

PASTORAL MINISTRY

Director of Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (R.C.I.A.)

Director Sister Patricia Hogan, CSJ. 1984-1985

Director of R.C.I.A. from 1985-1986

Pastoral Minister Stella Burns 1986-2010

In the beginning, I began my employment with the parish part time as R.C.I.A. Director, replacing Sister Patricia Hogan, CSJ, who had been voted onto the Council of the Sister's of St. Joseph, London. At this time, I was working part time at the Sarnia Christian Renewal Centre

In my new job at Sacred Heart, I was fortunate to be sharing office space with Maggy Barnfield who co-ordinated the Baptism Preparation program. In Maggy I found a kindred soul who loved to design and sew. Together, with Father Tom Lever's encouragement, we created many banners to enhance various liturgical celebrations.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)

Prior to R.C.I.A. Fr. Jim Chaseley and a team of volunteers began "Inquiry" (The Christian Renewal Centre in London and the John XXIII Centre in Windsor, also had similar programs.)

Inquiry consisted of two Phases and was meant primarily for couples who were entering an interfaith marriage, although others who were interested in the Catholic Faith also attended.

Phase One generally presented the basics of the Catholic Faith. Phase Two delved further into the Sacraments, etc. Those who expressed the desire to become Catholic were the main participants in Phase Two.

Later Father Chaseley and Stella Burns began the Christian Renewal Centre in Sarnia and continued to offer Inquiry among other programs, one of which was Marriage Preparation.

In the summer of 1984, the Diocese of London invited Father Jim Lopresti from the National Forum on R.C.I.A. to conduct a weeklong forum on R.C.I.A. Father Crunican and a team from Sacred Heart attended. It was decided among the team that R.C.I.A. would begin that September. Sister Patricia Hogan became the Director. We met in the library of Sacred Heart School.

Sister Patricia was elected to the Sister's Council in 1985 and had to leave R.C.I.A. Stella Burns became the new Director.

Over the twenty-five years of R.C.I.A. we have been blessed to have amazing teams of volunteers - Sponsors, Catechists, Hospitality People and the continued support of parishioners.

Over time Sacred Heart extended an invitation for other parishes in the area to send Catechumen and Candidates to join with us for their R.C.I.A. journey.

R.C.I.A. is a lengthy process of some twenty six weeks. Those who wish to become Catholic are interviewed by the Director where they are given an overview of the R.C.I.A. journey. Some are unbaptized and are called Catechumens, those who are baptized in a faith where the Trinity is invoked at Baptism are called Candidates. Each Catechumen and Candidate has a Sponsor who journeys with them. Some bring their own Sponsor (someone who is a practicing member of the Catholic Faith) others have a Sponsor assigned to them (meeting the same criteria of a practicing Catholic). The Sponsor attends all meetings and Rites. This is the Pre-Catechumenate stage. During this time topics include The Bible, Ministry, Liturgy (which includes a tour of the Sacristy and Church).

The Catechumenate stage begins on the first evening and ends with the Rite of Acceptance on the first Sunday in Advent. It is here the Catechumens and Candidates, accompanied by their Sponsor are presented to the assembly at Mass. The assembly promises their support of the Catechumen and Candidates. The Catechumens and Candidates from other parishes celebrate the Rite of Acceptance in their own parish.

The next phase is Evangelization. Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation are among the topics discussed. The need for community service is introduced. All participants, including the R.C.I.A. Director, Catechists, Sponsors, Hospitality Team, Catechumens, Candidates and Sponsors are asked to complete a minimum of twelve hours of community service. At the beginning of each R.C.I.A. evening assigned participants report the ministry in which they were engaged and a summary of their activity. Over the years many of the R.C.I.A. 'graduates' have become involved in the parish and in the wider community.

At Sunday Mass on the first, third and fifth Sundays in Lent, the Catechumens and Candidates attend the Scrutiny's where they begin their Lenten journey by looking inward to better prepare themselves to be received at the Easter Vigil. During Lent those who are baptized (Candidates) receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Those who are not baptized (Catechumens), need not receive the sacrament as Baptism will free them from their sins. Most who are not baptized more often than not do go to Confession although Absolution is not given due to their upcoming Baptism. The Catechumens and Candidates from other parishes celebrate the Scrutiny's in their own parish.

