

The RCIA
in the
Diocese of Charleston



**The Rite of Christian Initiation of
Adults**

**Overview and Guidelines
for the
Catholic Diocese of Charleston**

**Prepared in Light of National Guidelines
and
Feedback from 80 Parish Programs**

August, 2009

The Rite of Christian Initiation

There is no better way to describe the RCIA, a familiar process in our parishes, than by quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

§1229: "From the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey can be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion."

§ 1233: "The Second Vatican Council restored for the Latin Church 'the catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps.' The rites for these stages are to be found in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)."

While the initials RCIA actually stand for the liturgical celebrations which mark the steps of the catechumenate, common usage has led to the initials designating the whole process of the catechumenate but also, generally, the journey in faith taken by baptized Christians who seek to become Catholics or baptized Catholics who have never completed their initiation.





Coming into the RCIA

There are many ways in which people are drawn to the Catholic faith. At times it is through the practice of the faith which they observe in friends, coworkers, or spouses. At other times it is through independent inquiry—whether that is in the form of more academic study of religions or simply attending churches and being drawn to this one.

Once an initial contact is made and the interest of the inquirer is clear, those who have never been baptized prepare for the catechumenate. Those who are prospective candidates (that is, previously baptized but not fully initiated into the Catholic faith) need to produce a baptismal certificate or record to ascertain whether the Catholic Church recognizes theirs as a valid baptism. Marital status and the prospective catechumen's or candidate's living situation must be established. An initial interview should determine whether the individual or couple need to meet with the pastor for a discussion of possible need for annulment or some other resolution of marital issues.

Adults who have been baptized and have received Penance and Eucharist but have never been confirmed may also join the RCIA group, but they are confirmed with other confirmandi from their parish or with a group of adults being confirmed in the cathedral or at some other church in the diocese, with their pastor's knowledge and permission.

Children in the Program

When parents are entering the Church, children under the age of 7 are baptized with them. Older children may participate in the RCIA with their parents. Those who have been baptized but have yet to receive first Penance, First Communion, and Confirmation are encouraged to attend regular parish religious education and sacramental preparation sessions. In some instances, parishes offer the RCIA in a form adapted for children. (See the Rites book, Part II, §252-259 for norms.) Children in RCIA families who have been appropriately prepared may be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil. Judgments regarding what is fitting for the ages and circumstances of the children, for their families, and for the parish are left to the pastor.



The Process

Church documents emphasize the presence and involvement of the whole Christian community in sacramental preparation and formation. With reference to the introductory process called the precatechumenate, the catechumenate itself, and the period of mystagogy (reflection on the Christian mysteries after initiation), the role of all the faithful is especially noted. (Cf. General Directory for Catechesis, §256 and "Christian Initiation, General Introduction," in Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 1988 printing, §7.)

While the timetable for those seeking initiation into the faith may vary, ordinarily preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist in the case of adults involves the following five steps:

1. a period of *inquiry* or precatechumenate;
2. a time of *evangelization*, leading to interior conversion;
3. more intense *catechesis* in preparation for the sacraments of initiation;
4. *reception* of the sacraments after a time of purification and enlightenment;
5. *mystagogy*, the postbaptismal catechesis, a time of deepening.

Ideally, those preparing for baptism have selected sponsors who can accompany them on the journey through the various steps. If the prospective sponsor is supportive but lives at a distance and is not able to be physically present, it is vitally important that other people of faith will serve as guides and mentors and will also support the catechumen in prayer. Candidates for Holy Eucharist and Confirmation also require a Confirmation sponsor, so they, too, should be accompanied by a person who will encourage their growth in faith.

Sponsors must be practicing Catholics who have received all of the sacraments of initiation.



The Rites

Liturgical rites surround these steps of the RCIA process. As the process unfolds, catechumens and candidates for full communion or further sacramental initiation are expected to be following a Christian way of life, learning the basics of the faith, praying ardently, and participating actively in the Liturgy of the Word each Sunday. The following special rites are unique to the process:

The *Rite of Acceptance* welcomes those who are experiencing the tug of conversion and are entering into more intense catechesis.

The *Rite of Election*, celebrated on, or in close proximity to, the First Sunday of Lent, occurs as the catechumen begins more immediate preparation for the commitment which reception of the sacraments of initiation celebrates.

The *Scrutinies* are rites of purifying and strengthening the catechumens. The Church at its liturgies of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent prays for catechumens in a special way and presents to them the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

The Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil is the time when the whole Church remembers and indeed relives the mystery of Christ's dying and rising and the way in which all the faithful share in this paschal mystery.

The *Mass of the Neophytes* takes place at the end of the Easter season, culminating the Christian mysteries which the newly initiated are coming to live more deeply—while also encouraging them to continue the lifelong journey of following Christ as a member of the Church.



Guidelines for the RCIA Team

At the forefront of sacramental preparation and any program or process of catechesis is the Bishop of the Diocese who delegates to pastors and parish administrators the responsibility for formation of the faithful according to the mind of Christ and under the guidance of the universal Church.

