**My RCIA Reflection**

My RCIA experience was a great one and I learned so many new things about my faith, and I am looking forward to learning so much more as time moves forward. The main reason why I joined the RCIA program is because I wanted to come into full communion with my faith as well as strengthen my relationship with God, and the secondary reason why I joined the RCIA program is because I wanted to become more religiously active. The main thing that held me back from coming into full communion with the church was disapproval on the part of my family. But when I got closer to 18 my mother started encouraging me to start making my own decisions and finally at age 20 I took advantage of what my mother had said to me and I came back into the faith and entered the RCIA program. The whole process was great and, like I said before, I have learned a lot of new things about the church and I hope to learn so much more. The high lights that I had were mainly enjoying all of the ceremonies as I got closer to confirmation. The low lights I had were there were some things that I was taught that I found were difficult for me to accept but I got through them and that made me stronger. It was an amazing feeling to receive the sacraments at the Easter vigil because in one way it felt great to receive the sacraments and in the other way it felt good to end one journey and then start a new journey. The impact of becoming confirmed made a significant impact on my relationship with Christ, my family, etc. The impact that it made was that my relationship with Christ, my family, myself, and etc. grew fundamentally at every level. Some of my favorite things about the Catholic faith are all of the saints, First Communion, and all of the sacraments. If anyone was thinking about joining the church and coming into full communion with Christ I would strongly recommend it to them and that it is quite a journey and that the journey never ends. In the end it will all be worth it, and your relationship with Christ will become stronger and stronger. So if anyone wants to join the RCIA program to come into the church, please do not hesitate please make the transition and join the RCIA program and make the whole journey to come into the church.

**RCIA Candidate Ryan Russell Hebert**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

 Many years ago, when I started to attend Masses with Jerry, we discussed the topic of coming into full communion with God. It was continually something I desired for myself, but always said, “Maybe next year” as I recognized that the journey could be an overwhelming commitment. As I’m entering the stage of my life when I sense the need to get my existence in order, I felt it was time to enter the RCIA program. From the filing for an annulment from my first marriage, to the convalidation of my marriage to Jerry (yes, he did agree to marry me the second time), to the meeting of Bishop Callahan, to my first confession, to receiving the sacraments at the Easter Vigil…everything fell into place. I now recognize that this was something that I should have done a long time ago, as the knowledge and the gladness that I have gained from completing the RCIA process has given me the profound meaning and the full graces of God’s love that I had been missing for too long. I was anxious about my initial confession, but the sacrament of reconciliation brought the feeling of extreme peace of knowing that God has truly forgiven me for a life time of sins. The wisdom that I have obtained during the last eight months has brought me to a steadfast relationship with our God and the one, true doctrine. I have been enlightened to become a better person in my relationships and in my everyday life as a more loving, forgiving, and caring child of God. The Catholic Church can and is often misjudged due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the faith. The RCIA course provides the answers to all the confusion and misconceptions that non-Catholics and Catholics may hold.

 In closing, I want to thank the many people who gave me their encouragement and offered prayers during my exciting trip into the Catholic faith…also to Father Rolando, Deacon Jim, Father Dave, my wonderful instructor Susan, my sponsor Carol Kowieski (who lead my example), and to my loving husband Jerry who was perpetually by my side.

 I pray that together we will continue to intensify our faith and our love for God.

 **Diane Mancl**

**Journey into Faith By Myra Zydzik**

I came to the Catholic Church because of my Mother-in-law and I guess because of my Mother too. I used to go with my Mother to Mass, and when I was old enough to drive, I would take her. I guess I always had a fire inside me and a longing to know more about the Catholic Church. When my husband and I retired and moved to Wisconsin Rapids, we started to attend at Saint Lawrence when the “Calling Catholics Home” program started it was my chance to fill the space in my heart. The first year that I started I was working at McCain’s and after a while I was scheduled to work on the nights that the classes were held so I had to drop the class. Then in 2014 I was no longer working there so I started again. I know in my heart that it was God’s will that I wait the extra year because I was not quite ready, and He was right! When the next class came all the extra problems were gone.

 My Journey was incredible! The knowledge that I got was far above any expectations I had. My Sponsor was a gift from Heaven. We became best friends, and we have a relationship as if we were sisters. They say that with knowledge comes freedom and growth, they are right! I have become a totally different person, and I am at peace with the world and my life. I see good where others see indifference; I see God’s hand in all my days and all my decisions. My family has become very happy that I now am one of God’s chosen people. They believe that the only religion is Catholic, they may be right. It is the one that has made me whole. I made a promise to my Mother-in-law when I married her son, that before she turned 100 I would become a Catholic. My entrance into the Catholic Church was April 4; on April 3 she turned 97. My entrance to the Church was her Birthday gift from me. She is happy beyond all belief.

 The things I love most about the Church are the grand ceremonies and the Grandeur of the Church itself. It is a beautiful Lady. If you are longing for a place to belong, I would say to you come to the RCIA classes and learn what it is all about. If it is the right thing for you, then you will feel God’s love taking you into his arms and leading you to his Church to become one of his followers. For the rest of your life, you will know love, joy, and peace.

**“My experience in Saint Lawrence’s RCIA program”**

God created us in his image and likeness, he also gave us attributes that make us uniquely different. Thus is God’s plan for the journey of the catechumens to the Catholic Church. My journey has been made by millions of souls before and surely will be made by millions after. What made it unique to me were the choices and experiences I had along my path.

I learned in the RCIA program that humans are a body & soul union and together this makes up a whole person. Prior to entering into full communion with the Catholic Church, I only knew half of the human equation. I thought all I needed in life was to know that God exists and to follow the rules of society. When I received the Sacrament of Reconciliation my choices in life became real. It was an integral part of my spiritual connection to the Catholic Faith and opened me to a deeper understanding of the presence of the Holy Spirit. I realized how fortunate I have been that my path brought me to my wife and her understanding of grace. It was through grace I recognized the need to humble myself, to be obedient, and to give praise to God for all he has provided me.

During this Easter Vigil I received the Sacraments and it opened my eyes and heart fully. The sacraments change us; strengthen our identity with Christ and his call for us to be faithful and faith-filled. We’re made in his image and likeness and should aspire to conduct our lives as living temples of the Word. So it is with great peace and joy that one part of my journey ends and a life long journey begins.

Respectfully,

**Theodore C. Ashbeck Jr.**

I was Baptized Lutheran and had attended a Lutheran Church while growing up. Twenty years ago I married a wonderful Catholic woman and had three beautiful girls that were brought up in the Catholic Church. Throughout my years of marriage, I slowly fell away from my church. Although I had attended Mass on occasion with my family, it wasn’t until I had a conversation with an acquaintance that I felt that I was really missing something in my life. In a short time that acquaintance not only became a dear friend, but my RCIA sponsor as well. Raised in the Lutheran Church, I had struggled over what my family would think of this decision, but with the Grace of God and Guidance of the Holy Spirit things have worked out perfectly! The RCIA process has been wonderful. I feel blessed to have my family and Susan to guide me along this path. Everything from my first RCIA class, the retreat in Marshfield, to the Chrism Mass in La Crosse has been a wonderful experience. The Sacrament of Reconciliation truly gave me an understanding of what a loving and forgiving God we have. The highlight of my journey has been Holy week and the events leading up to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in His real presence at the Easter Vigil. I would tell anyone wanting to come into the Catholic Church, joining RCIA will give you the real understanding of how patient, caring, and forgiving our God really is!

 **Mark Stickney**