

# Hundreds prepare to enter the church at Easter Vigil

**By Elizabeth Skalski**

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*(Editor's note: The numerical data in this story has been updated.)*

Tonya Smith said she didn't grow up religious or practicing a particular faith tradition, but after meeting her fiancé, a Catholic, and seeing their two children baptized, 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 worships 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.

Similar services were held in Crofton and Libertytown. In Crofton there were 57 candidates and 32 catechumens from 13 parishes, and in Libertytown there were 56 candidates and 42 catechumens from 15 parishes, according to Michael Ruzicki, coordinator of Adult and Sacramental Formation and RCIA coordinator for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Not all catechumens and candidates entering the church attended one of the three Feb. 26 services.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults begins the process of joining the Catholic Church. During the Easter Vigil April 7, candidates and catechumens will be received into the church. More than 450 people are expected to be baptized at the Easter Vigil and a total of 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 both 2009 and 2010.

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

During the Rite of Election, godparents gathered with catechumens and sponsors with their candidates. Catechumens signed the Book of the Elect at their home parishes during Masses Feb. 25 and 26.

Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien presided at the cathedral. In his first public appearance in Baltimore since the Feb. 18 consistory in Rome, he 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 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.

Catechumen 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,” she said.

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