

Teens leave church for myriad reasons

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

Worried Father asks: We have five children. Only two go to church. Three live away from home and don't go to Mass. The two at home do go, but not with any enthusiasm. They all went to Catholic schools. We have always been faithful Catholics. Where did we go wrong?

Response: Join the club! You gave them opportunities and good example. They must choose. There are few families who haven't a similar story.

Twin Circles is a Catholic weekly, published by a woman of great executive ability. The publishers are 17 women and 13 men. It is a family oriented weekly. The July 16 edition has a good article entitled "Dropouts," by a Woodene Koenig-Bicker, analyzing reasons for dropping out of the Church.

"A 1985 study of the National Catholic Evangelization Association estimates 16.5 million Catholics — that is 24 percent of Catholics in the United States — are not members of a parish and have not been attending church in the past six months, excepting for weddings, funerals and special occasions. However the sociologist Father Andrew Greeley writes that for the past 30 years, the defection rate has been relatively stable, with 13 percent of those raised Catholics no longer defining themselves in

these terms."

Worried Father: But why do they leave?

Response: Father Alvin Illig, CSP, writes that the reason for dropping out of the church are seldom theological. Almost all of these reasons pertain to the human condition, not theology. What are the reasons? Father Illig attributes most of them to teenage rebellion, with most defections occurring between the ages of 15 and 29. Forty percent of young stop attending Mass for two or more years, and more than half of the Catholics who leave the church do so before the age of 30.

"The distinction between young dropouts and older ones is important," Father Illig writes. "First, the majority of the young dropouts return at some point. Second, because the teenage and early adult years are often a time of challenge, coupled with the formation of individual values, it is natural to expect teen-age rebellion to play a large part in dropping out."

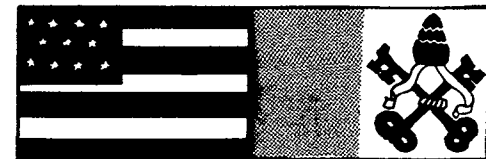
Worried Father: But my children say they don't get anything out of Mass.

Response: What bores them? Some possibilities are unsatisfying parish life, ineffective preaching, dull liturgies, uninspiring music, a lack of lay involvement, and the inaccessibility of some clergy. I think lack of involvement would be the most important. If people are involved,

those other things may well fall into less important categories.

"Another reason for leaving is the mobility of our society," Father Illig states. "Sixteen percent of Americans move every year. (The late Father Vincent Collins told me that one third of his parish, St. John of Rochester, Fairport, moved out every year.) The first six months after the move are critical ones for getting settled in a new parish. If it doesn't happen then, it's likely it won't happen at all, and the transplanted Catholic will become inactive," Father Illig notes. Part of Rochester's clerical legend tells that when Monsignor Schmidt was pastor of St. Ann's and Holy Family in Rochester in the 1940s, when a moving van arrived into his parish he arrived with it. Imagine the impact of immediate attention and care and invitation on the new arrivals, no matter what their religious affiliation.

Our parishes are so big, and tracts of homes are springing up in many places. Few priests could emulate Monsignor Schmidt personally. But I know of one large parish, which is divided into 25 sections, with a responsible person assigned to each section: to welcome the new-comers, whether Catholic or non-Catholic; to see that the sick are attended, Communion brought to the house-bound, and visitations afterward; to see that the children are in-



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

involved in the catechism classes; that deaths bring the parish concern for the bereaved families as well as the deceased; and that the needs of the poor are reported and cared for by a parish committee. Wise pastors delegate responsibilities, which strengthens those involved as well as the those attended.

The parish is a family, and we should not expect our members just to go to Mass on Sunday and use the parish envelopes. No, they should be considered as members of our church family.

Worried Father: But what about my wandering children?

Response: Love them. Pray earnestly for them. Keep on good terms with them. They know your concern, but they are adults, and have to walk in their own shoes. The little pamphlet, *Acceptance*, written by Father Vincent Collins might help you. I don't know of any booklet that has helped worried people as that. If you don't have it in your parish booklet rack, send a self-addressed envelope and a dollar to me at 10 Lewis St., Auburn, NY 13021.

Shield of faith enables David to overcome an invincible enemy

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Abner, where is the soldier who accepted the challenge to fight Goliath?" King Saul asked his chief army commander.

"He is being brought to your tent now," Abner replied.

"Someone has found his courage at last," King Saul said.

The king was perplexed when he saw David enter his tent. "Why he is just a boy," the king said to his advisers. "We would be sending him to his death if we allow him to fight the giant."

"It is wrong to be afraid of Goliath," David replied. "He has insulted God, and I intend to defeat him."

Saul hesitated. David was no physical match for the brute, Goliath. Yet he had shown more courage than any soldier in the entire Hebrew army.

"Goliath has been a soldier all of his life," Saul told the boy. "You have never fought even one day in the war. How do you plan to win your battle?"

"I have learned much from taking care of my father's sheep," David answered. "When a lion or bear comes to attack the sheep, I go after them to rescue even a single lamb. It was God who saved me from these lions and bears. Now God will save me from Goliath and let me defeat him."



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"Then may God be with you," King Saul said. "Go now and meet the giant. Abner, give the boy my armor and sword to wear."

When Abner returned a short time later carrying Saul's armor, the king asked, "Has he changed his mind?"

"No, not at all. He thanks you for this kindness, but insists he is not used to armor and cannot fight with them on."

"Well, what did he take with him to fight Goliath?"

"I watched as he selected five smooth stones from the stream and placed them in his bag with a slingshot," Abner replied. "He went to meet Goliath carrying only these and his shepherd's staff."

"Find out who this boy is," King Saul answered sadly. "We will have to notify his family when it is over."

Meanwhile, the Hebrew army was poised on one mountain top and the Philistine army on the opposite one. Both armies knew someone had accepted Goliath's

challenge. They expected a grand spectacle that would occur when two great warriors entered the arena.

When they saw David coming forward, however, soldiers on both sides shuddered.

As Goliath came down from the Philistines' hillside camp, the whole ground vibrated. The giant laughed heartily when he saw David.

"Am I like some dog that you come at me with a stick to beat off?" Goliath taunted David. "Come here, lad, so I can make you a tasty meal for the birds to eat!"

David was undaunted. "I come against you in the name of God. It is not I, but he who will defeat you, and the world will know that Israel has a God!"

As Goliath rushed toward David, he called down curses from his god. David took one stone from his pouch and took aim with his slingshot. The stone hit the giant in the center of his forehead, and he fell to the ground like a mighty oak struck down suddenly by lightning. Before Goliath could recover, David took the giant's own sword and cut off his head.

A loud cry of astonishment went up from both sides of the mountain. When the Philistines realized that they had lost their invincible weapon, their cry quickly changed to one of dread.

The Hebrew soldiers sounded the battle cry and pursued the Philistines all of the

way to Gath where they defeated them.

Abner was out of breath when he entered the king's tent. "He is dead with only one shot!" He gasped.

"Ah, I thought so. It is too bad," Saul replied.

"Your Majesty, it is the giant who has been killed!" Abner told him.

"Did you find out who the boy is?" Saul asked.

"His name is David, son of Jesse of Bethlehem," Abner replied. And then he added just as Saul remembered, "When you were ill, he came and played his harp and recited his poetry for you."

Scripture reference: 1 Samuel 17:31-58.

Meditation: "Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4).

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