

Liturgical Components of the Christian Initiation Process:

Gateways and Sources of Grace for Conversion

MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

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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.

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION *Reception into Full Communion*

ENLIGHTENMENT

PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

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*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 (Catechumens)
- Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer
- Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday

RITE OF ELECTION *Call to Continuing Conversion*

CATECHUMENATE

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

RITE OF ACCEPTANCE *Rite of Welcoming*

PRECATECHUMENATE

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

PRECATECHUMENATE

Start



CATECHUMENS



CANDIDATES



PERIODS



STEPS

Looked Up To By Others

Faith
is not the belief
that God
will do what you want,
but that God
will do
what is right.



*The absence
of God
is worse
than
material
poverty
because
it kills
every
firm hope
and
leaves
the person
alone
with
his pain.*

*Archbishop
Paul Cordes*

A thousand times
I've failed, and
still Your
mercy remains.

Live so that your life on earth
draws those you love to the God
who alone can reunite you in Heaven.

Peace of Soul



Looking Up To Him

Divinely wise souls often
infuriate the worldly-wise
because they always see
things from the
Divine point of view.
The worldly are willing to let
anyone believe in God
if he pleases, but only on
condition that a belief in
God will mean no more than
belief in anything else.
They will allow God,
provided that
God does not matter.
But taking God seriously
is precisely
what makes the saint.
As St. Teresa put it,
“What is not God to me
is nothing.”
This passion is called
snobbish, intolerant, stupid,
and unwarranted intrusion;
yet those who resent it
deeply wish in their own
hearts that they had the
saint's inner peace
and happiness.

*Archbishop
Fulton Sheen*

The Bottom Line of a Vibrant Sacramental Life:

Getting Sunday Right

If you don't have time for praising God, you are busier than He ever intended you to be.

Making Confession a Way of Life

It's not about trying not to sin – but focusing so much on Jesus that sin isn't an option.

Scheduling the Most Vital Relationships

I am in love, and out of it, I will not go. ~ C.S. Lewis

Becoming an Earnest Student and a Loyal Son or Daughter

Feed your faith, and all your fears will starve to death.

Living Sacrificially in Ways Beyond Your Normal

Intense love does not measure, it just gives. ~ Mother Teresa

Learning to Trust ~ This Will Always Be the Bottom Line

Childlike faith is the victory.

Catechesis in Mystagogy: Deepening in the Graces Received

(Teaching from the Rites: see RCIA, 229, 230, 244)

The time between Easter and Pentecost is spent in deepening the understanding and appreciation for the sacramental life. As well, the deepest meaning of discipleship must be examined, including the responsibility of all the baptized to give personal witness to the power of the Gospel, and to bring the light of Christian revelation to every corner of the world. Catechesis during this period should be driven by the Lectionary. The Church intends that the Lectionary readings for the Sundays and the Feast of the Ascension form the basis for the teaching given during this period.

MYSTAGOGY READINGS FOR YEAR A

Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 118

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Sacrament of Penance ~ Apostolicity

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14, 22-33

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:17-21

Luke 24:13-35

Emmaus Event ~ Paradigm for the Mass

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:20b-25

John 10:1-10

The Sheepfold = The Church ~ Relationship with Jesus

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-7

Psalm 33

1 Peter 2:4-9

John 14:1-12

Heaven ~ Relationship with the Father through Jesus

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Psalm 66

1 Peter 3:15-18

John 14:15-20

Relationship with the Spirit through Jesus ~ "do whatever He tells you"

Ascension

Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47

Ephesians 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission ~ Evangelism/Witness ~ Necessity of Baptism

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:12-14

Psalm 27

1 Peter 4:13-16

John 17:1-11a

Prayer for Unity and Glorification of the Church ~ Apostolicity

The distinctive spirit and power of the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community. (RCIA 247)

Ideas for Post-Baptismal Catechetical Sessions, and the Neophyte Year

Ask neophytes to share their experiences of the sacraments, and provide an opportunity to reflect on the Vigil.

Help neophytes see the sacraments in light of Scriptural images (called “typology”). For example...

Baptism

- ✦ Creation
- ✦ The Crossing of the Red Sea
- ✦ Living Water and the Samaritan Woman
- ✦ Water from Jesus’ Side

Eucharist

- ✦ Manna in the Desert
- ✦ Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes
- ✦ Last Supper: Commandment of Love
- ✦ The Road to Emmaus

Tell the Story of the “wonderful works” of God again, this time highlighting the sacramental life, foretold in the Old Testament and now available to them in the New Testament.

Proclaim and reflect on Scripture for the post-baptismal catechesis — especially the Sunday readings of Year A of the Easter season.

Sing songs to celebrate the Easter season. Repeat songs from throughout the initiation process and the Easter Vigil.

Pray together:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| ✦ Eucharistic Adoration | ✦ Liturgy of the Hours | ✦ Rosary |
| ✦ Extemporaneous Prayer | ✦ Guided Meditation | ✦ Other Catholic Devotions |

Tell stories of saints, such as those who were baptized or received into the Church as adults (St. Augustine, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, etc). Discuss the Universal Call to Holiness.

Make presentations on new topics or topics discussed earlier, keeping in mind the additional grace now at work in the lives of the neophytes.

Discuss current moral/social issues in the light of the Church’s teaching to help neophytes gain a “Catholic worldview.”

Set aside time for silent reflection or sharing between neophytes, team, and sponsors.

Encourage neophytes to continue asking questions as they come up. Answer them.

Make a pilgrimage to a local shrine, the Cathedral, etc.

Attend a Mass for new Catholics with the bishop.

Have a potluck with the pastor every six weeks or so.

Keep in touch! — Maintain a mailing list of neophytes; send a newsletter; create a website.

Insist that sponsors maintain regular contact with neophytes.

Help neophytes begin a Bible study or join a small faith-sharing group in the parish.

Discuss what it means to share in the Church’s mission of evangelization — spread the Good News!

Share opportunities for involvement in social outreach activities in the parish.

Have a retreat for neophytes in Lent and a celebration on the anniversary of their initiation.

Ask neophytes to assist with the next RCIA group, perhaps as a team member.





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 *LAY WITNESS*, JUNE 1998.



The Period of Mystagogy and the Neophyte Year

In this period of the catechumenal process, the neophytes must be welcomed and helped to continue in the journey that is the Christian life. RCIA 244 states:

This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through...

- ✧ Meditating on the Gospel
- ✧ Sharing in the Eucharist
- ✧ Participating in the works of charity

To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their pastors should give them thoughtful and friendly help.

RCIA, National Statutes for the Catechumenate 24:

After the immediate mystagogy or post-baptismal catechesis during the Easter season, the program for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation, with at least monthly assemblies of the neophytes for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the community.

RCIA 250: 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 251: 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.



Towards a Catholic Worldview

CT 20: Catechesis aims, therefore, at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's Word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that Word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more with the Church to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity to his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to.

A Catholic worldview takes years to develop. For neophytes, the support, accountability, and witness provided by those in their faith community are essential. The key components of a Catholic worldview are:

- ✧ Recognizing Christ as Lord of all history and Lord of each life, through an understanding of God's plan for salvation
- ✧ Holding firm to general principles (moral and doctrinal absolutes) and applying them to particular situations
- ✧ Recognizing the sacramental reality of creation—God is with us
- ✧ Having a strong incarnational perspective—God works through human nature and through material things
- ✧ Recognizing the redemptive value of suffering
- ✧ Living a life of hope, directed to the last things

Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose Body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God. ~ ST. LEO THE GREAT

Ten key principles of adult catechesis . . .

And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him . . . “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ~ Mark 10:21; Matthew 19:21



The *content* of adult catechesis are offered to men and women of every social and cultural background as the nourishing and satisfying bread of life so that, filled with Divine wisdom, they might radiate this wisdom in all areas of life (ACCC 47):

1. **Get to know them.** Must begin by accepting adults “where they are”, keeping in mind, “the specific adults with whom one is working, their cultural background, human and religious needs, their expectations, faith experiences, and their potential” (ACCC 56)
2. Ensure that the **great themes of Christianity** are clear, as well as how they can *participate* and *respond* to these truths
3. Provide **experiences of the Christian community** to reinforce concepts. The communitarian dimension of the contents of faith will be thoroughly developed . . . to know and experience the “mystery of the Church” . . . incarnate in a particular community (ACCC 53)
4. Incorporate **prayer**, opportunities for **service**
5. Say it so they *hear it* — find ways to break through. Enables them to gradually become more aware of **their value and dignity as human beings**, as a result of a careful and stimulating exposition of the great truths of faith (ACCC 49)
6. **Expect and encourage questions.** A meaningful faith response will be biblical, reasonable, and attentive to signs of the times (see ACCC 48)
7. Help them respond to you and to God. Catechesis of adults seeks to provide formation in a **spirituality suitable for the Christian laity**. Special attention should be reserved for teaching adults how to pray (ACCC 50)
8. Prepare them to **share their faith**, not just remain recipients (ACCC 51, 52)
9. Assist them in **living in the Church** in relevant and practical ways
10. Count on the **power of God** as dynamic and ever present

Methodological considerations for discipling adults . . .

