



Front the Heart

A Newsletter ♦ Published by Sacred Heart Parish ♦ Main Street South, P.O. Box 686 ♦ Southbury, CT 06488



Five-Star Team



There was a time not too long ago when adult converts came into the Church through the back door, as it were. No trumpets blew, no announcements were made; silently they joined the congregation. Of course their families rejoiced, but longtime Catholics paid no heed to these new members. They just moved over in the pew!

All this changed as the result of an action taken by the Second Vatican Council on January 6, 1972—the revision and restoration of the early liturgical and formational process of Christian initiation. The revamped Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), which was mandated for use on September 1, 1988, sought to restore a vision of Christian community that had been at the core of the early Church. Sacred Heart, always in the fore-

front, was quick to embrace the rite. In 1984, four years before the 1988 mandate, the RCIA was formally instituted in our parish.

How does the RCIA work? It needs two elements: potential converts and parishioners who are filled with the Spirit and willing to make an enormous commitment in time and effort. We have such people at Sacred Heart. Father Flynn provides the candidates, some even from other parishes that do not have this program. Under his guidance, the lay members of the RCIA team implement the teaching process, which leads the candidates to complete entry into the Church at the Easter Vigil.

The process has five stages: (1) the *precatechumenate*, a teaching stage of introducing Gospel values; (2) the *catechumenate*, the time at which the candidates formally enter

into the program and signify their intention to embrace Catholicism; (3) the *Rite of Election*, the day the candidates are received by the bishop; (4) celebration of the *Rites of Acceptance and Initiation*; and (5) *mystagogia*, the period of postbaptismal catechesis after Easter, when the new Catholics experience the call to service in the Church. Throughout the process, each candidate works with a sponsor who provides both instruction and constant support. Sponsors bond with the candidates and sometimes even become godparents to their charges.

Our five-star RCIA lay team consists of leader Linda Groves and veteran sponsors Paul Donnelly, Sherry Rancourt, Sue Palma, and Mary Ellen McQuail. They meet with the candidates every Tuesday evening from October until Easter and also accompany the candidates at Mass (this is in addition to attending Mass on their own), leading them in reflection and discussion once they are dismissed after the Prayer of the Faithful. Add up the hours, and you can see what a total commitment in time this ministry requires of Linda, Paul, Sherry, Sue, and Mary Ellen.

Linda Groves, who is responsible for the instructional content of the RCIA program, came to Sacred Heart in 1988. This wife and mother of two was schooled in

Five-Star Team

(continued from cover)

Connecticut, where she became a teacher. Involvement in parish life, particularly in the Extend-a-Hand Committee, led Linda to enroll in a master's program at St. Joseph's and embark on a second career in pastoral counseling. She now works as a guidance counselor and a theology teacher at the Canterbury School in New Milford. When invited by Father Flynn to be a part of the RCIA ministry, she eagerly accepted the challenge. Linda also serves as a eucharistic minister.

Paul Donnelly, a native of Brooklyn, New York, began attending Sacred Heart as a part-time Village resident 20 years ago. For the past 12 years he has been a eucharistic minister, and when he retired as a site administrator for American Express 4 years ago, he joined the RCIA team. Paul welcomed this call, bringing to his assignment as a facilitator both knowledge and kindness.

Sherry Rancourt is a convert to Catholicism. When she married her husband, a Catholic, she considered joining the Church. Instruction was not available at the time, however, and the moment passed. Sherry saw all four of her children through CCD classes, but it was only when her youngest started religious instruction that she felt an unmistakable call to conversion. After going through the RCIA program at Sacred Heart, she was soon recruited by Father Flynn to join the team. Sherry is also a eucharistic minister and a member of the Extend-a-Hand Committee.

Sue Palma tells a story similar to Sherry's. She too married a Catholic. As a committed Episcopalian, however, Sue did not even consider conversion at the time of her marriage. Even though she was an

