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Google your name, build community

Mike Sweitzer-Beckman | May. 27, 2010

The publication *US Catholic* recently did **a survey of its readers [1]**to find out how satisfied they are with their Catholic parishes. Most of the readers gave positive reviews of their parishes. At first, the results surprised me, because so many Catholics I know seem to either feel unsettled at their church, or have given up altogether on finding a home in a Catholic parish. After thinking about it, though, it makes sense that most readers of *US Catholic* would feel positively about their parish experiences. That is probably, at least partially, why they read *US Catholic*. Like an avid photographer reading *Modern Photography* or pilots reading *Aviation Week*, they are reading a trade journal.

One thing that has always fascinated me about a strong, lively Catholic parish is the sentiment that it is a big tent and there are as many perspectives on life and lifestyles as there are people in the parish. I see a lot of people questioning faith and the importance of being involved in a religious institution, and I know people have found it too painful or uninspiring to stick with it. However, one of the advantages that I see in being involved in a lively congregation is that it can be an opportunity for interaction with people across generations, economic lines, racial categories, and political views.

A microcosm of this sentiment is portrayed in the movie Google Me [2], a documentary featuring several people named Jim Killeen. A fellow named Jim Killeen from Los Angeles did what many people do: he googled himself. He found many other Jim Killeen's around the world, and decided to make a movie about meeting several of them (I suppose everyone in Los Angeles is an aspiring filmmaker).

He started e-mailing and calling other Jim Killeen's and began traveling the globe, from Ireland to St. Louis to Australia. He found that they had different political understandings, sexual experiences, career choices and hobbies. However, they all bore the same name, and the filmmaker's biggest desire is to connect with others. He hopes his movie will inspire the same.

It is with awe and wonder that the filmmaker gathers all of the Jim Killeen's in the city of Killeen, Texas, for a celebration. None of them have ever met before, and with the ensuing interviews it becomes clear that some of them have polarizing views on issues of sexuality and abortion that create so much political drama in the United States. However, they all get along well enough to spend a few days together, make some chili together for a chili cook-off, attend a rodeo, and receive the keys to the city for a day.

One of the Jim Killeen's talks about the two most profound moments in his life (falling in love and having a kid) but that this gathering of others who share his name is right up there as something he will never forget.

Those searching for meaning in this life have lots of options now. For a long time, the only option in this search open to lay Catholics was to go to Mass at the neighborhood parish and hope to find a deeper community and make sense out of life there. Now, however, if the local parish doesn't provide the meaning one is looking for, options abound.

Some may chose to travel across town to find a more comfortable church. Others are turning to Google and

doing broad searches on all sorts of interests and virtues that resonate with what is deep in their hearts. And sometimes, ironically, it is the search of one's own name that can bring forth a community of people that share the "all are welcome under the big tent" feature of the most vibrant Catholic parishes.

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