It is a sin to bore people with the Gospel. ~ Frank Sheed

- ✦ Create a **friendly and dialogical** rapport so that they can make known their needs and can participate . . . as subjects or agents in their own catechesis (ACCC 54, 57)
- ✦ Imbue all catechesis with a clear, **personal witness** to the Christian life (ACCC 58)
- ✦ Focus on expressing truths of the faith in practical and convincing ways. Knowledge and facts should not have to be ‘stored-up’, but should be **immediately applicable** to their lives and personal struggles (ACCC 58)
- ✦ Present truths of the faith as **certitudes** (ACCC 58)
- ✦ Ensure that catechesis has an **obvious, organic and systematic development**, and is not merely episodic or random. Connections between doctrines must be clear and deliberate at all stages (ACCC 59)
- ✦ Take advantage of the **diversity of means and instruments for imparting knowledge** of the faith and for maintaining communion in the faith. Don’t just lecture or talk (ACCC 64, 65)
- ✦ Look to **create links** between their experience of the local community, their participation in the liturgy, their charitable service, and their awareness of the Church’s life beyond the parish (ACCC 59)

Adult Catechesis must give priority to the proclamation of salvation, drawing attention to the many difficulties, doubts, misunderstandings, prejudices and objections of today. It must introduce adults to a faith-filled reading of Sacred Scripture and the practice of prayer. ~ GDC 175



To Love More Means to Learn More

www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/titles?type=CD

Faithful, Succinct, Clear, User-Friendly Resources: If there had to be just one book chosen on...

The resources suggested here are all brief and efficient in the topics they address; most are less than 150 pages. The gender-specific resources in particular are important as reading for both spouses. Their great value lies in helping each spouse to understand the forms of complementarity that God has designed into their sexuality, and how to serve a soul who is profoundly different physically and metaphysically.

- ✧ Learning to live Sunday...
Dies Domini (On the Lord's Day) by Pope John Paul II
- ✧ Learning an authentic lay spirituality...
Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis de Sales
- ✧ Learning to hear of Jesus speaking in daily lay life circumstances...
My Other Self by Clarence Enzler
- ✧ Learning how to direct a marriage towards true mutuality...
For Better...Forever by Gregory Popcak
- ✧ Learning how to understand Christian manhood...
Be a Man! by Fr. Larry Richards
- ✧ Learning how to understand Christian fatherhood...
Successful Fathers by James B. Stenson
- ✧ Learning how to understand Christian womanhood...
The Privilege of Being a Woman by Alice von Hildebrand
- ✧ Learning how to understand Christian motherhood...
A Mother's Rule of Life by Holy Pierlot
- ✧ Learning to be excellent Christian parents together...
Lifeline by James B. Stenson
- ✧ Learning to discern as a couple...
What Does God Want by Fr. Michael Scanlan, TOR
- ✧ Learning how to live in a spousal spiritual friendship...
Walking Together: Discovering the Catholic Tradition of Spiritual Friendship by Mary Deturris Poust
- ✧ Learning to discern the quality of your spousal spiritual friendship...
Spiritual Friendship: Darkness and Light by Ronda Chervin



We do not really want a religion that is right where we are right.

What we want is a religion that is right where we are wrong.

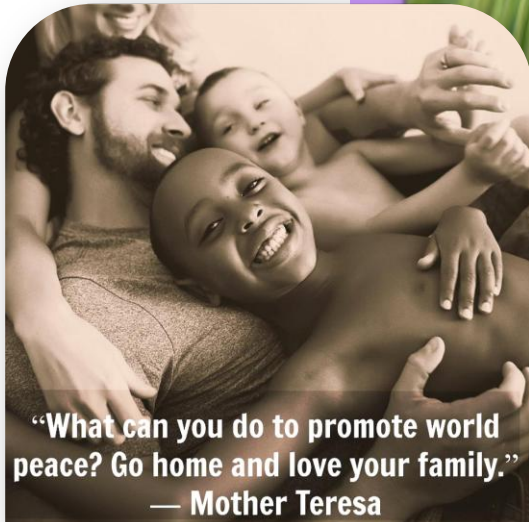


The difficulty of explaining "why I am a Catholic" is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true.

~ G.K. Chesterton

It is simply impossible to lead, without the aid of prayer, a virtuous life.

Saint John Chrysostom



Everybody today seems to be in such a terrible rush, anxious for greater developments and greater riches and so on, so that children have very little time for their parents. Parents have very little time for each other, and in the home begins the disruption of peace of the world. ~ Mother Teresa

Excerpts from:

On Evangelization in the Modern World ~ Evangelii Nuntiandi

Pope Paul VI ~ Given on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1975

Such an exhortation on evangelization seems to us to be of capital importance, for the presentation of the Gospel message is not an optional contribution for the Church. It is the duty incumbent on her by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved. This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced. It does not permit either indifference, syncretism or accommodation. It is a question of people's salvation. It is the beauty of the Revelation that it represents. It brings with it a wisdom that is not of this world. It is able to stir up by itself faith – faith that rests on the power of God. It is truth. It merits having the apostle consecrate to it all his time and all his energies, and to sacrifice for it, if necessary, his own life.

To evangelize: what meaning did this imperative have for Christ? Let it suffice for us to recall a few essential aspects.

As an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes "the rest," which is "given in addition." Only the kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative. The Lord will delight in describing in many ways the happiness of belonging to this kingdom (a paradoxical happiness which is made up of things that the world rejects), the demands of the kingdom and its Magna Charta, the heralds of the kingdom, its mysteries, its children, the vigilance and fidelity demanded of whoever awaits its definitive coming.

As the kernel and center of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and of being given over to Him. All of this is begun during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by His death and Resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of history, in order to be realized fully on the day of the final coming of Christ, whose date is known to no one except the Father.

This kingdom and this salvation, which are the key words of Jesus Christ's evangelization, are available to every human being as grace and mercy, and yet at the same time each individual must gain them by force – they belong to the violent, says the Lord, through toil and suffering, through a life lived according to the Gospel, through abnegation and the cross, through the spirit of the beatitudes. But above all each individual gains them through a total interior renewal which the Gospel calls metanoia; it is a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart.

Christ accomplished this proclamation of the kingdom of God through the untiring preaching of a word which, it will be said, has no equal elsewhere: "Here is a teaching that is new, and with authority behind it." "And He won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from His lips. There has never been anybody who has spoken like him." His words reveal the secret of God, His plan and His promise, and thereby change the heart of man and his destiny.

The Church knows this. She has a vivid awareness of the fact that the Savior's words, "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God," apply in all truth to herself: She willingly adds with St. Paul: "Not that I boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty that has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.

There is thus a profound link between Christ, the Church and evangelization. During the period of the Church that we are living in, it is she who has the task of evangelizing. This mandate is not accomplished without her, and still less against her.

It is certainly fitting to recall this fact at a moment like the present one when it happens that not without sorrow we can hear people – whom we wish to believe are well-intentioned but who are certainly misguided in their attitude – continually claiming to love Christ but without the Church, to listen to Christ but not the Church, to belong to Christ but outside the Church. The absurdity of this dichotomy is clearly evident in this phrase of the Gospel: "Anyone who rejects you rejects me." And how can one wish to love Christ without loving the Church, if the finest witness to Christ is that of St. Paul: "Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her"?

All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts

of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. The above questions will ask, whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptized people who do not practice, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking, and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name. Other questions will arise, deeper and more demanding ones, questions evoked by this witness which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization.

All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers.

Nevertheless this always remains insufficient, because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified – what Peter called always having "your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" – and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.

In fact the proclamation only reaches full development when it is listened to, accepted and assimilated, and when it arouses a genuine adherence in the one who has thus received it. An adherence to the truths which the Lord in His mercy has revealed; still more, an adherence to a program of life – a life henceforth transformed – which He proposes. In a word, adherence to the kingdom, that is to say, to the "new world," to the new state of things, to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the Gospel inaugurates. Such an adherence, which cannot remain abstract and unincarnated, reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers. Thus those whose life has been transformed enter a community which is itself a sign of transformation, a sign of newness of life: it is the Church, the visible sacrament of salvation.

Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.

It is not superfluous to recall the following points: to evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to bear witness that in His Son God has loved the world – that in His Incarnate Word He has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life. Perhaps this attestation of God will be for many people the unknown God whom they adore without giving Him a name, or whom they seek by a secret call of the heart when they experience the emptiness of all idols. But it is fully evangelizing in manifesting the fact that for man the Creator is not an anonymous and remote power; He is the Father: "...that we should be called children of God; and so we are." And thus we are one another's brothers and sisters in God.

Evangelization will also always contain – as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy. And not an immanent salvation, meeting material or even spiritual needs, restricted to the framework of temporal existence and completely identified with temporal desires, hopes, affairs and struggles, but a salvation which exceeds all these limits in order to reach fulfillment in a communion with the one and only divine Absolute: a transcendent and eschatological salvation, which indeed has its beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity.

Evangelization therefore also includes the preaching of hope in the promises made by God in the new Covenant in Jesus Christ; the preaching of God's love for us and of our love for God; the preaching of brotherly love for all men – the capacity of giving and forgiving, of self-denial, of helping one's brother and sister – which, springing from the love of God, is the kernel of the Gospel; the preaching of the mystery of evil and of the active search for good. The preaching likewise – and this is always urgent – of the search for God Himself through prayer which is principally that of adoration and thanksgiving, but also through communion with the visible sign of the encounter with God which is the Church of Jesus Christ; and this communion in its turn is expressed by the application of those other signs of Christ living and acting in the Church which are the sacraments. To live the sacraments in this way, bringing their celebration to a true fullness, is not, as some would claim, to impede or to accept a distortion of evangelization: it is rather to complete it. For in its totality, evangelization – over and above the preaching of a message – consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist.



