

FIVE WAYS TO BECOME at HOME at St. Margaret Mary

Registering in a parish is a formality that the American Church requires unlike parishes in Europe or Central and South America. When the parish is a small community it is easy to fit into and get to know people and feel like you really belong to the parish. When a parish is large, as Saint Margaret Mary, with a population of 3,500 families and about 12,000 parishioners, it is oftentimes much harder to feel like you are part of the parish.

A feeling of belonging is a two way street. If you normally are outgoing, then you will find a niche quickly in the parish, but if you are more quiet or very busy then it might take more time for you to get to know others and feel like you belong. The parish is also a very busy place with lots of people doing lots of things. It sometimes can feel that it is hard to break into any one of the ministries, even though we are eager to have new people.

Because we want you to feel a part of the parish and belong, and we want to get to know and appreciate you and the gifts, you bring to our parish, we have some suggestions to build a better bond between us.

1. Make Friends

When you first came to the parish we introduced you to a Parish Welcomer to meet with you. We not only wanted to answer all your questions about the parish, but we wanted you to meet some people. Getting to know the people of the parish will make the sense of belonging much easier and help us get to know you. Stay a little longer after mass and meet a crowd of people who are in the lobby. There are many of our people who like to gather with other people to talk about the parish ac-

tivities and ministries. They will easily reach out to you and want to get to know you.

Our parish is scattered all over Algonquin, Lake in the Hills, Barrington Hills and Carpentersville.

If you just get to know people in your neighborhood, you will more than likely get to know parishioners. They are great resources to not only answer your questions, but to make new friends and join things together.

If you got all your answers to your questions from your Parish Welcomer and you liked the experience then you might want to volunteer to become a Parish Welcomer. In that way you will not only offer a service to your parish, but get to know new and interesting members of the parish.

If you have children in the School, Religious Education, Youth Ministry or Polish School that is a great way to meet other parents and get involved in some common activity.

Saint Paul writes in Ephesians 4 *“There is one body and one spirit just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”* We are a family designed by God and we need to be one, so lets make it so.



2. Start Small

American Catholics, like all Americans, are enamoured with “big things.” We hear of Evangelists building



megachurches that fit in basketball arenas, and the Vatican is not only the location of the Catholic Church but a city and a country—talk about **BIG**. But Church begins small. Jesus began with twelve

disciples. The basic unit of Church is Family. That is why we need to practice our faith at home. Evening prayers, meal prayers, talks about following Jesus, doing what Jesus would do are all part of living our Catholic Faith. Sharing Faith in small groups is perhaps the best way to grow in faith. At Church, the homily is not a dialogue or a time to ask questions, but when gathered with friends to reflect on faith we learn from others and also from ourselves. In the parish we have many faith groups. In the Fall and Spring, we have many small discussion groups looking at “*what the Catechism says*,” “*what Scripture is about*” and *parenting classes* and much more. Joining a small group is a wonderful way to learn more about your faith and meet new people.

We have a parish retreat called **Christ Renews His Parish**. It is a different kind of retreat in that it is given by ordinary members of our parish, who have participated in this retreat themselves. They teach us about faith, as they learned about faith in their own lives. This experience with only a small number of people, has built bonds that have lasted a lifetime.

Don’t miss the power of the small day-to-day graces that comes from a moment of reflection on some human situation or remember the poor and hungry in just buying something extra for the food pantry, or don’t get mad at the person who butts in line at the grocery store or you grow closer to the Christ of the scriptures. Doing thoughtful things for others makes us more like the Christ and changes the way we approach life. And the way we approach life, often changes people who meet

us. We are the Body of Christ and when one part hurts the whole body hurts and when one does something for someone—they are served by Christ.

3. Get to Work

One does not win the lotto without buying a ticket. One doesn’t pass a course without opening the textbook. The best way to become part of a parish is to jump in. We have so many important and understaffed

ministries which are designed to help people in their life journey. Some ministries are life changing, like those that deal with alcohol addiction, visiting someone who is in the



hospital, or welcoming people back to a church they felt alienated from. Other ministries provide services to the community and help us function better. These are Eucharistic Ministers who distribute Communion, Choir members who add a beauty to our mass, the mailing team which stuffs envelopes to help us communicate better. “Pitching in” to help the “work” of the church is not only good in itself but doing God’s work and becoming a part of a community, that is not formed just in the same room together on a Sunday Morning. Sharing ourselves in our work is a unifying element that makes us part of Christ’s Body, the Church. Belonging is real and genuine when we work together from the heart.

Faith without works is empty. As we walk into church, we walk by the largest window in the Church. It is the window which portrays the **Corporal Works of Mercy**. The Gospel of Matthew Chapter 25:24 teaches us that Jesus says “*Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him,*

'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me.'"

We do not need to have another invite to

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit those in prison
7. Bury the dead

We already have the invite from Jesus himself.

4. Eat and Drink

Eating together also can erase boundaries. On a subzero winter day in the early 1990s, a group of Habitat for Humanity people at their work sight had finished putting up insulation and broke for lunch. They warmed them selves with some coffee and sandwiches in a local church basement. During the break in the conversation, a Methodist man in his 50s turned to another with a look of surprise on his face, *"I don't think I've ever been inside a Catholic Church before in my life nor would I have spent much time with Catholics."* Now they were eating and drinking together.

At Sunday Mass, we eat and drink—not just ordinary food—but Jesus' Body and Blood. Before we do that we partake in the Sign of Peace.



We are reminded that Jesus tells us that if we have a grievance with our brother, leave your gift at the altar and make amends first. The church tells us that we may have many differences—being republican or democrat, male or female, rich or poor, black or white, but we all are brothers and sisters in Christ. Eating and drinking takes away the differences when we are one in Christ.

It is easy to miss the great importance of being together at Mass and eating and drinking the same Jesus' Body

and Blood. We eat and drink of Jesus and we become the hands, the feet, the heart and the head of Jesus. It is not only an obligation to participate in Sunday Mass, but is our nourishment of God's life in us. With the busy schedules we all have, it is easy to be tempted to not go to Mass this or that weekend. Nothing is worse on our spiritual life.

We would have no energy and we would be isolated and we would eventually die, if we did not eat. So often we think eating is something we do through our car window, but eating is relationship. Think of your Thanksgiving meal—not only the food, but the time spent with others, the relationships built, and the feeling of belonging. If you isolate yourself from Sunday Mass, you isolate yourself from the community of the church. It is the community of the Church that feeds you the Body and Blood of Christ. Isolation leaves us not only not belonging, but alone and without the strength of a family.

SUNDAY MASS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY YOU WILL DO ALL WEEK.

5. Pray

Jesus tells us that *"where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there."* Prayer is the communication of relationship with God. We owe everything to God and we need to raise our voice to **THANK** him. But we also learn that God is our Father—he provides for us, he cares for us, he corrects us, he protects us, and he defends us. He asks us to come to him with our needs — to seek, to knock, and to ask.

When we have this relationship, we have not only a relationship with God but Jesus who is God has called us to be his body in the world.

We then have this Spiritual relationship with every other Christian and Catholic in the world. We cannot feel isolated when we are joined with everyone who is part of Jesus' Body and Blood. We will think and act like a family joined together.

