

Get to Know our Newest Catholics

Easter is a season of renewal and, this year, a season of new beginnings as our parish welcomes four new members into the Catholic Church on Holy Saturday. The four newest members, like the parish itself, are a diverse group with a varied path to get to Communion of Saints.

The newest members are Emily, an eighth grader from Communion of Saints School who will attend Beaumont in the fall, Anthony Paige, a father of four who attends Mass at St. Philomena, Nathanael Smith, an aspiring musician from Perry High School in Lake County and, finally, Jordan Thomas, a senior at Cleveland Heights High School.

Since October, the two elect and two candidates have been under the direction of Sister Mary Ellen Brinovec in the OCIA program (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, formerly RCIA). The two youngest – the elect – will be baptized and confirmed while Nathanael and Anthony since they had been baptized in another faith, will be confirmed, all four receiving the Eucharist for the first time as Catholics the Saturday before Easter.

“I was raised within the Protestant Church; I’ve always been following Jesus in some sort of way my whole life,” said Jordan, a high school baseball player who will attend college in the fall, “I think what led to me finding interest within the Catholic Church was just a lack of wholeness I felt within the Protestant Church.”

“I have a whole lineage of Catholicism in my family,” said Nathanael, whose mother was a devout Jehovah’s Witness but whose father’s family can trace their Catholicism back to Dublin four generations ago. “I was not raised Catholic but it’s always been in my blood; it’s always been there.”

While walking in Perry late at night two years ago, Nathanael wondered into St. Cyprian Roman Catholic Church where the priest prayed with him and, the next day, explained the process of becoming a Catholic, COS parishioner, John Grdina, who taught Nathanael at Perry High School and coached him in baseball freshman and sophomore years, brought Nathanael to Communion of Saints.

“He really was a mentor for me. He coached me up in baseball; he taught me how to be a man,” Nathanael says of John, his sponsor. “He is a true friend.”

Nathanael came to Communion of Saints a month after he lost his best friend, Army Specialist Jacob Ashton, the 21-year-old found dead in the barracks at Fort Drum in northern New York in August of 2024. Nathanael gave his eulogy at a Catholic Church and John Grdina invited him to come to Communion of Saints. “I’m going to do this. I want to be Catholic. I’ve always wanted to be Catholic.”

For Jordan, he received a challenge from his high school math teacher that appealed to his competitive nature.

“He was joking with me that Protestants were like the JV when it comes to faith and Catholics were Varsity so when he said that, I was like I have to make varsity,” said Jordan. “So then I got this deep passion, went through the catechism, watched a whole bunch of videos and, when I saw all that truth, it was so overwhelming.”

And Communion of Saints seemed like a fit for everyone.

“The people, I think the community is really inviting,” Jordan says. “I just feel very welcomed within Communion of Saints. These people want me to understand this and believe this.”

“Words can’t describe how I’ll feel,” said Nathanael on how his expectations for Easter Weekend. “When I entered this program, it was a very emotional thing and, I’m going to be honest, I didn’t know if I was going to make it to Holy Saturday. It’s just going to be such an emotional day for me to be confirmed into the church, to receive the Eucharist. and it’s a blessing to be able to do it alongside Jordan.”

“Deep joy,” said Jordan of what he expects to feel. “I’ll fully be set off to go on this mission, to truly go and be a disciple. I hope I’m able to share that light with a lot of people.”

Nathanael, who says he’s doing it in memory of his friend, summed up the feelings of everyone:

“I know I’m going to be in tears.”