Dies Domini

APOSTOLIC LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY AND FAITHFUL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON KEEPING THE LORD'S DAY HOLY

Chapter I – DIES DOMINI – The Day of the Lord

- ✦ The Celebration of the Creator's Work
- ✦ "Through him all things were made" (Jn 1:3)
- ✦ "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1)
- ✦ "Shabbat": the Creator's joyful rest
- ✦ "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gn 2:3)
- ✦ "To keep holy" by "remembering"
- ✦ From the Sabbath to Sunday

The commandment of the Decalogue by which God decrees the Sabbath observance is formulated in the Book of Exodus in a distinctive way: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy" (20:8). And the inspired text goes on to give the reason for this, recalling as it does the work of God: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (v. 11). Before decreeing that something be done, the commandment urges that something be remembered. It is a call to awaken remembrance of the grand and fundamental work of God which is creation, a remembrance which must inspire the entire religious life of man and then fill the day on which man is called to rest. Rest therefore acquires a sacred value: the faithful are called to rest not only as God rested, but to rest in the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving, intimate as a child and friendly as a spouse. (DD 16)

Chapter II – DIES CHRISTI – The Day of Christ

- ✦ The Day of the Risen Lord and of the Gift of the Holy Spirit
- ✦ The weekly Easter
- ✦ The first day of the week
- ✦ Growing distinction from the Sabbath
- ✦ The day of the new creation
- ✦ The eighth day: image of eternity
- ✦ The day of Christ-Light
- ✦ The day of the gift of the Spirit
- ✦ The day of faith
- ✦ An indispensable day!

Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday, but the duty to keep Sunday holy cannot be reduced to this . . . For example, the relaxed gathering of parents and children can be an opportunity not only to listen to one another but also to share a few formative and more reflective moments . . . This rather traditional way of keeping Sunday holy has perhaps become more difficult for many people; but the Church shows her faith in the strength of the Risen Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit by making it known that, today more than ever, she is unwilling to settle for minimalism and mediocrity at the level of faith. She wants to help Christians to do what is most right and pleasing to the Lord. (DD 52)

Chapter III – DIES ECCLESIAE – The Day of the Church

- ✦ The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday
- ✦ The Presence of the Risen Lord
- ✦ The Eucharistic assembly
- ✦ The Sunday Eucharist
- ✦ The day of the Church
- ✦ A pilgrim people
- ✦ The day of hope
- ✦ The table of the Word
- ✦ The table of the Body of Christ
- ✦ Easter banquet and fraternal gathering
- ✦ From Mass to "mission"
- ✦ The Sunday obligation
- ✦ A joyful celebration in song
- ✦ A celebration involving all
- ✦ Other moments of the Christian Sunday
- ✦ Sunday assemblies without a priest
- ✦ Radio and television

Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live . . . In order that rest may not degenerate into emptiness or boredom, it must offer spiritual enrichment, greater freedom, opportunities for contemplation and fraternal communion. Therefore, among the forms of culture and entertainment which society offers, the faithful should choose those which are most in keeping with a life lived in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Sunday rest then becomes "prophetic" . . . If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behavior that we cannot be happy "on our own" . . . But presuming a wider sense of commitment, why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? (DD 67, 68, 72)

Chapter IV – DIES HOMINIS – The Day of Man

- ✦ Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest, and Solidarity
- ✦ The "full joy" of Christ
- ✦ The fulfilment of the Sabbath
- ✦ The day of rest
- ✦ A day of solidarity

Chapter V – DIES DIERUM – The Day of Days

- ✦ Sunday: the Primordial Feast, Revealing the Meaning of Time
- ✦ Christ the Alpha and Omega of time
- ✦ Sunday in the Liturgical Year



A Martyr's Letter to His Girlfriend

"Let My Memory Always Remind You There Is a Better Life"

Here is a translation of a letter from Bartolomé Blanco Márquez, written to his girlfriend from prison the day before he was executed during religious persecution in 1930s Spain. The letter is published in the "Summarius Super Martyrio" of his beatification cause in Rome. He was arrested as a Catholic leader – he was the secretary of Catholic Action and a delegate to the Catholic Syndicates – on August 18, 1936. He was executed on October 2, 1936, at age 21, while he cried out, "Long live Christ the King!"



Provincial prison of Jaen, October 1, 1936

My dearest Maruja:

Your memory will remain with me to the grave and, as long as the slightest throb stirs my heart, it will beat for love of you. God has deemed fit to sublimate these worldly affections, ennobling them when we love each other in him. Though in my final days, God is my light and what I long for, this does not mean that the recollection of the one dearest to me will not accompany me until the hour of my death.

I am assisted by many priests who – what a sweet comfort – pour out the treasures of grace into my soul, strengthening it. I look death in the eye and, believe my words, it does not daunt me or make me afraid.

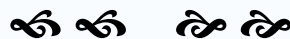
My sentence before the court of mankind will be my soundest defense before God's court; in their effort to revile me, they have ennobled me; in trying to sentence me, they have absolved me, and by attempting to lose me, they have saved me. Do you see what I mean? Why, of course! Because in killing me, they grant me true life and in condemning me for always upholding the highest ideals of religion, country and family, they swing open before me the doors of Heaven.

My body will be buried in a grave in this cemetery of Jaen; while I am left with only a few hours before that definitive repose, allow me to ask but one thing of you: that in memory of the love we shared, which at this moment is enhanced, that you would take on as your primary objective the salvation of your soul. In that way, we will procure our reuniting in Heaven for all eternity, where nothing will separate us.

Goodbye, until that moment, then, dearest Maruja! Do not forget that I am looking at you from Heaven, and try to be a model Christian woman, since, in the end, worldly goods and delights are of no avail if we do not manage to save our souls.

My thoughts of gratitude to all your family and, for you, all my love, sublimated in the hours of death. Do not forget me, my Maruja, and let my memory always remind you there is a better life, and that attaining it should constitute our highest aspiration.

Be strong and make a new life; you are young and kind, and you will have God's help, which I will implore upon you from his kingdom. Goodbye, until eternity, then, when we shall continue to love each other for life everlasting.



Born on November 25, 1914, Bartolomé was orphaned as a child, and raised by family members with whom he worked. He was an excellent student, studying under the tutelage of the Salesians. He also served as a lay catechist, and at 18 was elected youth secretary of Catholic Action in Pozoblanco, Spain. On August 18, 1936, Bartolomé was imprisoned while on military leave; September 24 he was moved to a prison in Jaen. There he was held with fifteen priests and other laymen; judged, condemned to death and shot on October 2, 1936.

During his trial, Bartolomé remained true to his faith and his religious convictions. He did not protest his death sentence and told the court that if he lived he would continue being an active Catholic. The letters he wrote on the eve of his death to his family and to his girlfriend Maruja show his profound faith. "May this be my last will: forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness; but indulgence, which I wish to be accompanied by doing them as much good as possible. Therefore, I ask you to avenge me with the vengeance of a Christian: returning much good to those that have tried to do me evil," he wrote to his relatives. According to documents supporting his cause for beatification Bartolomé went to the site of his execution barefooted, "in order to be more conformed to Christ." He kissed his handcuffs, surprising the guards that cuffed him. He refused to be shot from behind. "Whoever dies for Christ should do so facing forward and standing straight. Long live Christ the King!" he shouted as he fell to the ground under a shower of bullets. Bartolomé Blanco Márquez was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on October 28, 2007.



The love of the Sacred Heart without a spirit of sacrifice is but empty illusion.
~ Blessed Maria Vischering

OBEDIENCE

Let us resign ourselves in any sicknesses which befall us. Worldly people call illness misfortunes, but the saints call them visitations of God and favors. When we are ill we ought certainly to take remedies in order to be cured, but we should always be resigned to whatever God disposes. And if we pray for restoration of health, let it always be done with resignation, otherwise we shall not obtain the favor. But how much do we not gain when we are ill by offering to God all we suffer! He who loves God from his heart does not desire to be cured of his illness in order not to suffer, but he desires to please God by suffering. It was this love which made the scourge, the rack, the burning pitch sweet to the holy martyrs. We must also unite ourselves to the will of God with regard to our natural defects, as want of talents, being of low birth, weak health, bad sight, want of ability, and the like. All that we have is the free gift of God. Might He not have made us a fly or a blade of grass? A hundred years ago were we anything but nothingness? And what more do we want? Let it suffice that God has given us the power of becoming saints. Although we may have little talent, poor health, and may be poor and abject, we may very well become saints through His grace, if we have the will. Oh, how many unfortunate beings have been damned on account of their talents, their health, high birth, riches or beauty! Let us then be content with what God has done for us; and let us thank Him always for the good things He has given us, and particularly for having called us to the holy faith. This is a great gift, and one for which few are found to thank God.

~ Saint Alphonsus Liguori

In dryness and emptiness the soul becomes humble. The earlier arrogance disappears when one no longer finds in oneself anything that would give reason to look down on others; instead, others now appear to one to be more perfect; love and esteem for them awakens in the heart. One is too occupied with one's own misery to be concerned about the opinion of others. Through her helplessness the soul also becomes subservient and obedient; she longs for instruction in order to reach the right way. Spiritual greed is thoroughly healed; when one no longer finds any practice to one's taste, one becomes very moderate and does whatever one does purely for the sake of God without seeking any satisfaction for the self. And so it goes with all imperfections. All the confusion and unrest disappears with them. Instead, a deep peace and a constant remembrance of God are established. The only care that remains is the concern not to displease God. ~ Saint Edith Stein

HUMILITY

DETACHMENT

No unclean soul can see God. To be clean is to give yourself wholly to My will, holding nothing back. How much better it is to sever yourself here and now from all desires which do not lead you closer to Me. Seek after that which is hard, rather than that which is easy – for My love. Seek after that which is unpleasant, rather than that which is pleasant – for My love. Seek after that which is little, rather than that which is great – for My love. Seek to desire nothing but what I send you, and refuse nothing that I permit to happen to you – for My love. Are these harsh words? Do they mean that you are henceforth to give up all pleasure? By no means! I shall guide you to the degree of self-renunciation that is best for you. What is suited to one is not to another. If you strive to do all that I ask for love you will find joy in sacrifice.... Now I shall tell you a great principle. Strive less for *de*-tachment than for *at*-tachment. Concentrate more on filling yourself with what *is* Me, than on emptying yourself of what is *not* Me. Allow Me to come into your soul and I will push out of it what is alien to Me. Let Me flood your soul with grace, washing away the unclean bonds of worldliness. This is the peaceful way to purity of heart, the quiet, easy, trusting way, the way of a little child. ~ Clarence Enzler

Never say to God "Enough." Simply say "I am ready."
~ Blessed Sebastian Valfre

A Few Helpful Questions for Sharpening Your Parish's Catechumenate

What makes the initiation process truly catechumenal in the ancient sense, and effective in the modern sense?

