

Liturgical Components of the Christian Initiation Process:

Gateways and Sources of Grace for Conversion

MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

Devoted to post-baptismal catechesis, this period is a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community.



PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Coinciding with **Lent**, this period consists more in interior reflection than in instruction. It is intended to enlighten the minds and hearts of participants with a deep knowledge of Christ the Savior.

Minor Rites in the Period of Purification and Enlightenment

- Penitential Rite (Candidates)
- Scrutinies (Elect)
- Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer
- Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday

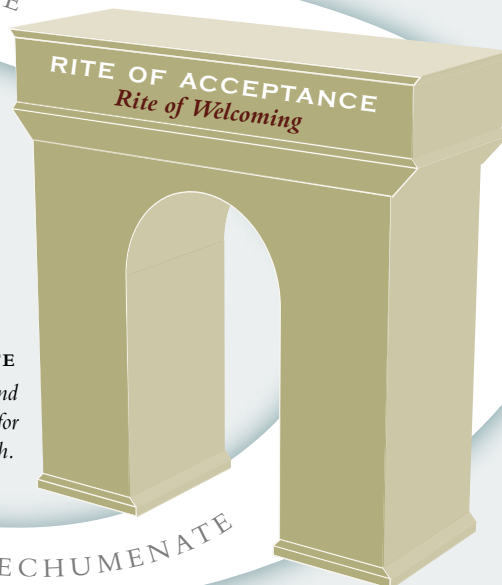
CATECHUMENATE

This is an extended period for pastoral formation and guidance aimed at training participants in the Christian life; it includes a thoroughly comprehensive catechesis on the truths of Catholic doctrine and moral life.

Minor Rites in the Period of the Catechumenate

- Celebrations of the Word of God
- Minor Exorcisms
- Anointings (Catechumens)
- Blessings

CATECHUMENATE



PRECATECHUMENATE

This is a time for inquiry and evangelization, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith.

PRECATECHUMENATE

Start

□ CATECHUMENS ■ CANDIDATES □ PERIODS 🏛️ STEPS



Suggestions for RCIA during the COVID pandemic

Four key things to focus on to ensure your RCIA process attends well to those God sends to you:

- Meet *outside as often as you can* and as long as the weather permits. Go heavy on the *food* and make it fun. Done carefully, potlucks during COVID can work, and are a great help to fellowship. Food is God's love made edible! Share time *outside* of the RCIA sessions – invite people over to your homes for a meal outside. *Befriend* them with greater intentionality.
- Focus on the *quality of one-on-one meetings* to touch base on how each RCIA participant is doing – this is normal to do prior to each of the major liturgical rites of the process, but such interactions can occur more frequently in this context (see the PDF handouts for discussion questions based on discerning readiness for the RCIA rites).
- Focus on giving each RCIA participant a *well-trained, attentive sponsor or godparent*, as early in the process as possible. Focus this year on improving your attention to the formation of those willing to serve in this critical person-to-person ministry.
- *Pray* with RCIA participants in a more deliberate manner and in *a more personal way* than perhaps you are accustomed to. Obtain for them *intercessors*, by name, from among the stronger prayer warriors in your parish community.

Four excellent resources to move forward, not backward, this autumn:

- Use the Catechetical Institute's workshops (www.FranciscanAtHome.com) to understand the pastoral aspect of RCIA better and approach the process more creatively. Some suggested workshops titles are:
 - *The Challenge of Charity: Life in the Family of God*
 - *Pastoral Components of the Christian Initiation Process: From Initial Motivation to Firm Conviction to a Catholic Worldview*
 - *Being Guided & Guiding Souls*
 - *Adult Catechetical Methodologies & Learning Styles*
 - *Developing a Team: Creating an Environment for Conversion*
- Purchase the *RCIA Godparent and Sponsor Handbook* from the Association for Catechumenal Ministry (ACM) and use it to substantially improve the quality of that area of RCIA pastoral care: <https://www.ltp.org/search/index?searchQuery=RCIA%20Godparent%20and%20Sponsor%20Handbook&matchType=3>
- Have your RCIA team and catechists read together the small book "The Good Listener" by Fr. James Sullivan. Used copies from Amazon are very inexpensive, and the book will give you a much stronger sense of how to pastorally impact others just by the quality of your one-to-one interactions with those in the RCIA process. You might also consider taking the Catechetical Institute workshop titled: *Building the Mentoring Relationship: Empathic Listening*.
- Take a look at the attached PDF handouts on questions to discuss among those tasked with RCIA to improve your parish's RCIA process, and then choose one or two to focus on this year.

The Catechumenal Model ~ Paradigm for All Catechesis

*Given that the *missio ad gentes* is the paradigm of all the Church's missionary activity, the baptismal catechumenate, which is joined to it, is the model of its catechizing activity. It is therefore helpful to underline those elements of the catechumenate which must inspire contemporary catechesis and its significance . . . Post-baptismal catechesis, without slavishly imitating the structure of the baptismal catechumenate, and recognizing in those to be catechized the reality of their Baptism, does well, however, to draw inspiration from this preparatory school for the Christian life, and to allow itself to be enriched by those principal elements which characterize the catechumenate. ~ General Directory for Catechesis 90, 91*

Jesus looked at him and loved him.
~ Mark 10:21



What's the point? ~ Conversion that is deep and lasting, authentic and spreading

- ▲ A process ~ not a program of pre-set duration for all participants (GDC 143)
- ▲ A turning process ~ focused on conversion from sin to sanctity (GDC 82)
- ▲ A gradual process ~ building systematically piece upon piece (GDC 88-89)
- ▲ A personal process ~ mindful that conversion is highly individual (GDC 118; CT 31)
- ▲ A pervasive process ~ leaving no part of participants' lives untouched (GDC 116; CT 22)
- ▲ A community process ~ joining not just to God, but to his visible family (GDC 72, 158; CT 24)
- ▲ A supernatural process ~ "then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45)

What makes something catechumenal?

- ✦ An authentically LITURGICAL aspect – pouring out God's changing graces, always as an act of movement, giving opportunities to the Holy Spirit to draw hearts nearer, and to follow trustingly the way of faith
- ✦ An authentically CATECHETICAL aspect – clearly and courageously proclaiming Christ Jesus, aiming for change, to accept all that He is, all that He offers, and all that He invites us to hope for in the Father's plan
- ✦ An authentically PASTORAL aspect – making abundantly present the sacrificial and generous love of the brethren, giving them a vision for the Catholic way of openness to life, calling them to heroic charity

She turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus . . .
Then, Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him, "Teacher!" ~ John 20:14, 16

What are the elements of Christian initiation?

- ✧ To know (GDC 174) ~ "...sincere and patient dialogue..." (AG 11)
- ✧ To be known (GDC 158-159) ~ "establish relationships of respect and love" (AG 11)
- ✧ Centered on the One to be known ~ Jesus is the point (GDC 89)
- ✧ Preparatory only ~ implying life-long pursuit of Christ at the feet of Mother Church (GDC 90)
- ✧ An invitation to participation ~ inculturation is reciprocal; the Church needs those who enter (GDC 109)
- ✧ Discernment ~ teaching them to read what God has written in themselves (GDC 152c)
- ✧ Definitive goal ~ peace, joy, the satisfaction of our deepest desires, the beginning of Heaven (GDC 117; CT 21)
 - ✦ Systematic and organic
 - ✦ Focused on essentials
 - ✦ Open to the fullness of the Christian life

This comprehensive formation includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life...which promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on his Person; it implies education in knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, in such a manner that the entire person, at his deepest levels, feels enriched by the Word of God; it helps the disciple of Christ to transform the old man in order to assume his baptismal responsibilities and to profess the faith from the heart. (GDC 67)



Journey through the Rites of Christian Initiation

TEACH TO THE RITES...

...in order to prepare the catechumens and candidates to experience them fruitfully.

Look at Prayers ✠ Scripture ✠ Questions ✠ Ritual Actions ✠ Intercessions

REFLECT ON THE RITES...