At the Easter Vigil the Catechumen are Baptized, receive Confirmation and First Communion. The Candidates receive Confirmation and First Communion.

There is a final wrap up session reflecting on Easter Vigil and each person's faith journey through R.C.I.A.

Pastoral Ministry Activities Stella Burns

Parish

Sacramental preparation, Advent and Lent parish liturgies (which included coordinating teams to lead the Stations of the Cross during Lent). Arranging for Priests to be available to hear Confessions during Advent and Lent, R.C.I.A. and First Reconciliation. First Friday Communion visits to the homebound and long term care homes. Hospital Visits. Preparing children to proclaim the Word, Prayers of the Faithful and the Offertory processions for School Ministered Masses. Also prepared the children and officiated at School Liturgies. A non-voting member of the Parish Pastoral Council, and a member of the Liturgy Committee. Trained new Lay Lectors, R.C.I.A. Catechists, Bereavement Ministers, Stephen Ministers, Confirmation Home Group Leaders.

Deanery

Member of the Council of Clergy Sarnia Deanery (Priest, Deacons, Laity). Coordinator of the annual Feast of the Immaculate Conception Mass. Team member and later Spiritual Director for Cursillo weekends, also Cursillo Secretariat member. Adult team member for Christ in Others Retreat (COR) weekends.

Diocese

First Lay member of the Pastoral Assistants Coordination Team (later called the Pastoral Ministers Coordinating Team). Member of the Evangelization Commission and the Evangelization sub-team which led a pilot project with fifteen parishes to develop Parish Vision and Principles under the guidance of Peter Burns. Working with Peter Burns to develop Vision and Vision Principles for Ministry to Priests, and the Diocese. Member of the Diocesan Women's Commission. Member of the Pastoral Diocesan Study Days Team,

Community

Conducted prayer services at both area hospitals. A member of the Mayor's Prayer Committee, the Sarnia and District Council of Clergy, Beginning Experience, a retreat weekend for those who were widowed, separated or divorced and Interdenominational Cursillo Weekends. All these endeavors were Ecumenical.

Pastoral Minister Reflection Stella Burns

Pastoral Ministry is demanding at times, especially during the major feasts in the Church's calendar. As a married woman I would not have been able to devote as much time to Ministry if it wasn't for my family, who not only supported me, but encouraged me. During my time at Assumption University, Windsor, my husband, Peter, also attended the Pastoral Ministry program, where he received a Master's degree in Pastoral Ministry. His thesis was "The Funeral Vigil And Funeral Liturgy. Sensitive Moments in Bereavement Ministry". (Used in Bereavement Minister Training)

I received great encouragement from our Pastors, Associate Pastors and family and friends to continue my education. I attended a part-time two-year certificate program in Adult Facilitation at Lambton College, Sarnia and five-year part-time certificate program in Pastoral Ministry at Assumption University, Windsor. Plus, numerous opportunities offered in the Diocese, John XXIII Centre, Windsor and in the local community.

On a personal level, I never ceased to be humbled by the acceptance of our parishioners and their families. I loved celebrating the Liturgy of the Word in the schools. I used to engage the children during the reflection on the readings, some wonderful insights were shared by them. Meeting with bereaved families was always a moving experience. They shared stories about their loved ones, showed photographs, needle work, wood work, etc. Sometimes we shared laughter, most times grief was shared. One of the most difficult bereavement visits was to the parents of a little child whose Baptism Home Visit I made just a year or so before the little ones death. Even more difficult was the First Friday Communion visit following the funeral to the child's Great Grandparent who asked "Why the little one and not me?"

There were many joys, journeying with those participating in R.C.I.A., wishing parishioners and visitors a "Merry Christmas" at the 8:00 p.m. Mass. Greeting people at the door at the Christmas Mass, especially, young people who received the Sacraments of Initiation at Sacred Heart during my time as Pastoral Minister and the introduction to their Fiancé, new Wife or Husband.

