

THE RCIA JOURNEY IN ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL PARISH

On November 22, the Feast of Christ the King, St Patrick's Cathedral Parish Ballarat celebrated the baptism of adult catechumens and the reception into full communion of candidates, as well as the baptism of children. It was indeed a wonderful parish experience as there were entire family groups baptised. The school age children had taken part in RCIC formation and the adults had journeyed through the stages of the RCIA process. Yvonne and Darryl and their two children Ella and William were baptised. Sandra was received into full communion and her two children Kai and Scarlett were baptised. Hollie and Dallas and their two year old son were also baptised. Christine and Darren were baptised; Jane was received into full communion and June was baptised. Following are the reflections of some of those involved in the journey.

Jane - Candidate

Standing on the sanctuary with the newly baptised and the other Candidates for Confirmation my mind swept back over the journey that led me there. I experienced conversion to Christianity eleven months prior and later progressed to the RCIA, and now, standing on the sanctuary I had finally reached the moment of the laying on of hands. What a journey it had been up until this moment and then all at once the journey seemed merely a perfectly designed path neatly laid out in a series of paving stones just for me to walk upon. As I looked around I realised this path was also perfectly designed to accommodate the eleven other adults and their five children, who had also wandered home, in their own way, just like me.



Waking up to believe in the Trinity was a beautifully jarring intimate brush with the unknowable, an overwhelming tidal pull that I could not control, love and growth and mystery demanding all of my attention. Recently baptised, at midnight on Christmas Eve 2014, I walked into the Cathedral with a new Catholic friend that I had met at an Anglican Baptismal education event. It was a good night indeed to be introduced to the beauty of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church.

I met Fr Justin Driscoll soon after this to discuss becoming a Catholic. To my disappointment he felt I needed more than two weeks to find my way and kindly broached the idea of a 'time of enquiry'. My new Catholic friend became my sponsor and guide, and a very special person in my life. I continued to meet with Fr Justin and to his credit he never laughed out loud as I unravelled like a badly woven tapestry, "But are you really sure I'm not ready yet?" I began to read about the Church and its teachings and while exploring papal missions I met Pope Francis. His small wave and radically loving heart both inspiring and provoking, just like Jesus. I watched the enigmatic Bishop Paul gently draw oil crosses on the foreheads of children, their eyes responding to the medicine of mercy in his touch. I listened to the homilies of the clergy that reached inside me and drew connection with my inner life in a way that cannot be described, thank you.

I breathed deeply during the Royal Commission and questioned why Catholic, why now? I saw the shadow that always chases light and felt the hounds of heaven drive me towards the truth the way and the life. I learned to pray for others and prayed hard for the victims of abuse and the blameless Clergy that shouldered the burden in the name of love.

Further debate with Fr Justin around my readiness assisted me to see that not being ready was not the same thing as not being worthy and then shortly afterwards I was publicly welcomed as a candidate. The RCIA team welcomed me into the RCIA with the kindest smiles and coffee and I learned about the essentials of Church life. The process also assisted a deeper understanding of the Gospel readings during Sunday Mass.

The preparation ceremony was completely beautiful and I experienced my first Reconciliation, during which I think I argued about the notion of sin and then accidentally confessed to something. I felt it lift up away from me as we were walking back for the ceremony of oils... so that's how it works. The warmth of the group was sustaining and as we stood together whilst Fr Justin moved to each of us during the laying on of hands I was overwhelmed by a feeling of just how right this was and just how ready I was to receive "The body of Christ", Amen.



June – Catechumen

The process of initiation into the Catholic Church was a very moving experience. My decision to join the Catholic Church is a reflection of a personal faith experience which led me to find my own faith. My own faith development has been fostered in a community of people working together. I have enjoyed encountering the Word of the Lord through the RCIA journey, as I profess faith in Jesus and the Catholic Church. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ during communion for the first time was a spiritually enlightening experience. It is through this experience that I have grown strong in my relationship living in light of Christ.

Christine & Darren – Catechumens

Both Darren and I would like to thank the RCIA, Fr Justin, Fr James and all of our teachers/guides during our Dismissals for truly making our journey into the Catholic Faith so lovely. The Reception Ceremony was a beautiful culmination to our Enquiry, Learning & Dismissals sessions, and It was so nice being part of such a welcoming group seeking to follow the same path as us. We have received so much from this experience, and we have learnt an awful lot as well! Again, we thank you for welcoming us into your Community of Faith

First time sponsor

To be asked to be a sponsor for an RCIA catechumen was indeed a privilege. I was a little apprehensive at first but I was willing to seek some direction. Time and commitment did not always allow me to accompany my catechumen in every aspect of the journey but none the less it was a very moving and enlightening experience. If I was the evangeliser I feel I was becoming the evangelised. I frequently reflected on a copy of a Sponsor's Prayer which I had been given and prayed it regularly, however, it was not until I passed on the Light of Christ from the Paschal candle to my catechumen as part of her Baptism ceremony that I realised that I had fulfilled my role in the journey to date. I trust that I can become a life- long support in her faith journey

Bernadette – Catechist

In sharing my reflections on what it means to be a catechist in the St Patrick's Cathedral Parish, I thought I'd start with a simple definition. A catechist is someone who supports the ongoing journey of those seeking to join a faith community as well as someone who shares their experience of a living faith and provides opportunities for catechumens to grow and understand what it means to live fully in the faith community.

If we were to put together a job description for catechists, it might include the following qualities/knowledge/skills/responsibilities:

- an awareness of God's grace and the desire to respond to that grace
- patience, responsibility, empathy, honesty
- a generosity of spirit, respect for diversity, and a sense of hospitality and inclusion
- a basic understanding of Catholic teaching, Scripture, and Catholic Tradition
- ongoing formation
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(adapted from <http://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2013/08/calling-forth-catechists-a-catechist-role-description/>)

The list could, undoubtedly be much longer but that might be a good start. Most of all, catechists need to be open to grow and this is one of the most unexpected aspects of the role. Despite reading and reflecting as part of my preparation, and having an outline of what we might do in a session, I am always surprised by the questions, observations, reflections and insights of the group. It is very humbling to see the richness of experience which people bring to our Parish community.

Something I read recently sums up the role of catechists quite beautifully in describing them as echoes of the Word. This poetic epithet describes not only catechists, however, but encapsulates all of us.

We congratulate the catechumens and candidates on their journey of faith and we ask all to remember them in their prayers.