...by remembering the prayers of the Rites and calling on the graces received.

Rely on God's grace to be with them and move them through the next period

Overview of the Major Liturgical Gateways

(RCIA, Introduction 6)

The Rites of initiation are suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of individuals, the actions of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place. This journey includes...the steps marking the catechumens' progress, as they pass, so to speak, through another doorway or ascend to the next level.

1. **The first step** (Rites of Acceptance and Rite of Welcoming): reaching the point of initial conversion and wishing to become Christians, those unbaptized are accepted as catechumens by the Church; those baptized are called to enter the path to full communion.
2. **The second step** (Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion): having progressed in faith, understanding, and Christian experience, and having nearly completed the catechumenate, they are accepted into a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation.
3. **The third step** (Reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist): having completed their spiritual preparation, they receive the sacraments of initiation and enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Rites of Acceptance and Rite of Welcoming

(RCIA 41-74, 406, 411-433, 505-529)

Assembling publicly for the first time, those who have completed the period of the pre-catechumenate declare their intention to the Church, and the Church in turn, carrying out its apostolic mission, accepts them as persons who intend to become its members. God showers his grace on the candidates, since the celebration manifests their desire publicly and marks their reception and first consecration by the Church. Before the Rite is celebrated, therefore, sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions.

The prerequisite to the first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root:

- ⊗ Evidence of the first faith, initial conversion and intention to change
- ⊗ Desire to enter into a relationship with God in Christ
- ⊗ Evidence of the first stirrings of repentance
- ⊗ Start to call upon God in prayer
- ⊗ A sense of the Church
- ⊗ Experience of the company and spirit of Christians by contact with a priest and members of the Catholic community



From now on catechumens and candidates receive blessings and are dismissed at Sunday Mass to go to "Reflection on the Word." The Church feeds them richly on the Word until they can "come to the Table."

Minor Rites Proper to the Period of the Catechumenate: (after the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming)

Celebrations of the Word of God (RCIA 81-89, 406)

During the period of the catechumenate there should be celebrations of the Word of God that accord with the liturgical season and contribute to the instruction of the catechumens and the needs of the community. These include:

- ⊕ Celebrations held specially for the catechumens
- ⊕ Participation in the Liturgy of the Word at the Sunday Mass
- ⊕ Celebrations held in connection with catechetical instruction

Minor Exorcisms (RCIA 90-94)

Minor exorcisms draw the attention of the catechumens to the real nature of the Christian life, the struggle between flesh and spirit, the importance of self denial for reaching the blessedness of God's kingdom, and the unending need for God's help. The minor exorcisms take place within a celebration of the Word of God held in a church, a chapel, or center for the catechumenate. Minor exorcisms may also be held at the beginning or end of meetings for catechesis.

Blessings and Anointings (RCIA 95-102)

The blessings of the catechumens are a sign of God's love and of the Church's tender care. They are bestowed on the catechumens so that, even though they do not as yet have the grace of the sacraments, they may still receive from the Church courage, joy, and peace as they proceed along the difficult journey they have begun. Blessings are usually given at the end of a celebration of the Word; they may also be given at the end of a meeting for catechesis.

During the period of the catechumenate, a Rite of anointing the catechumens, through use of the Oil of Catechumens, may be celebrated wherever this seems beneficial or desirable. This anointing ordinarily takes place after the homily in a celebration of the Word of God.

Rite of Sending (RCIA 106-117, 434-445, 530-546)

As the focal point of the Church's concern for the catechumens, admission to election belongs to the bishop who is usually its presiding celebrant. It is within the parish community, however, that the preliminary judgment is made concerning the catechumens' state of formation and progress. This Rite offers the local community the opportunity to express its approval of the catechumens and to send them forth to the celebration of election assured of the parish's care and support. The Rite takes place at a suitable time prior to the Rite of Election.

Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion

(RCIA 118-137, 446-458, 547-561)

The celebration of the Rite of Election, which usually coincides with the opening of Lent, also marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, during which the elect will be encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity. At this second step, on the basis of the testimony of godparents and catechists and of the catechumens' reaffirmation of their intention, the Church judges their state of readiness and decides on their advancement towards the sacraments of initiation.

Before the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, participants should manifest:

- ✂ A conversion in mind and in action
- ✂ A sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching
- ✂ A sufficient acquaintance with faith and charity
- ✂ An intention to receive the sacraments of the Church

Within the Rite of Election the bishop celebrant or his delegate declares in the presence of the community the Church's approval of the candidates. Therefore to exclude any semblance of mere formality from the Rite, there should be a deliberation prior to its celebration to decide on the catechumens' suitability. This deliberation is carried out by the priests, deacons, and catechists involved in the formation of the catechumens, and by the godparents and representatives of the local community.





Minor Rites Proper to the Period of Purification & Enlightenment: (after the Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion)

Scrutinies (RCIA 141-146, 150-156, 164-177)

The Scrutinies, which are solemnly celebrated on Sundays and are reinforced by an exorcism, are Rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose. The Scrutinies are meant to uncover, then to heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. The Scrutinies are ordinarily celebrated on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent.

Presentation Rites (RCIA 104-105, 157-162, 178-183)

The presentations normally take place during Lent. With the catechumenal formation of the elect completed, the Church lovingly entrusts to them the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts that have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church's faith and prayer. These texts are presented in order to enlighten the elect.

Penitential Rite (RCIA 459-472)

This Penitential Rite can serve to mark the Lenten purification of baptized but previously uncatechized adults who are preparing to receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist or to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. Because the Penitential Rite normally belongs to the period of final preparation for the sacraments, its celebration presumes that the candidates are approaching the maturity of faith and understanding requisite for fuller life in the community. It is normally celebrated on the 2nd Sunday of Lent.

Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday (RCIA 185-205)

When it is possible to bring the elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer, some or all of the following Rites may be celebrated as an immediate preparation for the sacraments: presentation of the Lord's Prayer if it has been deferred, "return" or recitation of the Creed, Ephphetha Rite, and the choosing of a Baptismal/Confirmation name.

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

(RCIA 206-243, 473-504, 562-594)

Through this final step the elect, receiving pardon for their sins, are admitted into the people of God. They are graced with adoption as children of God and are led by the Holy Spirit into the promised fullness of time begun in Christ and, as they share in the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal, even to a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

In this celebration, participants are incorporated sacramentally into the Body of Christ. For this step, they must be willing to, in accord with what they will be asked to profess publicly in the liturgy:

- ✠ Renounce sin publicly — reject sin, Satan, and all his empty promises
- ✠ Profess the faith publicly — profess the creedal truths; all that the Church believes and proclaims to be revealed by God

This final "gateway" leads directly to insertion into the mystery of Christ and to full communion with him in his Body, the Church. The elect and candidates are welcomed in Christ's light on the "night that shines like the day."

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ~ Isaiah 60:1



Discernment Interview Prior to the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming

Interviewer: Before beginning, read RCIA 42 and 43. This meeting should be preceded by a discussion with any members of the RCIA community (clergy, team members, godparents, sponsors, etc.) who have assisted in the formation of the individual regarding the person's readiness to take this step.

Use the following questions as a guide for a conversation with the inquirer. As you talk, let the inquirer know how you have seen God at work in his or her life during the inquiry period. Be sure to explain that, while some individuals may be ready to go through this Rite at this point, others may not, and that if someone needs more time to discern, learn about, and decide to follow the Catholic way of life, that is fine. If the individual is interested in celebrating these Rites, and you or others with whom you have spoken have concerns about his or her readiness, explain your concerns and that it might be in the inquirer's best interest to continue to discern for a period of time. At the conclusion of your conversation, unless you or the inquirer needs more time to come to a decision, let him or her know whether or not he or she will participate in the Rite of Acceptance or Welcoming. Notes on the conversation should be taken as needed.

