

Diocesan Conference for RCIA

A small number of people from across the Diocese of Ballarat gathered at St Patrick's Cathedral Hall on Friday evening, November 15, to discuss the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) process in our diocese. As participants arrived, they were welcomed with a light meal and hospitality from the Diocesan Liturgical Commission.

The evening began with prayer and a welcome by Bishop Paul Bird, who gave a short reflection on RCIA. The main event of the evening was an "armchair discussion" which was facilitated by Ms Audrey Brown (Director Catholic Education, Ballarat). Members of the Panel, Fr Andrew Hayes, Ms Judith O'Sullivan, Sr Manuela Cabigas cssjb and Dr Susan Crowe, were invited to reflect upon the question "What is RCIA in your experience?" Each member gave a short presentation from different aspects of their experience including RCIA in the Philippines, New Zealand, a prison and a local parish community. There was an invitation for those attending the conference to ask further questions which were 'guided' by Audrey, which led to a discussion on RCIA practices in the Diocese.

The culmination of the evening was the launch by Bishop Paul of the revised "Parish Handbook for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults". Conference participants were invited to read the document and then ask questions of Bishop Paul and members of the Liturgical Commission present at the conference. Bishop Paul blessed all who attended, inviting them to return the following day for the state conference.



State Conference for RCIA



People from the four Victorian Dioceses gathered in Ballarat on November 16 for the RCIA State Conference. The theme for the conference, "It takes a village..." was chosen by the planning committee as they wanted to highlight the importance that the Parish community has in the welcoming of catechumens into the life of the Church.

The day began with prayer, which set the overall feel of the day – one of community, enthusiasm and sharing. Bishop Paul welcomed all to the conference and gave a brief overview of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. The facilitator

for the day, Ms Audrey Brown (Director of Catholic Education, Ballarat) then introduced our first Key Note Speaker, Fr Kevin Lenehan who spoke to those gathered about the importance of community: **Created for Community: Receiving the Grace of the Other.** We cannot live as a Christian by oneself – we all need others, as we have been created in and through relationship. Our nature was "breathed into being" thus our relationship of love and friendship with God.



Kevin emphasized the points that:

Human persons stand in relation -

- *to everything, to the whole of reality, and to God*
- *to the natural world*
- *to their culture*
- *to their historical context*
- *in particular relationships with other persons*
- *to oneself, interior self-awareness*
- *to one's body and other bodies*
- *every human person is unique, yet fundamentally equal in dignity.*

(Lenehan, 16.11.2019)

Kevin further reminded us that we are responsible for not only maintaining these relationships but for recreating them when they are broken. For those who wish to join our community of faith through RCIA, they are also needing to build relationships.

"If you wish to become his disciples and members of his Church...you must learn to make the mind of Christ Jesus your own. You must strive to pattern your life on the teachings of the Gospel and so to love the Lord your God and your neighbour. Are you ready to accept the teachings of the Gospel?" (Rite of Acceptance of Catechumens)

Following this keynote address, we were fortunate to have a number of breakout sessions facilitated by those involved in RCIA from the different Dioceses. Ms Mandy Robinson explored the importance of **"RCIA for children in your village"** beginning with the question "What is the difference between a baptism program and the Rite of Christian Initiation (of Adults) adapted for children?" From the sounds coming from this group, quite a lively and engaging discussion followed. Ms Mary Anne Payne explored the "Who, what, when, where and how of Dismissals" in her breakout session **"Don't dismiss the Dismissals"**. She explained to her group that Dismissals afford the worshipping community the privilege of witnessing Catechumens being nourished by God's Word in a special way, as they are given the opportunity to relate the Gospel to their faith journeys. Mr Anthony



Kilmartin, a Pastoral Associate from Shepparton, led his break out group in investigating the question **“How do we learn or come to faith?”** Group members were given the opportunity to reflect upon their own faith journeys and were then reminded that we need to share these journeys with those with whom we work in RCIA.

Our second keynote address was presented by Ms Sharon Brewer who works for the National Centre for Evangelisation. Sharon spoke to the conference attendees on the challenges and opportunities of making our Church a joyful one in her address **“Will they find Joy?”** She used the themes put forward by the Plenary Council as a framework for her presentation. She firstly put the question to us – why do we have people wanting to join our Church at this time? – a question she (and we) often ponder during the RCIA journey. The response that we often receive is “They want what we’ve got”. They want the deep joy that can be found in our Liturgies, in our times of gathering together, in our times of prayer – they want to know ‘why do these people care for me?’

Our final breakout sessions were guided by Dr Julie Mitchell who took participants through an approach to spirituality **“Heart Wisdom”**, which seeks to be attentive and responsive to a person’s interior experience of opening mind, body and spirit to the enabling grace of God. Ms Jacqui Giuliano from the Archdiocese of Melbourne, presented a very practical workshop **“Come and See: Exploring the practicalities and possibilities of the RCIA for your context”**. Jacqui presented an overview of the rites, the roles and responsibilities of team members and particularly the role of the community during the RCIA journey.

The conference concluded with acknowledgements by Bishop Paul and a final prayer to send us forth to continue our work with RCIA with the hope of the community understanding that **“It takes a Village...”**

Dr Susan Crowe – CEOB Education Officer: Sustainability, Liturgy and Special Projects

