

THE MORE THE MERRIER: EASTER BLESSINGS FOR THE RCIA

In my nearly twenty-nine years as a priest, I have never witnessed such a large group of people who were baptized and/or received into full communion with the Church at an Easter Vigil. We welcomed 25 people into the Church, four through Baptism and 21 others who were sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation and received our Lord in the Eucharist for the first time. I consider it to be a tremendous privilege, attributable to the grace of God and the leadership of **Patrick Conley**. He has been an outstanding evangelizer, mentor and guide to so many whose inquiries have led them to knock on our door, pick up the phone or write an e-mail. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops describes the **Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults** as a process in which participants “undergo...conversion as they study the Gospel, profess faith in Jesus and the Catholic Church, and receive the sacraments...The RCIA process follows the ancient practice of the Church and was restored following the Second Vatican Council as the normative way for adults prepare for baptism” (cf. Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #64–66).

Make no mistake– it is rather involved, made up of **six phases**: Pre-Catechumenate (period of inquiry), Rite of Initiation (welcomed at a 10:00 a.m. Mass last fall), Catechumenate (weekly Thursday evening catechetical sessions), Rite of Election (First Sunday of Lent), Sacraments of Initiation (at the Easter Vigil) and Mystagogy, a post-Easter period of reflection. The final phase employs a word of Greek in origin, translated as “to lead through the mysteries.”. In the fourth century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem identified his preaching to the newly baptized as *mystagogical* when he spoke of “these daily instructions on the mysteries.” You may recall that Bishop Ambrose of Milan oversaw the preparation of Augustine of Hippo for Baptism. It requires a significant commitment from the candidates and they have been as faithful as they have been inquisitive all year long.

The **Second Vatican Council** called for the re-establishment of the Catechumenate, alluding in part to the ancient practice of the Church. The earliest post-apostolic picture of the catechumenate comes from The Apostolic Tradition, written by **Hippolytus of Rome** (d. 235 AD). When newcomers came to the church, Hippolytus insisted that they be interviewed, along with those who brought them, later called sponsors. Each new Catholic at the Cathedral has been accompanied by a sponsor. These selfless sponsors also commit to weekly RCIA meetings, and journey with those who are contemplating entering the Church. And yes, some choose not to continue in the program, discerning that the time is not yet ripe. God’s grace works in mysterious ways, and that is certainly the case this year as well.

God’s grace is alive in the Church! According to the 2016 Official Catholic Directory (OCD), baptisms totaled 683,712 for the year 2015. Of those, 39,721 were of adults and 71,809 people received into full communion, the latest with complete statistical data. That is most encouraging. The Catholic Church is growing in the South in ways we never would have thought possible even a generation ago. The Diocese of Raleigh, NC dedicated a new 2,000 seat Cathedral last July, replacing its former 320 seat Cathedral, as the diocese has grown by 42% in just the past decade. The Diocese of Knoxville, TN just dedicated a beautiful new 1,300 seat Cathedral in a diocese of 72,000 Catholics just one month ago.

As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, we are mindful of the many blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon us. He has graced us with the ability to see beyond the illusory promises of the world, in which happiness is too often equated with pleasure and self-expression. Our fundamental identity is one of being a disciple. Our primary point of reference is not ourselves, but the freedom and new life we have found in Christ Jesus. To those who were baptized or entered into full communion with the Catholic Church this Easter here at the Cathedral– congratulations and God’s blessings. We rejoice that you are part of our parish and pledge to you our continued support here in the family of the Church. None of us is perfect, but we strive to be perfected. You will find here a genuine love for *truth, beauty and goodness* and these are the same qualities that have kept people coming through these church doors for more than a century. May the Lord continue to bless us with many more people to our join parish. I extend to all of you reading this column most Blessed Easter.

- Speaking of mystagogy– this year’s Twins squad is a bit of a mystery. I’m optimistic by nature each Spring

(the Polanco steroid suspension fiasco aside), but feel a bit unsure this year. The Twins were the first team to lose 100 games one year and make the post-season the next, so the trajectory is good. Adding some new players through free agency will help, and I believe that Max Kepler is going to have a break-out season. The Twins will improve slightly on last year's total and finish with **89 wins** and another post-season appearance.

- “Please place all your items in the overhead bins.” Or not! Your generosity in the collection of medicines and funding for the Cathedral in San Juan, Puerto Rico is truly amazing. I spent time on Palm Sunday afternoon arranging all the medicines in the rectory basement (see photo), excitedly opening all the packages like a kid at Christmas! It looks like the newest branch of CVS Pharmacy! It is truly better to give than receive. We'll surely need to mail the medicines, but I will visit the Cathedral during the Twins and Indians two-game series on April 17-18 to present our gift check.
- Join us next Sunday for a **Divine Mercy Program** from 2:00-3:30 p.m. Fr. Jaspers will lead the prayers and we welcome transitional deacon Peter Toulee Ly (St. Vincent's campus of the Cathedral) to preach a homily for the occasion. Our growing Divine Mercy Cenacle continues to be a powerful witness to God's loving mercy.
- Our parish office will be closed Easter Monday for a well-deserved break for our valued employees. The Church will open at 9:00 a.m. See the schedule below.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector