



ASSUMPTION

of the
Blessed Virgin Mary
PARISH

RCIA: Inviting Others to Experience the Journey of Conversion in the Catholic Church

MARCH 2017
Inside

At its heart, Catholicism is about a journey of conversion and faith. God constantly calls out to each one of us, supplying us with grace to respond to Him and calling us to a deeper relationship with Him. Often, it is easy to forget this aspect of our faith, associating it instead with specific acts such as going to church, being involved in a ministry, or monetary donations. For those who want to join the Catholic Church, however, the aspect of conversion and journeying is made clear through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or RCIA process.

“Coming to the Church doesn’t just bring about a conversion,” says RCIA Team Leader Missy Lowrey. “Just joining doesn’t bring about a change of heart – a couple lessons don’t make you see the changes that God makes in your life. It’s a journey, and a person going through a journey of conversion takes time. It’s a change in your head and in your heart. This is how they did it in the early Church, so we’re going back to the roots of Catholicism in this way.”

Here at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a team of 13 people leads individuals in RCIA through a nine-month process. The process culminates with receiving the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion – at Easter and formally joining the Catholic Church. In this way, those who are interested in the Catholic faith



After RCIA, catechumens and candidates receive the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion.

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not only are taught the basic teachings of the Church, but also are invited to experience ongoing conversion through breaking open God's Word and experiencing community support.

"Through this process, they realize they think different, feel different, and are different," Missy says. "When you realize God has been there the whole time, your whole outlook on life changes – how you want to live, how you want to be better, how you can do what Jesus would do. You start living a God-based life instead of a me-based life."

During the RCIA process, the participants first receive an overview of the Catholic faith followed by three meetings in team members' homes to further discuss the faith, prayer and seeing God in one's life. After these sessions, they then attend Mass together each weekend, leaving after the homily to further break open the Word together. The combination of fellowship, prayer, lessons, and learning lasts roughly nine months, and culminates with the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation during the Easter Vigil.

"It's beautiful to see people go from cautious to comfortable, from uncertain to becoming part of our community and building relationships," Missy says.

This year, five new people will be joining the Church at Easter – Chris Demille, Megan Donaldson, Megan Butler, Chris McDaniel, and Annelise Solberg.

"It's part of our stewardship and responsibility as a community to pray, support, and love them," Missy says. "It's vital that the community share in this with them and as we support, we realize deeper how we have to live the faith out ourselves."



Here at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process is led by a team of 13 members, truly showing how the ministry takes the efforts of many people in the community and the prayers of all to help share the faith with those who are interested in joining the Catholic Church.



For those who are joining the Church, the Easter Vigil is the culmination of many months of prayer, learning, growing, and receiving God's love.

Please keep these people in prayer as they continue their journey in the Catholic faith! If you would like to learn more or have questions, please contact Missy Lowrey at 314-630-3983.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

The Season of Lent: A Pilgrimage to Joy

Dear Parishioners,

Pope Francis sent us a letter in 2013 entitled *The Joy of the Gospel*. It is a beautiful reflection on the deep joy which can be ours in Christ Jesus. It is this joy which sustains us in our mission to bring Christ to the world. Even while fear and obstacles attempt to block us, this joy which comes from the Spirit of Christ dwelling in our hearts can lift us up and strengthen us to persevere in faith, to continue in our efforts to build the Kingdom.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis invites us to see through the two “lenses” of Lent: the lens of baptism and the lens of penitence. As we journey through Lent, we accompany our catechumen and candidates through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, preparing to celebrate with them the great Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. We are all invited to follow their example of faith and recommit ourselves as disciples of Christ.

The lens of baptism and the lens of penitence together reveal a vision of heaven on earth, the Kingdom of God present in our midst. The divisions, the misunderstandings, the disappointments, the struggles, the suffering, the pain... and the dying,



which tempt us to bitterness and despair, are being healed before our very eyes. The season of Lent is a calming of the seas which allows us to see clearly. The invitation to do penance is an invitation to calm our souls and recognize the very Spirit of Christ dwelling in us; the same way we see the beautiful coral reef beneath the waters of the ocean. Just as impatient fishermen cannot slow down enough to see the life beneath their boat, we are sometimes afraid to slow down. When things are cloudy all around us, we can continue to complain, to criticize, to carry resentments, to be less than the best version of

ourselves. There is a risk in slowing down, in pausing to see. What if there is no life under my boat? Will Jesus invite me to cast my nets in deep waters? Or will He leave me wandering in search of meaning and purpose in my life?

