

ISSUE
#01



新山耶穌聖心主教座堂
CATHEDRAL OF THE
SACRED HEART OF JESUS
JOHOR BAHRU

The 40th Anniversary Celebration



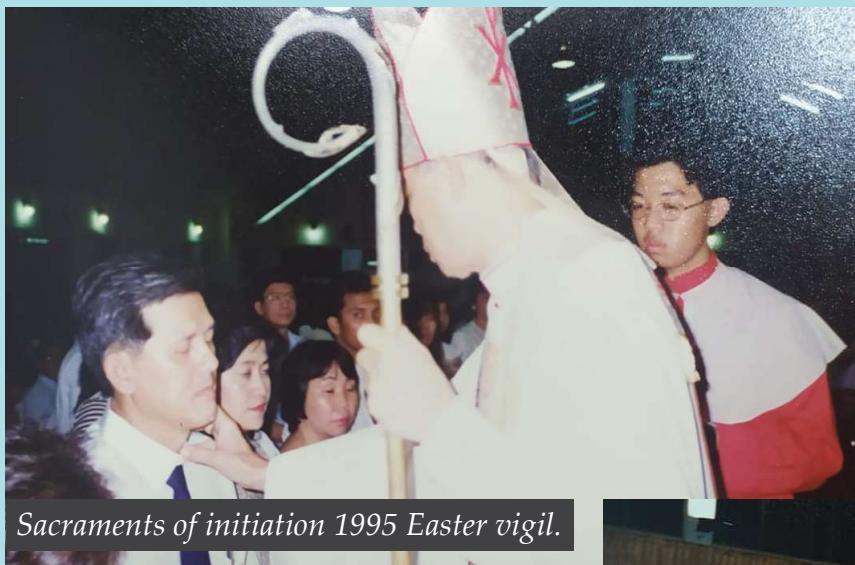
*stories from
the heart...*

1982-2022

REFLECTIONS ON THE RCIA

I am writing on my 75th birthday, a gift to my Church community I grew in to serve the people searching for a right path to find God's love and friendship in a journey called the RCIA.

When the Church announced they were starting RCIA, I left others to answer the call, considering I was born with a gift of teaching but not called to be evangelical. Yet soon after, I was drawn to a one week RCIA course in Cheras, KL, a course I never regretted attending. It was Sister Kathryn and her team of volunteers (namely George and Jenny Quake, the Yongs, Robert and Monica, Edmund and Janet and a few others) that set the ball rolling after 1990. I was still trying to escape the net that Jesus threw. I sent my husband to join the RCIA then but he dropped out, feeling like a fish out of water because he was not accustomed to a lot of sharings. A year later, in 1995, he resumed and completed the journey, a blessing from the Lord.



Sacraments of initiation 1995 Easter vigil.



The only photo I have of Sr Kathryn who initiated the RCIA journey.



One of the few photos I have of Sr Auxilia .

Sister Auxilia came in soon after and took over the RCIA. She was undoubtedly very serious and meticulous and she had the RCIA well structured with the many reference books she introduced. More serious inquirers also came in and I remember a lot of input was emphasised. Annette was her faithful assistant, loyal also were the Lingams and I was the greenhorn, rather afraid of Sr Auxilia but she trained me well. Annette continued Sister's legacy and I remained as the assistant in the team.

I reflect on the Catechumens we have had over the period of 30 years. During the late 1990's catechumens were generally a more matured lot, also very keen to learn and committed. They were very faithful in their attendance and they enjoyed a cordial relationship with the team of facilitators. The RCIA drew a younger cohort after the year 2000, injecting into the RCIA more vibrancy. The best of God's call were after 2005 till 2015, somehow the numbers spiked, lots more professional people came in with a hunger for God and his word. This later batch was more open too, prepared to share their hurts and their brokenness. We formed good friendships way after the RCIA journey ended for them. Not many people realise that when someone leaves a part of their true selves with you, you are entrusted with guarding the "secrets" of their lives. I also treasured those years when Christie Singaram came in with the hearing impaired inquirers and she herself volunteered to be one of the presenters.

