



Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 120.11

Christian Initiation of Adults

Approved By: Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland, DD

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THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [RCIA] is the paradigm for Christian initiation because the preparation for and celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist most clearly manifest the intimate relation of these sacraments to one another.

1. The primary focus of the RCIA is the Christian initiation of unbaptized adults.
2. The Rite also provides for the initiation of unbaptized children of catechetical age,¹ as well as for the reception of baptized non-Catholics into the full communion of the Catholic Church.
3. Priests, as well as other parish leaders involved in preparing adults for Baptism, should be familiar with the "General Introduction to Christian Initiation" and "National Statutes for the Catechumenate"² which provides the scriptural, doctrinal and pastoral foundations initiation ³

By its very nature, the RCIA is flexible and can be adapted to the cultures, circumstances and uniqueness of each parish. Planning for implementing the RCIA begins with a careful study of the text of the Rite.

- At the very outset of enrollment of a person in the RCIA during the interview process, a format should be developed in which the person is asked whether he/she or his/her spouse has ever been previously married. That individual is to be informed immediately that no guarantee can be given that any case submitted to the Tribunal might be adjudicated in time for reception into the Church at the Easter Vigil. The person should be informed of a need to contact the Tribunal (via the parish advocate or pastor) as soon as possible to determine freedom for marriage and, if necessary, begin a case and the local pastor should be informed of the same.
- Previously married catechumens or candidates who are now in a new marriage, are not to celebrate the sacraments of initiation nor the rite of reception until their prior marriage has been adjudicated by the Tribunal.
- Pastors, and those responsible with the pastor for the Christian formation of catechumens have a serious responsibility to ensure that the Church's teaching on faith and morals be

presented faithfully and completely to those preparing for baptism. Those who instruct the candidates must be well trained in the faith. Books and catechetical materials should be chosen which explain the faith accurately and fully. Candidates for baptism and for entrance into full communion of the Catholic Church have the right to hear the Church's teaching and should be helped to accept it with joy.

PARTICIPANTS IN THE RITE

1. The Catechumens

Catechumens are unbaptized adults "who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God's help, they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully."⁴ The catechumen's coming to faith is the essential prerequisite for the sacraments.

- The term "catechumen" is restricted to an unbaptized person who has celebrated the rite of acceptance.
- Many parish initiation programs gather the catechumens together with baptized non-Catholics seeking full communion with the Church for doctrinal, catechetical and instructional sessions, as well as for service, social gatherings, and prayer sessions. Baptized non-Catholics preparing for reception are called "candidates," so as to distinguish them from the catechumens.
- Because admission to the catechumenate, the rite of election, scrutinies and exorcisms -- are all preparatory rites for baptism, those who are already baptized do not participate in them. Therefore, in celebrating these liturgical rites, a clear distinction between catechumens and candidates must always be carefully maintained.

2. Sponsors

The sponsor is the person who assists and encourages the prospective catechumen in the early stages of initiation.

- He or she is usually a Catholic friend or relative of the candidate, often the one who brings the candidate into contact with the Church.
- The sponsor could also be a willing parishioner. After the candidate is accepted as a catechumen, the role of the sponsor is to witness to his or her own faith and to guide the catechumen along the initiation process.⁽⁵⁾

3. Godparents

Once the catechumen is called to more immediate preparation through the Rite of Election, a godparent is chosen by the catechumen or by the priest (or his representative) for each catechumen. The godparent may or may not be the same person who acted as the sponsor.⁽⁶⁾

- It is the responsibility of the godparents to furnish catechumens with a strong witness to faith, to assist them in dealing with doubts and anxieties, and to guide them personally in their Christian lives after Baptism.
- Because godparents exercise a public office, Canon Law requires that they be persons who:

- a. are Catholics who have been confirmed and have received the sacrament of the Eucharist;
- b. are at least sixteen years of age [an exception may be made by the parish priest for just cause];(7)
- c. lead a life of faith in harmony with the function they are undertaking and have the intention of undertaking this function;
- d. are not the parents of the catechumen;
- e. are not bound by a legitimately declared or inflicted canonical penalty.(8)

In light of the requirement "c" listed above, and in light of the stipulation in the rite that godparents are to give good witness and example to the catechumens,(9) Catholics in an irregular marriage are not to serve as godparents.