- The process must have authentic Liturgical / Catechetical / Pastoral components
- *Liturgies* are acts of movement – the discerned choice to step nearer to the living God, and depend on the graces therein
- *Catechesis* teaches for conversion – aims for change / harder choices / personal witness / call to trustingly embrace the Father
- *Pastoring* seeks to show authentic charity, and call it forth, to heal, to elevate, and to point our actions to Christ

What are the benefits to catechumenal catechesis that is authentically liturgical?

- ✦ Fosters more genuine and deep conversions to God and His calling on individual lives
- ✦ Allows for more frequent and more full appropriation of grace
- ✦ More fully expressive of the Church nature
- ✦ Fosters docility to the ancient ways of the Church
- ✦ Mitigates polemic tendencies regarding the teachings of the Church
- ✦ Helps the parish community grow in its communal and liturgical life
- ✦ Helps people to grasp the liturgical life of the Church in a daily, pragmatic way
- ✦ Creates a greater diversity of ministries for differing gifts and abilities of parishioners
- ✦ Assists in vocational awareness due to the regular focus on saints who have lived fully their vocations
- ✦ The ordered nature and paschal focus of the liturgical year implies and demands systematic catechesis
- ✦ Provides more diverse means of approach for children; in better accord with the learning types of children
- ✦ Gives people a chance to experience their priest's liturgical ministry more frequently and in a less distant setting
- ✦ Because the liturgical year forms the context of parish life, people become that much more integrated into parish life
- ✦ Helps catechesis accord with the adult learning model better than more didactic and academic forms of teaching
- ✦ Demands more people (sponsors, godparents, team) to be more liturgically aware and in tune with the cycles of the Church's life



What are some of the dangers to the degree that a parish lacks a liturgically-centered vision of the RCIA process?

- The catechumenate is viewed as unnecessarily effort intensive, or it becomes “canned”
- Doctrine is explained without reference to Jesus. His simple call is lost in the details
- Not expecting serious progress; or not having patience with how Jesus woos a soul
- Liturgical rites become celebrations of community entirely, not encounters with Christ
- The trust given to catechists and leaders never translates into trusting Jesus
- Forgiveness explained poorly can result in seeing Jesus' mercy as weakness or lenience

What are some questions to discuss in a parish setting to improve?

- ❖ How do we prepare RCIA participants and the parish for the major liturgical rites?
- ❖ How do we reflect on these rites after they take place?
- ❖ How often and how well do we make available the various minor rites (Celebrations of the Word, Blessings, Minor Exorcisms, Anointings, Presentations, etc.)?
- ❖ If we dismiss the catechumens from Sunday Mass, how often do we do so? If not, how can we change things to offer this opportunity?
- ❖ What takes place at Breaking Open the Word (Reflection on the Word)? Is it just another teaching session, or perhaps just a sharing of opinions?
- ❖ What happens during Lent? Is Lent a time for “interior reflection” or primarily catechetical instruction?
- ❖ Do we celebrate all of the Scrutinies, the Presentations, and the Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday?
- ❖ What is our Easter Vigil like? How many parishioners attend? Do the elect and the candidates feel welcomed and at home by their experience of the parish at the Vigil?
- ❖ Are sponsors and godparents deeply involved before and after the Easter Vigil? What sort of formation do they receive?

What should a parish see in its neophytes over time that gives evidence as to whether the RCIA process has been successful?

- ✦ Do your neophytes really feel they have a need for the Mass?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really have a desire for Jesus that is restless for more?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really desire to help others get to Heaven?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really have thankful hearts?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really need God in daily life?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really desire to sin less each day?

Using Small Groups in the Catechumenal Process

RCIA CATECHETICAL SESSIONS are not meant solely to transmit *information*. The purpose of catechesis is to initiate and foster the process of conversion of heart and entry into the mystery of Christ. Therefore, in addition to teaching the truths of the faith in catechetical sessions, it is important to provide time in small groups to give participants a forum where they can feel comfortable—

- ✦ Expressing how they have understood the truths they have heard.
- ✦ Articulating their initial responses: perceptions, insights, agreements, connections with other teachings, assent, thanksgiving; as well as concerns, reservations, difficulties, disagreements.
- ✦ Deepening their own conversions.
- ✦ Considering how they might apply the teaching in their lives.

This forum is the small-group discussion. Although small groups are not mentioned in the RCIA ritual book, small groups are exceedingly helpful to participants' spiritual journeys because they call for dialogue and response (see GDC 145). This personal dialogue with the truths of the faith is at the heart of the small-group component of the Christian initiation process. Speaking honestly about their thoughts and feelings on these matters causes participants to wrestle with them and, in time and with God's grace, experience a deepening conversion.

From the standpoint of participants, the small-group sessions have a specifically catechetical character. However, from the standpoint of the RCIA leader, god-

parents and sponsors, and the team, the sessions have a strong pastoral component. This is so for several reasons:

- ➔ Dialogue with participants in a small-group context allows sponsors, godparents, and team members to gain invaluable insights concerning the pastoral care that an individual may need.
- ➔ If a participant needs to talk something out, the small

groups provide people who are there to listen.

- ➔ If there is a recurring issue that needs further attention, a pastorally-astute godparent, sponsor, or team member can pick up on it.

A word should be said about the difference between small-group discussions following a



catechetical session and a small-group Reflection on the Word session (see Chapter 8 of this *Manual*, "Using the Sunday Lectionary for Mass in the Catechumenal Process"). Reflection on the Word sessions follow the dismissal of catechumens from the Mass after the Liturgy of the Word. These sessions are therefore a continuation of the liturgy and are not intended to be catechetical. The small-group sessions during the catechetical sessions, on the other hand, offer more time to respond to and discover the truths of God and his plan that participants have just heard, and consider how the teachings apply to everyday life.

PREPARING FOR SMALL-GROUP SESSIONS

Selecting and Training Facilitators

When considering specific members of the RCIA team to be small-group leaders, the leader should look for individuals who:



- ❖ Are good listeners.
- ❖ Are genuine in their concern for others.
- ❖ Can respect people with different opinions.
- ❖ Are comfortable sharing their own faith.
- ❖ Are able to help others express their thoughts.
- ❖ Are reasonably knowledgeable about Scripture, the Catechism, and Catholic doctrines and practices in general.
- ❖ Are extraordinarily kind yet astute enough to prevent faults in others from making the small group fail in its purposes.

The leader, however, may not have the luxury of choosing the best candidates for facilitators if most members of the RCIA team must double as facilitators. In these cases, training becomes more essential, since facilitating small-group discussion is a skill that can be learned. (Chapter 18 of this *Manual*, “The RCIA Team,” should be consulted for a general discussion on training and forming all members of the RCIA team.)

A team member with impaired sight or hearing should not automatically be excluded from serving as a small-group facilitator; the leader should consider on a case-by-case basis the person’s ability to respond to all the visual and auditory cues participants provide, and the person’s capacity to compensate for his or her physical disability.

A person who has never facilitated a small-group session before should not be asked to do so without sitting in on groups whose facilitators are experienced and capable. In advance, the leader should ask the “trainee” to watch the ways in which the facilitator ensures that the members of the group respond to the teaching they have just heard, while at the same time avoiding dominating the group. The facilitator can then meet with the trainee afterwards to discuss the methods the facilitator used to ensure that the group discussion was fruitful.

The leader can also ask experienced facilitators on the team to take some time to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and ask one another how they might work on eliminating their weaknesses. Such self-criticism ensures that facilitators remain focused on the purposes of the small groups. This is especially useful when, as is likely to be the case, some facilitators have relatively little experience. Trainees

who have not yet facilitated a small group might also find such a session useful in honing their own skills.

The Number of Groups Needed

Small groups are, by definition, small, and therefore the number of groups is determined by the number of participants, spouses or fiancé(e)s who regularly accompany participants, the number of godparents and sponsors, and additional team members who are not facilitators. The time available is a little longer than Reflection on the Word small groups (see Chapter 8, “Using the Sunday Lectionary for Mass in the Catechumenal Process”), and the number of people is possibly larger. Although small groups larger than the ideal of four to six individuals may be a practical necessity, groups larger than eight or nine persons may defeat the purposes for which they are intended.


Even if suitable tables are unavailable, the chairs should be placed in a circle so that everyone can face everyone else. Even the use of generally unsuitable areas such as hallways is preferable to seating arrangements that make small-group interaction impossible.

Composition of Groups

The leader will probably, by trial and error over a few cycles of the catechumenal process, discover whether small groups should always consist of the same individuals and the same facilitator, or whether their composition should be more fluid. The most significant determinant of the composition of small groups is the number of inquirers, catechumens, and candidates. If the total number is small, many of the questions that a leader might ask, as presented in the remainder of this subsection, do not even arise.

The leader should decide whether he or she desires a specific composition within each small group. For example, should individuals with something specific in common be grouped together? Should unbaptized and baptized participants be in separate groups? Should some groups be only men, and others only women? Should people who attend as couples (whether or not one of the two is already a Catholic) be put in the same or different small groups? Or should groups specifically reflect the diversity among the participants, so that there are young, old, single,





married, unbaptized, baptized, men, and women in each group? And, even if most of the time the groups are organized in a specific manner, are there special times when it is helpful to form groups in which all of the participants, for example, are either married or single to discuss the sacrament of Matrimony?