Name: _____

Seeking admission as a ☐ catechumen (unbaptized) ☐ candidate (baptized)

Godparent(s)/Sponsor(s), if determined: _____

- 1) What has been your experience of the sessions up to this point? What has affected you the most? What have you enjoyed the most? What has challenged you the most?
- 2) What changes have occurred in your relationship with God or with your family or friends during this time?
- 3) What kind of changes do you see in yourself?
- 4) How has your relationship with your godparent/sponsor (if established) been working out?
- 5) What experiences have you had in this parish community up to this point? Are you beginning to have a sense of belonging to this parish community?
- 6) What experiences have you had in reading the Scriptures?
- 7) Tell me about how you pray.
- 8) How would you describe your relationship with Jesus Christ?
- 9) To what degree do you see yourself turning away from sin and developing a desire for virtue?
- 10) Do you feel that you have a good grasp of the gospel (the good news) that Jesus Christ came to reveal? What do you most desire to learn more about?
- 11) How would you describe what being a Catholic/living a Catholic life means? What does it mean to you that a Catholic is called to live a life of charity?
- 12) What does it mean to be a member of the Body of Christ? A member of the Roman Catholic Church?

After explaining the importance of the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming, and the questions that will be asked of the inquirer during the Rite, then ask:

- 13) Do you understand what is being asked of you in the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming?
- 14) Do you feel that you are prepared to take this step in the initiation process?



Discernment Interview Prior to the Rite of Election or the Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion

Interviewer: Before beginning, read RCIA 120 and the questions that are asked of the catechumens and candidates during the Rite of Sending (RCIA 537-542) and the Rites of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA 551-557). This meeting should be preceded by a discussion with any members of the RCIA community (clergy, team members, godparents, sponsors, etc.) who have assisted in the formation of the individual regarding the person's readiness to take this step.

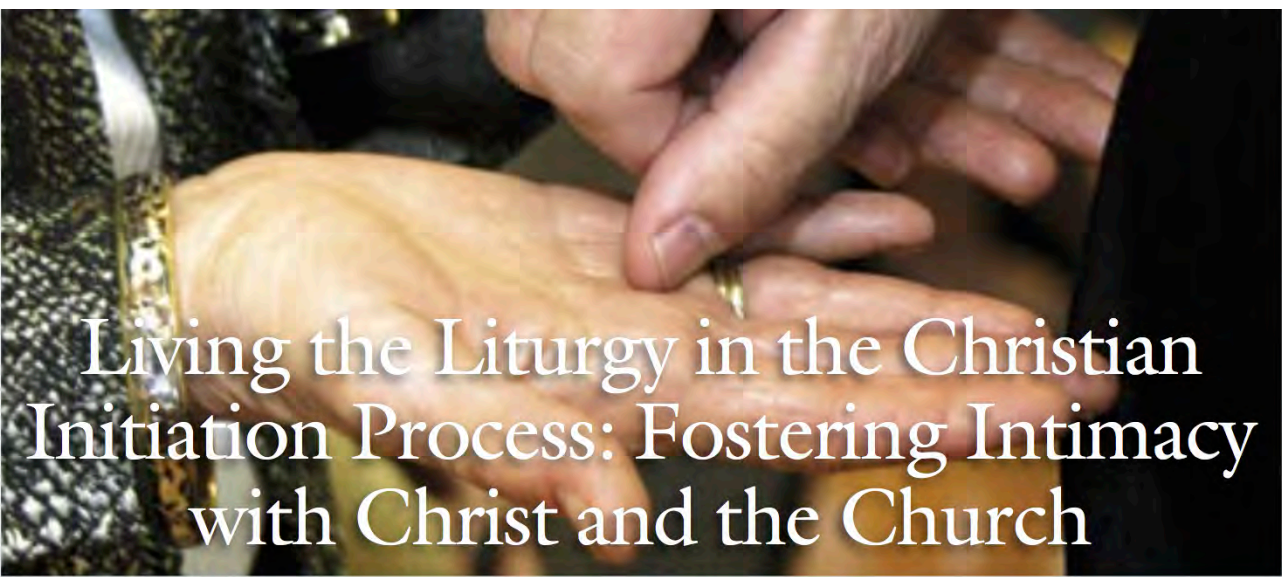
Use the following questions as a guide for a conversation with the catechumen or candidate. As you talk, let him or her know how you have seen God at work in his or her life during the initiation process. Be sure to explain that, while some individuals may be ready to celebrate the sacraments at this time, others may not, and that if someone needs more time to learn about and decide to live the Catholic way of life, that is fine. If the individual is interested in celebrating these Rites, and you or others with whom you have spoken have concerns about his or her readiness, explain your concerns and say that it might be in the person's best interest to delay celebrating the sacraments for a period of time. At the conclusion of your conversation, unless you or the catechumen/candidate needs more time to come to a decision, let the person know whether or not he or she will participate in the Rite of Sending and Rite of Election or the Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion. Notes on the conversation should be taken as needed.

Name: _____

☐ Catechumen ☐ Candidate for full communion ☐ Candidate for completion of initiation

Godparent(s)/Sponsor(s): _____

- 1) What has been your experience during the initiation process? What has affected you the most? What have you enjoyed the most? What has challenged you the most?
 - 2) How has your life changed in the time that you have been in the catechumenal process?
 - 3) What changes have occurred in your relationship with God or with your family or friends during this time?
 - 4) How has your relationship with your godparent/sponsor been working out?
 - 5) Tell me about some of the people in the parish whom you have come to know or experiences in the parish you have had during the initiation process.
 - 6) How comfortable are you reading the Scriptures?
 - 7) Tell me about how you pray.
 - 8) How would you describe your relationship with Jesus Christ?
 - 9) Do you find yourself relating to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints?
 - 10) Do you understand what it means to be faithful to the teachings and magisterium of the Church?
 - 11) Do you feel that you have a good grasp of the teachings of the Church? Do you have questions about any of them? What areas do you wish to learn more about?
 - 12) Do you understand what becoming a member of the Catholic Church entails? How would you describe what being a Catholic/living a Catholic life means?
 - 13) To what degree do you see yourself turning away from sin and developing a desire for virtue?
 - 14) How do you understand the call to holiness? What does it mean to you that a Catholic is called to live a life of charity?
 - 15) Do you desire the sacraments? Specifically the Eucharist?
- Explain to the initiate what will take place at the Rite of Sending (RCIA 537-542) and the Rite of Election or the Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA 551-557), then ask:
- 16) Do you understand what is being asked of you in these Rites? Are you prepared to take this step?
 - 17) Do you wish to be baptized/be received into full communion/complete the sacraments of initiation?



Living the Liturgy in the Christian Initiation Process: Fostering Intimacy with Christ and the Church

Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist...Catechesis...must...educate the disciples of Jesus Christ for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds..., as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life. (GDC 85)

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. ~ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16

During the Christian initiation process, catechumens and candidates should be introduced to different ways of praying: liturgical and non-liturgical, suited to the particular period.

The whole initiation must bear a markedly paschal character, since the initiation of Christians is the first sacramental sharing in Christ's dying and rising... (RCIA 4)

Insertion into the mystery of Christ is centered on helping catechumens and candidates 'become' liturgical people. The normal adult Christian life is to be liturgical. In general, there could be three reactions to this concept among participants:

- ✧ Some may be wary and resistant (especially Evangelicals and non-liturgical Protestant traditions)
- ✧ Some may be intrigued (especially the unbaptized and some Protestants)
- ✧ Some may be "naturals" (especially Jews, Anglicans, and Episcopalians)

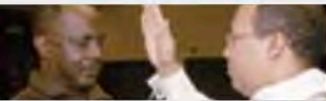
Sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in the sacramental practice. (CT 23)

The source of grace and the power of liturgy flows from the Paschal mystery. The instruction, experiences, and pastoral attention offered to participants regarding living the liturgical life should stress in particular the following:

- ⊕ The change that occurs in the very being of the human person in the sacraments (see CCC 1084, 1121, 1129)
- ⊕ The power and effectiveness of the liturgy. No other action of the Church can equal it. In the liturgy Christ himself is present and at work as nowhere else (see CCC 1070)
- ⊕ God's steadfast love expressed in the sacraments and liturgical actions (see CCC 1077-1083)
- ⊕ The Scriptural foundations of liturgy (see Luke 24:13-32; Romans 6:2b-11 among many passages)

The fruit of sacramental life is both personal and ecclesial. For every one of the faithful on the one hand, this fruit is life for God in Christ Jesus; for the Church on the other, it is an increase in charity and in her mission of witness. (CCC 1134)

In the liturgy we do what we are created to do: love God and give him honor and glory. What happens in liturgy is meant to spill over into all aspects of Christian living. Priests, deacons, catechists, godparents, sponsors, musicians, hospitality people, and other members of the RCIA team, must understand the central importance of the Paschal mystery in the catechumenate. Through the liturgical Rites the catechumens and candidates are progressively inserted into the Body of Christ and configured to him.



