NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

As the children grow and move on, the Catholic parents stay

Joe Ferullo | May. 28, 2013 NCR Today

Children leave but the parents stay.

I was noticing that at church this weekend. It was my youngest daughter's last Mass as an altar server; she graduates from eighth grade at our parish school in two weeks then moves onto high school in the fall. Everyone has been patting us on the back, telling us that -- after putting a couple of kids through all nine grades over a 14-year period -- we are finally "done."

But that's not true. It's something of Catholic given that children move on for a time: Once they go on to college, maybe even high school, they stop coming to church. Give it a few years, though, and they come back.

But the parents, they don't leave. I looked around the congregation at Mass and saw couples there whose children had left long ago: a daughter now at college in Washington, D.C.; a son at Ann Arbor, Mich.; another in Austin, Texas.

My wife and I will do the same. When people tell us we're done, we furrow our confused brows. It's never occurred to us we might stop going to church because our kids no longer go to the parish school or have moved on to other towns in other states. But why? Why do we all stay?

I mean, we know why we came back: We see it played out in young couples at Mass all the time. You move away from the church until you get married, then you start thinking about children, and you want for them what you had growing up -- and you return.

It's that same impulse that keeps you there, I realized. We stay because we never stop being parents. Raising children is like a prayer on a rosary that doesn't end: Each day is another bead, another reason to ask for forgiveness or give thanks for a blessing. Each day, we seek solace and comfort; we hope for the best and steel ourselves for something less. When do you turn that off? You don't.

You never want to feel far away from God because a parent always needs him close. Most times, children don't know any better -- and then in your 20s, you think you do know better, you think you do control your own destiny, that your own life is fully in your own hands.

But you grow up, you get married, you have kids, and you begin to understand.

And so we gather in the vestibule after Mass, all the parents of children who were once little ones by our sides in the pews but are not little anymore. We catch up on what they are doing, what they've got planned for their summers and their lives. We laugh, we worry, we smile and frown.

We are parents still. And we'll be back.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/02/2015 - 05:43*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/children-grow-and-move-catholic-parents-stay