



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

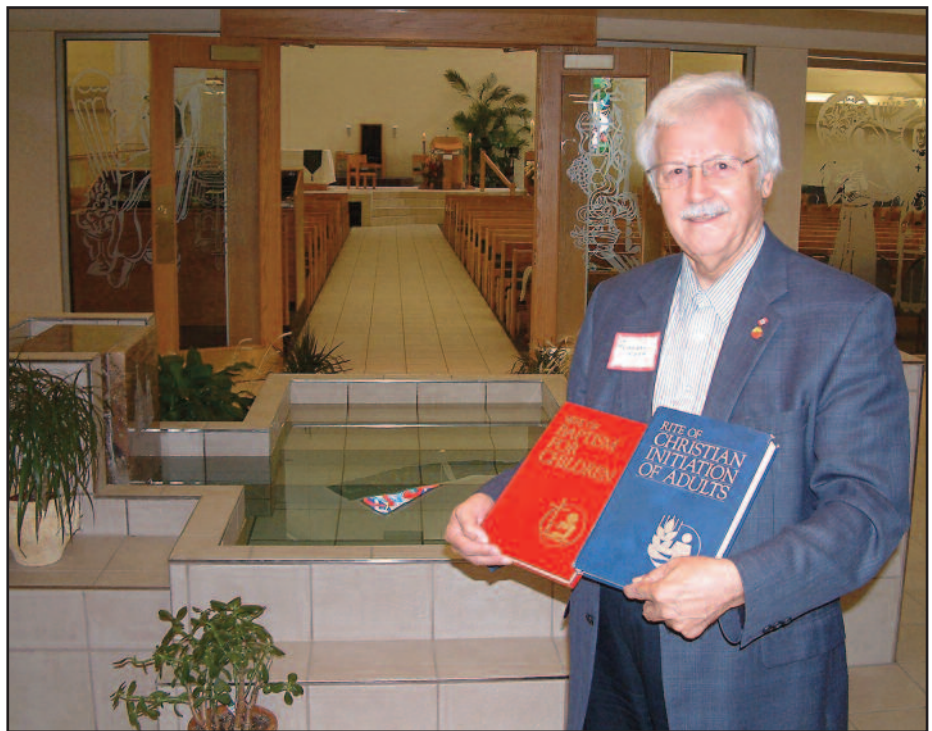
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Understanding of baptism mirrored in architecture says RCIA director

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

The interior design of the new cathedral for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon will clearly illustrate the meaning and importance of baptism, says Fr. Michael Koch, chair of the Western Conference for the Catechumenate.

Koch, who has spent more than 34 years studying and promoting the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the rite by which adults are baptized and come into full membership in the Church, says plans for the new cathedral interior call for an “awesome” baptistry.



Founder and director of the Western Conference of the Catechumenate Fr. Michael Koch at St. Anne's font. He has also recently been appointed diocesan RCIA director.

The design will clearly communicate the meaning of the sacrament as the life-changing sacrament of conversion by which we share in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and are led to the altar of the Lord, he said.

Design elements and building materials will show how baptism, Eucharist, and the death and resurrection of Christ are connected as the key elements of our faith, predicted Koch. “It will be obvious. Everything will contribute to make that understanding happen.”

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Visiting the cathedral in Quebec City last summer during the International Eucharistic Congress, Koch was surprised and a little shocked when he could not locate the baptismal font. Neither staff members in the bookstore nor local people in the building had any idea where it was located. “I never did find it,” he said. “What does that architectural design say about our understanding of baptism?”

Greater understanding about the central place of baptism in Christian life is very much needed, he maintained, suggesting there might one day be the kind of diocesan-wide gathering about baptism that was experienced around Eucharist in Oct. 2007 with the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress.

“The self-perception of being a baptized person needs to be awakened. People don’t always perceive baptism as making a difference, when it should make all the difference.”

We are continually called to live out our baptismal call in an ever deeper and more authentic way, he said. “It is baptism that takes us out of the world to become part of the Body of Christ. We are now still in the world, but not of the world.”

Koch noted that a focus on baptism also leads to a renewed ecumenical spirit, as Christians of many traditions recognize their shared baptismal identity.

The inherent richness of the catechumenate (the process which leads adults to baptism), is how it tries to initiate people into “a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith.” The RCIA process is held up by the Church as the model for all other catechesis, he said.

Architecture of church buildings can shape faith and understanding, Koch said, reflecting on how a renewed understanding of baptism has influenced the design of baptismal fonts in recent years. As an example, he pointed to the font at recently-renovated St. Anne’s parish in Saskatoon, located at the entrance way of the church building. It is designed so that those being baptized can walk in on one side, be immersed in the water and then walk out the other side as a new creation, being fed by the Word of God and the Eucharist, leading to eternal life, he explained.

“The baptistry is the womb of the church, where the whole living community gathers around to receive the new Christian, whether an adult or child,” he said, noting this will also be reflected in the design of the baptistry for the new Holy Family Cathedral. “In planning these things, it’s important to think about how architecture shapes our faith.”

Koch is founder of the Western Conference of the Catechumenate, which will hold its annual conference in Saskatoon June 12-14 with speaker Nick Wagner tackling the topic “RCIA: Ongoing Faith Formation.”

Koch is also pastor at Dundurn, as well as providing pastoral assistance at Holy Family parish in Saskatoon. With the retirement of Dolores Crawford, Koch will now also serve as diocesan director of RCIA.