

Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics **Saint Mary's Press 2018**

Rationale:

We need to develop the empathy and true understanding of the complex and varied realities of real people who have made a thoughtful, discerning, and often deeply reflective choice – a choice typically not made in haste or lightly.

To listen and to hear the stories of those who disaffiliate from the Church are essential and constitutive dimensions of what it means to be a community of faith.

The disaffiliated ought not be reduced to statistics, bar graphs, and easily categorized groupings. Each person who disaffiliates has a name, a story, and longings of the heart and mind, and all are grateful for the opportunity to have their story heard.

- Do we know who they are – the depth of their life stories – and do we know them by name?
- Do we miss these individuals now that they are gone?

Rachel, when asked if we could interview her about young adults and their disaffiliation from the Church, said *“Finally!”*

Personal reflection:

Can you identify a youth or young adult who no longer considers himself/herself to be Catholic? Is this person a family member? A child of a friend? Someone you know from the parish or school? What do you know about the factors that may have led to disaffiliation? Do you know this person's name? Do you miss them? Do they know that you miss them?

Everyone longs for a generative community and the essence of the community the person seeks is a place *“where they know your name and where they miss you when you are not there.”*
(Rabbi Jonathon Sacks)



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Common Dynamics

- A precipitating event or series of events or insight or awareness triggers a wonderment or process of questioning or doubt.
- Rationale for disaffiliation reflects the secularization of culture where faith and religious practice are seen as options among many.
- The individual has a sense of being happy and free or relieved by the decision to disaffiliate with the church or from belief.
- The individual believes that religion was forced upon them and they are determined to not force religion/religious practice or a particular faith on their own children. Religion and religious practice ought to be a free choice.
- The individual perceives him/herself as moral and committed to living a moral life, but reflects Peter Berger's observation about belief in a secular age: "I can be ethical without religion."
- Whether the person still somewhat 'believes' or 'disbelieves' in God or 'something bigger,' the individual is not closed to belief (or fuller belief) if a rationale argument or provable evidence can be presented to them.

Their Story:

- What am I hearing in this story?
- What is the grace that the disaffiliated are bestowing on the Church? Their stories serve as a mirror, reflecting back to the Church their lived experiences. What is the Holy Spirit telling the Church through the life stories of those who have disaffiliated?

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