THE PERIOD OF THE PRECATECHUMENATE

During the precatechumenate period, pastors should help those taking part in it with prayers suited to them, for example, by celebrating for their spiritual well being the prayers of exorcism and the blessings given in the ritual. (RCIA 40)

Inquirers should be helped to:

✠ *Believe* ✠ *Be freely converted to the Lord* ✠ *Commit themselves to him*

Inquirers should be introduced to some basic liturgical actions and prayers such as the sign of the cross and communal praying of the psalms. As they approach the Rites of Acceptance or Welcoming, they should be introduced to the responses in the Liturgy of the Word, in preparation for their first invitation to the table of God's Word.

The prerequisite for making this first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates. Thus there must be...evidence of...a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer. (RCIA 42) The role of clergy, catechists, team and sponsors is to:

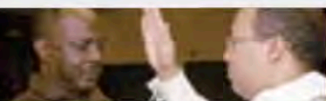
✠ *Model*

✠ *Explain*

✠ *Invite*

Ideas for this period:

- ✧ Explain and use the sign of the cross
- ✧ Explain and use grace before and after meals
- ✧ Introduce the proclamation of Scripture
- ✧ Pray the psalms and other Scriptural prayers
- ✧ Offer a booklet of "Basic Catholic Prayers" and explain them
- ✧ Sing hymns that help put words to the journey they are on
- ✧ Explain the Liturgical Year, Sundays and feast days, as they occur
- ✧ Begin simple, reflective, meditative prayer



THE PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

Prayers should be taught and used that would reinforce the formation in the Catholic life which catechumens are receiving. The goal of this effort should be that:

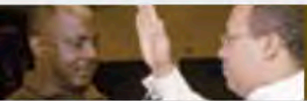
- ⊗ The catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer (RCIA 75.2)
- ⊗ Catechumens should be eager, then, to take part in celebrations of the Word of God and to receive blessings and other sacramentals (RCIA 47)

Beginning with this period, participants (depending on their baptismal status) are sustained by the graces dispensed by the Church through the means of:

- ✧ Celebrations of the Word (RCIA 81-89, 406)
- ✧ Blessings and Minor Exorcisms (RCIA 90-97)
- ✧ Anointings (RCIA 98-102)
- ✧ Presentations (under certain circumstances) (RCIA 104-105, 407)
- ✧ Sacramentals (CCC 1667-1680)

Ideas for this period:

- ✧ Reading and meditating on Scripture
- ✧ Explain and use sacramentals (blessed crucifix, holy water, candles, the Advent wreath, etc.)
- ✧ The Liturgy of the Hours (the simpler Hours, like Night Prayer, could be prayed at first)
- ✧ Spontaneous prayer, prayers of thanksgiving, or intercessions for needs
- ✧ Parish prayer gatherings, missions, vespers, etc.
- ✧ Exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours
- ✧ Attend and observe sacramental celebrations when possible: Baptisms, weddings, ordinations, etc.
- ✧ Devotions to the Sacred Heart, Mary and the saints, the rosary, litanies, novenas
- ✧ Spiritual reading, the lives of the saints
- ✧ Special retreat days for catechumens and candidates



THE PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

At this stage, liturgical prayer should deepen in proximate preparation for the sacraments of initiation. The entire period should be characterized by an atmosphere of prayer and retreat. “For both the elect and the local community, the Lenten season is a time for spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebration of the Paschal mystery.” (RCIA 138)

This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance. (RCIA 139)

In this period, the elect and candidates should reflect on:

- ✙ The Creed
- ✙ The Our Father
- ✙ Any of the Liturgy of the Hours
- ✙ Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament
- ✙ Devotional prayer, especially to Our Lady

Ideas for this period:

- ⊗ Prayer book for the Lenten Season
- ⊗ Stations of the Cross
- ⊗ Liturgy of the Hours
- ⊗ Explain meditation
- ⊗ Explain fasting and redemptive suffering
- ⊗ Retreat opportunities
- ⊗ Pray with the Scripture and prayers of the Scrutinies
- ⊗ Spiritual reading, the lives of the saints
- ⊗ Examination of conscience in preparation for Baptism
- ⊗ Examination of conscience and formal preparation (for those already baptized) for the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the sacraments of initiation (see RCIA 482 and RCIA, National Statutes 36)
- ⊗ Incorporate other ideas from the Catechumenate section

Proximate Preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation:

The elect are to be advised that on Holy Saturday they should refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast. (RCIA 185.1)

When it is possible, ‘bring the elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer...’ (RCIA 185.2)

Through modeling, catechesis, and joining with the community in liturgical prayer, by the end of the period of purification and enlightenment, the elect will feel “at home” in the liturgy and will be disposed to participate fully and actively in the sacramental life of the Church.



THE PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

In this final period of the catechumenal process, the neophytes “grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity.” (RCIA 244)

Their godparents, sponsors, catechists, and clergy should assist the neophytes to:

- ✦ Mature in Christian prayer and meditation
- ✦ Participate fully and actively in the liturgical life of the Church
- ✦ Become models of liturgical prayer to others
- ✦ Seek to live out the liturgy’s theme of loving sacrifice, through doing works of charity for others

On the anniversary of their Baptism the neophytes should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment. (RCIA 250)

To show his pastoral concern for these new members of the Church, the bishop, particularly if he was unable to preside at the sacraments of initiation himself, should arrange, if possible, to meet the recently baptized at least once in the year and to preside at a celebration of the Eucharist with them.

Ideas for this period:

- ⊕ Instruction on how they can draw on their Baptism and Confirmation graces; how to consciously live this new life of grace daily
- ⊕ Attend Mass at other parishes or shrines, and participate in pilgrimages
- ⊕ Attend the Mass for neophytes with the bishop, if the diocese celebrates one
- ⊕ Celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation frequently

Living a truly Catholic life cannot really be parceled out into bits and pieces: the rosary here, Mass there, a novena now and again, CCD, a retreat and so forth. There is only one agenda for the Christian, and that is to be configured to Christ. The Church is the place where this occurs — and by “the Church” we mean our private prayers as well as public occasions like the liturgy, since it is as members of one another as well as of Christ that we live.

~ FROM AN ARTICLE TITLED “FAMILY WORSHIP” BY THOMAS HOWARD, IN *LAT WITNESS*, JUNE 1998.



Encountering Christ as Sacrament ~ Models of the Catechumenate

by Msgr. M. Francis Mannion

The renewal of the process of Christian initiation stands as one of the most important and successful features of modern liturgical renewal. Since its promulgation in 1972 and its further elaboration under the auspices of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1988, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has been among the most pastorally effective features of Catholic life in the United States. (Despite its name, we should always keep in mind that when we are talking about initiation, we are not talking only about rituals, but the whole liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral process of which it is comprised. Widespread use of "RCIA" probably precludes renaming it more appropriately.)

RCIA is a model of Christian initiation that highlights the sacramental features of incorporation into Christ; more adequately integrates doctrinal instruction into a framework of comprehensive spiritual, moral, and liturgical formation; reinvigorates the communal elements of the process of adult formation; and gives the laity active responsibility. All of these clearly represent an advance over the process of initiation in use on the eve of the Second Vatican Council. Few areas of Catholic life have been as richly blessed by the *ressourcement* – the return to early Christian Order of Initiation--called for by the Council as has the whole process by which adults today become Catholic Christians.