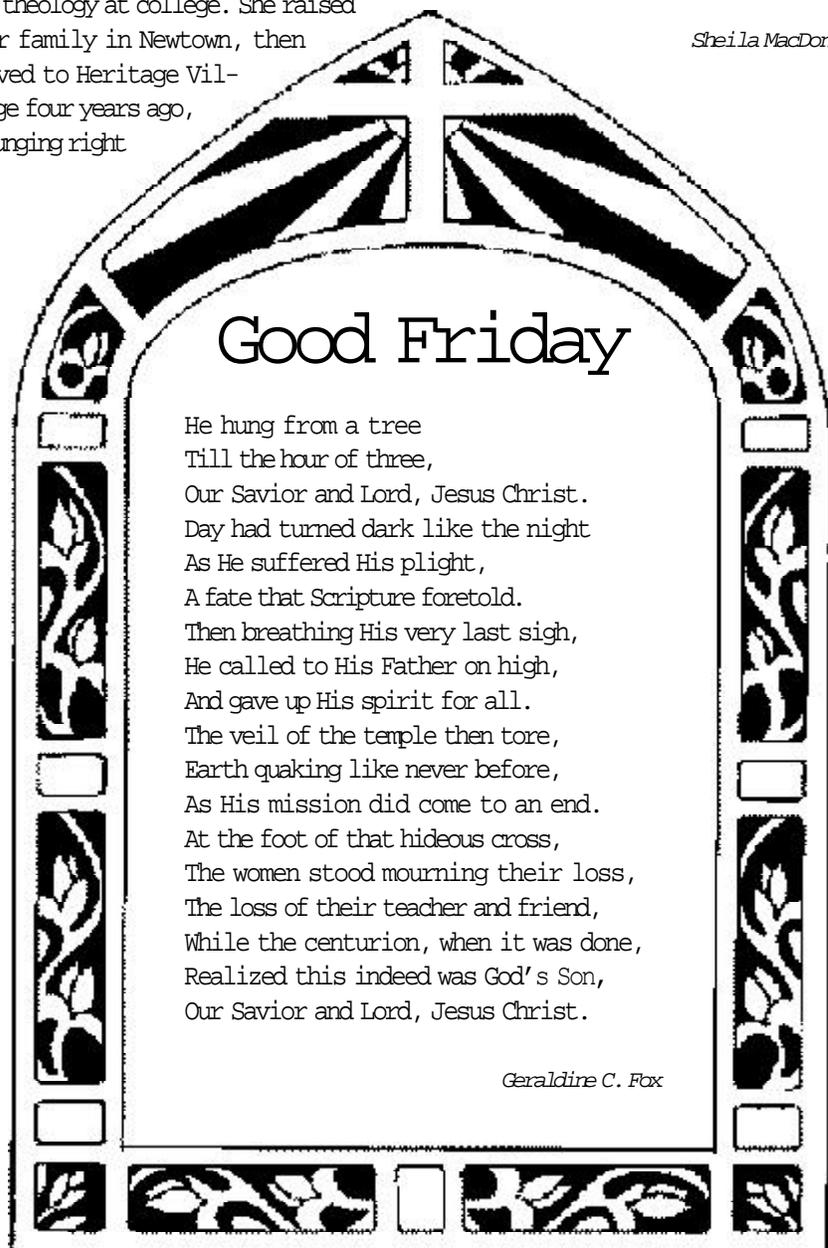
active participant in parish life, it was not until the last of her three children enrolled in CCD classes that she was inspired to review her religious state and enter our RCIA program, becoming part of the team shortly thereafter. She has also contributed greatly in other areas of the parish—as a catechist, as chairperson of the Welcoming and Hospitality Committee, and as facilitator of the 1994 Synod parish hearings.

Mary Ellen McQuail is the team's newest member. She was born in New York, where she attended Catholic schools, minoring in theology at college. She raised her family in Newtown, then moved to Heritage Village four years ago, plunging right

into church work. Mary Ellen participated in Extend-a-Hand and was elected to the Parish Council, serving as its president during her third year. Because of her special interest in the RCIA ministry, she asked to join it. Mary Ellen is most enthusiastic about the spiritual relationship that builds between the team members and the candidates; she believes that the Spirit's presence surrounds their sessions, overpowering and guiding the process.

The team—competent, caring, considerate, and Catholic. It's a Sacred Heart moment!

Sheila MacDonald



Custodian of the **Hearth**

In the late 1980s, when Sacred Heart's RCIA program was still in its infancy, Edward Comstock, a baptized but nonpracticing Methodist, accepted Father Flynn's offer to learn about the Catholic faith. A former carpenter, Ed, who has served as our custodial engineer since the new church was consecrated in 1989, is responsible for the maintenance and fine upkeep of the parish facilities that we have all become accustomed to.

While Ed did not choose to convert to Catholicism when he and Mary married at St. Joseph's in Danbury, he promised to bring up their children in the Catholic faith. Later, when Ed's oldest son became an altar boy, he decided to act on Mary's suggestion to attend Mass to see Edward Jr. serve. He immediately felt drawn to the religion, continuing to attend Mass with Mary and their four children for nearly a decade. Ed was such a regular at Mass that many parishioners whom he

had come to know thought he was a Catholic, but one who, for some reason, never received the Eucharist.