Other considerations in forming small groups have to do with the likelihood that team members will form relationships with specific participants early in the catechumenal process. The assignment of a person to a specific small group, or reassignment to another small group, may be influenced by these pastoral ties.

If the catechumenal process is one that experiences a fairly large number of “latecomers” (see Chapter 10 of this *Manual*, “The Foundation of the Catechetical Aspect: Understanding and Being Changed in Christ,” for more on how participants are “caught up”), the leader will have to decide whether to form new groups made up of these individuals, or whether to integrate them into existing groups. If this situation regularly occurs in the parish’s catechumenal process, and the leader does not desire to form new groups, then the groups when initially formed must be small enough that additional individuals later will not make them unwieldy.

Finally, the leader may choose not to establish fixed small groups, with the pastoral intention of encouraging the entire group—participants, any spouses who regularly attend, godparents and sponsors, and the RCIA team—to develop a more inclusive sense of community through weekly mixing. If this is the leader’s intention, the members of the RCIA team should specifically be instructed to sit in different places, at different tables, for each catechetical session.

Placement in the Catechetical Session and Duration

Because the purposes of small-group sessions have to do with “processing” catechesis, by necessity they must follow the teaching. It is generally helpful to allow a break between the catechesis and the small-group session, of approximately ten minutes (which should be reasonably strictly enforced by the leader or catechist, since the approximate duration of the entire session, from opening hymn to closing prayer or hymn, should be known and respected). The break

also makes easier any changes of seating necessitated by small-group composition. Unlike the Reflection on the Word sessions, the small-group sessions can last about twenty to thirty minutes. Facilitators are responsible for ensuring that this time is used well, since it is relatively brief.


WHAT TAKES PLACE IN SMALL-GROUP SESSIONS

The crucial event of a small group is dialogue: “Of fundamental importance is the *dialogical approach* which . . . respects the basic freedom and autonomy of adults and encourages them to engage in an open and cordial dialogue. In this way, they can make known their needs and can participate, as they should, as subjects or agents in their own catechesis and in that of others” (ACCC 57; emphasis in original).

The subject of the dialogue is, of course, what has just been taught. The RCIA leader may provide a list of appropriate questions (see the Application heading near the bottom of the page of the sixty lesson plans in ACM’s companion *Catechist’s Manual*; see also the CD-ROM of ACM’s *Participant’s Book*, which has the same questions in electronic form, and can be downloaded to allow them to be made more easily available to group facilitators). These can be used either to help guide the discussion or to provide help if it bogs down. The leader may prefer small-group facilitators instead to initiate the discussion by asking people to share one thought they had about the topic.

The facilitator’s principal tasks are:

- To create trust within the group, both in the facilitator and among the participants, as part of the process of community-building.
- Without forcing anyone to speak, to encourage everyone to participate in an open discussion (the leader, in training members of the RCIA team, and godparents and sponsors, will have instructed these individuals that, for the most part, they should not speak first, for otherwise they will dominate the discussion).
- To clear up simple misunderstandings of what has just been taught.
- To paraphrase what someone in the group has said in order to clarify it for others in the group, and to



demonstrate attentive listening to, and interest in, the person who spoke.

- ✦ As much as possible (and as even-handedly as possible), to show delight and excitement about each person's insights.
- ✦ To help members of the group understand the connection between what has just been taught and other doctrines of the faith, to discover how what has been taught deepens their own conversion, and to realize how it applies in their daily lives.
- ✦ To prevent problems from derailing the group (see the next subsection for a discussion of problems and how they should be handled).

Members of a given small group will be in a different place in the journey of faith, making it critical that the facilitator listen to each individual and affirm their insights and questions. To understand what is being expressed, the facilitator must pay attention not only to what is said, but also to the speaker's emotions and any non-verbal cues he or she unconsciously gives.

There are, as well, some fairly obvious "don'ts" when facilitating small groups:

- ➔ Do not dominate the group.
- ➔ Do not create a sense that people feel the need to say "the right things."
- ➔ Do not allow small-group discussions to consist largely of people "catching up" on each other's lives, griping about bad weather or high prices, rehashing sporting events, or—especially!—gossiping.

Specific Problems

Because people are people, small groups can go awry in numerous ways. It is the facilitator's task to foresee problems and prevent them from making small-group sessions a waste of time. Among the problems every facilitator is likely to encounter are:

- ✦ Some people will try to dominate the group.
- ✦ Some people will be less able to stay focused than others.
- ✦ Some people will continually ask questions as a way to extend the catechesis.
- ✦ Some people will hold back from joining the discussion.
- ✦ Someone is going through a crisis—a family or work problem, loss of a job, difficulty with de-

pression or addiction, or one brought on by the conversion process itself.

People Who Try to Dominate the Group. A person who tries to dominate a group may have a naturally dominating personality, believe (with or without reason) that he or she is always right, or be habitually rude. The facilitator should always courteously and firmly thank the dominating, know-it-all, and rude person for his or her comments before everyone else becomes so irritated that the group can no longer function, and invite others to speak up. After any small-group session in which these problems have arisen, the facilitator should discuss the situation with the person's godparent or sponsor, and with the RCIA leader. The purpose of this discussion should be how best to counsel the person about the need to change this behavior and to develop the virtues of humility, meekness, and self-control.

Some people dominate a group because they "get" what has been taught much more quickly than everyone else, or have had greater previous catechesis than originally thought. In either case, this may become a problem for the leader to resolve. If such a person is baptized, it might be appropriate to consider providing an abbreviated catechumenal and pastoral formation, as urged by the United States bishops (see NS 31). However, if this person desires not to leave a community with which he or she has already formed strong ties, he or she should be counseled about developing the virtues of charity, patience, and self-control. If the person is not baptized, he or she should remain with the group and be given similar counseling.

People Who Do Not Stay Focused. People naturally differ in their ability to stay focused in a group discussion. Those who are easily distracted tend to take the conversation on tangents by bringing up issues that are unrelated to the discussion. Sometimes a person will have difficulty understanding or accepting something that they have heard. In these cases, the facilitator needs to have a keen sense of what is best for the group as a whole. It may be that the "unrelated issue" is more relevant than it first appears, and it may be that one person's problem with understanding or assenting to a specific doctrine is also being experienced by others in the group. In these cases, the facilitator may



do a quick check with the others to determine if most of them want to deal with the “unrelated issue” or the difficult doctrine.

However, if the problem seems to be confined to one person, or the same person has the same types of problems every week, the facilitator may need to gently steer the group back to the main points while assuring the one person that he or she will be given additional attention by the facilitator, godparent or sponsor, another member of the team, or a catechist, as appropriate.

People Who Continually Ask Questions. The person who is always asking questions is hard to resist, for the facilitator, like everyone else on the team, desires and is in fact eager to pass on the faith. However, apart from clearing up simple misunderstandings, the facilitator should not allow a small group discussion to degenerate into a question-and-answer session. When the facilitator becomes “Mr. (or Ms.) Answer Person”—a serious temptation to anyone who knows much more than participants—the participants cannot process the truths that they have just been taught. The small group is *their* time; extension of catechesis is done by means of handouts (a complete set of handouts for participants is available in ACM’s *Participant’s Book*), one-on-one exchanges after the conclusion of the catechetical session, including a response to the question at the next catechetical session, or follow-up meetings or telephone discussions with team members, a catechist, or the leader outside the small-group setting. Facilitators should always ensure that questions are answered and, if it seems appropriate, to report back to the individual or the group at another time. Finally, the facilitator should also be alert to pick up a “question behind the question.” Participants may not be able to phrase a question well enough to receive an appropriate answer. It is also possible that the question reveals a deeper problem that should not go unaddressed.

People Who Hold Back from the Discussion. The opposite of the person who dominates a discussion is one who seems unwilling to participate at all. As with the other problems, this can have several causes. Some people need time to ponder a particular teaching, or have real trouble assimilating the teaching or connecting it to other doctrines. When the facilitator

realizes that this is the situation, he or she can simply avoid calling on the person until everyone else has had something to say. For this person, hearing the thoughts and reactions of others may help crystallize his or her own thinking. If the facilitator thinks this person is probably ready, he or she can then invite this person to comment. The source of this person’s problem is often the belief that their own contributions will be little valued, a form of false humility that needs a godparent’s or sponsor’s help to correct.

Sometimes someone’s contributions are criticized by another member of the group. Since one of the pastoral purposes of small-group discussions is fostering mutual charity and building up a sense of community, the facilitator must deal with all criticism (including nonverbal “comments” such as scowls or eye-rolling) immediately, with kindness and, if the facilitator is especially adept, with a comment that shows how useful or helpful the criticized comment is. The facilitator must involve other members of the team, and godparents and sponsors, to help inculcate behavior patterns of kindness and gentleness when critical comments regularly occur.

Unwillingness to participate may also stem from simple shyness, a speech impediment such as a stutter, or a hearing impairment. The facilitator should watch for physical problems that may, on the surface, seem to be shyness or even aloofness. An awareness of physical problems, and an open intention to make allowances for them—waiting patiently for someone to complete a sentence, restating points so that the facilitator is sure that the person has actually heard them—is an act of courtesy and kindness to every person in the group. The facilitator should encourage this behavior and gently reprove anyone who becomes impatient. If the problem is shyness, the facilitator should enlist the help of the person’s sponsor or godparent; the virtue required is courage.

People Going Through Crises. A participant might be going through a personal crisis of some kind, and either be completely inattentive or try to use the group to help with the problem. Inattentiveness, especially in a person who previously had been eager to participate or always had something to say, should be a red flag to the facilitator to investigate, privately with the





person, what the problem is. It might be no worse than the exhaustion of holding down a job and spending wakeful nights with a cranky infant, or it might be as weighty as a marital problem, loss of a job, or a newly-diagnosed serious illness. Once the facilitator knows what is happening, he or she should consult with the RCIA leader about appropriate responses by the team and by the parish. A person who seeks to use the small group to help with the problem can be asked to “hold off” with the promise of attention after the small-group discussion has concluded. If the person is unable to do this, the facilitator should excuse himself or herself and the person, put the problem in the hands of the leader, and return to the group.

