

Prayer, Scripture sustain faithful as they await delayed sacraments

The Easter Vigil was set to be the defining moment in Roomi Burney's life.

For two years he prepared for his baptism and confirmation into the Catholic Church, but that plan came to an abrupt halt. As a precaution against the coronavirus, all baptisms, confirmations, and first communions that would have taken place this spring have been postponed indefinitely in the Edmonton Archdiocese.

Nevertheless, Burney – and others preparing to enter the Church at Easter – won't let the pandemic divert them from their path.



Roomi Burney

"It's disappointing certainly. It almost feels like I was heading towards my graduation ceremony," Burney said. "But I said to myself, 'Roomi, it's only postponed. This should not stop you from continuing in this journey.' The more I grow in my faith, the more I see I've got a lifetime of learning in front of me.

"My baptism is only one part of the journey that I'll be on for the rest of my life – discovering the plan God has for me."

Burney is one of more than 116 people across the Archdiocese who expected to be received into the Church on Holy Saturday, April 11. Last year, 2,236 adults and children were confirmed, including 197 at Easter.

Burney and 11 others entered the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) program at St. Thomas More Parish in Edmonton last summer. These classes are now suspended, but Burney continues to watch RCIA videos and reads Scripture each morning.

“My friend told me how the Catholic faith helped him in his own struggles, and the more I looked into it the more I wanted to get involved,” said Burney. “From there I stepped into this extraordinary world of studying the Bible and the Church. Coming from difficult situations in my own past, this idea of redemption was something that really struck me.

“I initially participated in it just to see what would happen, and what has happened has never ceased to amaze me.”

It’s a common story for many in the RCIA. Chris Arnold was baptized a Catholic but rarely attended Mass as a boy. Now at age 38, the Church has become a vital part of his life. He was set to make that official with his confirmation at St. Joseph’s Basilica, until the COVID-19 pandemic delayed those plans.

“It’s tough having that taken away. For someone who was away from the faith for so long, going to church every week had quickly become something I needed,” said Arnold, who attended the basilica’s RCIA class with four others.



Chris Arnold

“I’m just trying to make sure I persist and don’t get complacent. It’s important for me to make time for daily prayer and remain accountable in my devotions.

“There’s a sense of loss, at least temporarily, but what’s happening here is beyond our control. All we can do is leave it in God’s hands.”

Seven-year-old John Rumsey was among 200 children at St. Thomas More Parish set to receive his first Holy Communion in late April. But that's been postponed too.

"His face fell when we told him," said Rachel Rumsey, John's mother. "He asked if it was cancelled forever and if he would ever get communion. But he's relieved it's not a total loss.

"It's an important milestone. It's something so special about being Catholic that you receive Jesus in this physical way. The parish has reassured us that this is a priority for them whenever things get back to normal."

"It will be a special day," John said. "I'll finally get to receive Jesus."

The Rumseys attended a weekend retreat in February to prepare John for his first communion, and it had a major impact.



Rachel and John Rumsey

"It's definitely helped him mature. He's made an effort to be more attentive during Mass, and that was one thing he always struggled with," Rachel Rumsey said. "When we livestream Mass from home now, he'll ask about the consecration and at what moment the bread turned into Jesus. Once, he even refused to eat a cough drop before Mass, because he knows you're supposed to fast before taking communion.

"To see him making that kind of sacrifice at such a young age, it's really nice."

While the pandemic has cut access to the sacraments, the Rumseys nourish their faith with a daily Angelus prayer and Rosary. It's a way to keep that faith

strong, as John awaits the moment he can finally receive his First Communion.

Roomi Burney said it's trust in God that gives him hope.

"Everyone's going through a lot of insecurities these days; our routines are completely turned upside down," he said. "But the practice of prayer, reading the Bible daily – it's really helped me. Throughout the day I take the time to ask God for direction and how to keep going. This too shall pass; we have to keep that in mind during these uncertain times."