

DIOCESAN NEWS

RCIA participants, 850 strong, on brink of initiation

By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

After his baptism as a Catholic, Marc Bigsby said, he never pursued other sacraments while growing up. In recent years, though, he had a strong desire to deepen his faith.

"I've personally been looking for more of a connection to God," Bigsby said. "I also feel it's important for Elijah to have a connection because I didn't have that growing up." Elijah is his 7-year-old son.

On Saturday, April 22, father and son are due to be received into the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil Mass at Ithaca's St. Catherine of Siena Church. The Bigsby's are among approximately 850 people throughout the diocese who have gone through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process this year.

"We have children as young as 6, several people in their 90s, and everything in between," noted Sister Karen Dietz, SSJ, diocesan coordinator of sacramental catechesis.

Sister Dietz said that this year's number of RCIA participants is approximately 50 more than last year.

"It could be from parishes evangelizing in this year of jubilee, I don't know," Sister Dietz said of the increase.

RCIA is the process by which adults join the Catholic Church. Initiates are broken into two categories: catechumens, who have never been baptized; and candidates, who were baptized as Catholics or in another Christian denomination but have never received Eucharist or been confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church.

The final stage of RCIA preparation was acknowledged by Bishop Matthew H. Clark when he greeted catechumens and candidates at five Rites of Election gatherings in mid-March. Three of the services were held at Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral, and one each at Church of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads and St. Stephen's in Geneva.

The catechumens and candidates have, in many cases, been preparing for their initiation for several months.

"It's a long process, but it's nice to do it nice and slow so you can absorb it," said Jane Galvin, who, along with her children Johnny, 11, and Julie, 9, have been preparing since September. They will be initiated on April 22 at St. Mary's Church in Elmira.

"St. Mary's Southside is a wonderful church. We're excited about the Easter Vigil; it's going to be a wonderful experience. The people I work with, they're all excited for me, too," said Galvin, a housing counselor with Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

Though she has not previously belonged to the Catholic Church, Galvin has been impressed by the example of her husband, John, and especially her mother-in-law, Lu.

"I have to give her credit for her strength



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark welcomes Lottie Cook, as mother Laura Cook and brother Andrew look on at the Rite of Election on March 19 at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

and strong belief," Galvin remarked. "When I've seen the love and strength the Catholics have in their faith, I wanted that for my kids."

Meanwhile, Ithaca's Bigsby said that he's been inspired by the example of his girlfriend, Angeline Duane, a St. Catherine of Siena parishioner.

"She would listen to my rantings and ravings about the Catholic Church and the misinformation I had about the religion," he remarked.

Bigsby was also touched by a prisoner he befriended while volunteering at the Tompkins County Jail: "I'd meet with him every week. He had a very strong faith in Jesus Christ."

Bigsby's RCIA class comprises St. Catherine of Siena as well as three other Tompkins County parishes: Immaculate Conception in Ithaca, All Saints in Lansing and Holy Cross in Dryden. According to Sister Mary Wintish, RSM, pastoral administrator at All Saints, this joint effort involves nearly 40 catechumens and candidates.

Christopher Pultz, of All Saints, said he has greatly enjoyed the preparation sessions.

"I think (the staff) making me feel at ease while I was going through the process was what I enjoyed the most," Pultz acknowledged. "I was a little nervous at first."

Another group of churches that turned

RCIA into a collaborative effort this year is St. James, Trumansburg; Holy Cross, Ovid; and St. Francis Solanus, Interlaken.

"It's gone swimmingly," stated Barbara Mearse, RCIA coordinator.

Six people were part of that group. Chris Carroll, of St. Francis Solanus, said she is finally going through the process after being married 41 years and raising four children Catholic.

"The preparation was extremely interesting," Carroll said. "Some of the others had gone to school with my children, and I found it inspiring to be with these younger people."

Carroll said she eagerly anticipates the Easter Vigil Mass at Holy Cross Church on April 22, when she will receive Eucharist for the first time as a Catholic.

"One thing that had always bothered me was not being able to participate in Eucharist," Carroll said. "I'm looking very forward to that; it's very important to me."

Pultz, also, said he is excited about being received into the Catholic Church. "I kind of felt there was always one part of my life that was missing, and that was it," he said.

Although the Easter Vigil Mass is the most frequent time when catechumens and candidates are received into the church, Sister Dietz said the diocese is encouraging parishes "to be more open on a year-round basis." She explained that candidates can be received into the church throughout the year, and shouldn't necessarily wait for the Easter Vigil if they, or their RCIA coordinators, feel they're ready sooner.

"The candidate should not be kept from the table any longer than necessary," Sister Dietz emphasized. "It may only take them four or five weeks (for preparation)."

Area station to air Catholic Answers Live

Rav Buonemani never sits down to listen to the radio. He doesn't have the time, between working at Eastman Kodak Co. and raising a family. But he does listen through the headphones while doing chores.

And he does have favorite programs — among them Catholic Answers Live, a 55-minute show featuring a range of topics and speakers. Through Buonemani's interest and efforts, it will be carried on Rochester-area airwaves beginning Easter Sunday from 9 to 10 p.m. every Sunday by WDCZ 102.7 FM, "The Light."

St. Luke's Medical Association agreed to fund the venture, but sponsors are being signed on to support the program through the year, Buonemani said. "We hope through advertising and sponsors it will pay for itself," he said.

Buonemani first picked up Catholic Answers Live by shortwave radio listening to EWTN's 24-hour broadcasting. He became determined to bring the program to the diocese.

"The prime reason is to expose Catholics to good solid programming," Buonemani said. "I think there are enough people who would enjoy this kind of program."

He approached Dr. Joseph DiPoala Sr. after hearing him talk at a Knights of Columbus Council 178 meeting. DiPoala is president of St. Luke's.

Airing the show will cost \$4,019 — or about \$77 an hour — during the first year, according to Buonemani. He is personally selecting recordings of episodes he considers most appealing and educational for broadcast on WDCZ.

The first locally aired program will feature Rosalind Moss, who converted from Judaism to Protestantism and then to Catholicism. April 30 will feature Father Joseph Fessio of Ignatius Press on "Good News in the Church." May 7 will feature "Our Lady of Guadalupe," and May 14, George Weigel, who wrote *Witness to Hope*, a biography of Pope John Paul II.

102.7 FM is a religious station that began

operations in 1993. According to its manager, Bob Hammond, it airs local programs and services of numerous mainstream and independent Protestant denominations. "Catholic Answers Live" is the station's first Catholic program, Hammond said.

The station's signal reaches west to Batavia, east past Newark, and south past Honeoye.

—Kathleen Schwarz

Recognizing

Father Kevin E. McKenna, chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester, served as chief editor of a new book from the Canon Law Society of America titled *Church Finance Handbook*. The reference text on church property administration is intended to answer questions that such people as pastors, business managers, and parish council and finance council leaders face every day.

Students at Aquinas Institute, Rochester, raised \$2,250 for the Al Sigi Center's "Just One" appeal earlier this year, the highest total of the 37 area high schools that participated. The appeal benefits the Rochester center, which serves people with various disabilities.

Sister Mary Judith Waldt, MHSJ, former co-director of religious education for Assumption of Our Lady Parish, Fairport, has been elected president of the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart, headquartered in Towson, Md.

The 1999 edition of *Our Lady of Mercy High School's* literary magazine *Mercedes* has been awarded a superior rating from the National Council of Teachers of English. Erica Bryant and Molly Clancy, both of whom graduated in 1999, co-edited the Brighton school's magazine.

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