The final problem to be discussed is not in fact properly described as a “problem.” This is the situation of a person who is experiencing a spiritual or moral crisis brought on by the catechumenal process itself. A crisis of this sort is to be greeted with joy by the facilitator and, if the person shares it with the group, by its members as well. The catechesis being received is truly fulfilling its purpose of changing a heart. Facing a change in one’s life—the possibility that a marriage may be invalid, that one must stop living as though married without actually being married, that a serious vice such as pornography must be given up, that a lifestyle of opulence and materialism is contrary to the Gospel and must be abandoned, that the frivolous and sinful use of time must be corrected, that the way

a father has raised his children has done damage that must be undone to the extent possible, that a woman must abandon her hopes for a child by means of in-vitro fertilization, that one’s pursuit of wealth or power or fame may have immoral aspects—is painful and frightening: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31). A small-group session is not the right setting for helping a participant with a spiritual crisis—this is the task of the RCIA leader, perhaps the pastor, and the godparent or sponsor—but the facilitator and those in the group can and should feel edified by what they are witnessing and privileged that they have been allowed to see it unfold.

CONCLUSION

Small groups are not an optional “if there is time” component of catechesis. The small group is an essential element in assimilating what has been taught, and necessary as part of the process by which a group of strangers begin to be incorporated into the community of the parish and of the universal Church (see GDC 159). If adequate time is provided for these discussions, if small-group facilitators are effective, and if room is left for the Holy Spirit to bring the right person into a small group at the right time, or to have someone say just what someone else needs to hear, then the experience that small groups offer can greatly aid RCIA participants in understanding the faith and allowing it to change their lives.



Portrait of a New Catholic

FOR THE NEW CATHOLICS, the sacraments of initiation mark the beginning of “newness of life” as fully initiated members of the Body of Christ. The new Catholics now have access to the fullness of sacramental grace. Having celebrated the sacraments of initiation, the neophytes have been “renewed in mind, tasted more deeply the sweetness of God’s Word, received the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and grown to know the goodness of the Lord” (RCIA 245). Mystagogy, or post-baptismal catechesis, is the time when they are “introduced into a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned and above all through their experience of the sacraments they have received” (RCIA 245; note that RCIA 410 directs that newly-received Catholics and newly-baptized Catholics are to go through mystagogy together).

Mystagogy is essential to help the neophytes “grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal mystery and in making it a part of their lives” (RCIA 244). Just as Lent provides an opportunity to enter into the desert to be purified and so become more like Christ, so the Easter season is an opportunity for the neophytes to rejoice in the risen Lord and, in that joy, to begin to practice their Catholic faith in its fullness. The RCIA ritual book explains that this will take place through “meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity” (RCIA 244).

MEDITATION ON THE GOSPEL

The ritual book explains that the Sundays of the Easter season contain “particularly suitable readings from the Lectionary, especially the readings for Year A”

(RCIA 247) to aid the neophytes in grasping the mystery of what has taken place in the Easter sacraments. For example, the Fourth Sunday of Easter always contains readings taken from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John focusing on Jesus as the Good Shepherd, reminding the neophytes that they are now “the sheep of his flock” and that he will always care for them.

The neophytes who were baptized at the Easter Vigil now begin to stay for the entire Mass on Sundays, and no longer participate in Reflection on the Word sessions. It may be beneficial for the RCIA leader to offer

ways that they might continue to have this experience (for example, joining a general parish Bible study that is lectionary-based, meeting after Mass or during the week as a group with their godparents, or discussing the Scripture readings at home with their families). Several Catholic publishing companies offer materials to use for this purpose.

It is important that the neophytes continue to listen to the Gospel message not only through the Scriptures that are proclaimed and homilies preached at Mass, but also through their own prayerful reading of Scripture. By meditating on the Gospel and by seeking to make it a part of their lives, neophytes grow in their personal identity as Catholics and in their relationship with God. If the neophytes had the opportunity to reflect on the first two gateway Rites, as suggested in Chapter 6, “The Major Rites of the Catechumenal Process,” and if Reflection on the Word sessions were a regular part of the catechumenal process, the neophytes will already have the tools and the habits to engage readily in post-baptismal mystagogy.





The task of systematic catechesis does not end with the reception of the sacraments of initiation. The period of mystagogy, and beyond Pentecost through the remainder of the neophyte year, can be used to establish a habit of ongoing deepening in the new Catholics' understanding of doctrine. Beyond mystagogy, the United States bishops recommend that the neophytes meet at least monthly "for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community" (NS 24). Monthly gatherings with the pastor or another member of the parish clergy, the RCIA leader, or a team member "just to chat" can be beneficial for them to ask questions about Catholic teaching or practices, clarifying aspects of their practice of the faith, and providing ongoing spiritual formation for the group. A monthly neophyte newsletter (or even a section of the parish's website) is another way to continue catechetical formation beyond regular meetings. Occasional retreat days during the first year also give opportunities for further systematic instruction in the faith and deepening of the life of prayer. Other ideas for keeping in touch with neophytes include regular emails or newsletters to inform them about events in the parish and the diocese. If fellowship was strong among participants before Easter, then they will seek to continue it in one form or another.

Neophytes should also be introduced to the vast and dazzling array of Catholic media explaining Scripture, the Christian life, and doctrine; telling the lives of the saints, Church history, and stories of conversion; and providing guidance in the life of Christian prayer, charity, and evangelization. Books, periodicals, newspapers, video and audio media, and the internet are available to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the financial resources of the parish and each neophyte. The RCIA team should use the neophyte year to give new Catholics a thorough introduction to Catholic media, helping them to learn where to look to find information, such as Catholic bookstores, subscribing to Catholic periodicals, finding good Catholic websites, and discovering additional opportunities for reading, listening, and viewing materials without cost, especially through a parish library if one exists.

SHARING IN THE EUCHARIST

While meditation on the Gospel strengthens the neophytes in their personal life of faith, the surpass-

ing means for grasping the Paschal mystery has always been the Eucharist, the Church's great sign of unity (see CCC 1396, 1398), and is the source and sustainer of *communio*. Sharing in the Eucharist binds the neophytes more closely with other Catholics and helps the entire community to grow in its relationship with God through liturgical worship.

There are several ways to make the "Masses for the neophytes" (RCIA 248) during the neophyte year more effective in drawing the community closer together. Special places should be reserved for the neophytes, their godparents, and members of the RCIA team during this year (see RCIA 248). This shows the neophytes the importance that the community places on their presence, reminds the rest of the faithful to live their own Baptismal apostolate which these individuals have recently taken on, and helps the community to remember to keep the neophytes in their prayers.

Both the Sunday homilies and the intercessions should "take into account the presence and needs of the neophytes" (see RCIA 248). The homilies that are offered throughout the Easter season should, for example, help keep the focus on Baptism and the other sacraments of initiation, and should remind both the neophytes and the rest of the faithful of the need to live out their Baptismal apostolate in both word and deed. Offering one of the Prayers of the Faithful after the Easter season (for example, one weekend each month) for the neophytes is another way to keep them on the minds and in the hearts of the community once the Easter season has passed (see Appendix VI of this *Manual*, "Prayers of the Faithful by the Calendar").

The pastor and RCIA leader should maintain especially close contact with the neophytes. The most recent study of new Catholics, completed several years ago by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, noted with concern that not even two-thirds of U. S. neophytes regularly attended Mass on Sundays (or the vigil Mass on Saturday evening) (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States*, October 2000). It is not much comfort to realize that this is twice the percentage of all U. S. Catholics who go to Mass every week.





DOING THE WORKS OF CHARITY

While the neophytes and the entire community must grow in their personal identity as Catholics (meditating on the Gospel) and in their corporate identity as the Body of Christ (sharing in the Eucharist), the reason Catholics do these things is not only personal but also communal—to turn to the service of others. From the time the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming were celebrated, various forms of parish service should be made known to the participants, and they should have been invited to begin engaging in service to the community. Now they are full-fledged members of the parish, and live the “law of love”: *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him”* (1 Jn 3:16–19).

Aided by the grace of the sacraments, the new Catholics are able to put the Gospel message which they have heard throughout their formation into practice in a more complete way. They are able to respond more and more as a disciple of Christ would when they encounter situations at home, at work, and elsewhere. Their access to sacramental graces enables them to act differently from the way the world would have them act. A dying to self leads to a rising to the new life of self-gift, a desire to respond to however God calls the neophyte to work for others. The fifty days of the Easter season can be an opportune time to encourage the new Catholics to rethink their choices and, to the extent that their health, obligations to family and employment, and availability of means of transportation permit, intensify their existing commitments to service (including changing commitments to other forms of service as appropriate).

During their first year as Catholics, neophytes should be securely established in the life of the parish. The difficulties of this year can be great. Even though the regular formation experienced during the catechumenal process is completed, the neophytes must be supported and strengthened to grow in faith, hope, and charity as they continue to live the moral life, the


sacramental life, and the liturgical life. A Bible study with new friends in the parish, a charitable work to join, and opportunities to contribute special skills to the work of the parish should all be aspects of this year. Throughout the year, care should be taken to make sure that the neophytes are always specifically invited to parish missions, presentations by visiting speakers, and other adult education events. They also can be helped to join an existing small Christian community, or to establish a new community with their fellow neophytes. The entire community of the faithful should endeavor to give their loving and friendly help to the neophytes; in so doing, they themselves, together with the neophytes, enter ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ (see GDC 168).

