



CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
OF YOUNGSTOWN  
Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry  
Office of Worship  
Directory for Catechesis

## THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church teaches:

“The catechumenate is not a mere exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the whole Christian life. Catechumens should be introduced into the life, liturgy, and charity of the People of God” (*The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, #14*).

“The entire community must help catechumens and candidates throughout the process of initiation: during the period of the pre-catechumenate, the period of the catechumenate, the period of the purification and enlightenment, and the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy” (*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #9*).

“The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough – several years if necessary – for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong. By their formation in the entire Christian life and a sufficiently prolonged probation, catechumens are properly initiated into the mysteries of salvation and the practice of an evangelical way of life” (*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #76*).

“After a period of pre-catechumenate has elapsed, persons who have manifested a willingness to embrace faith in Christ are to be admitted to the catechumenate in liturgical ceremonies. Through instruction and an apprenticeship in the Christian life, catechumens are suitably to be initiated into the mystery of salvation” (*Code of Canon Law, #788*).

“The baptismal catechumenate is both ‘a process of formation and a true school of the faith.’ It is a fruitful blend of instruction and formation in the faith; it progresses through gradual stages; it unfolds the Church’s rites, symbols, and biblical and liturgical signs; and it incorporates the catechumens into the Christian community of faith and worship” (*National Directory for Catechesis, 35D*).

The Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry and the Office of Worship recommend:

1. All parishes implement an active catechumenate according to *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.
2. All parishes assemble a team under the direction of the pastor to support the implementation of *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The team assists with the ongoing formation of the whole parish community in its role during the initiation process.
3. Parish implementation of the rite includes four periods, which together normally last at least a year:
  - a. the period of the precatechumenate, culminating with the Rite of Acceptance;
  - b. the period of the catechumenate, culminating with the Rite of Election;
  - c. the period of purification and enlightenment, including the scrutinies, culminating with the sacraments of initiation;
  - d. the period of mystagogy and post-baptismal catechesis.
4. The precatechumenate and catechumenate be offered on an ongoing basis and last as long as necessary for the person seeking initiation to embrace the faith and their own conversion.
5. The Rite of Election be celebrated when the person fully intends and is free to celebrate the Sacraments of the Church at the Easter Vigil.
6. *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children of catechetical age be implemented according to the Diocese of Youngstown *Directory for Catechesis* and *Liturgical Directory*.
7. The Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry and the Office of Worship provide ongoing formation for RCIA teams, suitable resources in the Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry Library, and consultative services.

## **GUIDELINES**

### Parish Preparation for the Initiation Process

- The people of God, represented by the local church, understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. The entire faith community helps and prays for catechumens and candidates throughout the process of initiation.
- The pastor has the responsibility of attending to the pastoral and personal care of catechumens and candidates. The pastor is responsible for forming a team to implement the process of initiation. He is diligent in the celebration of the rites throughout the process. He approves the choice of godparents. In the absence of the bishop, the priest who baptizes an adult or child of catechetical age also confers Confirmation.
- A sponsor accompanies the inquirer when he or she seeks acceptance into the order of catechumens and remains with the inquirer during the catechumenate until the Rite of Election. Sponsors testify to the candidates' faith and intentions.

- A godparent accompanies the catechumen during the rites and periods of election, initiation, and mystagogy. A catechumen chooses a godparent as a model for living the Christian life. The catechumen may choose his or her sponsor as godparent. The pastor approves the role of godparent for the designated person. The godparent, delegated by the faith community, gives testimony about the catechumen.
- Persons on the parish team fulfill the following roles:
  - Coordinator: facilitates the work of the team; schedules and oversees the periods of the process; provides support to all those involved in the process.
  - Catechists: help with the faith formation of those seeking initiation; have an active role in the rites of the initiation process; continue their own faith formation through the certification process facilitated by the Office of Religious Education.
  - Liturgy representative: coordinates, adapts, and prepares the liturgical rites of the process; works with the Parish Liturgy Committee, music director and choir, presider, and other liturgical ministers; and helps to prepare the assembly for the rites.
  - Sponsor coordinator: helps with the selection and formation of sponsors.
- In extreme or grave circumstances, it is lawful to arrange the schedule for the entire rite of initiation differently. The Rite of Election and the rites belonging to the period of purification and enlightenment may be held outside Lent and the Sacraments of Initiation may be celebrated at a time other than the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, #26-30).

