

A personal journey of faith...

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Nineteen million people the world over convert each year to Catholicism and that has brought the total number of Catholics world wide to more than 1 billion...

This Easter Season the Diocese of Portland welcomed 167 converts into the flock...

And closer to home, at St. Martin of Tours Church, a new convert was recently officially welcomed into the church...

However, those are cold, hard, faceless, impersonal statistics that fail to tell the poignant stories behind each convert's personal struggles, joys and triumphs as they walk their particular journeys of faith.

This is the story of one of those converts, whose journey of faith could be likened to the marathons she used to run, long, exhausting and round about, but the finish line finally crossed.

On Saturday, April 30, 74-year-old Millinocket resident, Nancy Schneider, received first communion and was confirmed by The Rev. Joel Cyr, pastor, to the sound of loud, warm and welcoming applause from the congregation. This followed her participation in the multi-month RICA program. With her that day to mark the occasion were her confirmation sponsors, long time friends Connie and John McManus, plus sons John and James, as well as grandson Michael.



Nancy Schneider in prayerful solitude shortly following her conversion to Catholicism.

Nancy's journey to Catholicism was a long one, more than 60 years in the making, a period during which she experienced more religions that most people do during their entire lifetimes. Nancy, following her birth, was baptized Methodist in a Connecticut church and remained with that church well into her teens. Sometime along the way she was confirmed in an Episcopal Church in New York state, but became a Lutheran shortly after she married her high school sweetheart, Robert Schneider, a Lutheran. She joined the Lutheran Church so she could fully participate with her husband - who she considered her friend and soul mate - in his church.

When Robert came to Millinocket in 1966 to accept a job with Great Northern Paper, Nancy and family, in the absence of a Lutheran Church, joined St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Millinocket and felt comfortable there, eventually becoming a lay reader and chalice bearer.

But Nancy began experiencing unease with the Episcopal Church when one element of that religion began ordaining gays as clergy persons. "...that went against the grain", says Nancy who has strong feelings about the issue. "The church shouldn't (ordain practicing gays), because it says that it is wrong in the in the Bible, God's word," Nancy explains. She stresses she has nothing against gays and certainly is not homophobic.

This discomfort brought her to a new phase of her religious life, attendance at St. Martin's Church. But it was not until June 2010 that her real journey began. In between that she suffered the loss of her husband to cancer and her own bouts with cancer and two bowel surgeries, none of which influenced her to become Catholic, she says.

What did influence Nancy, she says, was her strong desire to fully participate in the sacraments of the church, especially receiving Holy Communion "and serving the Lord Jesus as long as he keeps me here."

Last June she spoke to Deacon Dan Watson about fuller participation in the church and started RICA classes.

Things did not proceed smoothly, however. She attended about a month's worth of RICA classes, but left telling Deacon Dan, "I can't do this." She now confides, "I really wanted to do this, but I wasn't comfortable. There are a few things hard to take when you're not a cradle Catholic."

She was not surprised by what she was learning in RICA classes, since she knew most things, she says. But, she confides, "...believing is something else."

Weeks later, a simple rap on her car window as she sat outside a local restaurant was life changing and was what prompted her renewed interest in continuing her journey of faith. Hearing the taps, she looked up. The "tap, taps" were by Deacon Dan. He and Fr. Joel wanted to sit down and talk to her, Deacon Dan explained to Nancy.

"That was Friday," she says. The Holy Spirit "bothered me over the weekend," Nancy remembers. Thus, Nancy ended up meeting on Monday with Deacon Dan and Fr. Cyr and talking with them for two hours. They, she says, left it up to her to decide whether to resume classes and assured her they would not pester her, telling her "...faith is a life-long journey."

"I never had anyone go to bat for me before," observes Nancy. "If no one had talked to me I wouldn't be here now (a convert to Catholicism)," she confides. "Deacon Dan and Fr. Cyr made me feel welcome - I might not have come back if it were not for them," she explains. She also has had kind words for church secretary Dorothy Howard who, Nancy describes, as being "friendly and encouraging," plus all the RICA instructors.

"Her faith and devotion and independent way of thinking is refreshing," Deacon Dan says in commenting her Nancy's journey of faith.



Nancy Schneider receives a warm welcome from Deacon Dan Watson on converting to Catholicism and joining St. Martin of Tours Church in Millinocket.

Nancy's maternal great-grandmother was once a Catholic, but reportedly had a run-in with the bishop and declared, "I'm done". And so, now perhaps, Nancy with her conversion, has run the good race, come full circle and finally is home at last.

In recent years six other persons made a journey of faith, converting to Catholicism, to join St. Martin of Tours Church.