

# Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), May 2015

The following report addresses the parishes efforts this year with evangelization in relationship to the RCIA program. Briefly, the RCIA program operated very well overall and was successful in its purpose of providing a comfortable and safe community environment where people could learn more about their faith, as well as go through the process of coming into the church as a candidate or catechumen. There is little in this report that should concern the Pastoral Committee, and it is offered more as a vehicle for keeping this august body volunteer parish leaders aware of what is going on. The report will be more useful to Father Daly and to the next RCIA team that will be forming in the next months to begin organizing our parish efforts for the 2015-2016 liturgical year. God Bless.

Faithfully submitted by Deacon Jim Caldwell on May 21, 2015

## 1. **Leadership** - Who were the leaders....

Initially the plan was to have Miranda Jarnot and Gwen Haigwood lead the RCIA. Both parishioners agreed to lead it when Father asked them to do so. Both women worked for a number of years on different RCIA teams as walkers and as team members, and Gwen came into the church through RCIA. Up until this year, neither Miranda nor Gwen has led RCIA. In developing the information for this report, I talked only with Gwen because for the most part she acted as the only leader of the RCIA for most of the year. Miranda missed a lot of the meetings and did not appear to co-lead the RCIA as was originally planned. Miranda did give four talks and attended as a team member the retreat, and was of great assistance with a number of things, particularly in volunteering at the last minute to do a talk she was not originally scheduled to do. However, it was Gwen who served as the director of the RCIA during the 2014-2015 year.

2. **Team.** How many team members? 12 team members originally. This number included five team members who had not worked on the RCIA team before. While it was good to get new blood on the team, unfortunately all five stopped coming to RCIA on Thursday nights at various times after Christmas. It is unclear as to the reasons for their lack of participation after Christmas, but no matter the reason, this should not happen in future years because the team members commitment and ongoing gift of presence is very important to the success or failure of RCIA.

Additionally two people who had previously served as RCIA team members either had to drop out of participating or missed a significant number of RCIA gatherings on Thursday night because of family issues or other reasons. Again, this was detrimental to the program.

How many team members were new? 5 How many were repeat team members? 8 including Gwen Haigwood who lead the RCIA for 2014-2015. How many sponsors served? 11 sponsors served.

## 3. **Enrollees**

How many people came to RCIA originally as a result of the call by Father? We started with 63 people including walkers, sponsors, candidates, and team and Ended with somewhere around 35 people including walkers, sponsors, candidates and team. How many people came to RCIA

originally as a result of the call by Father? We started with 63 people including walkers, sponsors, candidates, and team and Ended with somewhere around 35 people including walkers, sponsors, candidates and team.

How many Catechumens? 3

How many Candidates? 5

How many Confirmands? 4

Started with this number and ended with this number though the beginning and ending number included different people. The people involved changed because some in these categories of enrollees left while others joined. The number of confirmed includes one gentleman who was deployed by the military and whom Father confirmed before he left. The number also includes two individuals who were unable to make RCIA gatherings on Thursday nights, but whom were received into the church. These two people received instruction in other ways so that they could be confirmed. .

As to the 63 of the original number . . .How many walkers? 11 How many Sponsors? 11

How many were team members? 12

The remaining 29 people came to the RCIA's first several meetings out of interest in learning more about the faith. This qualifies them as either potential candidates or walkers. They stopped coming for a variety of reasons, including some dropped out because making every Thursday night meeting was too big a commitment for them; some stopped coming because of nasty winter conditions; some small few were frightened away by the emphasis on making a commitment before the first scrutiny. This last category of souls is important because it is a matter of presentation more than anything else. They were in essence driven away by an overemphasis on getting them to commit to the first scrutiny because of Archdiocesan requirements for information.

**4. Average Attendance:** What was the average attendance? Through October we were up near 63, by November around 45, and as winter truly set in we got down to 35 and we remained at 35 for the rest of the year for the most part.

Like in past years, attendance dropped off after Easter and we ran somewhere in the range of 15 to 20 attendees including the team and the new parishioners. This decline in numbers is not unusual because some come to view Easter as a kind of graduation. This year the decline in numbers who attended RCIA sessions after Easter was exacerbated by the fact that a large number of team members and sponsors stopped coming. This year marked the first time in a lot of years where a significant number of Team members stopped coming in the weeks before and after Easter.