When the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops looked at the incorporation of neophytes into parish life, they found that “among the most appreciated parts of the RCIA process cited by the survey participants is incorporation into parish life. The RCIA is viewed as a helpful instrument for enabling participants to become more fully integrated into the community’s life and mission. This element is rated as important to the participants as growing closer to God, experiencing conversion, and learning about the Catholic faith” (USCCB, *Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States*, October 2000).

While acknowledging that there are many ways that parish communities can become better, the USCCB report commented that neophytes who were surveyed expressed “particular appreciation for the wide range of activities available to them in their parishes, the strong sense of community that they experienced, and the quality of the clergy who are assigned to them.” Nevertheless, there is a long way to go to fully incorporate neophytes into the life of the parish. Only half of survey respondents actually participated actively in “parish ministries and committees” (USCCB, *Journey to the Fullness of Life*).

THE MISSION TO EVANGELIZE

Over the course of the neophyte year, the new Catholics will continue to grow in their faith. They will find joy in the celebration of the sacraments and



in the welcome they receive into the parish community. As they celebrate the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year, they experience the mystery of Christ as presented in the Mass and other prayers of the Church, in the joys and sorrows of their own lives, and in the life of the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church. Some will rejoice that they now share the faith of their spouse, or of a Catholic family into which they had married. Others will find that their parish has given them new purpose and new friendships. Some may also experience sorrow as they lose contact with friends who do not agree with their decision to become Catholic or who have a way of life which they find does not support them in living as a Christian. Some may suffer the loss of closeness with parents who did not want a son or daughter to become a Catholic. They are called to accept their suffering for the sake of making their Beloved more loved.

Neophytes should experience a filling up with God's zeal to unmake the world's work in others' souls. Neophytes should share the joy that they have found in the Catholic faith with their families, friends, and co-workers. The witness of individuals who have made a decision to become Catholic and who live the fullness of the Christian life with joy and enthusiasm is a powerful force to draw others to the Church. However, they should also remember that, while some might see their joy and ask about becoming Catholic themselves, not everyone will share their excitement and some people might even be cynical or rude. As neophytes live out their Baptismal apostolate to bring Christ to the world, it is essential for them to find ways to witness to their new-found faith outside of the parish, despite indifference and rejection. They must come to understand that they will always be a minority, but nonetheless always look for opportunities to work in the "mission field" wherever they live and whom-ever they encounter (see GDC 86).

In restoring the catechumenate, the Second Vatican Council reminded the Church of her call to evangelize and her responsibility to provide formation for the men and women who approach the Church seeking the sacraments of initiation so that they may be "introduced into the life of faith, liturgy and charity of the People of God by successive sacred rites" (AG


14). The Church succeeds in accomplishing her mission every time an individual begins the Christian initiation process, is initiated, and embarks upon the Christian life in the company of his or her brothers and sisters in the faith. The paths taken by the men and women who have entered into the mystery of Christ through the adult Christian initiation process vary greatly after initiation. Many raise families who are strong in the faith. Some are called to priesthood, religious life, or the permanent diaconate (see GDC 86). Others respond to God's call through a life entirely committed to generous service to others. All are called to spread the Good News of God's love and salvation which he offers to all through the Church. If those who have taken on the name of Christian live out their Baptismal apostolate, then the world will be transformed.

THE CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW

What is the Catholic worldview? It is the way that Catholics perceive, think, and act in light of the authentic realities and transcendent truths that God has revealed through the Church. It is seeing and understanding the world *as Christ and his Church see it*. Becoming Catholic is not simply like joining a club; it is a change of attitude, perception, and intent in life, to differing degrees, depending on the spiritual place where an individual was when he or she first began the Christian initiation process.

Developing a Catholic worldview takes time, usually several years. Many new Catholics find themselves saying, "In *my* church..." not meaning the Catholic Church but the ecclesial community they last attended or in which they had grown up. Eventually, they begin to correct themselves: "Well, I really mean *my old* church." They may discover with surprise that they look at an issue in a different way, or they may discover that new issues arise that they had never dealt with before, and they desire to understand them from a Catholic perspective. These are signs that they are beginning to identify themselves as Catholics and to form a Catholic worldview.

In their new identity, some neophytes may face decisions about habits or ways of thinking which they discover are not consistent with their new life in



Christ. Some may have a radical new perspective on how they relate to their families and friends, how they engage in their jobs, and how they see the world at large. Others will have less dramatic transformations but will find that they are “different” somehow from the person they were when they began the Christian initiation process. More and more, they see things and events through new eyes: those of a Catholic Christian.

Every person has a worldview, whether or not he or she consciously thinks about it. A worldview is the way of thinking and feeling through which an individual understands the people and events of his or her culture, and through which decisions are made as to his or her beliefs and actions. It is formed by the culture in which people live, and the circumstance and events of their own and others’ lives. What kind of lifestyle choices are made, what one looks for in a spouse, decisions about the number of children to have, where to live, what kind of employment to seek, what goals to seek in life—all are formed by one’s worldview. Attitudes about public issues such as crime and punishment and war, the legality of abortion and euthanasia, the government’s role in helping the poor and the sick and immigrants, are colored by one’s worldview; even whether to view public issues in a moral light is affected by one’s worldview. Participation in the popular culture affects a person’s worldview, and a person’s worldview affects how much he or she chooses to participate in, or disengage from, the popular culture.

Since beginning the Christian initiation process, the neophytes’ worldview has been changing, thanks to prayer, the witness of other Catholics, learning the Church’s teachings, and the graces they have received from the Rites of the Christian initiation process and the sacraments of initiation. The reception of the sacraments brings sacramental grace and light to their minds and hearts to aid them in developing their Catholic worldview. As their minds and hearts continue to be fed on Scripture, the liturgy, reception of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, prayer, and continued study of the Church’s doctrines, the fullness of Catholic truth begins to permeate all areas of their thinking. They may find themselves more sensitive to issues concerning life, human dignity, the value of suffering, the importance of family, the dignity


of labor, and stewardship of the natural world—in short, every aspect of human life and society. They may find that their own lifestyles are too shallow and extravagant. Their goals in raising their children may begin to focus less on the “right” college and career, and more on preparing them for eternity.

CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES

By the time participants have received the sacraments of initiation, the RCIA leader should have ensured that they have heard, understood, and been formed by principles that define for them a Catholic worldview. Taken together, the following nine points comprise one way of describing the principles of a Catholic worldview:

Who God is Always Informs Us About What God Does

“*God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). This is who God is; his essence is love. This central truth sheds light on all others in the Deposit of Faith, and informs his followers of the essential purpose of all of God’s actions—from the first act of creation, through the long drama of salvation history, down to the final act of just estrangement of a damned soul and the final act of merciful espousal of a saved soul. God’s power is not wielded in an arbitrary way (see CCC 271, 373), and he wishes us to know this by revealing his “innermost secret” (CCC 221, citing 1 Jn 4:8, 16). God is a family of Persons whose life is love, an eternal exchange of complete self-gift (see CCC 221). The fact of the Blessed Trinity, one of the two core tenets of the Christian faith (see GDC 100), illuminates all the other mysteries of the faith, and the mystery of humankind itself, made in the image of the Trinitarian God. Trinitarian love is our source—God’s love outpoured in the act of creation, of which humanity is the crown. Trinitarian love is the Divine charity that is infused into every Christian soul at Baptism. Trinitarian love is the point of being Christian at all, for through our redemption our deformed and defaced human nature is restored to God’s original purpose, the loving gift of self, the death to self that gives eternal life for which each of us was created. Who God is—love—informs us why he made us free beings—love demands that the beloved have



authentic freedom to respond. Free will is necessary because we must be able to *choose* to love God, not be *compelled* to love him; we must be able to *choose* to give ourselves to others, not be *compelled* to self-gift. Yet the necessity of free will opened the possibility of abusing that freedom. In this way love also necessitates taking the risk that the beloved would say “no.” Hence the potential for that which is evil to come into existence in a creation wholly authored by he who is All Holy. Thus are the questions of free will and evil (and all aspects of Catholic life and doctrine) enlightened by the logic of God’s loving identity—God’s essential nature informing us, sometimes dimly, sometimes with burning clarity, of the reasons for God’s actions.

The Content of the Faith Reflects the Character of God

Our God is one God, not three, and the Catholic faith given to us is one as well. All of the truths of the faith begin with the central doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and flow from these core doctrines organically. St. Paul, in writing of the Mystical Body of Christ, used the analogy of the human body in its organic wholeness: *“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable”* (1 Cor 12:21–22). As with the Mystical Body of Christ, so with the doctrines of the faith. Each doctrine is arranged in its proper relation to the others (called the “hierarchy of truths”) and each is essential to the whole, so that the entire Deposit of Faith would fail to hold together logically if even one doctrine—one part of that organic truth—was removed.

God’s attributes are truth, goodness, and beauty, and all three are attributes of the faith as well. The intellect seeks to know truth, and the will seeks the good. In the Catholic worldview, doctrinal and moral absolutes are the source of human freedom and the standard by which all situations are judged and the true basis of human freedom. Morality flows from recognizing the truths of our human nature, the original harmonies of body and soul that were destroyed by the sin of our first parents. God has revealed who and what we are in Jesus Christ our Lord, who “fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most


high calling” (GS 22). Human freedom is God’s gift to enable his beloved creatures to seek the good; that is, to seek Goodness Itself. Morality, therefore, is not rule-following; it is the pursuit of happiness.

Finally, the Catholic faith is beautiful, and everything that is Catholic should be beautiful. Beauty, one of God’s attributes, is reflected in the beauty created for his glory, especially the art and architecture and music that houses, adorns, and accompanies worship.

