

Active in the Church?

A few months ago, I was asked to sign a paper stating that a family was active in the Church so that a child could receive reduced tuition at a Catholic High School. Since I did not know the family personally, I began to ask around about the family. After asking the entire staff and no one knew them I asked several of the long-time parishioners. No one seemed to know the family in question. After doing a search for contributions for the past 3 years, we discovered 3 small donations. Since I did not feel that this showed active participation in the Church, I did not sign the paper. However, this led to a question about what it means to be active in the Church.

Activity in the Church falls into three areas: participation in Liturgy, assisting in Ministry, and financial support.

Participation in Liturgy

The Church guidelines ask us to attend Mass each week when we are not sick or infirm. As a member of a community, it is important to assemble together. Think of your family and friends. How often do you need to see them to keep a close relationship? If you only see them once or twice a year, how can you consider them more than acquaintances? To be a part of someone's life you must share time and experiences together. We come together weekly to pray with and for each other and without that interaction, we drift apart. Think of it this way, sometimes we don't feel like praying and the others in the congregation can lift us up and we can lift them up if they are down. If someone is missing, we notice it but after awhile we get used to them not being there and we lose contact. Participation in liturgy is also more than just taking up space in the Church. We are there to actively listen and participate. It also means that while you are there, you are engaged in the whole liturgy and not reading the bulletin or trying to slip out early to catch the beginning of a ball game or a better seat in a restaurant. I have tried very hard to get our Sunday liturgies within one hour. There are special occasions where the liturgy is longer but for the most part they only last an hour. Jesus asked his apostles "So, you could not stay awake with me for one hour? Stay awake and pray that you will not come to the test." (Mark 14:37-38)

Assisting in Ministry

The Church is more than a building that people gather in to pray. It is a community of people that support one another and spread the good news. If the building were not there, we would still be a Church. It just would not be as convenient to pray together. The support of one another and the spreading of the good news is our ministry. And as Jesus' disciples, we participate in the ministry of the church as we can. The Spirit has given us gifts and talents to use in service to the community and the church and we must use them or risk losing them. We offer several different ministries here at Santa Catalina in which parishioners can participate. We have groups that knit prayer shawls, prepare meals after funerals, and visit shut-ins. These are just a few of the many ways we reach out to others. At the Ministry Fair on the weekend of November 10 -11, there will be an opportunity to see the various ministries of the parish and to find one (or more) that you can get involved in. "What good is it, if someone claims to have faith but does not show it in action?" (James 2:14) Sometimes the focus here is on what can I do, but we have to remember that prayer is also doing something. So even if you are physically unable to do much, you can still pray.

Financial Support

This form of participation is only a portion of our participation in Church, but it gets the most attention sometimes because it is the easiest to quantify. We easily know how much our money is worth, but it is hard to tell what our prayers are worth. Some people view their contribution to the Church as “giving back to God.” However, God does not need it. The Church does, but God doesn’t. God gave it to you and will ask you in heaven, “What did you do with what I gave you?” In the Old Testament, and traditionally, the “tithe” was to be 10% of your gross amount. God was to get his portion before the government or anyone else. And God’s 10% was supposed to be from the best portions. Now, it would be unusual for people to donate 10% to the Church even if was net of taxes. But I would like to challenge you to look at your total giving, not just to the Church, but also gifts to Red Cross, Boy or Girl Scouts, Knights of Columbus, Golden Goose, etc. Your total giving should be approaching 10% and if it is not maybe it is time to be more generous. On average, the Catholic donation to the Church is 2% of income while the Protestant donations are around 7 - 10%. The reason the Protestant donations are larger lies mainly in the fact that they require their members to “tithe” 10% to remain members in good standing where there is no requirement for Catholics to donate to the church to be members. Catholics usually make up the difference in donations to other groups, so that total donations are about the same. The Catechism states that, “The faithful have the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church, each according to his abilities” (2034)

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Santa Catalina Catholic Church