And yet all is not well. The very fact that the challenge is conversion, the conforming of imperfect men and women to Christ, means that the process will never be perfect. Initiation is, after all, the beginning of a process which has its ending in eternity. However, there are problems that are more concrete and, for that reason, can more readily be corrected. In general, three models of RCIA are operative today in U.S. Catholic parishes. Each of the models conceives of, and practices, Christian initiation differently. This chapter describes these models, discussing their strengths and weaknesses in terms of catechetical, liturgical, and pastoral/ecclesial dimensions.

The First Model: Doctrinal-Apologetic

The first model can be termed "doctrinal-apologetic". The key operative elements here are, obviously, doctrine and apologetics. The doctrinal features of Catholicism are matters of the highest importance. It is not possible to be a Catholic without adherence to a body of doctrine, nor is it possible to become a Catholic Christian without acquiring a thorough knowledge of Christian doctrinal tradition. By the same token, apologetics--the defense of Catholic faith--is no less important today that it was in the past. Even from New Testament times, apologetics of necessity played an important part in providing a clear delineation of Christian belief, offering an "account of the faith" in a wider cultural context, and defending orthodoxy from corruptions of various sorts and from various sources.

The doctrinal-apologetic model, however, is one in which the doctrinal and the apologetic elements are the *primary* focus, so that the teaching of doctrine and apologetic methodology are regarded as the principal tasks and concerns of Christian initiation. The cognitive aspects of religion are preeminent, so that religious reality is approached in a



manner similar to philosophy or science. The emphasis is on clear, comprehensive, and detailed communication of the doctrinal elements of Catholic faith, so that the participant can proceed into membership as quickly and efficiently as possible. In this model, Christian initiation tends to be businesslike, juridical, and pragmatic. The participant tends to be thought of as well-informed and well-formed when he or she knows the Catholic faith and can account for it conceptually.

In this model, the catechist is primarily a *teacher*, a master of doctrine and a good apologist for the Faith who is able to demonstrate the truth of the Catholic faith against other religious claims to truth with which the catechumen or the candidate may be familiar. The physical place for RCIA in this model is a *classroom* and its image is a *blackboard* (see table below).

This model of Christian formation has considerable strengths. These include providing strong doctrinal knowledge to those joining the Church; tailoring the process to individual needs, social backgrounds, and levels of education of converts; placing a necessary emphasis on Catholic identity and on what is distinctive about the Catholic faith; accounting well and in a compelling manner for the truth claims of Catholicism; and, not least, requiring of converts a clear sense of what they are undertaking, as well as requiring of them a lifelong commitment to Catholic faith in its explicit ecclesial dimensions.

However, the duration of instruction tends to be relatively short, often fitting comfortably within the timetable of the secular school year. The catechumen is a student in the regular educational sense; though the process may take place with other learners in the classroom, the communal dimension might not be significant. The actual event of initiation in this model may also be non-communal and involve few people, and options that allow for private initiation will tend to be used. The ritual dimensions will accordingly tend to be truncated. An approach which gives priority to the doctrinal and the apologetic, and which highlights the formal and juridical features of the Church, tends not to have a high sacramental and liturgical consciousness. Thus, what is problematic about this approach is not the importance it accords to doctrine and apologetics, but rather the relatively low profile given to other crucial factors of initiation: the spiritual, the communal, and the liturgical. Spiritual and moral formation, and introduction into the sacramental life of the Church, have their place in this model, but they are expected to fall into place by themselves and are not systematically and carefully stimulated and promoted.

Furthermore, the ecclesiology that goes with this kind of understanding is overly institutional. When the formal, structural, and procedural features of the Church are highlighted disproportionately, a kind of rationalistic, excessively scholastic, and abstract theology and spirituality will be generated in participants, with negative results for the general life of the Church. When the cognitive, the propositional, or the informational features of faith dominate and become the paradigm for the whole, then Christian life and the process of Christian initiation are more easily misconceived.

This process of formation, which has its roots in the pre-Vatican II Church, produces good converts; it would be arrogant and untrue to suggest otherwise. Indeed, the strengths of the conversion process of that era are very easily forgotten in the enthusiasm for the newer RCIA process. The problems are not found in what it actually does or seeks to do, but in what it could do more amply, comprehensively, and richly. Vatican II sought not to replace the old system but to take its strengths and to expand them, amplifying areas not adequately emphasized previously.

The Second Model: Spiritual-Expressive

The second model is the conception and practice of RCIA as a means by which the spirituality of individuals is brought to expression and given shape. The use of the word “spiritual” here does not mean what has traditionally been meant by the word in Catholicism, but instead what it has come to mean in our secular culture and, to a very significant and profound degree, in contemporary writing about spirituality in American Catholicism: the personal, intense search for meaning.

The spiritual-expressive approach has its roots in what is called “the turn to the subject” that began in the 18th-century European Enlightenment. Philosophers and psychologists assert that whatever is finally important to religion is found in the pre-reflective, experiential depths of the self. Adherents to this approach regard the outer, or public, features of religion principally as expressive and evocative of internal experience. The subjective manner of thought that this movement produced is now fully embedded in Western secular culture.

In this model, the RCIA is seen as a means of helping individuals to find God within the deepest part of themselves. It is generally anti-doctrinal, standing in opposition to catechisms and manuals of formal belief and paying little attention to the systematic and detailed transmission of the information of faith. This approach arises from a conviction that the formation of an individual spiritual universe, based on some generalized personal spirituality, takes precedence over conceptual knowledge of doctrine, Scriptures, and initiation into the traditional language of faith. As a result of an understanding that the individual is naturally religious, proponents of spiritual-expressivism conclude that this religiosity needs only an environment of freedom, creativity, and imagination to come to expression.

The operative image here is not the blackboard but the *mirror*, and the physical place is not the classroom, but the *support group*. The catechist is not a teacher, as is the case whenever anybody approaches a blackboard, but a *therapist* (see table below).

In this model of the RCIA, the spiritual, the affective, and the personal are underscored. It attends to areas of formation other than doctrine. The focus is more psychological than theological, more personal than ecclesial, more emotive than cognitive. It pays considerable attention to the rites and symbols of the liturgy, often utilizing them with great enthusiasm and energy. Its processes are highly communal, in theory and in practice, and it involves the laity in diverse ways in the many features of catechumenal formation.

However, the effects of the spiritual-expressive model on catechesis are deeply problematic. This model fails to pay adequate attention to doctrine, generally attending instead to the exploration of personal experience. A lectionary-based catechesis can unfortunately foster this tendency. Deacon Owen Cummings points out that “the spiritual-expressive approach fails because of its inability to initiate men and women adequately into Christian faith, into Christian understanding and Christian practice. Spiritual-expressive catechesis . . . misunderstands the very nature and process of formation. [It is] too naive, and . . . overly optimistic about the ability of . . . unmediated religious experience to achieve the level of mature Christian faith.” Deacon Cummings continues that catechesis in this framework “operates on the conviction that a few direct experiences . . . suffice to develop the religious skills” that adults require. Where this happens, he says, “faith is self-legitimizing, impervious to examination or argument, and has its home in the private imaginings of the believer or in the sheltered world of religious communities.”

In the spiritual-expressive model, liturgy comes to be regarded as playing a merely functional role in Christian life. The Catholic worship system is not revered as the objective action of God through Christ in His Church, but instead is seen as a symbolic guide to the expression of an inner spiritual state, so that the focus is no longer the worshipping Church but the self; awe is attached not to the liturgy but to a personal interiority. This focus on the priority of the inner and the personal creates the view that divine grace is available without sacramental mediation. Sacraments are not understood to mediate God’s grace, as traditional Catholic theology holds, but only to articulate, express, and celebrate divine grace already present and active in the world. When connected with the anti-ritual and anti-sacramental bias of North American culture, itself derived from Protestantism, the rites and symbols of the liturgy are instead sometimes viewed as potential threats to authentic spirituality. For these reasons, liturgical rites are used rather functionally, being regarded as aids to inner personal spirituality. The rites and symbols of the liturgy are consequently regarded as temporary, provisional, secondary, and experimental. They lose their revered, solemn, God-bearing status. As a natural result, a great deal of experimentation occurs in the rites of the RCIA.

