

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
PARISH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RITE:
How are we doing?
Updated August 2018

This document deals primarily with the unbaptized person seeking full initiation into the Roman Catholic Church. For more information on pastoral considerations for ministry with those who are already baptized and seeking to enter into the full communion of the Church, please see the Archdiocesan RCIA statement, *Reception of Already Baptized Candidates*. Go to <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Reception-of-Baptized-Candidates-8.1.18-1.pdf>

I. Introduction

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* was mandated for use in the dioceses of the United States on September 1, 1988. Since that time, parishes have sought to understand the vision of the rite and begin its implementation. Now that we are thirty years from the date of implementation, it is well to consider, once again, the directives set forth in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and evaluate the progress that has been made over the years. In addition, it is important to remember that the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is a “rite” of the Church, and as such, parishes should seek to follow it closely as they would any other rite of the Church (e.g. *Order of Christian Funerals*, *Rite of Marriage*, *Rite of Baptism*, *Rite of Confirmation* etc.)

In the following paragraphs, the vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is explained based on the principles presented in the rite. We invite you to reflect upon your parish experience. Is the rite being implemented fully in your parish? Are there areas that are exemplary? Are there areas that need attention? Are there areas not being implemented at all?

It is the goal of this statement to remind us of the importance and power of the vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. When the rite is implemented well in the parish setting, it has the power to transform not only the lives of those seeking to enter the Church, but also our parish communities.

Four major areas to consider are: process of conversion, community involvement, celebration of rites, and formation.

II. Process of Conversion and Discernment

From the Ritual Text:

- #1 *The rite of Christian initiation presented here is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God’s help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully.*
- #4 *The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.*
- #5 *The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the*

many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place (RCIA, 5).

For Pastoral Consideration:

- Is the parish process year-round in order to accommodate the many needs of those seeking to enter the Church?
- Is it a “gradual process” adapted to the needs of the individual?
- Are those in the process free to seek the living God of their own accord?
- Is the process a spiritual journey that varies according to God’s grace and the response of the individual?
- Based on their conversion and response to God’s grace, do the individuals celebrate the various rites and the sacraments of initiation when they are ready for fruitful reception of them?
- Does the length of time an individual is in the process depend on the needs of the individual?

III. Formation

From the Ritual Text:

#75 *The catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. ... this is achieved in four ways.*

1. *A suitable catechesis is provided...accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they participate.*
2. *As they become familiar with Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes on Christ...*
3. *The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing. Celebrations of the word of God are arranged for their benefit, and at Mass they may also take part with the faithful in the liturgy of the word... Ordinarily, however, when they are present in the assembly of the faithful they should be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the Eucharist begins.*
4. *Since the Church's life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by witness of the lives and by professing their faith.*

#76 *The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances....*

The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough - years if necessary - for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong.

#78 *The instruction that the catechumens receive during this period should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the Spirit of Christ. (RCIA, 78)*

See also the National Statutes for the Catechumenate (USCCB):

NS, #6 *The period of catechumenate, beginning at acceptance into the order of catechumens and including both the catechumenate proper and the period of purification and enlightenment after election or enrollment of names should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction and probation. Ordinarily, this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year.*

For Pastoral Consideration:

- Does the formation of the individual include the four-fold aspects of Christian formation: catechesis, community, liturgy, and apostolic witness?
- Is the catechetical formation accommodated to the Sunday liturgy?
- Do catechumens participate in various liturgical celebrations appropriate to the period of the catechumenate?
- Does the process of formation train catechumens in the Christian way of life? Does the catechetical formation present Catholic teaching in its entirety, along with forming catechumens to participate in the liturgy, to live apostolic lives, and to live life in the Spirit?
- Does the period of the catechumenate last for at least one year, beginning at the time of the Rite of Acceptance?
- Does the structure of formation change during the Period of Purification and Enlightenment to reflect a “retreat-like setting”?
- Does the period of Mystagogy extend through Pentecost and then meet regularly for a year? (nos. 247 - 250; *National Statutes*, nos. 22 - 24)

IV. Community

From the Ritual Text:

... the catechumenate is a gradual process which takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously. (RCIA, 4)

In light of what is said in Christian Initiation, General Introduction (no. 7), the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ.... Hence, the entire community must help the catechumens throughout the process of initiation.... (RCIA, 9)