#### Period of Evangelization And Precatechumenate

- The Rite of Christian Initiation is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts.
- Adult participants in the RCIA may be those who are unbaptized and/or those who were baptized with water in the Trinitarian formula. The former will be known as catechumens. The latter will be known as candidates, and their membership in the Church and their status as children of God will be recognized. The conversion of candidates is based on the Baptism they have already received; the effects of which they must develop. Guidelines for the process of initiation for baptized Christians are outlined in *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. (#400–498). Baptized and catechized adults may participate in the catechumenate as long as no greater burden than necessary is placed on the catechized adults.
- The invitation to participate in the life of the Church is extended by the faith community through its witness to the Gospel and faithfulness to the baptismal call and its continual expressions of welcome and hospitality.
- During the period of evangelization and the precatechumenate, the parish and the RCIA team provide inquirers with help and attention in gaining a sense of the Church and the company and spirit of Christians; of the practice of calling upon God in prayer; and the stirrings of repentance.
- Inquirers complete the precatechumenate when they declare their intention to the Church and the Church accepts them as persons who intend to become its members in the celebration of acceptance into the order of catechumens. In the Rite of Welcoming, the Church acknowledges inquirers who are baptized but uncatechized Christians (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, #400). The Rite of Acceptance and the Rite of Welcoming may be offered several times throughout the year. A year-round catechumenate

welcomes catechumens as they complete their time of evangelization and prepare for the next step.

### Period of The Catechumenate

- The catechumenate is an extended period during which catechumens are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. It should be long enough – several years if necessary – for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to be strong. Candidates for Confirmation and Eucharist base their conversion on the Baptism they have already received. Participation in the catechumenate strengthens their ongoing conversion.
- The parish provides opportunities for formation in four ways:
  - Catechesis, accommodated to the liturgical year;
  - Prayer, which turns them readily toward God and keeps their hopes set on Christ;
  - Liturgical rites, which help to strengthen and purify them on their journey;
  - Apostolic witness, which joins the catechumens and candidates with the Church in learning to work actively to build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.
- The period of the catechumenate is closed with the Rite of Election and the enrollment of names. The catechumens are to have undergone a conversion in mind and action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. The godparents and catechists testify to the catechumens' state of readiness. The bishop or his delegate declares in the presence of the community the Church's approval of the catechumens, who then become the "elect." Candidates answer the call to continuing conversion, which may be combined with the Rite of Election and celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent. Catechumens and candidates then enter into the period of purification and enlightenment.

### Period of Purification And Enlightenment

- The period of purification and enlightenment customarily coincides with Lent. The parish provides opportunities for more intense spiritual preparation by the elect and the candidates rather than catechetical instruction.
- During this period, the faith community solemnly celebrates with the catechumens the scrutinies, which should take place on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. The readings for these Sundays are given in the Lectionary for Mass, Year A (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #146*).
- Also during this period, the faith community may celebrate with the candidates the Penitential Rite on the Second Sunday of Lent. The Penitential Rite is solely for baptized Christians and must be kept separate and distinct from the scrutinies, which focus on the approaching Baptism of the catechumens (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #459ff*).
- Catechumens do not participate in the sacrament of reconciliation prior to initiation. The candidates may celebrate the sacrament. Catechesis for the sacrament should be provided for all.

### Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

- The usual time for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation is the Easter Vigil.
- Baptism is celebrated with immersion or the pouring of water.
- Baptism is followed immediately by Confirmation.
- The newly Baptized and Confirmed take part for the first time and with full right in the celebration of Eucharist.

- Candidates are to be received according to the reception of baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #473-486*), which may be celebrated during the Easter Vigil. Candidates will make a profession of faith, receive the sacrament of Confirmation, and take part in Eucharist. This may also be celebrated on another Sunday. (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Appendix III, National Statutes, #33*).

#### Period of Post-Baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

- During the period of mystagogy, the faith community together with the newly baptized, now called neophytes, grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and making it part of their lives through meditation on the gospel, sharing in Eucharist, and doing works of charity.
- Neophytes are introduced into fuller and more effective understanding of the mysteries of faith. The candidates who complete their initiation become more fully integrated into the community by going through the period of mystagogy with the neophytes.
- To close the period of post-baptismal catechesis, the parish holds some sort of celebration at the end of Easter near Pentecost Sunday.
- On the anniversary of the neophytes Baptism, the parish brings together the neophytes in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment.

### **SELECTION/DISCUSSION**

Those involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as parish team members are to be faith-filled members of the Church committed to the sharing of the faith to those interested. Team members are to be cognizant of their own faith journey and of those coming to inquiry about the Catholic faith. Any person who is interested in learning more of the Catholic faith should be considered for the RCIA. Through discernment and prayer, those serious about joining the faith are to be encouraged to continue their journey. Interested and possible RCIA participants should be made aware of circumstances due to previous marriages as part of their inquiry.

### **FORMATION/TRAINING**

Those involved as RCIA team members are to have a familiarity with the entire Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as adapted for the dioceses of the United States. It is to be used for study, reflection, and preparation. They are to be familiar with the proper and usual times for the rites, and the appropriate ministers of the rites and the Sacraments of Initiation. Team members are also to be educated and formed in the understanding, teachings and beliefs of the Catholic faith. Team members are encouraged to participate in workshops and further education opportunities regarding implementation of the RCIA.

### **EVALUATION**

The pastor, pastoral staff and RCIA team should engage in a yearly evaluation and review of their process to include a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.