

The Migrant Spirit: Journeys of Faith Beyond the Catholic Church

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Introduction: Among the many challenges confronting the Catholic Church is the migration of her members to other faith denominations. Globally, young adults are increasingly disengaging from Catholicism, with the growth of Christianity driven more by independent churches rather than by the Catholic Church itself. In the Philippines, this trend is evident in young people finding spiritual fulfillment within charismatic and evangelical communities. This study explores the motivations and reasons behind former Catholics' departure from the Church and delving into the joys and difficulties they experienced in transitioning to other faith groups.

Methodology: This study employed the basic qualitative research design, utilizing a semi-structured interview to collect more information on the motivations and experiences of disaffiliated Catholics. The recursive textual analysis guided by Lichtman's 3 Cs was utilized to analyze the data and come up with themes that will describe the experiences of the participants.

Results: The analysis of the collected data led to the identification of four major themes and eight subthemes. These findings reveal that former Catholics were motivated to leave the Church due to several factors: persistent invitations and follow-ups from members of other denominations, limited engagement in Catholic practices, a strong sense of belonging experienced in other faith communities, and dissatisfaction with the quality of homilies. Additionally, the data show that their transition involved challenges such as confusion over doctrinal inconsistencies and the pain of losing friendships within the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, many participants reported a renewed passion for the Sacred Scripture and a profound sense of spiritual fulfillment in their new religious affiliations.

Conclusion: This study examined the motivations, difficulties, and joys experienced by former Catholics who have joined other faith denominations. The insights gathered point to critical areas for pastoral reflection within the Church, such as the need for more intentional spiritual formation for young people, the enhancement of liturgical experiences to ensure deeper engagement, the fostering of dynamic community fellowship, and the implementation of Scripture-based initiatives that promote both individual and communal spiritual development.

Practical Value: The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the factors that led former Catholics to leave the Church and join other faith communities. Understanding their experiences can help the Church respond more effectively to the pastoral needs of young people. These insights may also guide Catholic schools in developing formation programs for the youth that are thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum. Additionally, the Church can use this knowledge to foster initiatives that promote unity and build harmonious relationships, regardless of differing expressions of faith.

Direction for Future Research: This qualitative research may be further developed through a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to achieve a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject under study. Expanding the pool of participants to include a broader and more diverse demographic could also enrich the findings by capturing a wider range of perspectives. Future research may also investigate the experiences of former Catholics who, after joining other faith communities, eventually returned to the Catholic Church. Additionally, exploring the journeys of non-Catholics who have converted to Catholicism presents a compelling avenue for further scholarly inquiry.

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