer and sharing in a welcoming setting, and create “a bridge” to the larger church community.

Citing a 2008 study that showed Sunday Mass attendance is decreasing, Father DeSiano said the church is facing “a pastoral challenge” that the Paulists’ campaign is addressing.

He referred to a study titled “Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics,” conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in Washington. It found that only 23 percent of adult Catholics in the U.S. attend Mass once a week or more often, and only about 31 percent of adult Catholics are estimated to attend Mass in any given week.

The same study showed that 32 percent of Catholics rarely or never attend Mass, and 24 percent attend only a few times a year.

“As a church proclaiming the saving mission of Jesus Christ, we must face this urgent pastoral challenge directly and find new ways to invite and welcome inactive Catholics,” Father DeSiano, co-author of the campaign, said in a statement.

He said there is plenty of evidence that inactive Catholics are open to an invitation to return to the church.

The reason the campaign is being launched now, he said, is because large numbers of these Catholics seek out a church during Lent and the Easter season. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is Feb. 25 this year.

Father DeSiano developed the prototype for the campaign when he was pastor at Old St. Mary’s Parish in downtown Chicago, 2002-06.

The campaign’s other co-author, Paulist Father Kenneth Boyack, who is vice president of the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, talked about the role a parish team has in the campaign.

“Under the direction of the pastor or a parish staff person, a team of four to five people is all that is needed to enable a parish to participate,” he said.

“We need to present a powerful invitation to Catholics,” said Father DeSiano. “We need to provide inactive Catholics with opportunities to reconnect with the church so that they can discover, in a new way, the life-changing love of Jesus Christ and the rich treasure of their Catholic faith.”

He added, “These pastoral efforts can bring new life to our parishes.”