4. The Minister of the Sacraments of Initiation

The ordinary minister of Baptism is a bishop, priest or deacon. (10)

- Priests having the faculties of the Diocese enjoy the faculty of baptizing infants, children and adults.(11)
- Whenever a priest baptizes an adult or a child of catechetical age, he is to confer the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.(12) Canon Law does not grant a priest who baptizes or receives into full communion a person of catechetical age the discretion to defer either Confirmation or Eucharist. (13)

5. The Christian Community

It is the responsibility of the faithful, as part of their apostolic vocation, to assist in the formation of catechumens. They can fulfill this responsibility in a variety of ways:

- a. during the time of evangelization and pre-catechumenate, they should express the spirit of community by inviting the candidates into their families, engaging them in private conversations, and accompanying them to community gatherings;
- b. they are encouraged to be present at the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens, sharing in the prayers and responses;
- c. on the day of election, the presence of the faithful gives encouragement to the catechumens and candidates;
- d. during Lent, which for the catechumens is the time of purification and enlightenment, the faithful should be present for and attentive to the celebrations of the scrutinies (14) and presentations (15) and give the catechumens an example by their own renewal in a spirit of penance, faith and charity;
- e. the faithful should take part in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, welcome the newly baptized and share with them the joy of belonging to the community. (16) The parish community has an obligation to assist in bonding the new members to the life of the parish.

THE EASTER VIGIL

The Easter Triduum is the high point of the liturgical year, for "the greatest mysteries of the Redemption are celebrated yearly by the Church beginning with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday until Vespers of Easter Sunday."⁽¹⁷⁾ In celebrating the Easter Vigil, the norms of the *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and the Celebration of the Easter Feasts* and of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults are to be followed.

According to the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*,

- "The entire celebration of the Easter Vigil should take place at night, that is, it should either begin after nightfall or end before the dawn of Sunday."⁽¹⁸⁾ To celebrate the Easter Vigil before nightfall or to conclude it with the light of dawn at a "sunrise service" runs counter to the symbolism of Christ the Light in the vigil liturgy. This norm is to be observed in scheduling the Easter Vigil: It should be celebrated well after nightfall.
- The Easter Vigil is the proper time for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.⁽¹⁹⁾ However, the celebration of the rite of reception for baptized candidates may take place at a time other than the Easter Vigil.⁽²⁰⁾ In addition, pastoral reasons may suggest the use of combined rites at the Easter Vigil as found in Appendix I of the RCIA.

UNBAPTIZED CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

Unbaptized children of catechetical age, are appropriate candidates for Christian initiation according to the periods and steps of the rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

- The rite indicates that their initiation, like that of adults, is to be extended over several years, if need be. However, in determining the manner in which such children should be prepared for full initiation into the Catholic Church, many factors must be considered which will call for very flexible pastoral policies regarding both the catechesis of the children and the celebration of the liturgical rites.
- Although unbaptized children cannot celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to baptism, they should nonetheless be catechized for Penance so that later they can celebrate this sacrament with the other children in the parish or school of religion.
- In determining a child's readiness to receive a sacrament, the same standards should be applied as for children baptized and raised as Catholics.
- Baptized but uncatechized children are to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to making their first communion.
- As is the case for adults, the initiation of children is marked by liturgical rites.⁽²¹⁾ These rites are contained in Part II of the RCIA. While they follow the same structure as the rites for adults, the language is adapted to the level of young children.
- Pastors are expected to use prudent judgment in determining whether young children, even if seven years of age, should be initiated according to the Rite for Children of Catechetical Age, or according the Rite of Baptism for Children. When the parents of such children are also candidates for Baptism, their children might participate in these rites along with their parents.
- In the celebration of the liturgical rites of the RCIA, a clear distinction must always be maintained between the catechumens and the candidates for full communion in the Catholic Church.⁽²²⁾

rites for particular circumstances

The Reception of Baptized Christians into the Catholic Church

The *Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church* [hereafter abbreviated to *Rite of Reception*] addresses the situation of a person baptized in another Christian Church who now seeks full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.⁽²³⁾

The reality of an existing relationship with Christ and with the Church, established by Baptism, must be recognized and fully respected as such individuals take another step in their journey of faith.