Pastoral Minister Leanne Moran 2011-2021

In addition to her music director role at Sacred Heart Church, in 2011 Leanne Moran became the pastoral minister for the newly clustered St. Michael and Sacred Heart parishes.

Sacramental preparation began as her primary area of responsibility including Baptism, First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, RCIA for adults and adapted for children, and Confirmation off and on. For the first few years' preparation for First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation was overseen primarily by the grade two and eight teachers at the parish affiliated schools (St. Michael, Sacred Heart, St. Anne and Gregory A. Hogan) and supported by the parish. Fr. Peter Keller, who was the pastor at the time, took to heart the following words of Pope John Paul II who had coined the term "domestic church" for the home: "Catholic parents must learn to form their family as a domestic church, a church in the home as it were". With this in mind, sacramental preparation with the grade two and grade eight children was restructured to allow parents to take on the role as the primary educators of the faith for their children with the parish pastoral team as their direct support and the Catholic schools taking the secondary support for the parents. This model was later formalized by the diocese as well. Ministry to the elementary schools also included the planning of quarterly school Masses and newly instated school confessions usually during Advent and Lent, roles overseen by Christine Bresette during her tenure as coordinator of youth ministry.

As pastoral minister Leanne took on a leadership role for family ministry including programs such as Vacation Bible School with 125 children attending and 60 plus teen and adult leaders for a week each July. A Mass and Potluck BBQ in Canatara Park became a highlight of the Vacation Bible School week with the children singing some of their VBS songs after the Mass. This outdoor Mass was very well received with usually about 300 plus people in attendance. Parents and preschoolers began as a time for parents with preschoolers to gather monthly. Family Faith Days served as “kick off” events for sacramental preparation.

Ongoing formation for adults became an area overseen by Leanne as well. Over the years this often took place under the title of “Learning Community” lecture series on a variety of different topics such as Bishop Robert Barron’s “Catholicism” series, Art Talks with Fr. Tony DelCiancio, and a series of talks on the Nigerian culture with Fr. Festus Komolafe. A few Bible study programs were offered in the parish as well as a couple of Fr. Michael Gaitley’s programs – 33 Days to Morning Glory and Consoling the Heart of Jesus. A pilgrimage to see Pope Francis in Philadelphia was a highlight for many as was a follow up pilgrimage to Quebec City & Montreal.

A Single Seniors group and muffins and coffee were two social groups that met monthly for a time of fellowship. The Feast of the Sacred Heart became an annual celebration with Mass and a BBQ. In more recent years Canada Day Mass was hosted at Sacred Heart Church for the Sarnia parishes and all joined for cake and lemonade following Mass before heading off to the parade and Canada Day festivities. Leanne partnered with Ana Maria Moniz for the ever-popular Trivia Night and Superbowl Soup Luncheon for the first couple of years until Ana Maria brought these to a whole new level with an amazing group of volunteers.

Bereavement ministry, which began under the pastoral ministry leadership of Stella Burns, continued with a team of parish volunteers serving in this important role – both walking with families in planning the Vigil Service & Mass of Christian Burial and also following up with the families afterwards. An annual Memorial Service to remember those who had died either in the current year or in years past began and was very well received.

Leanne also spearheaded the formation of a Parish Life Committee bringing together the leaders of the various parish outreach groups to enhance communication and support between the various groups. This was a partnership group with the parish pastoral council. A new group that emerged around 2015 was the refugee ministry group which to date has led the sponsorship and support of two families from Syria now living in Sarnia.

The highlight of Leanne’s role as pastoral minister of St. Michael & Sacred Heart Catholic Parishes was developing relationships and friendships with people too numerous to count who came forward to partner in the various events, ministries and any time there was a need. Leanne believes the absolute greatest strength of St. Michael and Sacred Heart Catholic Parishes is the ongoing faith, commitment, generosity and love of the parishioners for their brothers and sisters in Christ, near or far.