



Keith Holden signs his name in the Book of the Elect during the Rite of Election at St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois, on March 5, 2023. This serves as a sign of his commitment to join the Catholic Church.

The joy of joining the church

Every year during the Lenten season, hundreds of people in the United States participate in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). During this process, participants — also known as catechumens — prepare to become fully participating members of the church.

When the Rite of Election took place at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in DuBois on Sunday, March 5, no one was more excited than Keith Holden. Keith is one of the catechumens from the Warren County Catholic Community. Like other candidates, he's a 25-year-old man who is passionate about his faith and has been driving his RCIA experience. The only difference is Keith was born with Down syndrome.

Keith's mother, Connie Holden, says that Keith closely follows a schedule he doesn't typically deviate from.

"Every Saturday, he goes to his grandmother's, and he usually stays there until 1 pm on Sunday," said Connie. "One day, she was talking to Keith and asked him about going to church. He said he would like to go, and she was so happy about that."

Since Keith prefers to follow his set agenda, both his mother and grandmother were surprised when Keith brought up his September visit to St. Anthony of Padua Church in Sheffield a few days later. "It's really something for Keith to change his routine," said Connie. "We've been going ever since then. He just wants to go and pray and learn more about Jesus Christ."

Father Stephen Schreiber, pastor of Holy Redeemer Parish in Warren, became familiar with Keith and his family through their presence at Mass.

"As I got to know Keith and his family,

Keith's mom told me that he really enjoys being at Mass. He sits between his mom and his grandma, who help him follow along and understand. He is really focused and intent during Mass," said Father Schreiber.

Father Schreiber learned Keith hadn't been baptized through their conversations before and after Mass.

"We invited him to consider entering the church, and he said yes," said Father Schreiber.

Keith's faith formation and RCIA instruction are overseen by Jennifer Wortman, director of Faith Formation for the Warren County Catholic Community, who enlisted the help of Alice Fadale, a member of St. Joseph Parish, Warren, and a special education teacher for more than 20 years.

"I love using the incredibly gifted and talented people who make up our church to offer every learner the best possible encounter with Christ and his body," said Wortman.

Together, the two women began creating a customized faith education plan for Keith.

"Jennifer and I met with Keith and his mother, and we took some time to get to know him so we knew his interests and personality to see how we could approach teaching him," said Fadale. "The Holy Spirit reached out to Keith. He is the one that pursued it on his own. We knew he would be a lot of fun to work with because he was very intrigued about what was happening in the church."

Fadale and Wortman have taken Keith's interest in movies, music and tactile learning to tailor Keith's faith formation journey in a way he understands and enjoys.

"We incorporate all the different senses, so he's not just there listening to us. We start with a movie that is as age-appropriate as possible. He asks a lot of questions which is really good," said Fadale.

Fadale said they went over the sacrament of baptism and taught Keith the steps he would go through on the day he was baptized. "Keith was 25, so seeing a baby baptized is



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different from how he was baptized. I made note cards with pictures and numbered steps with the baptism process. We've talked about why we get baptized," said Fadale.

Fadale emphasized how important it was for Keith to visualize what would happen during these sacraments. She said that she and Wortman took him into Holy Redeemer Church during their meetings so he could experience elements of the sacraments while engaging all five senses.

"We took him to see the baptismal font and smell the oils," said Fadale. "Keith was apprehensive and worried about being submerged in the water, so we explained the process to him and pretended to baptize our hands."

Keith's mother, Connie, joined him for his faith formation classes.

"We met up with Jennifer and Alice every Monday," said Connie. "He really worked on and looked forward to seeing those two women. They worked well with him to show him what was going to happen. He's a great reader and writer, and took measures to show him how things would happen with pictures. He asked questions, and he really understood it."

Through Keith's interest in becoming Catholic, he has brought his mother back to church with him and has more time to share with his grandmother, Rosy Cashmere, who is also his sponsor through the RCIA process. Everyone involved in his faith formation agrees that Keith's enthusiasm about becoming Catholic brings joy and excitement to everyone around him.

"The Lord himself must be given credit for bringing Keith to this point in his discipleship," said Father Stephen Schreiber. "Keith radiates Christ's love to all of us gathered for the Eucharist on Sunday mornings. I was so privileged and excited to baptize this young man and welcome him into the Catholic Church." †

Alice Fadale used pictures, movies and music to create a unique learning plan for Keith to help him understand the sacraments.





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