The recent years have brought more difficulties for catechumens and the RCIA team. More and more persons began to work in Singapore or uphold jobs that have irregular hours so have to miss sessions. Facilitators offered to give quick replacement sessions before masses and Annette did a fair share of helping out. More and more inquirers came from non-Catholic backgrounds so this provided obstacles in their journey in their understanding of Catholic teachings and ways. Also, more catechumens did not have Catholic sponsors they knew so relied on the team finding one for them. Another difficulty that remains is that not many are accustomed to sharing in a group. Strangely in the age of technology, technology gives you access to many things but not the human heart.

What other changes did I see in the era after 2005? We moved from a very structured format to allow inquirers, catechumens and confirmands to engage in interactive activities, role play, visits and community projects. Video clips and Powerpoint presentations came in and we invited more visiting priests and religious to enlighten us. We looked forward to our stay and retreats at Majodi as the parish priests engaged in drafting more engaging and meaningful sessions for our groups. Fond memories we have of priests like Father Lawrence Ng and the late Father Ignatious, to name a few. Our stay deepened our bonding and gave us time to reflect on our relationships with God.

Coming to the team of facilitators, they were given room to be more dynamic and proactive. I have fond memories of simple people God called like Daniel Boo and later Christopher and Stewart. Later on came more assertive facilitators like Cornelius and Angelica whose strong commitment to serve and help in media kept us going. Deep in my heart remains gratitude for the dedication of Alice Loke who gave way to another strong core group of Veronica Lim, Michael Lim, Vincent Tan, Jane Lai, Janet Tan and Joan Oh. Newer members like Janet Ng, Bernard and his wife, Marie, and Nicole, Christopher and Jenni provided steady support. Faithful to supporting us was always Stephen Goh. Not many people understand that it is not a big ministry but evangelical work requires a lot of work at peak

periods when there are Rites and needs time in planning especially for a team that also has to work nine to five for their bread and butter.



Right before Father Eddie came, it was proposed to have a Reunion of the big family of RCIA bringing together the hundreds who had journeyed through the RCIA over the years. To finance their coming together in fellowship and strengthen the bonding, we had food fairs to raise the funds. We wish to thank our very generous donors and the dozens and dozens (of those who completed RCIA) who generously donated (too many to name) but definitely they have expressed their love for God in this gesture. God bless you all.

However, the changeover to Vincent Tan and later Janet Ng in the RCIA team with a new parish priest led us to abandon the project but undoubtedly our best years were those very years our RCIA graduates came back to help us to realise our vision which sadly was not reached.

In the growth of RCIA we have not forgotten our many sponsors who committed themselves to being present weekly to share the faith with the ones they sponsor. Not only that, they prepared and brought food to the table at fellowship time. In the earlier years, many of them were just a phone call away to help.

Our RCIA would not have thrived without our priests and religious. Our parish priests and rectors over the years have

supported us and served us by coming in to give talks and counselling and pastoral care. They have blessed us with prayers and we bless them in return.

What has been The RCIA then? It is not just classes to learn about the Catholic teachings, it has been a journey made by people who answered to God's call to know Him and love and serve Him, persons called to give up time and energy to share the faith, persons who heard God's call "I love you" "Come and see" and really stayed on, persons who bond together in God's love. My greatest joy is to always meet someone who has journeyed in the RCIA with the RCIA team and me, someone who updates me about how they have moved on spiritually and how their family and children have been blessed, someone who remembers me and takes me out for an occasional cup of tea. We are really blessed to see them come back and thank RCIA for helping them encounter Jesus. Like all other ministries in our parish, we are the ones God has called and blessed. Thank you also to all the other ministries in Church who have supported and helped us, especially the Hospitality Ministry and Choir, at our Rites.

To end my treasured reflections, I need to thank Father Simon Yong and Raymond Goh, Chairperson of PPC, for bringing me back to the RCIA when it was time for me to be pensioned off with all my shortcomings of mobility and also for taking over some of my duties. I also want to thank Father John Pereira, the current priest in charge of RCIA for his support. I do LOVE THE RCIA and all that I have done has just been being an instrument of God. We pray the labourers in the vineyard will multiply and someone younger who loves God passionately will take over. Your not being mentioned does not mean RCIA has forgotten you, each and every one I have encountered in the RCIA remains close to my heart and definitely you are even more precious to our Lord. I believe your names are already carved on the palms of the hands of Jesus.

| *Shirley Howe-Chan*