

SAYING YES TO CHRIST

The stories of three people who have elected to become Catholic this Easter

For most Catholics, the word *baptism* evokes the image of a baby cradled in its mother's arms beside the baptismal font. *First communion* calls to mind seven- and eight-year-olds lined up in suits and white dresses, receiving the Eucharist as cameras flash. And *confirmation* conjoins those same children as teenagers, filing forward in their best attire to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Not all Catholics, however, receive baptism as babies, first communion as grade-schoolers and confirmation as teens. For a variety of reasons, some are

called to the faith as adults, and when this happens, the Church and its parish communities welcome them through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

Many Catholics have witnessed RCIA ceremonies during mass: the Rite of Acceptance, usually in autumn, when the Catholics-to-be are introduced to their congregations and all pledge to support them in their journey; and the receiving of the sacraments at the Easter vigil, when they are fully initiated. These are occasions of joy for a parish.

This year, *Archways* is following the progress of three adults in the archdi-

ocese who are on the path toward initiation as Catholics. Each of them has passed through the *inquiry* phase, during which they discern their calling to the Church, and all are now in the period known as the *catechuminate*, receiving intensive instruction. (For a more detailed description of the RCIA process, see *Forum*, page 5.) Their stories are a reminder to all Catholics that our faith remains a beacon to the world and that, when we stand together in love, we have the power to spread peace and joy and give support to our sisters and brothers.

St. Francis de Sales, Manhattan

Jayne Porcelli, RCIA Coordinator | Michelle Lai, catechumen

"I was raised without religion," says Michelle Lai, a medical student in Manhattan. "My parents grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution, during a time when the government made it illegal for people to practice religion. When they came to this country, there was a local Christian family that helped them a lot, so I was raised with good values, but we did not belong to a faith. It was a part that was always missing."

Several years ago, before moving to New York for medical school, Michelle started dating a Catholic man and saw how compassionate the community was. "I have loving people in my life now who are Catholic," she says.

"When my family came to visit me in New York, I brought them to the church, and they loved it."

Though very busy with her studies, Michelle looks forward to living out the teachings of Jesus in her future career. "Once I'm finished my course work, I will do a residency and choose my specialty – perhaps pediatrics," she says. "Clearly my chosen profession, medicine, is about helping people, and I want to bring faith to that. In med school a lot of my peers are cynical and don't have a faith, which makes medicine very dehumanizing. Coming to this Church and talking to people who are devoted to service, I've been able to rehumanize the science of medicine."



Coordinator Jayne Porcelli (right) discussing the RCIA process with a catechumen at St. Francis de Sales.



"In a troubled time in the Church, I want to bring the message, so people can see someone who wants to join."

The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens at St. Francis de Sales, Manhattan.

Photo: Stephanie Massaro Photography