



**PRAY** We  
live in the mystery  
of God who gives life.  
(repeat after each date)

# SPiRIT

## Choosing Baptism



An interview with Joan Mitchell, CSJ

**T**o get to Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Victor Mendoza drives down the Interstate in Minneapolis past the Twins' Target Field and past the Basilica of St. Mary. Victor got his license the day school started this year. His high school has a special Hire4work program that introduces students to jobs in the community. Four days a week Victor studies in school; one day a week Victor works for the Minnesota Twins (and if the team is in town, watches the game from the diversity marketing office window where he works).

After school and evenings Victor might be boxing or playing soccer, his two favorite sports. He likes the boxing workouts, the intensity and the fellowship of

boxers sitting around and talking about the "randomest things." "Boxers are humble because they know their strength," Victor

observes. His girlfriend boxes and has gone to national competitions.

Victor loves soccer. His dad played professionally in Mexico. Victor is 5'8", a perfect height for soccer. He hopes to make a video to interest St. Louis University or Notre Dame in giving him an athletic scholarship.

Tuesday evenings Victor is at the Basilica, where he is preparing for baptism with other young adults. At 17, he is the youngest person participating in the RCIA program. RCIA stands for Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.



“My first reason for getting baptized is my father,” says Victor. “He is Catholic, he is older, 68. It’s a way to remember him. My dad is the one who usually helps me. I live with both my parents, but my dad drives me to soccer. He’s always been there for me and taken care of me.”

“My dad grew up in Mexico going to church with his family. But my mom isn’t Catholic so there was conflict when I was born. I finally made the decision to step up to the plate and get baptized myself,” Victor explains. He has a sister studying at Georgetown, two step brothers, and two step sisters in Mexico.

**G**etting baptized is something Victor has wanted to do for a long time. “It’s a big thing for someone my age to be willing to put in the time and effort,” he says. “Anyone can do it. It takes faith and the right reasons.”

“It started for me during eighth grade when my grandparents passed. I had a lot of questions. Why do things happen? Then Masses in high school brought me into a bigger picture. I have more faith now than I did.”

“We have prayer every day in every class. I don’t

say what I pray for out loud. I keep the prayers in my head and then I say amen and they all go up with everybody else’s.”

On the school’s Hire4work program Victor worked for a month at the Basilica. When he told his religion teacher he wanted to get baptized, his teacher researched what parishes had RCIA programs. Basilica was one. “It is beautiful over there,” says Victor. “I told my teacher Basilica is where I want to go.”

Victor chose a friend at Cristo Rey, another junior, as his sponsor. Victor became a catechumen, a person preparing for baptism. Together they go to the weekly RCIA sessions.

**E**ach Tuesday the catechumens listen to the gospel and reflect on what it means with their sponsors one on one. Then they have a

speaker and again break up to talk about reflection questions with their sponsors. “We pray the Our Father as a way to end,” says Victor. “It’s powerful stuff. I enjoy it a lot. People are nice. A couple of days my sponsor was not there, so I partnered with someone else, and they helped me out just as well as my sponsor did. They are welcoming people.”

“It’s great to learn about the past and what people have sacrificed to have the world the way it is today. It’s great to learn from other people and to be part of the RCIA group.”

Jesus’ faithfulness to his Father impresses Victor. “Overall what Jesus does throughout his entire life, not sinning and trying to be the best person that his Father wants him to be for the benefit of all—that’s what gets me the most, to say not even one mean thing but to follow what someone wants you to do the entire time,” says Victor. “A lot of people are rebellious and don’t want to listen, but Jesus listens and does what is right the way God wants him to be.”

Baptism means being accepted into the world wide Catholic Church community. “To me it is opening a new door and being accepted into a bigger community than those around me and being more accepted in the eyes of God and Jesus.”



**A**t the Easter Vigil last year Victor received the sacraments of initiation—baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. His family, the president of his school, teachers, and friends celebrated with Victor. People filled the huge church, the choir sang, bells rang, the priest lit the new fire outside, and brought the Easter candle inside the darkened church. People lit their own small candles from the Easter candle, spreading the light of the risen Christ.

Victor knew the Easter Vigil is a long service. “I thought that it might be boring, but was I wrong! It was the most elegant and most fulfilling night that I’ve ever had. I was amazed at how beautiful the church was.”

Victor remembers feeling nervous and shaking when the pastor called the catechumens to come to the altar and lay face down on the floor. “I told my sponsor I wasn’t nervous,” says Victor. “When we lay on the floor to get the blessings of all the saints, I felt protected though it was a long time lying there.”

Each catechumen climbed into the baptismal pool of water. When Victor’s turn came, Father Bauer poured water on his head, saying, “Victor, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Then Father anointed Victor on the forehead with oil, saying, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” the sacrament of confirmation.

The newly baptized surrounded the pastor at the altar for the eucharist, where Victor received the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time. Victor explains, “I thought that communion was receiving a part of Christ. But when I took it, I felt different, like it wasn’t just Christ but myself as well being taken into me. I thought that nothing could feel better.”