The term "catechumen" is not to be used in a formal way as a description for such Christians, for this term implies a conversion to the Christian faith.

- The term "convert" is likewise not to be used for such Christians. Those who choose to enter into the full communion of the Catholic Church may well be leading profoundly Christian lives. The Rite of Reception appropriately refers to baptized Christians seeking the full communion of the Catholic Church as "candidates."
- The process which incorporates candidates into the Roman Catholic Church must be one that supports them as they take another step in their journey of faith. Great care must be taken to identify where candidates are in that journey in order to develop an appropriate process for continuing catechesis.
- The Rite of Reception and the optional preparatory rites can be found in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.²⁴

The framework of their formation for reception into full communion may include some elements similar to the catechumenate:

1. Sponsors are to accompany candidates in this step in their faith journey;
2. The presentation of the candidates to the community and the need to have the community provide them with assurance of its support;
3. The period of formation should be adapted to the unique needs of each candidate;
4. A prayerful reflection period may precede the Rite of Reception;
5. Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by those who are considered validly baptized. This should be a private confession with absolution;
6. The Rite of Reception should take place in a communal celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist.
7. The whole Christian community should extend its support in helping its new members enter more fully into its own life.

The Sacrament of Baptism is never to be repeated.

- If there is a doubt about whether or not someone has been baptized, or about the nature of

that baptism, conditional Baptism should be administered only if doubt persists after serious investigation.(25) Care should be exercised to determine that the immersion in, pouring of, or at least sprinkling of water took place, together with the use of a Trinitarian formula which explicitly involves ... "The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." and at least an implicit intention to baptize as the Church baptizes.

- Conditional Baptism should not be conferred until after the teaching on Baptism has been offered to the candidate and the reasons for the doubt have been explained. It should be noted that the Church sees as dubious the validity of the baptism of Mormons because they do not share the Trinitarian faith of the Catholic Church. Thus, a Mormon seeking membership in the Church is to be baptized in the Catholic Church. (The Community of Christ — formerly RLDS— Church, based in Independence, should not be confused with the Mormons).

RITE OF RECEPTION

- For reception into full communion of one born and baptized outside full communion with the Catholic Church, only a profession of faith is required.
- By law, the priest who receives a Christian into full communion has the faculty to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and is required by law to use that faculty.(26) Note that for Orthodox Christians received into full communion, they are required to make only a profession of faith.(27) Since the Church recognizes the validity of Confirmation in the Orthodox Church, they are not to be re-confirmed.
- The rite of reception is generally to be celebrated within the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. The person to be received into full communion should be consulted about the form of reception."(28) If for a serious reason Mass cannot be celebrated, the reception should at least take place within a celebration of a Liturgy of the Word.
- If Mass cannot be celebrated in connection with the reception, then the Eucharist should be celebrated as soon as possible thereafter so that the newly received candidate can receive Confirmation, and participate in the celebration and reception of the Eucharist for the first time. In such cases, great care must be taken to demonstrate the intimate relationship between the rite of reception and the celebration of the Eucharist.(29)
- The sponsor should be a person who has had a role in bringing the candidate to full communion and has been involved in the formation process. The sponsor accompanies the candidate to the rite of reception and, along with the entire community, remains an integral source of support in the faith life of the newly received persons. Thus, the sponsor exercises a role similar to that of godparents in the case of infants or catechumens, and likewise incurs similar obligations. However, the sponsors of candidates for full communion should not be referred to as godparents since the candidates have already been validly baptized.
- Candidates should celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their reception into full communion.(30) Preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance should be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Great care should be taken to assure that the candidates' first confession is positive and fruitful. In the case of an adult or child [of catechetical age] to be baptized, it should be noted that reception of the Sacrament of Penance prior to Baptism is prohibited.(31)
- Where there are catechumens to be initiated and candidates to be received into full communion, some of the catechesis can be done together. This provides support for members of both groups, and can be of considerable help to those who assist them in their formation. While some of the catechesis and the experiences are the same, this does not mean that the liturgical rites for each of these different groups are to be the same.