It is important for us to take time to pray, to fast, to serve, to love, to confess... to enter ever more deeply into the waters of baptism during Lent. When we emerge from these waters, we will be ready to say “yes” again to our faith in Jesus’ power to save. And we do this together. Not one of us is alone in this journey. This season of Lent is an opportunity for us to begin again, as disciples and as a parish family. The Joy of the Gospel can be ours. Let us together walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, on Calvary, to the Cross, into the Tomb and into Resurrection Life. Let us join Mary, bringing the Risen Christ to the world.

Per Matrem Ad Filium,
(Through the Mother to the Son)

Fr. Mitch Doyen

Fr. Mitch Doyen,
Pastor

“With God in My Life, I See

Kathy Hicks Reflects on Her Path to C

If you have ever met parishioner Kathy Hicks, you know what a life transformed by the love of Christ truly looks like. Kathy came to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process at Assumption 13 years ago, and has long since become a fixture at the parish. She participates in countless ministries, and it would truly be difficult to imagine our parish without this tireless and faithful servant!

Looking back, Kathy realizes she had always felt a closeness to the Catholic Church, even as a young child. Although they had never been baptized or attended a Mass, Kathy and her siblings took part in a few faith traditions carried out by their mother, including the placement of a Nativity scene under the family’s Christmas tree and an observance of the Lenten season. So, it was not surprising when Kathy chose to enroll at a Catholic university, which brought her even closer to a life of faith. Following her college graduation in 2003, Kathy moved to O’Fallon with her mother and began looking at area churches. When she saw Assumption for the first time, she says, something just felt “right” about the church.

Kathy immediately made inquiries about starting RCIA classes and was matched with a wonderful and supportive sponsor. Though Kathy was excited about preparing to enter the Church, that year would prove to be the most difficult of her life.

“To be honest, it wasn’t easy,” Kathy admits. “In fact, I wasn’t sure if I would make it to the Easter Vigil. While the RCIA sessions were amazing and I was learning so much about the Catholic faith, I was dealing with a medical issue that was making it difficult for me to maintain my focus. I was starting to become angry with God because of the pain and agony I was in. That year, I found out that I was carrying a seven-pound fibroid tumor, which was causing excessive bleeding and excruciating



Kathy preparing for Mass.

ating discomfort. My feelings were all over the place, because I didn’t understand why this was happening to me.”

In desperation, Kathy turned one day to the Scripture that describes Jesus’ experience in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). Reading the words of Christ as He prepared for death – “not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39) – completely changed the way Kathy viewed her circumstances. She began repeating a mantra to herself: “Jesus suffered more than I did, Jesus suffered more than I did.” Later, it would be this newfound perspective that would help her when she received some devastating news – after

many failed attempts to get her bleeding to stop, Kathy’s doctor informed her that she would need to undergo a hysterectomy just days after the Easter Vigil.

Despite her suffering, Kathy was able to turn to her growing trust in the Lord and find a fullness of joy in the coming days.

“Instead of focusing on the pain, I began thinking of the joy of becoming Catholic, so I put all of my energy into the Sacraments,” she explains. “Oh, what an amazing [Easter Vigil] night! People said I couldn’t stop smiling. I went into the water a hurt and broken person, and came out a new creation, born of the Holy Spirit.

“A few days later, I received the Anointing of the Sick, and was prayed over,” she continues. “And then, I was in the hospital receiving a blood transfusion. I went into pre-op, terrified and alone – and then I heard a voice say, ‘You are not alone: I’m here with you.’ To this day, if it weren’t for RCIA giving me the faith foundation and illustrating that God loves me, I don’t know where I would be.”

