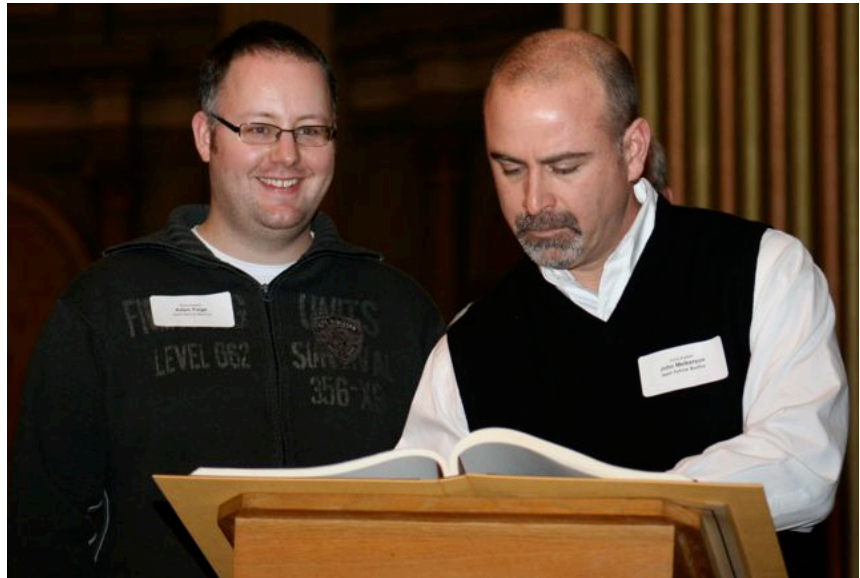


New faithful receive warm, joyful welcome

MONTREAL — The Archdiocese of Montreal will receive more than 80 new faithful into the Catholic Church this Easter.

Another 145 adults have decided to make a deeper commitment to their Catholic faith and will receive the sacrament of confirmation.

Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte welcomed the 227 candidates during the Rite of Election at Mary Queen of the World Cathedral Feb. 21.



Adam Paige (left) and Jon Melkerson sign the Book of the Elect during the Feb. 21 ceremony at the cathedral. They will be baptized at St. Patrick's Basilica during the Easter Vigil (Photo: IERACI)

Accompanied by their godparents, sponsors, family and friends, the assembly numbered more than 550.

This is the largest group of candidates for baptism, first Eucharist, confirmation and full communion in Montreal in the last five years. Last year, the candidates numbered 153.

Among the candidates, 43 are from cultural community parishes, namely Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese. Fifty-three are from English-speaking parishes and missions. The latter prepared for their sacraments through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The RCIA is a Christian formation program offered over an eight-month period.

"I wish to tell you of the joy I have in being here with you this afternoon," said the cardinal in his homily. "You are numerous and this fact may seem surprising to many. Our Church, despite all of the challenges it faces, demonstrates, through all of you, a remarkable vigor. It is enriched by new members. Catechumens of all ages have come. They have discovered or rediscovered faith."

The Rite of Election is held each year on the first Sunday of Lent. It recognizes that the candidates have heard and heeded Christ's call to be his disciples. It also serves to formally announce the names of those who will celebrate the sacraments of initiation — baptism, confirmation and Eucharist — at the Easter Vigil mass.

Of the 82 people to be received into the Church, 69 will be baptized and 13, who have already been baptized in another Christian denomination, will be received into full communion.

Cardinal Turcotte commented that the candidates' witness of faith urges Catholics to reflect. "We, too, have to revitalize our faith, always returning to that which is essential," he said.



Sibo Guo (*left*) and his godfather, Giorgio Benetti. Godparents placed a hand on the candidates' shoulders during a moment of prayer. (Photo: IERACI)

He also offered the candidates words of wisdom for the faith journey. "Being baptized or confirmed is not the end of the road... Just the opposite, it is a beginning, a step, a very important one, of course, but one step nonetheless. It is an exclamation point, I dare say, on the road of life.

"Like many Christians, your faith may sometimes waver. You will live moments of uncertainty or a spiritual

desert. Being baptized and confirmed does not automatically protect you from all temptations," he warned. "You, too, like Jesus, will be led into the desert."

He urged the candidates to continue to grow in their human qualities, according to the Gospel message, and to share their joy in Jesus Christ with their brothers and sisters in the faith and with the "entire universe".

The number of adult confirmations is expected to double and even triple in the near future, said Pierre Alarie of the Catechumenate of Montreal.

Thousands of young Catholics were not confirmed these past 20 years following the deconfessionalization of Quebec's public schools. Many seek confirmation in order to be eligible to marry in the Church or to become godparents, he explained.

Another important trend, he reported, is the marked increase in the number of young adults, aged 18 to 35, of all nationalities, who are requesting baptism. Many parents in the past two decades decided not to have their children baptized as infants, preferring instead to allow them to choose their own religion as adults.

Laura Ieraci

For more information on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, call 514-925-4300, ext. 349.