

# Catechumen eagerly waits to become a Catholic

Joe Boys, 67, didn't grow up in one church. His father was in the United States Army, and his family traveled often. Now that his grandson, Stephen, is Catholic and many of his friends are Catholic, he, too, is preparing to make the next step in faith.

"I was not really happy in the churches I attended, but in the Catholic Church you get the feeling of unity," said Mr. Boys, who is inspired by his grandson, who is stationed in Iraq. "I told him (Stephen) I want to learn how to pray hard for him. I want to be closer to Stephen."

Mr. Boys said he has been learning what Catholics believe, how they believe and why they believe. He has learned the Order of the Mass and has learned about the sacraments, among other things.

"It's been a wonderful program with such great people," said Mr. Boys who is attending Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) classes at St. John the Evangelist, Columbia. "We sit together after Mass for about two hours and cover different topics."

Peter Barbernitz has been working with RCIA groups for about 10 years at St. Camillus, Silver Spring, and recently St. John the Evangelist.

Mr. Barbernitz explained the RCIA program is divided into phases. The pre-catechumen phase explores what being a Catholic is all about, and in the catechumen phase participants work with the RCIA team and a sponsor to learn about the Catholic faith.

The elect phase happens during the Lenten season, where the elect go on retreat and focus on prayer and fasting before coming into the church at the Easter Vigil.

"In an ideal world, RCIA is the work of the whole community," said Mr. Barbernitz. "We ask the community to pray for them and bless them. It reminds us that we are a eucharistic community and a welcoming community."

While a person is going through RCIA, Mr. Barbernitz makes notes of their special talents that can be used for the parish in the future.

“We want to transition them into a community that knows them,” said the RCIA coordinator. “We also look for their gifts and talents to serve the church.”

Mr. Boys, who teaches courses on public health and U.S. health care, said he is truly looking forward to the Easter Vigil to become an involved full member of the parish. He hopes to start an exercise program at the parish for those who are at risk for diabetes and heart disease.

“The social justice side of the church has really shown me how they feel about people all over the world, and they try to help those less fortunate,” said the avid runner.