The bishop and the appointed pastors and parish administrators recognize the important role which the faithful play as prayerful supporters, instructors, mentors, and models of living the Catholic faith. Thus, each parish or mission church will have persons designated to assist in the preparation and instruction of those seeking to enter the Church, come into full communion with the Church, or complete their initiation as Catholics.

In the experience of the Catholic Diocese of Charleston, it has been found that a number of characteristics are most desirable in those who form the RCIA team in any parish or mission. Team members:

- Are faithful, active Catholics with a sound sense of Church doctrine, moral teaching, and Sacred Scripture;

- Are able to explain the faith in a clear and direct way and also to share the blessings of their lives of prayer and worship;
- Are comfortable with some of the challenges and the ambiguities and complexities presented by seekers and learners;
- Readily admit areas which may surpass their own expertise and either make referrals to appropriate authorities or carefully research answers to inquiries;
- Work cooperatively and harmoniously with others;
- Refrain from using the process as a platform for airing personal opinions or grievances;
- Avoid engaging in discussions of political or religious controversies except when there is a clear and evident response given by the Catholic tradition of faith and morals;
- Are approved by the pastor, administrator, or chaplain overseeing their RCIA process;
- Exhibit loyalty to Catholic magisterial authority, to the local bishop, and the Roman pontiff;
- Have a respectful attitude toward other religious traditions and to diverse ethnic and personal religious practices and devotions;
- Take seriously their commitment to solid preparation for RCIA sessions and rites and to all persons enrolled in the process.



General Resources

For all RCIA programs and participants a Catholic edition of the Holy Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are and ought to be the primary sources.

Weekly reflections on the Sunday readings and on readings of Holy Days of Obligation ought to be a focus of RCIA sessions. In addition, there is to be systematic instruction in Catholic doctrine and the liturgical and devotional life.

The following resources are among those successfully used in the diocese and recommended for all parish, mission, collegiate, and military base programs:

Texts:

A Brief Catechism for Adults: A Complete Handbook on How to Be a Good Catholic, by William J. Cogan, 2008.

A Catechism for Adults, by William J. Cogan, rev. 2000. Available through Catholic Free Shipping.

Believing in Jesus: A Popular Overview of the Catholic Faith, by Leonard Foley, OFM, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 5th edition.

Camino de Fe. Liguori Publications.

Catholic Updates. St. Anthony Messenger Press.
(Should be systematically chosen, topically keyed to
sections in the Catechism.)

Compendium : Catechism of the Catholic Church.
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006.
\$14.95.

Come and See. St. Anthony Messenger Press.

Essentials of the Faith, by Alfred McBride, O. Praem.,
Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, rev. 2002.

Exploring the Catholic Faith: A Guide through the
Basics, by Herbert McCabe, O.P., Pauline Books, 2008.
\$6.95. (Question-answer approach.)

Foundations in Faith. LTP (Liturgy Training
Publications).

Handbook for Today's Catholic, Ligouri Publications,
rev. 2004. \$3.95.

Invitation to Catholicism by Alice Camille, ACTA
Publications, 2001.

Journey in Faith. Liguori Publications.

Manual para el Católico de Hoy, Ligouri Publications,
2005. \$3.95

Outlines of the Catholic Faith. Leaflet Missal
Company, rev. 2000. \$2.95

The Essential Moral Handbook: A Guide to Catholic Living by Kevin O'Neil, C.Ss. R. and Peter Black, C.Ss.R. Liguori Publications, 2006.

This Is Our Faith, by Michael Pennock

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006.

Visual

Echoes of Faith, RCL Benziger.

For children and other young people in the program, age-appropriate catechetical resources need to be selected under the direction of the parish DRE/CRE.

Best Practices

Across the diocese, RCIA coordinators have reported that the most effective helps to the process include the following:

- Hospitality to all inquirers;
- A diverse and knowledgeable team;
- Persons who have recently completed the RCIA process who are willing to share their stories;
- Use of varied resources and materials and consideration for diverse styles of learning and interacting;
- Outreach and advertising by numerous means: announcements, ads, personal approach and invitation, parish website, giving away resources (informational or prayer leaflets);
- Willingness and readiness to help people address various issues (marital, familial, language, etc.);
- Genuine personal interest in participants;

--Updating team members through deanery and diocesan workshops as well as regional conferences held by such groups as the North American Forum on the Catechumenate or others recognized by our bishop.



Resources for RCIA Leaders

Directory for the Applications of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism. Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith , 1993

General Directory for Catechesis. Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998.

Our Hearts Were Burning within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988.

The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers. Vatican , 1998.

Ut Unum Sint (On Commitment to Ecumenism), by Pope John Paul II. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995

In addition to these magisterial resources, the following are also recommended:

Breaking Open the Lectionary, by Margaret Nutting Ralph.

The Cultural World of the Bible, by John Pilch.

The RCIA Transforming the Church, by Thomas H. Morris. Paulist Press, revised 1997.

Word and Worship, by Mary Birmingham



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