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Lent serves as time of preparation

Dioceses report high levels of catechumens and candidates readying for initiation as Catholics

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Tens of thousands of men, women and children declared their intention to become Catholic in diocesan ceremonies across the country during the first few days of Lent.

More than 1,400 catechumens and candidates came forward in the Phoenix diocese. There were more than 1,400 in the Cincinnati archdiocese as well. The Philadelphia archdiocese had more than 1,200; Seattle, 1,100; Atlanta, 1,000.

Even smaller dioceses had numbers in the hundreds. The Diocese of Manchester, N.H., had 437; Portland, Maine, 382; Salt Lake City, more than 500.

There were 125 in St. Cloud, Minn., 182 in Lafayette, La., 330 in Greensburg, Pa., 642 in Fort Worth, Texas, and 762 in Austin.

Please see accompanying story for figures from the Diocese of Rochester.

These numbers often represent only two-thirds or three-fourths of the total number as many others go through the ceremony at their parish.

"My daughter's taking first Communion this year. That's my incentive," said David Vaughn of Kansas City, Mo., one of 581 candidates and catechumens at ceremonies in the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese. A high school teacher, he is joining the church this Easter after attending Mass for nine years with his wife, Shelly.

Every year at the start of Lent, Catholics in parishes across the country are made aware of how many people in their community have been eagerly preparing to become Catholic.

Catechumens — unbaptized people preparing for baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist at Easter — participate in the Rite of Election, marking the start of their final phases of preparation during Lent to enter the church.

Candidates — who are already baptized but not full members of the church — start their final Lenten journey to full church membership in a parallel ceremony, the Call to Continuing Conversion. Candidates may have been baptized in another Christian church or may have been bap-

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Sara Ochs, an RCIA candidate and parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church on Rochester's Humboldt Street, sings during a March 14 Lenten prayer service.

“All our rituals are to be public, celebrated in the midst of the community as people progress in their faith community.”

Barbara Carroll
Diocesan coordinator for sacramental catechesis

PHOTO BY
S. JOHN WILKIN
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

RCIA numbers reach all-time high at parishes in Diocese of Rochester

think of the difference between a candlelight dinner and a New Year's Eve celebration.

That should give a picture of the manner in which adult initiation into the Catholic Church has evolved since the Second Vatican Council.

"There should be nothing quiet about the RCIA," said Barbara Carroll, who serves as diocesan coordinator for sacramental catechesis. "All our rituals are to be public, celebrated in the midst of the community as people progress in their faith community. This is a radical departure from what happened in adult initiation prior to Vatican II."

"It ought to be large and life-giving," added Father William M. Barrett, pastor of St. Michael's Church in Lyons.

That prevailing attitude has apparently been well received in diocesan parishes since the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was implemented here for the first time in 1982. According to Carroll, this year's list of diocesan catechumens and candidates has hit an all-time high of 737.

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STORY BY
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