

Highlighting RCIA



RCIA, an acronym for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, is a thriving and ongoing ministry of St. Francis by the Sea. The beginnings of this program can be traced to the early Church, but the revival came in the early 1970's after the revisions of Vatican II. Prior to the establishment of RCIA, adults seeking full communion in the Catholic faith consulted a priest and were instructed on a private one to one basis. With the advent of RCIA, the focus shifted to a communal one, with the group, instructors and other volunteers forming a community within the main body of the Church.

Participants in the program fall into two categories. The first are those who have not been baptized. These are the catechumens. They will receive the rite of baptism prior to confirmation at the Easter Vigil or other appropriate time. The catechumens have godparents who support them on their faith journey. Adults who have been baptized in other Christian denominations, whose baptism is recognized as valid, are candidates. These individuals have sponsors who serve the same function as godparents. RCIA is a series of rites interspersed with teaching and formation through which adults can enter into full communion in the Catholic

Church. There are four stages in the RCIA: the Precatechumenate, or period of inquiry and evangelization; the Catechumenate, which is a time of serious and dedicated formation; the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, which coincides with Lent; and Mystagogy, which lasts from Easter to Pentecost. All of these stages are marked by distinct liturgical rites.

There are currently 23 adults enrolled in the RCIA program including 9 in the Hispanic RCIA. Many of these have been attending weekly classes since September. However, anyone interested in joining the program may enter at any time of the year. The program is open to inquiry throughout the year. The program is extremely flexible; there is no pressure from the instructors or sponsors to commit to joining the Church. The Holy Spirit is the guiding presence for all involved in RCIA. And there are many, many people involved in RCIA.

The guiding members of RCIA are Sr. Kathleen, who is in her sixth year of instruction, and Charlie and Pat Birmingham, who are in their fifth year of participation. Sr. Kathleen brings her perspective as a religious; Charlie as a former RCIA

participant, and Pat as a “cradle Catholic.” They work well together and continually evaluate the program to improve it. Other core team members include Kay Drescher, Mary Jo Happle, Ricki Goshorn, and Pat Gilmore. This year evenings of prayer and reflection have been added with wonderful results. It is easy to see their enthusiasm and dedication in bringing adults into the Catholic faith. However, they are dependent on many other volunteers who support the program.

Priests and deacons attend classes and instruct the candidates in a variety of areas. Father Mike, Father Chris, Father Bell, Deacons Joe, Matt, and Gerry, and Director of Music Ministries Jonathan Davis all work as a team to educate the catechumens and candidates in the Catholic faith. Don't forget the sponsors and godparents who are essential to the success of RCIA. There are many others who contribute to the program, both individuals and church ministries. There are many who come to the meetings occasionally to share their faith and experience. There are those on the hospitality team who provide light refreshments to the class each week, those who help with the annual Pot Luck supper, the Prayer Shawl ministry who made prayer shawls for each catechumen and candidate, and the Women of St. Francis who made rosaries for each one. The SCC, Believers without Borders, presented an entire evening of faith sharing and personal witness.

The RCIA class at St. Francis truly embodies a community of seekers and believers. There

is a special bond between all candidates and catechumens that lasts well beyond the Easter Vigil. Weddings, births, and baptisms are often celebrated with group members years after the classes have ended. Sr. Kathleen, Charlie and Pat have noticed through the years that members of RCIA are often the most involved in the life of the parish, a tribute to the program.

As the candidates participate in the Scrutinies during Lent, they need the prayers of each of us in the parish. Be sure to take the name of a candidate or catechumen as you leave Mass to pray specifically for that individual as well as for the group. The support and witness of the entire parish is important. If you want to get more involved, contact Sr. Kathleen or the Birmingham's to find where you might support RCIA.

Remember that RCIA is ongoing year-round. Whenever someone comes to the team, they work with them. Even though the program is



a communal one, they offer individual counseling. They have worked with candidates in various stages of life – from a teenager to a 90-year-old. No matter what the age or circumstances of the individual, each becomes a part of the RCIA community and shares a very special faith journey. They deserve our prayers and support.