

# Annapolis family finds home in the Catholic faith

ANNAPOLIS – Alex Burton, an eighth-grader at St. Mary's Elementary School in Annapolis, will complete his entrance into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil March 31.

He brought along his parents, Ross and Kristin, on that journey.

The Burtons were among the 688 candidates and catechumens who gathered at three locations Feb. 18 for the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion.

Candidates, such as the Burtons, are those who have already been baptized, and are preparing for the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. Catechumens are those who have not been baptized in another Trinitarian faith tradition, and are preparing for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist.

The Burtons were among 192 participating at St. John Neumann in Annapolis.

The desire for conversion first came for Alex in sixth grade, when he transferred from public school to St. Mary's.

"I hadn't really learned much about religion, but I still believed in God," Alex said. "When I was exposed to a religion class, it really changed the way I saw everything related to faith."

Alex's school called home and said that he had expressed interest in converting. His parents were open to the idea, but wanted him to mature and explore it before committing.

"We explored it as a family and chose to go the journey together," Kristin said. "It's brought us closer as a family. It's changed our life."

"Through Alex coming to St. Mary's, it's positively affected our whole family and

transformed our family,” Ross said. “He had a thirst that we hadn’t quenched for some time, and he got it here.”

The Burtons are part of a new program at St. Mary’s that is geared toward teens wanting to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Upon accepting the director of faith formation position at St. Mary’s last summer, Karen Bruskewicz noticed a gap in the parish’s religious education. There were classes for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children (RCIC), but nothing for those in the middle.

Bruskewicz initiated RCIA for Teens to bridge the gap. This year, 14 teens are going through the program, some from St. Mary’s and some from other schools.

“I keep telling all of them, ‘You are witnesses,’” Bruskewicz said. “Their journey is a witness to community, to our whole parish.”

Bruskewicz said one of the best parts of the RCIA for Teens is that some, like Alex, have inspired their parents to go through the program. Not all teens, however, have the support of their families.

Thomas Fiedor’s mom found out only recently that he was converting to the Catholic Church, and as he is 18, he did not need her parental consent.

Two years ago, Fiedor moved more than 1,000 miles from West Palm Beach, Fla., to Annapolis in a hurry when his mom got a job at the U.S. Naval Academy. Though he was raised Protestant, he was enrolled at St. Mary’s High School.

“Coming to St. Mary’s changed how I wanted to continue my religion,” Fiedor said. “I felt closer to Christ through Catholicism.”

Now a senior, and nearing the end of his process, Fiedor is able to have open conversations with his mom and answer questions that she has, as she offers her support of his journey.

Liz Harris, a junior at St. Mary’s, switched from public school in ninth grade and has found guidance in Bruskewicz, and in RCIA for Teens.

“Karen takes time to explain everything and go through everything, and I just love it,” Harris said. “I didn’t really have much religion, then I came (to St. Mary’s) and was like, ‘This is amazing.’”

All of the faith formation classes come together for the rites and scrutinies.

At St. John Neumann, a mission church of St. Mary’s, the rite was celebrated by Bishop Mark E. Brennan in both English and Spanish.

“Lent is the final act in your preparation for baptism, confirmation and the holy Eucharist – perform well,” Bishop Brennan said in his homily. “The Lord has called you to come closer to Him.”

Archbishop William E. Lori celebrated the rite at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland, and Bishop Adam J. Parker at the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg.

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