**5. Retreat-** how many went? About 24. How do you think it went overall? It went very well and typically changed the community because it serves to bond those attending together in a way that nothing else does.

Was the facility OK ... Short answer is Yes. From what the team heard based on comments made by Father Daly, he was not happy with the facility. Some team members commented on the cleanliness of the quarters, but the Cafeteria was spotless and the food rather good.

The RCIA retreat has been held at this facility for the last two years. The facility is a youth camp that is run by the Methodist Church, named The West River United Methodist Retreat Center. It is of close proximity and relatively cheap given the cost of such places these days, which can run upwards to \$225 per three day retreat. Our costs this year were subsidized for the catechumens and candidates who were charged, if they could afford it, \$60. The team members were charged \$120.

6. **How Did Things Go:** Anything you might like to share re how things went or anything missing from the support you would like to have in the future? The following are among the main issues that will need to be addressed for next year's RCIA program.

- A. **Sponsorship.** In past years in the RCIA generally discouraged husbands, wives and friends from being sponsors. This is because when a husband, wife, or friend serves as the sponsor, the RCIA director has no way of knowing what level of knowledge that person has about the faith, and they most likely have a reduced control over what the sponsor does in relationship to who they are sponsoring because the sponsor's first interest is on the relative or friend they are sponsoring and not on what has to happen in the RCIA process.

This year most of the sponsors were either husbands, wives, or friends of the catechumens and candidates. This created some predictable problems. One such problem happened as a practical matter: when a husband, wife, or a friend sponsor could not come to a particular RCIA session, then both did not come. Neither generally encouraged the other to show up when one of them could not come. This usually does not happen because when the sponsor is a volunteer church member they know their job is to encourage the candidate to come and to become a part of the community and not be dependent on their presence. When the church volunteer sponsor knows they cannot show up for some reason, they generally encourage the candidate or catechumen whom they are sponsoring to come. Because of how we did things this year, the number of participants at sessions were sometimes reduced by double the number of person who would miss sessions because both the friend/relative and the candidate did not come when one or the other had a conflicting commitment.

In one case, this year one of the sponsors who was a friend did not want to go to the retreat because that would have required her to get a baby sitter and so she convinced the candidate that she did not have to go to the retreat either. In another instance a husband and a wife team of sponsor and candidate had something that interfered with their attendance and so neither of them came to the retreat. Similar issues regarding attendance at meetings happened throughout the year.

Most importantly, allowing relatives and friends to be sponsors does not ensure you are combining people who have knowledge of the faith with the people who are coming into the church. Assigning sponsors to the candidates and catechumens who have a good working knowledge of the faith helps the candidates and catechumens immeasurably. This factor combined with the increased chance of reduced attendance should move us to go back to assigning volunteer sponsors from the community who are not related to the candidate or catechumen and who are knowledgeable in the faith.

- B. Commitment of team members** – For some reason this year, team member commitment to the ongoing nature of RCIA presence was low. All five of the new team members for the 2014-2015 RCIA year stopped coming to sessions around February and at least two repeat team members, people who had worked RCIA teams in past years, also stopped coming. The lack of commitment by team members to be present faithfully week to week left Gwen alone with the help of far fewer hands than most directors have had in the past. We need to do some things to ensure that this does not happen in future years. If someone drops out of participation in the team for whatever reason, they need to be replaced. Similarly, we need to do something to make sure that parishioners volunteering to work as team members are fully aware of the importance of their being at sessions throughout the year and particularly after Easter. The importance of this commitment to show up is of the highest importance.
- C. Space in the Parish Center.** The space that we were using was good and it accommodated the large number of people who initially responded to Father’s call to come to the RCIA. However, it had the huge disadvantage of requiring a lot of set up and break down time to break down and reconfigure space that is considered to be CCD space. Gwen had little help in breaking down the CCD configuration of tables because a large number of the RCIA team work during the day and cannot come early to set things up. Because of the requirement that tables and chairs be returned to an exact configuration according to the CCD program’s specification, it was not a very comfortable situation for the team, and particularly Gwen who was always worried about possible complaints from CCD. This may change as we understand that the RCIA will return to meeting in the basement of the Church next year so that the Addictions Thursday night programs can move into the space. Now they get to live in fear of CCD complaints.
- D. Prohibition on the Use of Email.** In past years in the interest of building community, email addresses have been gathered and shared among the team members and the community of RCIA attendees in the interest of facilitating communication and building community. This year the RCIA leader was instructed to under no circumstance share email addresses even with other team members out of a fear that someone, somewhere might use the addresses for some unknown purpose and a complaint be raised. This change in policy was damaging because it creates a communications process that requires every electronic communication from team or candidate to go through the RCIA director who is the only one who knows how to reach anyone coming to RCIA. This is an onerous policy that damages the prime basis of what RCIA is about, which is building a

