

THE CLASS

“How many this session, Ben?”

“Eighteen so far, Father.”

“Well, with the way these classes go, we’ll probably gain or lose a few,” the priest says.

Pausing a moment to survey the group standing around a table filled with coffee and pastries, he and Ben stand silent for a moment while Joey mingles with the assembled guests.

“Yea, from what I gathered as they signed up, I think this session should be a pretty active one,” Ben says softly, not wanting to disturb the group. “When Joey and I were interviewing the folks you see here, we both sensed some interesting personalities and backgrounds in the group.”

The priest smiles. “So, Ben, you think they’ll keep the two of you on your toes?” he says, chuckling softly.

“I hope so.”

“Good. What do you say we join Joey?”

“Sounds good to me, Father ... lead the way.”

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Tonight, is the initial session of this year’s RCIA program at St. Kate’s. RCIA is the Rite of Christin Initiation of Adults; the formal program for adults seeking to learn about the Church of Rome with an eye on possibly be initiated into it. And it also serves as a structured course of instruction for those Catholics who find deficiencies in their understanding of their faith. The structured process dates back to the early candidates for initiation in the time of the early Church Fathers .

“Uncle” Joey and Ben Foster are two members of St. Kate’s selected by Father Bob several years ago to head up the weekly RCIA sessions. Both are lifelong members of the parish, having a background in the teachings of the Church what with attending St. Ed’s and studying theology somewhat extensively in college. And others will help along the way; we’ll meet them later on. Father trusts the two of them and I think he knows his program is in good hands.

Tonight, is informal; an evening to get acquainted. The coffee and pastries were furnished by Samantha Bates, owner of Sam’s; the best Bistro on the Southside. Samantha, a parishioner at St. Kate’s, loves doing this and feels it’s her contribution to the faith formation of her friends and neighbors. A sweeter soul than Sam, you’ll never meet.

So, as they say on the game shows, without further ado, let’s meet the members of this year’s session.

Janice Manning – forty something mother of three children, one a college student and two in high school. Janice comes from a mixed background of Christian denominations, having on occasion, attended Catholic services here at St. Kate’s and has indicated a desire to know more. From past encounters, she is noted for a keen and sometimes biting sense of humor.

Lois Webster – Quiet young woman in her early thirties. A newlywed, her husband is a parishioner at St. Kate’s and Lois decided to take the course to better understand his faith. Comes from a Pentecostal protestant background and is unsure whether she would take the step of entering the church of Rome at this point. From what she has said, she’s been the target of some animosity about marrying a Catholic from several family members.

Thomas Taylor – Early fifties, businessman in banking and finance, has no affiliation to any church, claiming to be a “curious agnostic” as he calls himself. Was baptized Catholic as a boy, but family was generally non-observant, and, as he says, only remembers the Catholic Church from Christmas and Easter services.

David Palmer – late twenties, single, seriously dating a Catholic young lady who is steadfast in practicing her faith. Professing no particular denomination, Dave calls himself as a “generic Christian.” The possibility of a future with the young woman in his life is the impetus for his presence in the group, as he wants to better understand her faith choices.

Melissa Stargell – mother of two boys ages 7 and 9, she was baptized as a child in the Catholic faith and attended a Catholic grade school for a few years. Melissa describes herself as a “sometimes” Catholic and feels a need for something firmer in her understanding of the faith to which she has exposed her two sons.

Devin Crosby – student at the nearby Catholic college, Devin was raised in the Baptist faith. He is on a basketball scholarship and his continual exposure to the monks at the college has prompted him to ask questions. St. Kate's does function as a home parish for the college students here and there is an active student ministry on campus. Devin states he wants a different perspective and not only what is offered by the school.

Angela (Angie) Marie Santini – Bobby Jo's most senior stylist at the Kurle Up N' Dye salon. Raised in the Catholic faith, she fell away from its practice as a young girl due to the apathy of her parents. In her late thirties, she is a divorced single mother of a little girl named Marissa. Very talented at her craft, she is the most sought after of the stylists along with Bobby Jo. Wishing to return to active participation in the Catholic faith, her secondary purpose is to give her little girl the grounding in the faith, she didn't have as a younger woman.

