

# RCIA process renews earlier tradition for initiates

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- Candidates who were baptized in a Christian denomination other than Roman Catholicism.

- Candidates who were baptized in the Roman Catholic Church but have never received the Eucharist or been confirmed. These are known as "baptized-uncatechized Catholics."

- Candidates who were baptized in another faith, but have a strong working knowledge of Catholicism. Since they are "well-catechized," their preparation period need not be as lengthy.

According to the Catholic News Service survey, candidates outnumber catechumens by about a 2-to-1 margin.

For the most part, the Easter Vigil is the point at which catechumens receive the sacraments of baptism, first Eucharist and confirmation. Candidates, meanwhile, receive only the latter two sacraments since they have already been baptized.

While confirmation preparation is part of the RCIA, Carroll noted that the Rochester diocese, as of September, 1991, no longer permits those seeking just the sacrament of confirmation to receive it at the Easter Vigil. Instead, these people must wait until Bishop Matthew H. Clark or an appointed delegate visits their parish.

Another change taking place is the increasing inclusion of children in RCIA. According to Carroll, RCIA can technically include children of catechetical age, typically those age 7 through high school. This year, nearly 100 diocesan youths will be initiated at the Easter Vigil.

One extremely appealing aspect of RCIA, Carroll remarked, is that the process allows catechumens and candidates to learn about the Catholic faith through a spiritual rather than a technical process.

"RCIA is about conversion and formation. It is not about instruction," stated Carroll. "It's to let the Scriptures



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor  
**Davina Romanchick, a parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece, reflects during an April 3 Mass at the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard. Romanchick was one of the parish's candidates and catechumens who participated in a one-day retreat at the abbey.**

speak and to talk about them." Most parishes conduct these discussions through weekly get-togethers. Catechumens and candidates, along with their Catholic sponsors, attend Sunday Mass, adjourning to a separate meeting after the Liturgy of the Word, to reflect on the readings' content.

During Lent, RCIA participants become involved in additional activities. A combined ceremony — known as the Rite of Election for catechumens, and the Call to Continuing Conversion for candidates — marks the final preparatory stages of RCIA. This event takes place during the first week of Lent at four locations within the diocese, where Bishop Clark officially welcomes

each catechumen and candidate. In addition, parishes frequently offer RCIA retreats during Lent. For instance, eight soon-to-be initiates at St. Charles Borromeo Church, 3003 Dewey Ave., Greece, made a daylong journey this past Saturday to the Abbey of the Genesee monastery, 3258 River Road, Piffard, Livingston County.

One candidate from that St. Charles Borromeo group, Wesley Vyverberg, said his overall RCIA experience has helped remove some misconceptions he had harbored about the Catholic faith.

"I was looking at this established rule structure, laid down by higher powers, that people had to follow," remarked Vyverberg, a Greece resident who was baptized Presbyterian.

"But (my RCIA training) is a matter of going beyond, to find out who established the rules and why. That's the beauty of the sessions we've been go-

ing to," said Vyverberg. "I like the fact that I'm able to come in and ask questions, although I'm sure some of the elders might take offense to us challenging the way things have always been."

Vyverberg said this approach has drawn him spiritually toward Catholicism in such a way that he has come to regard his Easter Vigil initiation as a mere formality.

"The Spirit seems to be the thing I can touch the most. I can feel something moving through me; I feel like I'm already (a Catholic)," Vyverberg commented. "The (Vigil) Mass will be a way of recognizing and formalizing something I already know."

Stephen McCagg, an Ogden resident who went through the RCIA process in 1983, further stated that catechumens' and candidates' faith journeys should not end on the Easter Vigil.

"The learning doesn't need to stop. Don't stop there (at initiation)," advised McCagg, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church, 60 Martha St., Spencerport.

In the Rochester diocese, McCagg's concerns are partially addressed via follow-up sessions conducted weekly for about one month following initiation. Initiates then have the option of participating in monthly meetings over a year's time. These encounters are known as *mystogogy* — Greek for "living the mystery."

Enforcing this portion of RCIA, Carroll emphasized, is essential.

"The Gospel talks about the confusion of the disciples after Jesus' resurrection, and we're no different. (The initiates) need support," she added.

Carroll acknowledged, however, that *mystogogy* is "one thing we're not very good at implementing yet. Our mentality is that when the (Easter) Vigil is done, RCIA is done."

Carroll went on to point out that continued spiritual growth through RCIA is not a process reserved strictly for initiates.

"Anyone who is involved in the process, such as a sponsor, goes through conversion," she acknowledged. "Even if you've been Catholic all your life, there's a part of you that's called to go deeper."

McCagg asserted that even adults who are already fully initiated Catholics would benefit from the same kind of training he received through RCIA.

"If you're going through confirmation at the age of 14, you may not get another opportunity to make a choice about your faith — a choice that might lead you toward keeping active in it," he said. "If I'd walked in (as a youth) and been confirmed, I might have felt that I'd completed my part. It would be nice if people had the opportunity to reexamine their feelings at some point in their adult life."

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