Just as their new participation in the sacraments enlightens the neophytes' understanding of Scriptures, so too it increases their contact with the rest of the faithful and has an impact on the experience of the community. As a result, interaction between neophytes and the faithful is made easier and more beneficial.... (RCIA, 246)

For Pastoral Consideration:

- How does the entire parish community take responsibility for the initiation of the adults seeking entrance into the Catholic Church?
- Are all of the major rites celebrated in the midst of the community?
- Are a number of parish members involved in the process through the various ministries of initiation (i.e. sponsor, team member, catechist, liturgy coordinator, musician, hospitality, Precatechumenate catechist, etc.)?
- Does the community understand the process of initiation and their role as examples of discipleship for catechumens and candidates?
- Is liturgical/catechetical formation provided for the community of faith regarding the process of initiation of adults, including celebration of the rites?

V. Celebration of the Rites

From the Ritual Text:

This journey includes not only the periods for making inquiry and for maturing (see no. 7), but also the steps marking the catechumens' progress, as they pass, so to speak, through another door way or ascend to the next level.

1. *The first step: reaching the point of initial conversion and wishing to become Christians, they are accepted as catechumens by the Church.*
2. *The second step: having progressed in faith and nearly completed the catechumenate, they are accepted into a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation.*
3. *The third step: having completed their spiritual preparation, they receive the sacraments of Christian initiation.*

These three steps are to be regarded as the major, more intense moments of initiation and are marked by three liturgical rites.... (RCIA, 6)

The scrutinies (nos. 150-156, 164-177) should take place on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sunday of Lent, or, if necessary, on the other Sundays of Lent, or even on convenient weekdays. The bishop may dispense from one of them for serious reasons or, in extraordinary circumstances, even from two.... (RCIA, 20)

By ancient usage, the presentations, since they take place after the scrutinies, are part of the same period of purification and enlightenment.... (RCIA, 21)

For Pastoral Consideration:

- Are the following rites celebrated within the context of the Sunday worshiping community?
 - ❖ Rite of Acceptance (two or three times a year) (RCIA, 18, 41-47)
 - ❖ Rite of Dismissal (weekly dismissals after the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance) (RCIA, nos. 75.3, 83.2)
 - ❖ Rite of Sending to Election and Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA, 106, 434, and/or 530)
 - ❖ Scrutinies (Third, Fourth, Fifth Sundays of Lent) (RCIA, 20, 150-156, 164-177)
 - ❖ Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil (RCIA, no. 23)
 - ❖ Celebration of the Sunday Eucharist during the period of Mystagogy: Are Neophytes present in a significant way? (RCIA, no. 248, NS, no. 22)

- Are the following rites celebrated and directives attended to in the parish?
 - ❖ Minor Rites: Word Services, Blessings, Minor Exorcisms, Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens (RCIA, 81, 90, 95, 98)
 - ❖ Presentation of the Creed and Lord's Prayer (RCIA, 21, 147-149)
 - ❖ Do catechumens participate in the Rite of Election? (RCIA, 118- 128)
 - ❖ Do children of catechetical age receive all three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil along with the adults? (RCIA, 409, NS,18)
 - ❖ Is there discernment of readiness prior to each of the major rites with the catechumen? (RCIA, nos. 43, 120)
 - ❖ Is the community fully involved in the celebrations of major rites through song, prayer, and attentiveness to the action?
 - ❖ Is there a clear distinction made between the baptized and unbaptized?

VI. Conclusion

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults reaches its high point when those who have embarked on this journey of faith finally join us at the Eucharistic banquet. These men, women, and children who have been preparing to be fully initiated during the period of the Catechumenate and in the more intense period of Purification and Enlightenment, now join us at the Table of the Lord week after week. Throughout the period of Mystagogy, these new members of the Church reflect on their experience and continue on the journey of deepening their understanding of their faith and what it means to be Catholic. Ultimately, the question they must ask themselves is, “Am I changed weekly through participation in this Eucharistic community?”

Membership in a Eucharistic community means that we are all sent to do good works. John Paul II wrote, “The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church’s life; it is also a *project of solidarity* for all of humanity. In the celebration of the Eucharist the Church constantly renews her awareness of being a ‘sign and instrument’ not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race.” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 27) The criterion by which the quality of any parish RCIA process should be judged is this, “Have we formed faithful disciples for mission to go into the world to be the Body of Christ?”