Finally, a poor ecclesiology is at work. The Church is seen as a community of like-minded people on a spiritual journey that sometimes leads them into the Church and sometimes out of the Church. The result is that no great value is attached to strong, lifelong commitment to the Church. The staying power of Catholics formed in this model can be very poor indeed.

The extent to which this model of Christian initiation is operative should not be exaggerated. Yet the “spiritual-expressive” model is widespread in American Catholicism today, especially at the level of popular liturgical and pastoral theology. It is strongly promoted in many liturgy and catechetical offices and organizations at diocesan and national levels, as well as in existing literature, workshops, and conferences on Christian initiation. The philosophical and cultural movement represented by the spiritual-expressive model has generated and encouraged the deeply negative phenomena, both in cultural and ecclesial life, of radical subjectivism, emotivism, and individualism. The effects of these upon the whole range of Christian institutions has been decidedly negative.

The Bible, the sacraments, the spiritual tradition, established forms of religious life, and the RCIA are easily rendered devoid of their authoritative character and become instead little more than conceptually-limited, time-conditioned, cultural aids for the expression of personal spirituality. The operation of spiritual-expressivism is one of the most fundamental causes of disorder and disorientation in the life of the Church and its formative ministry at the present time.

The Third Model: Sacramental-Acculturation

The RCIA exists to advance *all* the crucial dimensions of initiation: the spiritual, moral, and Biblical as companions to the doctrinal; communal life as the formative context for initiation; the responsibility of the laity to work with ordained clergy in Christian formation; and liturgical and sacramental elements as central to the whole process from beginning to end. The most adequate model to achieve these ends can be called the “sacramental-acculturation” model.

If the focus on the first model is doctrinal and apologetic, and the focus on the second is the Christian expression of interior spirituality, the focus of the third model is the sacramental life of the Church and the need for the prospective Catholic to be acculturated into that sacramental life. The word “sacramental” is used here primarily in the ordinary sense of the word, having in the forefront particularly the sacraments of initiation. It is also used, however, with the awareness that the sacraments incorporate us into the Church, which is the sacrament of Christ, and into Christ, Who is the sacrament of God.

“Acculturation” means that the prospective believer has to be initiated into the sacramental culture of the Church. Acculturation has to take place in the way that one moves from one culture to another and learns the new culture; it is cultural literacy. The sacramental economy forms and affects the religious experience and reality of a community and of its

individual members. In the spiritual-expressive model, the experience of the Divine comes first and the sacramental expression comes second. In the sacramental-acculturation model the reverse is true; the sacramental expression comes first and the spiritual experience is the result.

The sacramental system, therefore, is a culture in which an individual moves, requiring interiorizing a set of skills by practice and training. Learning how to feel, how to act, and how to think in conformity with a religious tradition is a process that leads an individual to his or her true self. Learning the story of salvation history, of God acting in history, allows an individual to experience and interpret himself or herself, and the world, in its terms. Becoming a Christian is a matter of learning, interiorizing, and practicing the Scriptures, doctrines, sacraments, prayers, moral traditions, spiritual writings, and communal protocols of the Church. To become a Catholic is to be initiated into the culture and language of Catholic sacramental life.

If the image of the doctrinal-apologetic model is the blackboard, and the image of the spiritual-expressive model is the mirror, then the image of the sacramental-acculturation model is the *icon*, the living presence of God and His holy ones in our midst. If the place of the first model of formation is the classroom, and the place of the second model is the support group, then the place of the third model is the *worshiping assembly*. Finally, if in the first model the catechist is a teacher, and in the second model the catechist is a therapist, then in the sacramental-acculturation model the catechist is a *saint*, in the New Testament sense: the holy one (see table below).

In the sacramental-acculturation model, the strengths of the first two models are conjoined and their weaknesses avoided. For example, rather than seeing catechesis as the process of identifying and giving expression to the interior religious intuition of individuals, as spiritual-expressivism holds, catechetical formation is a profound, comprehensive, and dynamic immersion in the whole tradition of the Church. The task of religious formation, then, is an internalization of the tradition through immersion into the liturgical-sacramental, Scriptural, doctrinal, and moral culture of Catholicism. This view of catechesis embraces what spiritual-expressivism resists: the transmission of information, memorization, detailed religious literacy, and the initiation of the person into the complexities of the tradition, even before the possibility of whole understanding. (It is also the way to teach children doctrines that they cannot yet understand. They begin to interiorize this language, slowly learning its meaning and how to speak it and make it their own.)

Furthermore, in the sacramental-acculturation model, the rites of the RCIA are neither edifying ceremonies to be used minimally, as the first model tends to do, nor human fabrications to be experimented with at will, as the second model tends to understand them. They are, rather, divinely-ordered actions crucial to the process of conversion to Christ. The formative character of the Church’s sacramental system is thus strongly underlined.

In this model, there is a clear understanding that, without sacramental and liturgical mediation, the mysteries of salvation have no presence in the world. Without liturgy and sacraments, therefore, the construction of the Catholic Christian world simply does not take place. Conversely, through them, Catholic Christianity creates its culture and establishes and maintains and advances its outlooks, attitudes, responses, and

motivations in all areas of human life. Christian sacramentality precedes, holds authority over, and is critically necessary to the experience of divine presence, activity, and grace. A person has only become a Christian when he or she has been acculturated into the sacramental reality of the seven sacraments, leading into the Church as sacrament, leading to encounter with Christ as sacrament.

Moreover, liturgy is not merely the symbolic celebration of spiritual experience, but the divinely-ordained mediation, and the basis of the very possibility, of that experience. The sacraments are not human creations but “the masterworks of God” (see CCC 1116) for the salvation of the world. The sacramental life is a diverse, multifaceted system that emerges from the creative act of God in history, a marvelous drama of signs and symbols, words and actions, music and imagery, times and seasons, prayers and places that constitutes the very shape of God’s presence and activity in the world.

Finally, in the sacramental-acculturation model, the sacramental life of the Church is not in any way separated from the rest of ecclesial life, but stands at the heart of Christian life as its source and its summit. Thus, to be acculturated to the sacramental life of the Church is to be acculturated to its whole moral, spiritual, doctrinal, and practical life, to the living tradition of Catholicism. Alexander Smaymen, the distinguished Russian Orthodox theologian, never tired of saying that “Christ’s Church is not an institution with divine mysteries, but a divine mystery with institutions”. This summarizes the ecclesiology of the sacramental-acculturation model very well.

The sacramental-expressive model is not simply a return to the catechetical theory and practice of the Church before the Second Vatican Council. It is, rather, the renewal of the Church’s fundamental intuition about the nature of catechesis that also takes into account the genuine insights into human formation offered by modern philosophy, the social sciences, and culture theory. It gives full play to doctrinal and apologetic aspects of catechesis while also giving the elements that the doctrinal-apologetic model neglect--the ritual, the communal, and the practical--more attention. The sacramental-acculturation model does not diminish the genuine values of the spiritual-expressive model either. The elements of experience and the importance of the personal and the affective are incorporated without falling into self-exploratory, introverted, and privatized subjectivism.

There is nothing ultimately novel in the sacramental-acculturation model. It is the model that is implicit in the RCIA itself, the model that most adequately accounts for all the aspects of the prayers, the texts, and the rites found in the ritual book. It incorporates all the central elements of the Church’s theology and its sacramental structure. It had its ancient expression in the catechetical instructions of Sts. Hippolytus, Ambrose, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Augustine. Its early modern exponents were the fathers of the modern liturgical movement, for whom catechesis and liturgy were woven together in a rich and vigorous conception of Catholic culture. The Church is fundamentally a baptismal, Eucharistic reality, and from this all else in the life of the Church flows. It is into this great mystery that the believer is called, and it is this great mystery that all the institutions of the Church, each and every one of them, exist to serve. The RCIA has no other purpose than the service of the holy mystery, the saving sacrament, of Christ present and active in His living Body.

