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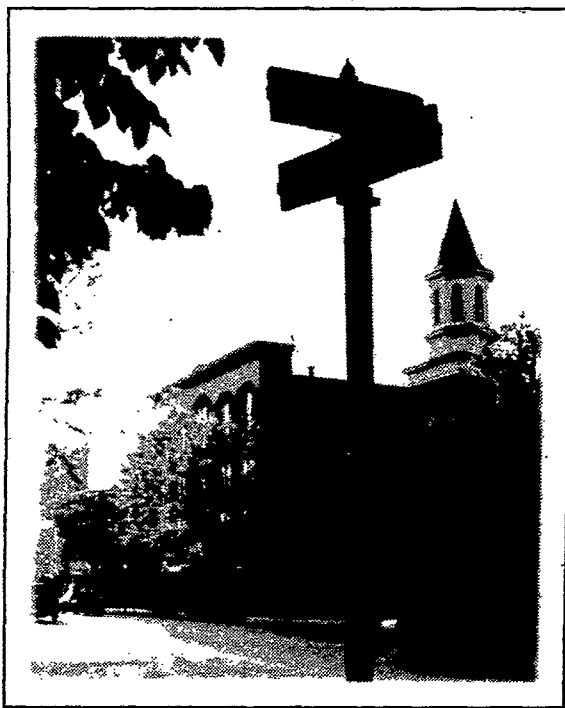
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Sue Hauser (left), parishioner at Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Church, is sponsoring Sara Ochs during the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process.

RCIA

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In addition, there are now five Rite of Election services for catechumens, as opposed to just two in 1982. Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided at all five Rites of Election held earlier this month — three at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester, one at St. Mary's Church in Elmira and the other at St. Francis de Sales Church in Geneva.

Carroll also noted that two parishes — St. Michael's in Lyons, as well as the St. Januarius/St. Patrick cluster in Naples and Prattsburg — are fully implementing the RCIA process for the first time this year. This brings the total number of diocesan churches with RCIA programs to 126.

In Lyons, Father Barrett said, two catechumens and three candidates will receive sacraments in front of the St. Michael's Easter Vigil congregation on Saturday, April 15.

The pastor noted that his parish quickly embraced the community approach to RCIA when the catechumens journeyed to Sacred Heart Cathedral on March 6 for their Rite of Election.

"We had a chartered bus. The catechumens had their sponsors, teachers and family members come with them. Some of them had never seen the cathe-

dral before," Father Barrett remarked.

Sue Hauser, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church, 549 Humboldt St., Rochester, pointed out that RCIA can be invigorating not only for newcomers to the church, but for lifelong Catholics as well.

Hauser, who is serving as sponsor for Sara Ochs, stated that some aspects of her faith have been rejuvenated through preparation sessions with RCIA leaders and those about to be initiated.

"It's upbeat, and we have a good time. We have a lot of discussions," Hauser said. "Now I feel more open about being able to discuss things. After I got confirmed (approximately 20 years ago) I forgot all that stuff, so I learned a lot (through RCIA)."

Another factor which has enhanced the popularity of RCIA in the Rochester diocese, Carroll pointed out, is the large number of young catechumens and candidates. Approximately 20 percent of this year's group is between the ages of 7 and 16.

Youths who have not yet received any or all of the sacraments of baptism, Communion, or confirmation have "certain

needs that can't be taken care of in a regular religious-education program or Catholic school," Carroll acknowledged.

"For 10-year-olds who don't have the religious language or experience, it's necessary to take them where they're at and honor their faith journey," Carroll said.

While RCIA has obviously been successful in regard to the months leading up to Easter, Carroll observed that she would like to see continuing improvements made in the *mystogogy* — Greek for "living the mystery." This process involves a series of monthly meetings, lasting approximately one year after the Easter Vigil, for those newly received into the church.

In an April 1993, *Catholic Courier* interview, Carroll had pointed out 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."

When interviewed last week, Carroll said her office has attempted to provide seminars suggesting ways in which parishes can keep new initiates active, such as inviting those people to sign up for various parish ministries.

"In the Catholic Church, the hardest part is the follow-up after the celebration of the sacrament, or the continuing formation," Carroll said.

Preparation

Continued from page 1

tized Catholic but did not complete their initiation into the church with first Communion and confirmation.

In many parishes the Book of Election, with signatures of those preparing to join the church, is displayed throughout Lent. As the season goes along, other ceremonies at Mass mark their final steps toward full entry.

Joseph Pantilone of Vineland, N.J., is another cradle Catholic completing his sacramental initiation as an adult.

"My father did everything he could to encourage me (to receive confirmation and first Communion as a child)," the 36-year-old mechanic said. "(But) when I was young and stupid, it did not seem important."

The Lenten ceremonies are part of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, inaugurated in the 1970s to

revive elements of the ancient catechuminate for those preparing to become Catholic.

Since the early 1980s, when bishops were urged to preside over the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion at the start of Lent, the number of candidates and catechumens has grown rapidly.

Father Philip Murnion of the National Pastoral Life Center in New York calls the revived catechuminate one of the major signs of hope in the church today.

Some 163,000 adults were initiated into the church in 1994, he said at a church planning meeting March 11 in Westminster, Md.

That, he said, is more than double the 75,000 adults who joined in 1974, when people were just starting to implement the RCIA, and it has surpassed the previous peak figures for adult conversions in the years before the Second Vatican Council.