God Has the Plan

A Catholic worldview is imbued with a sense of transcendence—the majesty of God in relation to his creatures: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Is 55:8–9). Yet from the beginning God intended intimacy with his human creatures, and thus the Catholic is equally imbued with the immanence of God who, as Jesus told his disciples, is always near: *“I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you”* (Jn 14:16–18).

Even while humans have, again and again, failed to keep the covenantal promises, God has remained faithful to the covenant (see Heb 10:23). God invites us to life in the covenant according to our nature as beings who exist in time. He accommodates the revelation of himself to our nature, gradually and incrementally bringing us to knowledge and love of him. He has made our relationship with Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity who took our human nature and became truly man while remaining truly God, the center of being Catholic. At its height, this relationship takes the form of spousal love (see Lk 5:34–35) and, in each human life, God’s justice and mercy are offered efficaciously as a husband cares for and loves his wife, not as a judge would mete out justice to a condemned criminal. Christ humbled himself to share in our humanity so that he might lift us up to share in his Divinity (see CCC 460, 526). A Catholic worldview is founded on the Blessed Trinity and the recognition of God’s plan and of Jesus Christ as the Lord of history and of each individual life:



He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.... For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in Heaven and things on earth. In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory (Eph 1:5-6, 9-12).

What God Enters into, He Redeems

This is the core of the distinctively Catholic sacramental principle. In God's plan, the visible creation becomes a channel for that which is invisible. The Catholic understands in his very being that the Incarnation is the key to understanding how God works. God uses human nature, the ensouled body and embodied soul, to accomplish his purposes. Jesus entered the womb of Mary, and made motherhood holy in a way that it had never been understood in any prior culture. He chose to live in poverty, and thus made poverty a powerful means of drawing nearer to God that uncoun­ted millions would vow themselves to in centuries to follow. He entered suffering and death, the greatest consequences of sin, and thereby made suffering necessary for our sanctification (see Rom 8:17) and an efficacious means of helping others (see below). This is the paradox that the "way of perfection passes by way of the Cross" (CCC 2015), that "*whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for [Jesus'] sake and the gospel's will save it*" (Mk 8:35). By his death, Jesus redeemed death itself. Instead of death being the worst curse of sin, believers now know that Jesus has transformed it into the only route to eternal blessedness (see 1 Cor 15:54-55). God can bring good from evil (see Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20), for God wastes nothing, and anything human can be used to glorify God. The redemption of the material world (see Rom 8:19-22) is the reason that God uses the sacraments as the continued history of Christ on earth. In every time and in every age, God uses the material world

to pour out his grace, most superlatively through the sacraments of his Church.


Jesus Did Not Come to Take Away Suffering, But to Give It Meaning

The world has such a horror of suffering that it often uses deeply immoral ways to avoid it. In dramatic confrontation with the popular culture, which fears suffering above all else and will use any means, moral or immoral, to evade it, the Catholic worldview sees that suffering is not valueless. Jesus' purpose was to redeem fallen humanity; he came to deal with the greatest evil, which is not suffering, but sin.

The cross of Jesus has redeemed suffering itself. Jesus has told us that "*if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Mk 8:34). Furthermore, human suffering has value to God; he has given it redemptive power (see Col 1:24). Sanctified by Christ in his Paschal mystery, human suffering has been endowed with redemptive value in light of Christ's sacrifice. Not only is holiness attained only through suffering, but also the Christian is able to suffer for others, and thereby impart grace to other souls. We can take confidence from the fact that God will not test us beyond what we can bear (see 1 Cor 10:13).

We are Saved as a Family, Not Just as Individuals

Catholicism is not a "me and Jesus" faith in which all that matters is repentance for sins and acceptance of Jesus as one's Lord and Savior. God's relationship with human beings has always, from the beginning of our creation, operated through familial covenants, an exchange of persons in which promises are made. God has always worked with his people this way, both with Israel and with the New Israel, the Catholic Church (see Lk 22:20). On the first Pentecost, when St. Peter finished speaking to the crowd, "*they were cut to the heart*" and asked St. Peter and the apostles what they should do (see Acts 2:37). St. Peter instructed them to repent of their sins and to be baptized (see Acts 2:38), which incorporated them into the Body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:13). God has fashioned our redemption to be interdependent, declaring that to love neighbor is to love God: "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*" (Mt 25:31-46).



Fellowship is necessary to the practice of Catholicism; love of the brethren teaches charity and forgiveness (see GDC 86). A superb “first thought” upon arising in the morning is “Who has God given me to love today?”

God Normally Works Through the Normal

While God has never failed to suspend the physical laws of the universe to demonstrate his power and show his glory, the faithful Catholic does not expect that this is the only or the most often way God will work in his or her life. Most Christians with terminal cancer will not be healed miraculously, but will find that the blessings God intends are not in their case to be in the nature of a miracle, but in the nature of the normal act of dying—the lessons of dependency upon the Lord in times of fear and pain, and the paradox of surrendering to the normal ways in which God calls most of us home, and by which he purifies souls very powerfully. God normally interacts with each person within the confines of the physical laws that he has ordained, and has saved us in such a way that those physical laws can be used in his plan, not always subordinated. Otherwise, our faith would not be based on trust in God, whom we cannot see—which is an act of acknowledging and responding to *love*, but more so on miraculous events that we can see—which is an act of acknowledging and responding to *power*. God desires us to be attracted not primarily to his power, but to his love, which is in part why Jesus so fully laid down the trappings of Divine power to live in normalcy and to carry out the great saving act of love by a death that would attract by the very paradox of its powerlessness. Jesus told St. Thomas and, through him, us that we are the more blessed for believing without seeing evidence of miracles (see Jn 20:24–29). The usual interaction of God with the material world is through our spiritual souls, and from this fact flows the importance of prayer.

Truth Demands a Witness

The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman near Jacob’s Well. Eventually, the woman goes back to the city and tells everyone, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be

the Christ?” (Jn 4:29). Jesus frequently speaks of bearing witness to himself in the Gospel of John (see, for example, Jn 1:7–8, 5:36, 15:26–27), and the Acts of the Apostles emphasizes the importance of witnesses to Jesus and to his Resurrection (see Acts 3:15, 10:39). The entire New Testament bears witness to Jesus (see DV 17–20).

Sacred Scripture is seen as the Word of God written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is its chief Author (see DV 11) and who guides the Church in distinguishing Divine revelation from other writings, even those most edifying and faithful. The Holy Spirit is the Inspirator of sacred Scripture, Animator of sacred Tradition, and Guarantor of the magisterium, and the true Catholic acknowledges the Church’s Divine mandate and authority to preach, teach, and sanctify. The life of the faithful Catholic is animated by the Holy Spirit, who animates the Body of Christ.

Faith is passed on to each generation by the witness of the family (see CCC 2205). Beginning with the self-gift of husband and wife to each other, the family is a school of faith, hope, charity, and self-gift. Husband and wife sanctify each other, and transmit the faith by the witness of holy lives.

Achieving a Catholic worldview means that everywhere, the world offers opportunities to love. Every day, a Catholic is to see life from the perspective of who God has given him or her to love. This might be spouse and children, or a dying parent, or an aged relative or neighbor who needs help and support. It might be the homeless man or family that one never meets, or the sick in a hospital or nursing home where one volunteers, or the co-workers burdened by depression. It might be a child with a bloated stomach and stick-like arms and legs from starvation, or a child in need of foster care. It might be a member of the parish who can no longer drive to shop or to see a doctor, or a parish in a desperately poor part of the world that cannot afford liturgical books or catechetical materials. It might be a person who cannot read, or a person who cannot hear. It might be a person who has never heard the Good News, or who has been hurt or angered by the bad witness of “good Catholics.” Seeing opportunities to love is the same as having a heart eager to love with the love of Christ, a heart giving witness to the truth.



The Only Reason to be Catholic is to Become a Saint

Trinitarian love is our hope, our goal, our end, and the reward we, with St. Paul, await: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing”* (2 Tm 4:7–8).

For a Catholic with a truly converted heart, everything in life is oriented to the end of life, where Christ himself will be the measure of all that each person has experienced and accomplished. Everyone’s life will be judged, as St. John of the Cross wrote, “on our love,” and those who lived in God’s friendship will be saved and those who spurned God’s offer of love by putting other things ahead of love of God and neighbor—power, wealth, pleasure, fame—will be damned (see Mt 25:31–46). The Catholic’s life is focused not on the goods of this world, but on the “pearl of great price” (see Mt 13:45–46), eternal happiness with God in Heaven. At the same time, the worldview of a Catholic abounds in hope and a realistic assessment of death as the door to eternal life, not something to be ignored, denied, or escaped. The holy death of a loved one, even a beloved son or daughter, is a source of joy as well as of mourning, and even the death of one obviously not prepared to meet God does not destroy hope, for God’s mercy extends beyond the grave (see CCC 1030).

Holiness is not mere goodness, for many people have been superlatively good but not holy. Holiness is “Godness,” desiring *“what God has prepared for those who love him”* (1 Cor 2:9), when we shall see God, in all his glory, beauty, and love, *“as he is”* (1 Jn 3:2). The Church exists *solely* for the purpose of making sinners into saints (see CCC 760, 776).

CONCLUSION

The result of conversion to Christ is peace of soul and zeal of heart. These new Catholics join the rest of the Christian faithful in a life of ongoing conversion in which, by cooperating with God’s grace, they turn away from things that are not of God and towards those that are. They become *“strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”* (Eph 6:10) as they strive to live up to their call to a life of holiness, contending *“against the world rulers of this present darkness [and] against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the Heavenly places”* (Eph 6:12). They do not fear the hour of their death, for they have decided to engage in spiritual warfare until their last breath. Founded in grace—the power of God’s very life—then they can say, more and more each day, *“it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (Gal 2:19–20) until they achieve the goal that Jesus set before the crowds on the mountain in Galilee: *“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect”* (Mt 5:48).