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What Catholic School Teaches

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I recently shared an article on my Facebook page called "24 Signs you went to Catholic School." Some of the highlights included, "You still write in cursive" and "You've had to dress as an angel at some point in your life."

I was surprised how many people responded to the post, sharing "war stories" of their days back at Catholic school while swapping memories of their favorite women's religious order. This common experience is often worn as a "survivor's badge," but can teach us a great deal about how we can build the church.

I loved Catholic school because it was an epicenter for community. Every classmate knew their friends' families -- after all, there were only 20 of us. My mother was on the Parent Teacher Association, and my father was forced to work an ungodly amount of Bingos to support the school's mission (I still believe he deserves indulgences for this). Yet through it all, each family rallied around a common purpose and set of ideals they wanted to instill in their children.

This carried over to our spiritual life, as well. Families worshipped together. Children were altar servers and choir members. Mothers joined women's prayer groups and fathers were members of the Knights of Columbus. In short, we had a communal faith identity that was both social and spiritual.

When our Catholic school closed, many of the families weren't seen again. They moved to a different parish or stopped going to church altogether. For those of us left, we often take an easy approach of saying they were simply "angry" or "hurt." We fail to admit that the problem is much deeper: People had lost their community.

As our pews seem a bit emptier and ministries continue to close, we have to ask ourselves, "What have

we done to build our faith community?"

While Catholic schools shrink in number, the model is still applicable in everyday life. Parishioners need to be more active in getting to know the people around them, and parish staff needs to make sure that the flock is supported. Our Mass and parish life needs to grow to meet the holistic needs of the laity instead of being "45 minutes we kill on a Sunday."

These are just some thoughts, but they present a deeper problem we have to address. Before we can launch any more campaigns saying "Catholics Come Home," we have to ready our homes to welcome them back.

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