“Afterwards my father was very emotional. I never knew how much my decision meant to him. Everyone who was there for me was ecstatic, giving me hugs and wanting to take pictures of me. The president of my school couldn’t stop smiling the entire night.”

Victor plans to go to college, study international business, and open up his own daycare centers for middle class and lower income families in parts of the world that need them. “I think little kids are fun people,” says Victor. “I used to work at a preschool nearby and I like being around the kids. I’ve wanted to open a daycare since freshman year.”

## SUNDAY GOSPEL

Baptism of the Lord

### Jesus is God’s beloved Son.

**NARRATOR:** This is what John the Baptist proclaimed to people who came out to him in the wilderness.

**JOHN THE BAPTIST:** One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

**NARRATOR:** It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven.

**VOICE:** You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.

Mark 1.7-11

**QUESTIONS** 1 What does Victor like about the process of becoming a Catholic? 2 How does his school help him? 3 What groups does Victor appreciate belonging to? 4 What change does Victor experience in receiving the sacraments? 5 Who is the Holy Spirit to Jesus? Who is God to Jesus? 6 Who is in Jesus’ community?

## OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

### The Spirit animates our lives

**T**he Spirit is the wind or the breath of God that stirs the waters of chaos into giving birth to creation in Genesis 1.2. The Spirit animates and gives life.

At Jesus’ baptism the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus, first driving him into the desert to be alone with God. Then the Spirit impels Jesus into his public ministry. Jesus preaches the nearness of God, heals the sick, frees many from evil spirits, forgives sins, and gathers disciples.

**O**ur experience of school spirit can help us understand the Holy Spirit.

School spirit—the shared feelings and experiences of a student body—has many visible signs. Posters in hallways advertise dances, candidates for class office, drama performances. Boxes pile up during a food drive. Students wear letter jackets. Trophies jam glass cases and championship banners hang in the gym.

These outward signs make visible the invisible belonging students feel in the excitement of teams winning, in the anxiety of final exams, in the anticipation of summer vacation. Students share feelings such as sadness at the tragic death of a classmate, anger at neighbors' complaints about their cars, or frustration with policies that end pep rallies because the school can't hold them for every sport. School spirit is sharing cafeteria food, walking to class with friends, wondering who is seeing whom this weekend.

**L**ike school spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit is visible in many signs. Creation suggests the animating presence of God in our daily experience. A baby grasps one's finger with its tiny perfect fingers. A butterfly emerges from a chrysalis. We experience our own capacity to change and think.

All the traditional images of the Spirit in scripture—blowing wind, flowing water, burning fire—picture the invisible Spirit visibly moving. On Easter evening the risen Jesus breathes his Spirit upon his gathered friends (John 20.22). Jesus teaches that like wind, the Spirit blows where it will (John 3.8), and like flowing water, is a deep well within each of us from which the desire for God bubbles up (John 4.14). On the first Pentecost, the Spirit comes like roaring wind and sets fire to the

tongues of Jesus' disciples to preach his resurrection to people of every nation.

**T**he story of God's love for us begins with creation and continues in Jesus. But God is more than the Creator—ancient, infinite, and beyond us. God is more than the Son who became one of us in Jesus so that we might become one with God. God is also Spirit, continuously present within and around us, always at work urging us to connect, bond, and build community. We live, move, and have our being every day in the invisible but present Spirit.

The Spirit is the giver of our lives—our sorrows and joys, threats and moments of wonder, tragedies and reunions, breakups and breakthroughs, angers at injustice and delights in sharing. The Spirit breaks down walls and boundaries, moving us to share our lives. The Spirit is moving wherever people break stereotypes such as racial or gender stereotypes or those teens have about older people or those older people have about teens. The Spirit urges each of us to treat all others as respected equals.

The Spirit urges us to build a justice-seeking, peacemaking, forgiving community among us on earth like the shared community of three persons in one loving God in heaven.

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Take turns sharing an experience of the Spirit with a partner.
- 2 Plan a Spirit Sunday at one of the Masses in your parish to celebrate ways teens take part in building parish community.

The Spirit moves and calls us in our lives every day in experiences such as those listed below. Check the experiences of Spirit you have had.

- A moment of wonder and awe, of oneness with nature
- A feeling of disgust at garbage left in a nature area
- Disbelief at one teen's violence toward another
- Doubts about the meaning and purpose of life for you
- The discovery that you have a creative talent
- Amazement at a friend's loyalty
- Deep hurt at a friend's betrayal
- Courage to stand up for a friend
- Stopping a rumor
- Admitting you have done someone wrong
- Staying in school against all odds
- Struggling to decide on college or a career
- Discerning what's right and wrong
- Awakening to love for someone
- Struggling with the suicide of a classmate
- Mourning the loss of a parent
- Walking after a rain
- The enthusiasm of youth rallies or rock concerts
- Recognizing your parents rock