

# Hundreds prepare to enter church at Easter Vigil

**By Elizabeth Skalski**

*eskalski@catholicreview.org*

Tonya Smith said she didn't grow up religious or practicing a particular faith tradition but after meeting her fiancé, a Catholic, and baptizing their two daughters, she decided that it was time to join the Catholic Church.

"I just figured it was time to finally be baptized," said Smith, 36, who attends Mass at Our Lady of Hope, Dundalk. "I seemed to be able to relate to the Catholic religion more than any other religion. The church has the same views I have. They practice what they preach."

Smith was one of more than 400 candidates and catechumens from 52 parishes who filled the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland Feb. 26 for the annual Rite of Election. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults begins the process of joining the Catholic Church. During the Easter Vigil on April 7, candidates and catechumens will be received into the church.

Similar services were held at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Crofton and St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown. At St. Elizabeth Ann Seton there were 57 candidates and 32 catechumens from 13 parishes and at St. Peter the Apostle there were 56 candidates and 42 catechumens from 15 parishes, said Michael Ruzicki, coordinator of Adult and Sacramental Formation and the RCIA coordinator for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Candidates have been baptized but have not received the sacraments of Communion and/or confirmation and catechumens have not been baptized.

During the Rite of Election, godparents gathered with the catechumens and sponsors gathered with their candidates. The catechumens signed the Book of the Elect at their home parishes during Masses Feb. 26.

More than 450 people are expected to be baptized at the Easter Vigil and about 650 adults are expected to enter the church, Ruzicki said.

In 2010 the Catholic Review reported that nearly 1,000 people entered the church at the Easter Vigil in 2009 and 2010.

Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien, who presided at the Cathedral and made his first public appearance in Baltimore since the Feb. 18 consistory in Rome, told candidates and catechumens during his homily to see their journey "as a process in progress."

"If only the enthusiasm that is ours today would be as radiant in the rest of us," Cardinal O'Brien said. "You catechumens and candidates may be the spark to enkindle the Holy Spirit within the rest of us."

Cardinal O'Brien urged the candidates and catechumens to "become active, zealous participants in parish life" and to make God "the center of your life, not only on Sundays but also on the weekdays."

Moe Greenberg said he decided to join the church after being married nearly 13 years ago at Sacred Heart, Glyndon and raising two daughters in the Catholic Church.

"I think it's been a gradual thing leading me here," said Greenberg, 43, of Finksburg.

Greenberg said he "started to take note of particular role models in faith," including his father-in-law, a colleague and his wife, Kathleen Greenberg.

"They're living their lives in faith," Greenberg said.

Nancy Portillo, 17, a parishioner of Sacred Heart, Glyndon, said she is a lifelong Catholic but hasn't been through the sacraments.

"I decided now that I'm older I understand more of the religious things," Nancy said.

RCIA invites and forms new members while inspiring a renewed enthusiasm of faith among those who have received the sacraments.

Cardinal O'Brien concluded the Feb. 26 service calling attention to "the challenges in our church," saying the Maryland House and Senate, which recently passed legislation to legalize same-sex marriage in Maryland, is an "act of arrogance" and that marriage was "established by God, not by the church and not by the government."

The cardinal urged Catholics to express their opposition to the legislation and to sign petitions to move the item to referendum in November.

Cardinal O'Brien also said the federal government's "unprecedented act" of forcing Catholic employers to offer employees health coverage that includes contraception and abortion-inducing drugs is an "act of arrogance."

"Let us not lose the momentum that has begun," Cardinal O'Brien said. "(We have the) right to religious freedom, to protect the rights that are ours as Americans. We simply want the rights that are ours."