

The **Knights of Columbus** recruit new members who are to be practicing Catholics. It is presupposed that if one is to exercise a leadership role in the Catholic community as, for example, a member of Parish Pastoral Council or School Council, teacher, that one be a practicing Catholic.

## **Who, then, is a practicing Catholic?**

In attempting a response to this query one often receives the impression that Catholics are people who, more than anything else, have additional rules to keep. Somewhat akin to this is the opinion that being a Catholic is a matter of membership in an institution with various rights and duties attached.

While it is clear that a pattern of behavior flows from the gospel, it cannot be reduced to a moral code. At the heart of the gospel lies a call that is far more important than that. St. John's Gospel speaks of it this way. To all who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God (1:12). The invitation of the gospel, then, is not just to a particular way of life but a radically new life itself. It is a call to life on a different level. The call of the gospel takes us beyond ourselves into a communion of life with God. For St. Paul it is in the Lord.

## **What, then, does constitute a practicing Catholic?**

The question is not a simple one. First of all, it must be admitted that no one, save God, is a fully practicing Catholic. All of us fail in some aspects to live the faith; everyone has gaps in their faith practice. Strictly speaking none of us can ever claim fully to be practicing our faith. However, beyond this necessary and important confusion of ambiguity, not all is vague. There are some essential components to Roman Catholicism that can and must be named.

Thus, at some point, one can define what constitutes the practice of that faith.

- Full initiation into the community (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist)
- Communion with the church through compliance with legitimate authority
- Regular participation in the Eucharist within the local community, including within that a sensitivity to the liturgical rhythm of the church's life. (This component is so emphasized because, as Roman Catholics, that which essentially defines us is that we are a Eucharistic community).
- A life of prayer and private morality
- A commitment to the social teachings of the church
- A sense of responsibility for ministry and leadership within the church, including financial
- A concern for the universal church, its unity, its spread and its maintenance
- A concern and respect for the public forum with the community; that is in the public forum not being at variance with respect to major doctrinal or moral teachings of the church

In the final analysis, allowing for the fact that only God practices the faith perfectly, to do public ministry within the church, be it teaching or serving on a board, one should, as a minimum, meet these criteria.

In Jesus' own community, some found the package of following him to be tough and so they stopped going with him. Hurt by this Jesus said to the twelve, "And what about you, do you want to go away too?" Jesus continues to ask the question, and continues to look for an accepting, positive response.

**Bishop of Prince Georges** Most Reverend, Gerald Wiesner, O.M.I.