Having a strong sense that she was being called to be a servant of Christ, Kathy now jokes that she

“Every Day as a Blessing”

Catholicism and a Life of Stewardship

“wasn’t even dry yet” from her baptism before she had jumped head-first into parish life! Thankful for the life-changing weekend provided through her first Christ Renews His Parish retreat, Kathy has dedicated countless weekends to helping out with this ministry over the past 13 years. In addition, she has served as a RCIA sponsor, a sacristan, a lector, a Eucharistic Minister, and a coordinator of Holy Week Masses, and has also helped the Social Justice Ministry bring awareness to Fair Trade.

Although Kathy was already serving the parish in so many capacities, seven years ago, one of her friends told her something that would inspire her to get involved with even more ministries.

“At a meeting I was attending, someone said, ‘We are all moms here,’” Kathy remembers. “And that was like a knife to my heart, because I can’t have children. It took my very good friend to see that I was hurting, and she said this to me – ‘I have to be a mom to my two children before I can even think about anyone else – but Kathy, you can be the spiritual mom to so many children.’ *That is a moment that changed me.*”

Following that conversation, Kathy looked into the possibility of working with the children of Assumption. She served as the helper to a PSR teacher for two years before becoming the PSR teacher for the third grade. Now, some of her first students are preparing for their Confirmation, which has led her to help out with the Youth Group. Her desire to work with the parish children also inspired Kathy to become the Altar Server Coordinator, which in turn brought her to serve on the Liturgy Committee as well.

For Kathy, giving back to God in service to His people is a natural way of thanking Him for bless-

ings received. And on one of several mission trips she has made to Belize, Kathy was witness to a truly inspiring act of stewardship.

“One of my mission groups was blessed to witness a First Communion Mass,” she says. “It was in this small church – which also doubles as a school building – and it was packed with families and friends. During the offertory collection, people were coming forward to place money into a little bowl in front of the altar. These men and women have next to no money, and yet they tithe because they have faith.”

Reflecting further on the role of stewardship in the faith life of a church, Kathy views the three facets of stewardship as inextricably linked.

“I don’t see time, talent, and treasure as three separate concepts,” she says. “It’s like the Holy Trinity – three persons in one body. All three work together to bring life to a parish. When I think of church, it’s not about a huge place with stain glass or fancy equipment – it’s about what we are called to be: one body in Christ, which is what stewardship is to me.”

In all things, Kathy gives thanks for the many ways that the Lord has touched her life since she first arrived at Assumption 13 years ago. What abiding joy she has found!

“Before I became Catholic, I just went through my normal day – wake up, go to work, come home,” she says. “Now, with God in my life, I see every day as a blessing. I take time to appreciate what God has given me, and I’m starting to slow down and see those moments with a new vision of how God wants me to see the world around me. I think about my life, and what it would have been like if I hadn’t become Catholic, and I truly thank God for giving me such a wonderful gift!”

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Stewardship of Treasure

Giving to God First

Have you ever wondered why no one really becomes uneasy when someone brings up the first two “Ts” of stewardship – giving of your time or talents – but when the third “T” comes up, many of us become uncomfortable?

That third “T” is treasure, and some people simply become so annoyed by the subject, they tune out the words from the pulpit.

Why is there seemingly such an adverse reaction?

Our finances are such a personal subject. Discussing money issues with others is not easy, and having someone tell us what to do with our finances is even worse. We earn the money, after all. So shouldn't we decide what to do with it?

Of course, the answer is “yes” – we decide every day how to spend our hard-earned dollars. Indeed, the monetary choices we make will either keep our finances in check, or put us into the red. The average American family has about \$7,000 in credit card debt – so finances certainly represent a challenge to our current society. Tight budgets, trying to “keep up with the Joneses” or poor financial management may be to blame for our tight re-

sources. Does this mean we do not have anything left over for God?

Stewardship, at its roots, teaches that we are not supposed to give God our “leftovers.” We should instead strive to return to God a portion of our “first fruits” – giving to God first and then using the rest for our other needs. God gave us our talents that help us earn a living, after all. He should come first.