Since his conversion ten years ago, Ed, also an usher at the Saturday Vigil, has found inner strength from his faith, which helped him cope with the deaths of his parents in May and August of 1998. As an only child, the burden of these events fell heavily on Ed's shoulders, but the support he received from Father Flynn and his wife, Mary, a Catholic minister and a reader, helped him through and even further strengthened his faith. Today Ed views his conversion to enter the RCIA program, which has steadily evolved over the years as a turning point in his life, a decision that defined him both personally and professionally and in a good way.



Our camera-shy custodial engineer!

Rich Stephens

Weekend with the Boys

With the encouragement of Bob McGarry, I signed up for my first weekend retreat in 1992. Being a new convert to the Catholic faith, however, I was somewhat apprehensive about going. My mind was full of stories I'd heard about the strict nuns who had taught at parochial schools, and so I imagined getting a dose of doctrine in an unflinching, heavy-handed manner. Most of the time, I figured, I'd be on my knees praying—a bit worrisome for me, as I still didn't know my prayers by heart. Bob pooh-poohed all this and assured me I would enjoy the weekend.

Bob and I and a few other Sacred Heart parishioners arrived at the Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center in West Hartford on Friday evening, where we were joined by about 150 men from other Connecticut parishes. After a light supper and an orientation, Father Terry Kristofak, the center's director, introduced himself and the other members of the team. We listened to a talk about the theme of the retreat and then went to the chapel for an impressive prayer service. The night ended with an evening snack.

Saturday began with a morning service—prayer, readings, and a homily having to do with the retreat theme—followed by a big breakfast. After the first talk, which dealt with how the theme related to one's personal spirituality, I found myself getting into the reasoning behind the retreat and was actually enjoying it.

What happened next really impressed me. During a reconciliation service, which I had always thought of as a face-to-face meeting with a priest, we were asked to write down our sins, come forward to seek forgiveness, and then burn these "sins" in a fire. Lines of men talking softly to the priest and adding their "sins" to the spiral of smoke was truly inspiring. After another lecture and lunch, we were given the option either to attend a rosary service or to spend some quiet time.

(continued on page 4)



Weekend

(continued from page 3)

I wasn't much on the rosary, but I participated, figuring it was part of Church. We spent the rest of the afternoon in workshops, discussing topics such as male sexuality, the effect of our beliefs in our daily lives, and the Gospels. The evening began with the Eucharist, followed by dinner, more workshops, and finally vespers.

Sunday started off much the same as Saturday—with a prayer

service, breakfast, and a lecture. The Mass that followed was very special. A group of singers and a number of musicians who played flutes, guitars, drums, and violins had volunteered their talents for the service. The entire retreat team, along with many of the retreatants, participated in the liturgy. My only disappointment was that I had not been told about the traditional dress—jacket and tie. I was not alone, however, as a few others were also wearing sweatshirts. Spirits were high as the service ended and we went on to our final brunch.

Since that first retreat, I have attended five others. Each has been a little different, but all have been equally satisfying. Having a place like the Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center is a gift to the Catholics of Connecticut. More of us men from Sacred Heart should accept this wonderful gift. Imagine the sense of community it would give us to have 150 men from our parish alone! If you think a retreat is for you, contact me at 264-0408, or call Bob McGarry at 264-9028.

Ernest E. Swanberg

Ashes: A Badge of Honor

One winter, about 15 years ago, my family thought it would be a good idea to spend a few days at Spring Lake, New Jersey, also known as the Irish Riviera. I was not advised of the pending trip, however, until a credit card was needed.

Not being vacation season yet, no rental homes or hotels were available, so the group decided that a local bed-and-breakfast would more than suffice. The task fell to my oldest son, Tommy, to make the arrangements. After setting everything up, he delighted in informing me that the bed-and-breakfast's proprietor, Mr. Burbage, had heard of us. I wasn't sure if that was good or bad.

It was Ash Wednesday. We all piled into the car, arriving at Spring Lake less than two hours later. Shortly after we got there, I turned to my family and said: "Let's move it. St. Catherine's is waiting for us." I had made it a family tradition that we receive ashes on this, the first day of Lent, so, vacation or not, we were going to stick to my rule.

Seeing Monsignor Moore at the church, I volunteered Paul and Tommy to serve on the altar at Sunday's Mass. The monsignor declined my offer, advising me that the number of altar boys in the parish was battalion in size. I was disappointed, and when my sons echoed my feelings—not that I'm naturally suspi-

cious about my sons' piety—I suggested that they might want to inquire about the meaning of crocodile tears to see if it applied to their new saintly conduct. I was answered with innocent stares.

Then we all got in line for ashes—or so I thought.