- The distinct nature of the two celebrations may even suggest different times for their celebration. The RCIA focuses on the Easter Vigil as the appropriate time for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation for catechumens. For the reception of baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church, there are a number of possibilities:

1. It may be decided that the rite of reception is to take place at the Easter Vigil so as to express and celebrate the paschal nature of full initiation.

In this case, great care must be taken to avoid confusion between candidates for reception into full communion and catechumens to be initiated. The Rite of Reception nowhere mentions clothing the candidates in white garments. Candles and other symbols are prescribed for the rite of Baptism, not for the rite of reception. The revised RCIA contains specific guidelines for the celebration at the Easter Vigil of both the sacraments of initiation of catechumens and the rite of reception of candidates into full communion.⁽³²⁾ Subsequent paragraphs will contain specific references;

2. There are good reasons for receiving baptized Christians into full communion at any Sunday Eucharist, or perhaps another day of special significance such as the feast day of their patronal saint;

3. There will also be cases in which candidates are ready to be received into full communion at another time of year, such as Pentecost.

- The criteria of readiness are indicated in the appropriate sections of the RCIA and should be consulted. Since each person's faith journey is unique, care must be taken not to suggest any specific timetable. Rather, in every case, readiness must be discerned in view of the individual's situation. In all cases, however, discernment should be made regarding the length of catechetical formation required for each individual candidate for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.⁽³³⁾

PREPARATION OF UNCATECHIZED ADULTS FOR CONFIRMATION AND EUCHARIST

The RCIA also address the case of those who were baptized as Roman Catholics but who did not receive further catechetical formation nor, consequently, the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. The section of the rite, "Preparation of Uncatechized Adults for Communion and Eucharist" is to be used in such cases.⁽³⁴⁾

- When receiving adults into the full communion of the Catholic Church, a priest is to confirm, in accord with the directives in the Rite.
- If in those cases where baptized, uncatechized Catholics have participated with a catechumenate group, a priest may confirm them at the Easter Vigil, only with permission from the Bishop. **This permission is required for the validity of the sacrament.**

1 Children who have reached the use of reason are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults.

See canon 852, §1; RCIA, Part II; Appendix III, National Statutes for the Catechumenate, 18.

2 Both contained in the RCIA book of rites.

3 The catechetical teaching from CCC, 1229-1284, is also presumed and should be employed in conjunction with the other texts and sources indicated.

4 RCIA, 1.

5 RCIA, 10.

6 RCIA, 10.

- 7 Canon 874, §1, 2.
- 8 Canon 874, §1, 4
- 9 See RCIA, 11.
- 10 Canon 861, §1.
- 11 Canon 863; See Faculties for Priests of the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph, 1.
- 12 Canons 866 and 883, 2?; RCIA, National Statutes for the Catechumenate, 18.
- 13 Canon 885 §2.
- 14 See RCIA, 141-146 for pastoral directives in celebrating the scrutinies.
- 15 See RCIA, 147-149 for a description of the presentation of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer. See also CCC, 26-1065 and 2759-2865, respectively, for catechetical background on the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.
- 16 RCIA, Introduction, 9.
- 17 Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1988, 38.
- 18 General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, 21.
- 19 RCIA, 8, 17; National Statutes for the Catechumenate, 14, 18.
- 20 National Statutes for the Catechumenate, 32-33.
- 21 RCIA, 260-276; 277-290, 291-303, 304-329.
- 22 RCIA, 565.
- 23 RCIA, 473-504.
- 24 RCIA, 473-486.
- 25 Canon 869, §1. Also consult Marriage Preparation Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph pp 46-47 for a partial list of denominations whose baptism we deem valid.
- 26 Canon 883, 2.
- 27 RCIA, 474.
- 28 RCIA, 475.
- 29 RCIA, 476.
- 30 RCIA, 479 and 482.
- 31 RCIA, 26.
- 32 RCIA, 562-594.
- 33 RCIA, 478.
- 34 RCIA, 400-472.