

RCIA JOURNEY EXPERIENCE

BY: Lori Kozikowski ~ Convert to the Catholic Faith 2017

My name is Lori Kozikowski and I have been asked to write about my experience regarding the RCIA program.

I was raised in the Baptist Church and baptized at an early age. After my first marriage, I drifted away from the church. When I had my children, I wanted them to know about God so we started back to church again. I did not have the same experience that I had when I was a child so I went away from the church again.

My second husband was born into the Catholic faith. He went to church regularly. We wanted to get married in the Catholic Church but things just didn't go the way we wanted; years went by and my life went on. I took care of my mother most of my adult life as she was getting older and more frail each year. But, she never let things get her down. She passed away in 2014 not from being sick, but from a fall when she hit her head and died of a head trauma. I blamed myself for the next couple of years, missing her every day; not making it through a day without crying.

My daughter started going to the Catholic Church the year that my mother passed away. She seemed to be at peace; I wanted and needed that. When she asked me if I wanted to go to the RCIA classes, I didn't think twice about starting the classes. After attending a couple of the classes, I just felt that the weight of the world was lifted from my shoulders. I knew that my mother must be in heaven and I knew I would see her again.

When I began the RCIA process, I had some knowledge of God but no knowledge of the Catholic Church; and even less of an understanding about how this faith would fit into my life. The RCIA team, my sponsor who is my husband, and my fellow RCIA participants were all instrumental in my journey to become fully initiated into the Catholic faith at Easter Vigil.

Each Tuesday night I learned about Jesus, the bible, and the church. I was introduced to different forms of prayer, meditation, and ways of communicating with God. I learned the history of our faith, the life and teachings of Jesus and the struggles he endured. I learned about the Mass, the gospel, Eucharist, and other Sacraments. I also learned what it means to be part of a "church community" by attending Mass each week and being active in the church. I wanted to experience the events of the Catholic Church, all the holidays, and other aspects of becoming a Catholic.

On Sunday mornings, I learned new ways to read, interpret, reflect upon, and understand the Gospels. Through group discussions, I learned how to apply the teachings of Jesus Christ to my everyday life. I learned how to look for and recognize the presence of God in my life at all times, not just while in Church on Sundays. I learned so many things in RCIA, the most important is that the journey of faith can begin at any time and it does not end with Baptism or our final class. It is a life journey.

Another highlight to RCIA for me was coming home to discuss that night's topic with my "cradle Catholic" husband and astounding him with things he did not know about his Church whether it be on the history of the Church or the sacraments. My husband started coming to the classes with me. I believe he gained as much as I have from the RCIA experience.

Our faith is ever changing and growing and we have so much to learn from one another that each encounter with someone else's faith journey adds something to our own. Being there to help someone else on his or her journey is, I am told, an incredibly rewarding experience. I believe this to be true.

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BY: Mary Pratt ~ Convert to the Catholic Faith 2017

My nine month experience with the RCIA began in September 2016 by meeting with the RCIA team. You could tell right from the start that this adventure would be a great decision.

All of my life, I had been involved as a member of another church serving as a VBS Director, Church Board, and Pastor Assistant. As I think back on my experiences of church, I am saddened by the lack of participation by the parishioners. In the Catholic Church you are engaged and want to be a part of it.

We began with eight individuals with eight different views about religion, Catholic upbringing and traditions. However, not one time did the staff make the class feel inferior or “stupid” regarding the Catholic faith. You were always made to feel welcome and engage in the conversations as well as each person’s experiences and personal reflections.

At our first class we were introduced to the term “cradle Catholic”. It was a funny term but then when explained, you get the picture of old time religion. This provided great conversations at my home with my mother-in-law, Frances, and my husband, Chris. The best part of this class was sharing the information I learned with them and getting their feedback. It enriched our family relationships as we discussed religion and life experiences.

During the first three months we learned about the traditions and basic teachings of the Catholic Church. The change for me started in December when we were part of the innkeepers program for Mary and Joseph. Our family welcomed them into our home. I thought of Mary’s role in having the baby Jesus, sharing Him with the world, and being at His final destination as He died on the cross. We share our families every day, but truthfully, how many of us would want our child in this role? As I sit in the sanctuary, I look at Mary and Joseph and ponder what they did for us and thank them for sharing Him. As I glance at the cross, I can imagine Christ looking at me and saying, “Mary, this was for you”.

In March we went to Pittsburgh to St. Paul’s Cathedral. This was AWESOME! It was a beautiful day and our families came to share the experience with us. The Cathedral was beautiful, I enjoyed listening to the organ and choir, Bishop Zubik’s homily, seeing all the priests and other candidates. All this was overwhelming. It was an experience I will never forget. The best part was being able to share it with my family. We had three generations of Catholics there.

Prior to the classes, I would bring my stepchildren to Mass and glanced around watching the parishioners interact supporting their faith and the growth of the Church. Masses have become more personal and special to me as I share them with my family. This relationship of having the family sharing the same faith is different than what I had previously experienced.

When I read in the bulletin about the classes being offered, I kept putting it off. Something inside of me said its time and I was sharing this with a close personal friend. This was the best decision I have made in a long time. I had so much fun in these classes as I shared my thoughts and “quirkiness” with my classmates, RCIA staff and sponsor who are all more like family now than just friends and classmates. We had good discussions, personal reflection, and laughed.

The classes were never boring. You go on this personal crusade to learn more and do more for your parish to serve our Lord. This class is the first step to learning the basics of the Catholic faith—the rest is up to you. ... Mary Pratt