

# The whole church joins in Rite

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

This is one of my favorite weeks in the year. Why? Because it is the week during which people from all parts of our diocese gather for the formal presentation and election of those who will become members of our community of faith at the Easter Vigil.

The Rite of Election, although simple in its format, is a joyful and exciting experience. Certainly those to be baptized and those already baptized who now prepare to join our community are filled with enthusiasm. The moment of election comes after much work and prayer, and it is the beginning of the final phase of preparation.

It is my experience that the members of our community who accompany those preparing for the Easter Vigil are generally no less excited than our new friends. These wonderful sponsors and companions share much with those who are taking this new step, but they are the first to say that they receive much more from the experience than they give.

For all of us who attend, there is a special joy that comes from knowing that so many others share our journey — that so many different people from a variety of communities hear and respond to the same call that leads us on.

The Rite of Election is one moment in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, an ancient rite in the church. Restored and adapted to modern times after Vatican Council II, it is a process by which the community



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shares its faith with others and helps interested persons prepare to become full participants in the church's life. It is an experience of prayer and community that honors the individual's own story and recognizes that the gift of faith grows in all of us in different ways.

At this writing, we have celebrated the rite twice this week. On Sunday, our gathering in the Southern Tier was at St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads. Last night and this evening, we'll be at Sacred Heart Cathedral. On Friday evening, our final celebration will be at St. Mary's Parish in Auburn.

As our experience of the RCIA lengthens, our communities are learning more about themselves and about how best to invite and help others to participate in our life. The alterations we make based on what we have learned then become occasions to

learn new things. And so the process develops.

This year, for example, we note that among those preparing to enter our church is a higher-than-usual percentage of unbaptized persons. I am wondering if that will become a trend and, if it does, what we will learn from it.

Of great interest, too, is the fact that nearly 10 percent of those being elected this year are children. What accounts for that? What can we learn from this phenomenon, which has grown slowly for several years.

You will be happy as I am to know that this evening we will be electing seven candidates from our Vietnamese community. That small but growing community brings a new vitality to us, and reminds us that Catholic life is rich in its diversity and its traditions.

I ask you please to pray for all of our candidates as they enter this privileged phase of their preparation for the Easter celebration. Ask God to strengthen them and fill them with joy at the knowledge that they are indeed the beloved of God.

And let us pray for one another as we share this special time of prayer. Imperfect as we are as individuals and as a community, we must be doing something that attracts our candidates to us. It might not be a bad Lenten prayer to ask God to help us to know better our strength and our beauty so that we can build on them and share them ever more fully.

Peace to all.

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