Tommy and Lauren had disappeared. After looking around, I noticed them in the atrium and started walking back there. As I approached, Tommy, anticipating whatever arguments I was about to offer, said, "You know, this isn't even a holy day of obligation." Lauren, in one of the rare moments of her life, actually agreed with him. "Nor

a sacrament," she chimed in.

"Penance," I blurted out. "Ashes remind us of penance. Are you so good and holy and sinless that you don't need to be reminded that God will call us one day? It's a sign that you're Catholic, and I'm proud that I'm Catholic. Perhaps upon reflection you'll realize just how fortunate we are that Christ gave us the opportunity to reconcile ourselves with Him. But it's up to you."

Later that day, while I was gazing out over the Atlantic with my youngest child, Sean, my two miscreants joined us. I noticed the ashes on their foreheads but said nothing. I just smiled to myself, thanking God and thinking how truly good it is to be a parent.

Dennis McLaughlin

Spotlight on Youth

Hoop, Hoop, Hooray!

Sacred Heart now has its very own boys' basketball team. Founded by Gary Napoli, who is ably assisted by coaches Tom Williams and Douglas Waterbury, it is in its initial season.

The team's 17 players—Eric Benson, Jim Butler, Eric Hellriegel, J. R. Jasinski, Emmet Kinsella, Jeff Maleri, Sean McGowan, Jay Mikrut, Ryan Moran, Tony Pereira, Peter Rencsko, Matt Rinaldi, Todd Samuelson, Al Villadolid, Ryan Waterbury, Dan Westuba, and Rob Williams—are very enthusiastic about this sports activity. They practice Wednesday evenings at Pomperaug Elementary School and play their games at Waterbury's Kennedy High School on Sunday afternoons, but only if they have attended one of the weekend Masses. Their opponents are the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) teams in the Greater Waterbury Deanery of the Archdiocese of Hartford. Among those they have played thus far are St. Thomas the Apostle in Oxford and Good Shepherd in Seymour.

While the parish pays a lot of the team's expenses, the boys also contribute. Maybe we can even acquire some benefactors!

Through this activity, the boys are taught the value of both hard work and teamwork, and they have developed a great comradeship. Teenagers need this in their lives. High five to them all, and God bless! A girls' team, perhaps, down the line?

George Vachris

Pageantry

The children and teens of Sacred Heart have many opportunities to become involved in parish activities. One of these activities is the Christmas pageant, run by Janet Bashar. This annual event reenacts the Nativity from the appearance of Gabriel to Mary all the way to the birth of our Savior. The younger children play the parts of angels, travelers, and shepherds, and some sing in the choir. The teens portray narrators, innkeepers, kings, Mary, Joseph, and the angel Gabriel. I was an angel for a few years, I participated in the children's orchestra for one year, and then I played the part of Mary.

I asked some of my friends whom I had met at the pageant what they liked about taking part in, or watching, the living Nativity. Dan Piccoli, one of the wise men, commented: "The Christmas pageant was a very worthwhile activity. It was fun to act out the part of one of the Three Kings, although I didn't talk." Chris Tocco, the boy who played Joseph, said: "The pageant is a great way to meet new people in the church, and it's a great experience." Lynn Nagel, the soloist who sang "Oh Holy Night," volunteered her point of view as part of the audience: "The pageant looked very nice, it was well prepared, and everyone did a great job projecting their voices without the

use of microphones. The actors did a wonderful job portraying the birth of Jesus."

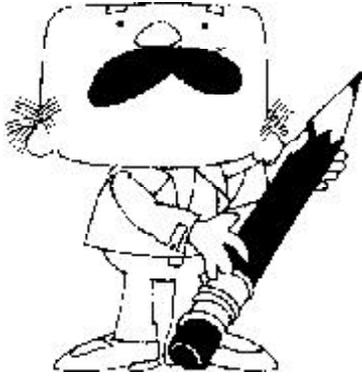
By being in the Christmas pageant, I came to better understand and appreciate the true meaning of Christmas—the birth of our savior—and all of us who participated were able to remind our families and friends of the significance of this special holiday.

Lynn Ellis



Rhyme Tyme

The answer to each definition at right is a pair of rhyming words, like "City Kitty" for "Urban Feline." The initial letters are given for all but the easiest pair to help you solve the puzzles. -Geraldine C. Fox



1. Cheer for Deacon Lavoie

_____, ✕ _____ !

2. Ash Wednesday no-no

E_____ ✕ M_____

3. Wedding limo

M_____ ✕ C_____

4. Good Friday food regimen

L_____ ✕ F_____

5. Festive celebration at our parish

H_____ ✕ P_____

6. Just-acquired church seat

N_____ ✕ P_____

ANSWERS: 1. GO' LOE

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From the Hat

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