Table 1: Models of RCIA

Model	Role of Catechist	Place	Image
Catechetical-apologetic	Teacher	Classroom	Blackboard
Spiritual-expressive	Therapist	Support group	Mirror
Sacramental-acculturation	Saint	Worshiping assembly	Icon

Christian Initiation

A Liturgical, Catechetical and Pastoral Process

by William J. Keimig

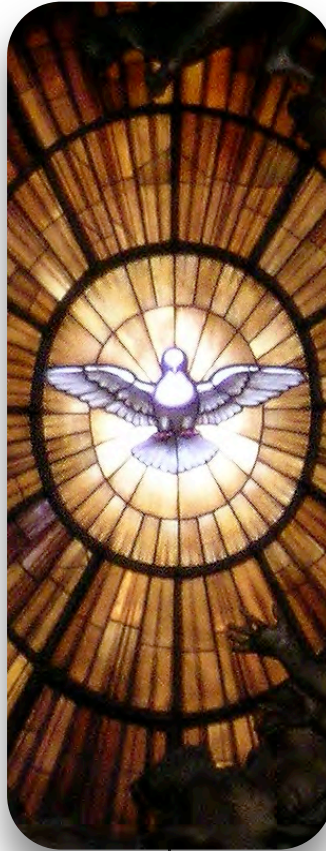


RCIA is a privileged and, in many ways, challengingly complex form of adult formation. Its complexity flows from the need for the process to be authentically truthful (implying catechesis that is far removed from the easy sound-bite answers and errors of the culture), authentically personal (implying pastoral flexibility and sacrificial effort to call forth from people deep conversion), and authentically unitive (implying insertion into a profoundly countercultural liturgical way of life to realize union with a divine Spouse). In other words, to the degree that the RCIA process is complex, it is so because it must be *fully human*, so that it may be fully open to the divine. The restoration of the ancient catechumenal process, as called for in no less than five documents of the Second Vatican Council, is a reflection of the Church's wisdom in going back to a tried and true practice in order to lovingly bring people into her fold.

The catechumenal process is not a program. Programs have a fixed length of time and a determined course of studies. No one can “program” the Holy Spirit as he moves individuals to conversion; each person's conversion journey is unique. While a parish may do things systematically and make a calendar of events each year, it must also pay close attention to the fact that this is an individual conversion journey for each inquirer. The RCIA team's primary task is not to run a program but to be present to help facilitate conversion. For this reason, it is not desirable to call what parishes do “the RCIA program” as this invariably creates a false impression for all involved, and tends to imply that the journey of the participants is an isolated endeavor within the community of faith.

Catechesis is understood to be concerned with conversion in Christ and with how to live continuously in such a manner not only prior to but after initiation as well...Catechumens are viewed not as anonymous attendants at private educational inquiry classes, but as public persons in the local church. Their faith, progress, and prognosis in communal faith-living are the concerns of the entire local church met for solemn public worship (Fr. Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B., *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, Liturgical Press, 1978, p. 128; see also pp. 120-122).

One way to understand the Christian initiation process is by breaking it down its three distinct aspects: liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral. *All three are equally important.* It is an injustice to those considering or seeking union with the Church for a catechist to be unambiguously catechetical to the detriment of the liturgical aspect, or be wonderfully pastoral despite offering poor catechesis. In order for RCIA to be what it has the potential to be, directors and catechists can benefit greatly from understanding the implications of its liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral dimensions to make available the fullness of the process as intended by the Church.



The catechumenal process is divided into four periods: **1)** the Precatechumenate up to the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming, **2)** the Catechumenate proper up to the Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion normally held on the first Sunday of Lent, **3)** the period of Purification and Enlightenment which normally coincides with Lent, and **4)** Mystagogy, which traditionally spans the seven weeks of the Easter season, followed by the Neophyte Year, which lasts until the first anniversary of one's initiation. It is useful to discuss the nature and scope of these periods in light of the three aspects.

The First Aspect of the Process: Liturgical Formation **(see RCIA 40, 75.1, 75.3, 79, 141, 147, 247)**

The RCIA process is dynamically moved along by liturgical rites that serve as gateways into the major periods of the process. Beginning with the Rite of Acceptance for unbaptized catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming for baptized candidates, and going through all the subsequent minor rites and major gateways, liturgy propels the process and motivates conversion. Grace comes with every gateway and every liturgical moment. The sacraments of initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist — are the powerhouses for the whole process. This grace — all that it means to be reborn in Christ, to be infused with the theological virtues, to become a co-heir with Christ, to be sealed with a deeper and stronger configuration to the crucified One, and to come to the

Table of the Lord among his people — abundantly provides the ongoing impetus for the conversion process. For all involved in RCIA, it is crucial to understand the Catholic sacramental and liturgical sense of reality (see GDC 85):

The sacraments [in the catechumenate of the early Church] were seen as a totality coextensive with the Church's life itself...The liturgy was not seen as a matter of exquisite ecclesiastical ceremony to occupy clergy and religious but as the way a Christian people live in common...[The rites of initiation] were a unified sacramental discipline through which both convert *and* community moved in the Spirit from what each had been toward what each was capable of becoming under grace in that same Spirit — a movement shot through with both pain and glory, with affirmation and renunciation, exorcism and celebration toward a new degree of communion in faith that would leave both convert *and* community irrevocably changed (Kavanagh, pp. 118, 120-121; italics in original).

The RCIA process aims to lead participants to become “liturgical people,” moving them towards full and active participation in the worshipping community around the one Table:

[H]ere is the last and most decisive reason why teaching through worship is superior to all other forms of Christian teaching: *The liturgy gives what it teaches.* It not only

presents the mystery of Christ concretely: it also lets us immediately participate in this mystery. If there is anywhere in Christianity that a true initiation into the mystery of Christ takes place, it is here (Johannes Hofinger, S.J., and Francis J. Buckley, S.J, *The Good News and Its Proclamation*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, pp. 53, 56; italics in original).

The liturgical aspect in each particular period is the driving force behind the whole process and the primary means of inserting those along this journey into the mystery of Christ. In the first period, the Precatechumenate, the liturgical aspect is at a minimum. There are no formal liturgical rites during this stage, because the inquirer has not yet entered a publicly-recognized relationship with the Church. While no formal liturgy takes place at this stage, prayer is an important part of evangelization. Singing hymns, which is a form of prayer, can help draw the heart up to God and facilitate conversion.

The first liturgical rites, the Rite of Acceptance and the Rite of Welcoming, establish (for a catechumen) or deepen (for a candidate) a relationship between the Church and the participant and are the gateways into the period of the Catechumenate. There are numerous liturgical moments in this period that impart grace to participants and help them continue along the path of conversion. Blessings, minor exorcisms, anointings, and celebrations of the Word (which can also be called Liturgies of the Word) are all designed to introduce those in the Catechumenate into the liturgical life of the Church and the benefits of the graces of liturgy.

The next gateway, the Rite of Election for catechumens and the Continuing Call to Conversion for candidates, begins the intense period of preparation for the sacraments of initiation. Participants are greatly helped by the Scrutinies (for catechumens) and the Penitential Rite (for candidates), as well as the Presentation Rites and Preparations Rites, all directed towards their final preparation for complete Christian initiation and insertion into life with God. Lent becomes a rising crescendo of liturgical graces, the war against sin at the height of its strength (see Rom 5:20).

The third gateway, reception of the sacraments of initiation, fully inserts participants into the mystery of Christ. This is the climax of the catechumenal process, and it is not by accident that it occurs during the Easter Vigil, the Church's greatest and most solemn feast of the year. This third gateway gives birth to the new "fledgling Catholics" or neophytes who, while enjoying the fruits of all the sacraments like the rest of the faithful, are still watched over and cared for in a special way during the course of their first year. The Neophyte Year begins with seven weeks of Mystagogy, that is, Post-Baptismal Catechesis. During this period, neophytes are invited to participate in the main Sunday Mass of the parish as a group, and the readings during these seven weeks have been selected by the Church to meet their needs.