This idea can be worrisome for many. If our finances are already strained, how will we ever find enough to give back to God? Or, if we do try to give God our “first fruits,” will there be enough left over to cover our required expenses?

Taking the correct financial steps toward good stewardship simply boils down to trust – believing that God, who takes care of all of His creation, will take care of us. Trust that in giving to God first, we are both acknowledging that our multitude of blessings come from Him, and that we are thankful He chose to give them to us. And finally, trust that if we give to Him first, that all else will fall into place – because He is in ultimate control.

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Transmitting Healing and Comfort Through Intercessory Prayer

“I’ll pray for you.” As Christians, we say these words often – when we pass a friend at the grocery store, when a loved one is struggling, or during times of grief. Yet, as wonderful as this phrase is, how much more powerful is it to actually be prayed for at that very moment, receiving the power of the Holy Spirit and being reminded that we are not alone.

“I have learned over the years that it is much more powerful for me to take them in that moment and to ask if I could pray with them then and now,” says Prayer Team coordinator Doug Prize. “It makes that prayer experience much more real to them. Not everyone is necessarily called or comfortable doing that, but that is kind of what our ministry is all about.”

The ministry first started in 2009 with a periodic evening of Prayer for Healing and Hope, where parishioners could receive healing and forgiveness through Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, and finally through trained Prayer Teams. Later, the ministry expanded to also offer Prayer Teams following the Masses each first Sunday. This allows parishioners in need of prayer – whether for physical, emotional or spiritual needs – to open their hearts with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and to receive God’s healing graces through intercessory prayer.

“It’s all about that face-to-face encounter,” Doug says. “We are making God more visibly present to them through that personal encounter. God’s presence is there during the prayer time. It’s not the Prayer Team members’ holiness, it is just that God loves His people so much that when they have the courage to come up to strangers and ask for His help through their intercession, He just pours down His graces on them.”

Embracing Christ’s words, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20), Prayer Teams seek to bring hope and healing to parishioners through Christ’s name. In the process, parishioners are reminded that they are not alone amidst their struggles and are strengthened

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Members of the Prayer Team Ministry



Prayer Teams are available the following all Masses the first Sunday of the month, and every Sunday following the 10 a.m. Mass.

Seeking to continue making this resource available to parishioners, Prayer Teams have recently become available every Sunday following the 10 a.m. Mass, in addition to the first Sunday offerings at all Masses. Prayers for Healing and Hope will also be offered on Thursday, March 30 at 7 p.m. in the Church. All parishioners are invited to take advantage of these opportunities for healing. For more information on the Prayer Team ministry or upcoming events, please contact Doug Prize at 636-284-6613.

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Intercessory Prayer

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to carry their crosses.

"I think God really wants us as Catholics to be there for one another, supporting them in their faith journey and reminding them that they're not in it by themselves," Doug says. "They are also given comfort and are strengthened to carry the burdens of their illness or various life struggles – they are reminded that they are not alone."

This is very encouraging for Prayer Team members as well, says Doug. They are humbled to become God's instruments for peace and are also greatly touched by the faith and openness of those seeking prayer.

"I think you really see Jesus in people when they are broken, because that is Him on the cross," Doug says. "Seeing the way He meets them in that suffering has been a really powerful witness in my own life."



You are personally invited to attend the

Fifth Annual Day of Reflection!

When: 8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 4, 2017
(doors open at 7:30 a.m.)

Where: The Fr. Joe Kempf Parish Center at Assumption Church

The day includes reflections on seeking community with one another and finding communion with God. Our very own Fr. Zac will share a reflection, and we'll also have a presentation on Adoration from Fr. Mitch.

The Day of Reflection includes lunch and an opportunity to bond with fellow parishioners. Feed your spirit during this holy season of Lent!

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday: 9:00 a.m. (MH), Vigil Mass 5:00 p.m. | **Sunday:** 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., Noon

Daily Mass: Monday – Friday: 8:00 a.m., MH at 6:30 a.m.

Perpetual Adoration: 24 hours a day, seven days a week

Reconciliation: Thursday 6:00-7:00 p.m. in the Chapel, Saturday 4:00-4:45 p.m. in the Church