

For the next three weeks, five people, known as the Elect: Yong, Ying, Alex, Isabella and Mahtab, all of whom have been involved in exploring the Catholic faith in our parish will undertake rites of healing, comfort and peace during our masses, as part of the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA). These are known as the Scrutinies, ancient rites which are profoundly rooted in our human experience. We all need to examine (scrutinise) how we live, the areas of our lives where we stray from God in what we do and what we fail to do. These rites are done in community so we can hold our Elect in prayer and our hearts, journeying with them as they move to being re-born at Easter. We plan to hold one ritual in each Mass so all our parishioners can meet and greet them and dedicate them to prayer. We asked Yong and Mahtab to give us some insight into what drew them to our faith tradition. The photo below shows our Elect and some RCIA team members from L-R: Godparent to Alex and Isabella, Julia; Alex, Yong, Isabella, Ying, Mahtab and RCIA member, India at St Patrick's Cathedral for the Right of Election on 21 February 2021.

My Journey by Mahtab

I was brought up into a family who was Shia Muslims. My mother and father were nominally Muslim, and they were not observant. Because Iran was such an overwhelming Shia Muslim country, I did not come into contact with many Christians or followers of other religions. I did have Armenian friends who were Christian with whom I did exchange information about culture and religion.

My journey into catholic faith began when I attended my nephew, Daniel's baptism in 2013 in Brisbane. I really felt God called me that day. It was such an honour, I observed the holiness of the



church and I found a different relationship to that which I had with Islam. The Catholic faith has more emphasis on finding peace and forgiveness and love. With every question and conversation, the Catholic Church has come out ahead; the beauty, ritual, and art of the Catholic Churches quickly claimed my heart.

Years later, a desire to celebrate the faith with my sister and her family brought me even closer to Jesus and the Catholic faith. When I saw my nephew celebrate his sacrament, I realised that I wanted more, I wanted to be fully involved, to seek our Jesus. I was still living in Brisbane and I made

enquiries at the Cathedral on how I could do this and become formally initiated. What I began in Brisbane, I continued when I came to Melbourne and it is here that I will enter this faith tradition at Easter.

I feel this process of finding Jesus and finding a new faith has made reflect on my life, on what is important in life and I guess it has also helped me in the last few months with everything being the way it is. It certainly made me reflect on what I should be doing in life to help my family and to help others, living my best life in the service of Jesus. I also feel that I am more involved with the Church and have a lot more understanding of the Church community.

However, this is not the end, but the beginning, in which I will experience more and more of Christ's love for me. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Who Called Me to the Church by the Yong on behalf of the Song Family

My first experience with the Catholic faith happened in Columbia, Missouri. One day I was driving through a very rough town near St Louis. I needed a toilet stop and for safety reasons, I pulled up at a very small Catholic church. I saw a strange sight, in an all African American congregation, a white priest was singing with the African American choir, which was highly unusual. We chatted casually for some time and as I turned to go, he said, quite prophetically, "Son, I believe you will come back". While I never returned to that church, it was to be a meeting with another 20 years later that would draw me fully into the church.

Our family first met Manwel Cassar in 2018. At the time Manwel was a parishioner from St Columba but this is not how we knew him. We came to know him when we were looking for a drawing class for my son, Alexander. Manwel was a famous artist and he held classes in Oakleigh. When we first met him, he had difficulty walking due to hip pain but he did not let this get in the way of his teaching. He was devoted to every student's learning in his class. Despite the fact that he had great pain while walking, he never missed one class, even in extreme or bad weather. As it was a late evening class, he was very kind to allow our whole family to sit in the class. Honestly, that was a good time. He never complained about his pain or his other health problems. The only thing he ever mentioned was his wife and the sadness of losing one of his sons. We always felt his love and care for his wife and family.

During second term, Manwel fell in his yard at home when he was picking up lemons, worsening the pain in his legs and hips. He started to bring his daughter, Bernadette with him to the classes. We could see that he was enduring great pain while teaching and although all the students implored him to suspend the classes, he still struggled on, saying "I like to teach students and have been doing that for more than 30 years. Sitting in the class makes me feel happy. And I like to see students develop their drawing skills".

Not only did Manwel teach art to Alex, but he also taught our whole family, so much about living the Catholic faith in everyday life. He never pushed faith on us, he just lived it – the values of it, the joy of it, the strength of it.

One day, the power was down, Manwel and all of us had to wait outside until the power supply to be repaired. That was a pleasant evening and the temperature was lovely. We were all listening to him talking about the art history. My daughter Isabella was playing guitar and Manwel asked her to play again, saying that he loved to hear her to play. Everyone was happy in his/her heart. At that moment, I felt he was like a saint and we were followers. That moment is engraved in our memories and was the nicest evening in our life. We were not to know that after that evening, we would never see him again. Two weeks later, we were shocked to hear of his passing. We later heard that in his last days in hospital, Manwel kept asking his son and doctor to let him go and to teach the class.

We were devastated to find that we have lost him forever. In a short two terms, he had become a role of father to me and my wife, and a grandfather to my two children. He was the light of our family. We could not stop crying. But a strong will formed in our hearts. We wanted to be like Manwel, we wanted to find the joy, happiness, dedication, generosity that he embodied and this brought us to St Columba looking for the faith that made Manwel the man he was.