It is important to communicate to both current and future Catholics that liturgy is much more than ritual, and that it is through the liturgy (the summit of which is the Mass) that our relationship with Jesus Christ becomes as intimate as possible outside of Heaven. As RCIA participants move towards full communion with the Church, nothing is more fundamental to their catechesis, and more crucial to impart to the worshipping community, than the fact that it is through the liturgical rites of the catechumenal process, and the sacramental participation to which they point, that a foundational relationship with Jesus is most firmly established.

The Second Aspect of the Process: Catechetical Formation **(see RCIA 38, 75.1, 78, 139, 245)**

Catechesis, stemming from the Greek verb *katekhein*, can be defined as the re-echoing or echoing down of that which has been received, developing "in women and men a living, explicit, and active faith, enlightened by doctrine", and concerning "itself not only with

nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith" (CD 14; CT 19; see DCG 17).

This *Manual's* focus is on the catechetical aspect of the RCIA process, and it is the mission of the other sections in this book to elaborate on this facet of RCIA formation. However, a brief overview at this point can serve as context for what follows.

The three major liturgical gateways of the RCIA process help to define the methodology and scope of catechesis during each of the four periods. During the *Precatechumenate period*, the focus is mainly apologetic and evangelistic, with a delivery of the basic Gospel message and unreserved answering of questions:

From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love. The whole period of the precatechumenate is set aside for this evangelization, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek Baptism may mature (RCIA 37).

The Precatechumenate prepares for and is ordered to the first liturgical step, which is the Rite of Acceptance for the unbaptized or the Rite of Welcoming for the baptized.

In the *Catechumenate period*, the focus moves to a systematic, organic catechesis involving the complete delivery of the essential elements of the Deposit of Faith, laying the flesh on the bones of the Gospel laid out in the previous period. Describing the Deposit of Faith, the Second Vatican Council stated:

What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in its doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that it itself is, all that it believes (DV 8). Tradition and Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church (DV 10).

The Catechumenate is typically the longest period of the Christian initiation process. It is also the most densely catechetical. Catechesis is to be "gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word" (RCIA 75). Instruction received during this period, "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).

This systematic and organic delivery of the Deposit of Faith seeks to ensure that, by the second liturgical gateway, participants sufficiently understand and desire to live the faith, that they may choose without hesitation to enroll their names among the elect or, if candidates, confidently continue their progress toward full communion with the Church. These rites call forth power and grace to nourish the elect (unbaptized) and the candidates (baptized) during the next period.

During the *period of Purification and Enlightenment*, the catechist places stronger emphasis on the spiritual and mystical life in preparing participants for the sacraments. The ritual book's guidelines for this period (which normally coincides with Lent) as well as the rites associated with them, direct catechists to shift the focus of teaching from an exposition of the Deposit of Faith to spiritual, reflective, and meditative preparation for the reception of the sacraments of initiation, seeking to foster a state of repentance and to effectively arouse the life of prayer and the practice of self-denial and charity. Before they receive the sacraments of initiation, "the elect must have the intention of achieving an intimate knowledge of Christ and his

Church, and they are expected particularly to progress in genuine self-knowledge through serious examination of their lives and true repentance” (RCIA 142).

In the *period of Mystagogy or Post-Baptismal Catechesis*, the focus is on a deepening of the neophytes’ understanding and practice of the sacramental life, in light of now being able to receive the fullness of sacramental grace, and to present ways to synthesize all that they have learned, applying it to their lives. The rest of the Neophyte Year would then be devoted to substantiating, strengthening, and deepening their understanding of the faith that will lead to more committed and mature Christian lives. “The distinctive spirit and power of the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community” (RCIA 247).

The Third Aspect of the Process: Pastoral Formation **(see RCIA 42, 45, 75.2, 75.4, 120, 244, 246)**

The RCIA process is a growth in intimacy as much as in knowledge. Aidan Kavanagh, in *The Shape of Baptism*, refers to the catechumenal process as “a structure of Christian nurture” (Kavanagh, p. 182). Along with the powerful liturgical moments of the process and the catechetical endeavor, there is also an intense pastoral activity, which must be initiated from the first time an inquirer expresses interest in the Church. This activity operates with the knowledge that each participant will vary in his or her background, lifestyle, motivation, and state in life. Those doing the RCIA apostolate steep themselves in the lives of participants, with gentleness, prudence, and a genuine desire to open their hearts wide to any whom the Spirit draws (see 1 Cor 6:11).

The pastoral components of RCIA are the *people* who participate, some intimately and others from a distance, in Jesus’ work of conversion and discipleship. The pastoral work of the

catechumenal process is accomplished through the love and labor of many people, including the clergy, catechists, hospitality people, sponsors, small group leaders, prayer intercessors, and parish members:

Christian initiation during the catechumenate is not the concern of catechists or priests alone, but of the whole community of believers and especially the godparents, so that from the outset the catechumens will have a sense of being a part of the people of God (AG 14).



This pastoral work is a people-to-person endeavor — all the people serving this one person for the Lord. The pastoral aspect of RCIA involves both information and formation. By instruction and by the experience of authentic fellowship, the catechumens and candidates learn who God is, what his plan is, and how to follow him as a member of the Christian community, “which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith” (GDC 68):

[T]he 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 (RCIA 9).

Through the pastoral attention of others, participants are informed about him, and formed in him, so that their experience of the community of believers becomes an “apprenticeship of the entire Christian life” (GDC 67). As with liturgy and catechesis, the pastoral aspects change as participants move through the periods of the process. The Precatechumenate is a time of inviting people to come and see, of determining their motivation, and moving them from the initial stages of faith — an encounter with Jesus, turning away from sin, and finding a home in the Church. During the next period, the Catechumenate, the pastoral aim is to facilitate the work of Holy Spirit in moving the participants from initial motivation to firm conviction, with strong elements of fellowship and spiritual guidance.

The period of Purification and Enlightenment serves as a time of strong support, spiritual direction, and encouragement for participants to examine their conscience, intensify their life of prayer, and increase in works of charity. In the period of Mystagogy, new Catholics receive help to become more open to the pursuit of holiness by deepening their spiritual life through the communal experience of the sacraments, and by strengthening relationships in their new parish family. For the remainder of the Neophyte Year, the pastoral focus is to provide continued support and encouragement in living out a full Catholic life in a parochial setting where they feel comfortably at home. The process aims not just at making non-ignorant Christians — it facilitates transforming them into outwardly-focused Christians growing in an authentic Catholic worldview — sure in the conviction that the fullness of the truth has been revealed and can be shared with joy.

In summary, the RCIA process seeks to prepare people not merely for assent to eternal truths, but more so to fall in love with an eternal Lover. If participants are falling in love with the Person of Jesus, then it is only reasonable that, like anyone that we love in the human order, they would want to *know* him more. Without the teaching and converting aspects of the liturgy and the loving witness of the community, formal instruction runs the risk of becoming just information, instead of light for the path of faith in Christ (see CCC 89). The catechumenal process, a balance of liturgical, catechetical and pastoral aspects, thus becomes an engine of conversion today, as it was centuries ago, fulfilling the intention of its restoration by the Second Vatican Council (see SC 64-66).

The Church can be understood as the earthly configuration of Jesus Christ — to be a member of the Church is to be configured to Christ. Our inner being in Christ has its demands. They are not obligations imposed from outside, although one of Church’s missions is to articulate those demands for our guidance and growth. The Christian initiation process invites a beautifully simple view of the matter: the reason to be a Christian is to be perfectly configured to Christ — to be a saint. The reason to be a Catholic is because within the Church subsists the fullness of the means to become a saint — through her graces, her teachings, her people, and her Head, enabling those who so will to be perfected in love.