

Sacraments of Initiation: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The catechumenate process consists of various stages of experience, bridged by ritual celebrations. As an individual progresses in faith toward full initiation through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, he or she is supported by a sponsor (godparent), guided by catechists (both lay and ordained), and embraced by a community of believers. This process may extend over a period of years (generally 1-3), and requires the support of an entire parish family, not just a few folks on an RCIA team. This process is designed for all those who have reached "catechetical age" or "the age of reason" (usually considered to be about age 7), and so may include children and teenagers, as well as adults. The restoration of the catechumenate process connects us to our ancestors in the early Church and speaks to our ongoing need for conversion to the Gospel way of life. This revised rite is one of the outstanding legacies of the Second Vatican Council, since it holds forth a model of apprenticeship rather than instruction for initiation into the Catholic Christian community.

Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

Period of the Catechumenate

Celebrations of the Word of God (Liturgical Catechesis)
Minor Exorcisms, Blessings, and Anointings
Rite of Election

Period of Purification & Enlightenment

Scrutinies
Presentations (Creed, Lord's Prayer)
Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday
Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (Easter Vigil)

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate

RCIA #36 It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed...

RCIA #38 ...a suitable explanation of the Gospel (see no.42).

...are to receive help and attention so that with a purified and clearer intention they may cooperate with God's grace.

RCIA #42 clearly defines what is supposed to occur during the period of the pre-catechumenate:

...the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root

...there must be evidence of the first faith...and an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and enter into a relationship with God in Christ

...evidence of the first stirrings of repentance

...a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer

...a sense of the Church

...some experience of the company and spirit of Christians

Period of the Catechumenate

RCIA # 75 The catechumenate is an extended period...

...suitable pastoral formation and guidance

...training in the Christian life

#75.1 A suitable catechesis is provided...

...gradual and complete

...accommodated to the liturgical year

...solidly supported by celebrations of the word

This catechesis leads the catechumens...to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.

#75.2 ...the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer

...to bear witness to the faith

...in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ

...to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds

...to practice love of neighbor

Since this transition brings with it a progressive change of outlook and conduct, it should become manifest by means of its social consequences...

#75.3 The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey

by means of suitable liturgical rites...

...celebrations of the word of God are arranged for their benefit

...when they are present in the assembly of the faithful, they should be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the eucharist begins

#75.4 Since the Church's life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn

how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.

#76 The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of

God and on various circumstances...

Nothing, therefore, can be settled a priori.

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

#79 ...celebrations of the word of God are most important

#80 Provision should also be made for the entire community...to participate in some of the celebrations belonging to the catechumenate

Rites Belonging to the Period of the Catechumenate:

Celebrations of the Word of God (nos. 81-89)

Minor Exorcisms (nos. 90-94)

Blessings of the Catechumens (nos. 95-97)

Anointing of the Catechumens (nos. 98-103)

Period of Purification & Enlightenment

RCIA #138 The period of purification and enlightenment, which the rite of election begins, customarily coincides with Lent.

For both the elect and the local community, therefore, the Lenten season is a time for spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery.

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

RCIA #140 Holy Saturday is the day of proximate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation and on that day the rites of preparation (see nos. 185-192) may be celebrated.

SCRUTINIES

RCIA #141 The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good....These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.

RCIA #143 ...three scrutinies are celebrated. ...From the first to the final scrutiny the elect should progress in their perception of sin and their desire for salvation.

PRESENTATIONS

RCIA #147 The presentations take place after the celebration of the scrutinies....with the catechumenal formation of the elect completed, the Church lovingly entrusts to them the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts that have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church's faith and prayer.

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

RCIA #244 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 meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the eucharist, and doing the works of charity.

RCIA #245 The neophytes 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 #246 Just as their new participation in the sacraments enlightens the neophytes' understanding of the Scriptures, so too it increases their contact with the rest of the faithful and has an impact on the experience of the community.

RCIA #247 ...its main setting is the so-called Masses for neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season.

RCIA #248 All the neophytes and their godparents should make an effort to take part in the Masses for neophytes and the entire local community should be invited to participate with them. Special places in the congregation are to be reserved for the neophytes and their godparents. The homily and, as circumstances suggest, the general intercessions should take into account the presence and needs of the neophytes.

RCIA #249 ...some sort of celebration should be held at the end of the Easter season near Pentecost Sunday.

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.