

COMMITTING

Continued from page B1

Joan and David Wilcox Sr. said they never meant for their children to go so long before becoming full members of the church. By the time David Jr. was born, Joan had four children under the age of 8. Trying to bundle everyone up and get to religion class was nearly impossible, she said, so the family decided to take a year off and return to religious education the next year, assuming they could just catch up. But the family soon found out that catching up didn't work, according to Joan.

"It wasn't a matter of we chose not to; it just kind of fell by the way-side," she said.

As they got older, the children expressed interest in going through RCIA, but life got in the way and they always seemed to miss the program's start date, their father said. David Sr. said he felt guilty going up to receive the Eucharist while his children were sitting in the pews, and it eventually got to the point that every time the family went to Mass, the kids would start asking their parents when they were going to make their first Communions.

"The kids were really the catalyst to follow through on this," he said.

Joan and David Sr. are quick to point out that it wasn't as though their family went through some sort of religious awakening; rather, they just realized that it was time. Their lives were still as busy as ever — with all three teens on school sports teams and David Jr. involved with Boy Scouts — but they made full membership in the church a priority.

Joan said she's glad her children are going through RCIA now, although it certainly has made the last few months busier. Since both she and her husband work on opposite sides of town, arranging rides has been a struggle, but they agree it's worthwhile. David Sr. asked his children if they knew and understood the commitment they were making, and all three said they did.

"This was a priority, and everything else kind of fell to the side. You do have to make that commitment. Anything worth having is worth working for," he said.

David Jr., Amanda and Tim and the four other children in their RCIA group meet once a week with Mercy Sister Miriam Nugent. Sister Nugent, pastoral associate at St. Charles, leads the children's group as well as two groups of adults going through RCIA. Participants in the children's group range in age from first-grade students to seniors in high school, she said.

This wide age range is the biggest challenge she faces while leading



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Tim Wilcox receives a hug from Bishop Matthew H. Clark during the Rite of Election ceremony Feb. 29 at Greece's Our Mother of Sorrows Church. Tim and his siblings, Amanda and David Jr., were among the nearly 600 adults and children throughout the diocese who participated in Rite of Christian Initiation programs this year in preparation for the Easter Vigil.

youngsters through the process, Sister Nugent said. She tries to meet the needs of all the children and reach them at their own level as she teaches them about the sacraments, the Bible and the elements of Catholicism.

"It's very Scripture-based. That's the first thing I do, is teach them how to read the Bible," she said. "I try to get across to them what Christ did for them and Christ's life and how it relates to this life. It's very rewarding to see them pick up their faith."

The process is slightly different every year, Sister Nugent said, because the candidates and catechumens are different each year, bringing different backgrounds and

levels of understanding. Being in a group with younger children can be frustrating to older ones, like the Wilcoxes, so Sister Nugent tries to provide them with additional age-appropriate materials if she feels they need more. She also believes both younger and older students can benefit from hearing the perspectives of a different age group.

Joan said she enjoys driving her children home from sessions with Sister Nugent. Each child has a slightly different take on the material they learned, and they often discuss it on the way home.

"It's interesting to hear what they say about it. They all kind of hit it on a different level," said Joan, who be-

lieves this discussion helps her children gain a better understanding of what they've learned.

Several weeks ago, Sister Nugent showed the initiates how to pray the rosary and gave them a packet explaining the different prayers. Amanda has been praying the rosary every night since, and said it has helped her learn the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be. She knew some of the Mass responses from attending church and playing in the bell choir before she began the initiation process.

"(Mass) is kind of getting more comfortable as we go along. It's becoming more familiar," Amanda said.

Each Sunday during Mass, the Wilcox children and the other candidates and catechumens leave the rest of the congregation after the Liturgy of the Word and talk with an adult, usually a staff member or volunteer from St. Charles. In these sessions they can discuss what they've just seen and heard, which helps them get to know and feel more comfortable with other members of the parish community. Going through RCIA as adapted for children is slowly taking the mystery out of the Mass and Catholicism in general, the Wilcoxes said.

"Listening to the homily, I kind of understand it because I know why this stuff happened and what it was about," David Jr. said.

Between weekly sessions and the talks after each weekend's Liturgy of the Word, the Wilcox children learn a lot, but sometimes they still have questions. Joan, who was born into a Catholic family, and David Sr., who converted to Catholicism more than 10 years ago, say that between the two of them, they can usually answer most of their children's questions.

"The church isn't new to them, but a lot of the finer points are. We still have a lot of the practical things to go over," Joan said.

Although the process has made their lives busier and more complicated, the children are enjoying it, and their parents are proud of them for making the commitment to become full members of the church.

"They are following through on it. I felt guilty before, but now I don't because they are going down the right road," David Sr. said.

B23

Faith & Family

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