Darrell Lambert – middle age businessman and member of a local non-denominational Christian Church. Unsatisfied with the answers to his questions about the Catholic faith and the constant criticism he hears of Rome from those he comes into contact with, he says he wants to hear about the Church "from the horse's mouth." So, while "warning" Father Bob that he is making no promises to join the Catholic church, he has come here to find his own answers.

Roy Sanders – late thirties, father of three, successful sales career, and another man who was baptized in the Catholic faith when he was a boy, but never received much exposure to Rome because his parents were lax in their own observance. A somewhat typical product of parents who expose their children to the Catholic faith, but don't participate themselves. Roy is looking for answers he should have gotten thirty years ago.

Suzanne Mantle – graduate student at the University Law School with no affiliation to any church. Has a significant number of family in the area, all of which belong to Pentecostal and Fundamentalist Protestant denominations. Said she decided to take these classes when her academic exposure to moral issues collided with some of the religious teachings she was exposed to as a young girl. Her parents sent her to a Catholic All girls high school, but she was not of the Catholic faith at the time.

Carolyn Evert – Methodist, grandmother of five children. She sees a need to better understand the Catholic faith as both her son and daughter in law are Catholic; he having converted a couple years after the two married. While not certain about converting herself, Carolyn feels she needs to be able to better relate to her grandchildren in a manner consistent with what their parents are teaching them.

Barbara Larsen – Mother of three grown children and married to a Catholic husband. Says she was always interested in his faith but never really had the time or inclination to make the effort to look further into the Church. With the kids being pretty much on their own, she decided it was a good time to give the church a serious look.

Jennifer Jordan – mid thirties, divorced with no children. An accountant and financial planner, she recently moved to the city to accept a position as the regional vice president of consumer investment division of a large national bank. Raised in a strict Pentecostal household in the deep South, as she grown professionally, has caused her to question much of what she was exposed to growing up. Her exposure to several Catholic peers co-workers and employees has caused her to question what she has historically heard about the Catholic faith. At the gentle urging from her peers, she has decided to look a little deeper into the Church. As she has said, no so much as to convert, but more to get a better understanding of the faith of her friend.

Sandra Bradshaw – early twenties, single, recent college graduate, embarking on a career in teaching. Was raised in no singular faith structure as her family drifted around through various non-Catholic denominations; mostly Pentecostal in nature. Having always been involved with charitable causes, she was impressed by a group of Catholic nuns she met in the course of working with poor children, and wanted to see what was the source is of what she calls, an attitude of simple joy in the sisters' work.

Anthony Rice – early thirties, U.S. army veteran who having seen some serious combat and the misery that accompanies it, says he decided to look into the Catholic faith in an attempt to find answers to questions his military service and exposure to the darker side of life has raised. Suffers from PTSD and says that the only place he really finds peace is inside St. Kate's by himself in the quiet. Says he feels a presence and wants to know more.

Mike DeCastro – Early thirties, bachelor, successful businessman and self-described lapsed Catholic and “former playboy”. Seems his former lifestyle is now more troubling than pleasurable and is looking at what was offered to him in his youth in an attempt to find a deeper meaning in life.

Margaret Tillman – Graduate student at the University pursuing an M.B.A. Very attractive, yet claims she is not interested in the men she runs across in her life. Seems their morals are not glued to them too tightly as she laughingly described them. Yet the professors she encounters all seem to be happily married and the kind of men she claims to be looking for. It happens that three of those professors are Catholic and it made her want to take a look at why they live the way they do and relate to their wives in such a manner, a manner she can't seem to find in the men she comes across daily.

Laura Bird – Single mother in her early thirties. Has two young children, ages 4 and 6, and was baptized in the Catholic Church when she was a child, but drifted away in her late teens. With her parents passing away recently, she became reacquainted with the church at the funeral services for her parents. Realizing the need to ground her children in the religion of her youth, she is participating in an attempt to be able to pass the faith on to her kids, as well as reconnecting herself.