community of believers who in trust shares the faith among one another. This policy has to change.

If there are concerns about misuse of email addresses, this could be addressed at the time of gathering email with an appropriate admonition concerning proper use. Everyone's email gets repeated and used eventually by people whom were not originally intended to receive the address. The church may be a receiver of complaints, but it is not responsible for people sharing around addresses. It is a high overreaction to complaints to restrict sharing addresses and despite pressure from offended persons, we should not draw back for gathering addresses. Problems can be addressed by making it clear that we will do everything reasonable we can to safeguard a shared address, but we are not responsible for instances where someone ignores our instructions and does something about sharing a person's address that they should not have done. This is the danger everyone faces when one has an email address. Live with it.

**E. Arrangement of Chairs and Tables:** Use of a classroom approach was detrimental to developing a community atmosphere. Unlike in past years, the RCIA space was through most of the year set up so that tables and chairs were arranged much as they would be if we were in a classroom setting. This focused all attention on the speaker for the evening, but hampered discussion afterwards by virtue of the fact that if you sat in the front of the desk arranged area, you could not easily see who was talking behind you. If you sat in the back of the area, you were looking at the back of a lot of heads. In past years the space has been arranged into a circle of chairs so that everyone can see everyone else. This was not thought originally feasible given the fact that we initially were dealing with 63 people. In future years the circle of chairs should be the first choice of arranging the RCIA space to facilitate discussion. It could have been done even for 63 people with two rings of chairs: not ideal because some still would have been looking at the backs of some people's heads, but they would still have been able to see most of the people's faces who were sitting in the circle.

**F. Exploration Contributing Factors for Why People Stopped Coming:** A good number of folks stopped coming to RCIA as a result of a couple of factors. First among these was that there were a number of souls who were not Catholic, but whom wanted to learn more about the faith, but who stopped coming once an announcement was made that the RCIA director needed to know who was coming into the church because they had to notify the Archdiocese [definitively] concerning their intent to join the church. A number of these souls were not in that place yet and so they withdrew. There has to be a better way of handling this so that someone who is seeking info but has not made a decision to commit to becoming a Catholic is not driven away because of some administrative practice or policy.

A second contributing factor for why people stopped coming to RCIA sessions was the weather, which was unusually cold and severe. A number of walkers stopped coming because of this.

The third contributing factor, though there is no definitive proof for this and in some ways it is an opinion, the lack of commitment by some team members for showing up regularly for RCIA sessions may have caused walkers, seekers, and others to adopt a relaxed attitude for coming to sessions.

**G. Lack of Team Meetings:** For some reason, there were no meetings of the team or of the team with sponsors. In past years, the team met several times in the first months to share impressions and debrief concerning any problems or how things were going with sessions. Similarly, in past years because the sponsors were chosen from among knowledgeable volunteer parishioners committed to the gift of an ongoing presence at sessions, rather than family members committed to their relative first and the process second, meetings were held with them regularly to inculcate them first with a clear understanding of what was expected of them and then on an ongoing basis over the remainder of the year to get their opinion of how things were going with their assigned candidate or catechumen. Because most sponsors were family members this year, it was neither easy nor doable to get them to come to meetings either initially to give them a clarified view of what was expected of them or to get objective feedback from them about how things were going with their relative.