



Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry  
Office of Worship  
Directory for Catechesis

## THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS ADAPTED FOR CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church teaches:

“The period of catechumenate, beginning at acceptance into the order of catechumens and including both the catechumenate proper and the period of purification and enlightenment after election or enrollment of names, should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation. Ordinarily this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year” (*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Appendix III, National Statutes for the Catechumenate, #6*).

“Since the children to be initiated often belong to a group of children of the same age who are already baptized and are preparing for confirmation and Eucharist, their initiation progresses gradually and within the supportive setting of this group of companions” (*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #254*).

“Priests, in addition to their usual ministry for any celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, have the responsibility of attending to the pastoral and personal care of the catechumens...with the help of deacons and catechists, they are to provide instruction for the catechumens...they are to be diligent in the correct celebration and adaptation of the rites throughout the entire course of Christian initiation” (*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #13*).

“For the purpose of Christian initiation, children who have reached the age of reason, generally understood as seven years of age, are considered adults in a limited sense. As much as possible, their formation in the faith should follow the general pattern of the ordinary catechumenate, making use of the appropriate adaptations permitted in the rite. ‘They should receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens’” (*National Directory for Catechesis 2005, #36A, #3*).

## CATECHESIS

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

1. All parishes implement an active catechumenate for children of catechetical age according to *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*.
2. All parishes assemble a team under the direction of the pastor to support the implementation of *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children. The team assists with the ongoing formation of the whole parish community in its role during the initiation process.
3. The precatechumenate and catechumenate are offered for children on an ongoing basis and last as long as necessary for the child seeking initiation to embrace the faith and their own conversion.
4. A process of initiation adapted for children separate from and in addition to the parochial school and parish elementary and adolescent catechetical processes be made available to every unbaptized child of catechetical age in a parish or cluster of parishes.
5. *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children is to include the celebration of the Word, catechesis, conversion, celebration of the rites and involvement of the parish sponsor and the local community.
6. The rites are to be celebrated in the presence of the Sunday assembly including children of comparable age, family, friends, and sponsoring families, within the parish community.
7. Children of catechetical age who have been prepared for initiation through *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* should celebrate the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the same time in a single celebration.
8. The Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry and the Office of Worship provide ongoing formation for OCIA 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 Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* is the norm from which the adaptation for children is derived. The OCIA team, along with the parish staff and Parish Liturgy Committee, is challenged to adapt the process to meet the needs of the participants and according to the unique circumstances of the parish.
- As with the initiation process for adults, the initiation of children of catechetical age is the responsibility of all the baptized. The people of God, represented by the local church, understand and show by their concern that the initiation of children is the responsibility of all the baptized. The entire faith community helps and prays for them throughout the process of initiation.
- The pastor has the responsibility of attending to the pastoral and personal care of children in the initiation process. 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 of the choice of godparents and sponsors. In the absence of the bishop, the priest who baptizes children of catechetical age also confers Confirmation.
- Parents of children seeking initiation give consent and affirm the child(ren)'s participation in the rites and are present at the celebrations of the rites. Parents may not be godparents nor confirmation sponsors for their own child(ren).
- The pastor along with OCIA team members should discern a sponsor or sponsoring family (ones with children of comparable age and religious development) from the parish who participates and accompanies the child(ren) on the journey toward initiation. The role of the sponsor/sponsoring family is to: (1) be present and welcoming; (2) share stories of the faith community; (3) help share and nurture faith; (4) participate in the catechumenal process; (5) listen to the catechumen's questions and concerns; (6) share in regular gatherings and prayer; and (7) join in celebrating the rites.
- Godparent(s) will be selected during the pre-catechumenate or catechumenate periods to be available for the period of purification and enlightenment. The godparent for Baptism must meet the requirements for a sponsor. The role of the godparent begins at the Rite of Election and is a lifelong commitment.
- Persons on the parish team fulfill the following roles:
  - Coordinator: facilitates the implementation of the process described in *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*; provides support to all those involved in the process; schedules and oversees the periods of the process. The coordinator may: (1) form and train a parish team that will assist in evangelization of children, promote and develop sponsor involvement, participate in catechetical formation, prepare and assist with the rites, and facilitate hospitality; (2) identify children and youth who are potential catechumens and candidates and conduct initial interviews; (3) recruit and train sponsors/sponsoring families; (4) select the appropriate materials for the process of formation; (5) arrange the schedule with the parish staff and Parish Liturgy Committee for the various components of the process; (6) serve as the liaison with the parish staff, the Christian initiation team, Parish Liturgy Committee and encourage the involvement of the parish community; (7) evaluate the process with the parish staff and Parish Liturgy Committee.

- Catechists: help with the faith formation of children seeking initiation; have an active role in the rites of the initiation process; continue their own formation through the certification process facilitated by the Office of Faith Formation and Lay Ecclesial Ministry.
- 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; helps to prepare the assembly for the rites.
- Sponsor coordinator: helps with the selection and formation of sponsors.

#### Period of Evangelization and the Precatechumenate

- Children who are part of the children's catechumenate include unbaptized children (catechumens), and baptized but uncatechized children, (baptized Catholic, or baptized in another Christian denomination). Potential catechumens and candidates may be: children of adult catechumens or adult candidates; children of returning or reconciling Catholics; children attending parish elementary and adolescent catechesis processes, youth ministry, Catholic school education; children from families where there is no longer a Catholic parent in the home but a Catholic family member and/or guardian who is the support person and brings the child with parental consent.

#### Period of the Catechumenate

- The period is marked by the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens or the Rite of Welcome. These rites may be offered several times a year as catechumens and candidates are prepared. These and other rites as adapted for children may be celebrated outside the Sunday liturgy with family, friends, and a representative group of parishioners.
- Lectionary-based catechesis, rooted in the Sunday scriptures of the liturgical year, is the recommended process for the catechumenate.
- The period of the catechumenate is closed with the Rite of Election. Ordinarily the Rite of Election occurs on the First Sunday of Lent. The Rite of Sending, as adapted for children, occurs at the parish. The Rite of Election is celebrated with the larger diocesan community, and includes both adults and children.

#### Period of Purification and Enlightenment

- The period of purification and enlightenment customarily coincides with Lent. The parish provides opportunities for a more intense spiritual preparation by the elect and candidates rather than catechetical instruction.
- For those preparing to be baptized, at least one and preferably three scrutinies, as adapted for children, ordinarily occur on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent.
- 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

- Children in the catechumenate are to be Baptized, Confirmed, and receive Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children does not provide for the separation of the celebration of the three Sacraments of Initiation. (*National Statutes, #18*). The completion of initiation of already baptized children may take place at the Easter Vigil or at another Sunday Eucharist. (*National Statutes, #3233*).

### Period of Post-Baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

- Ongoing gatherings for mutual support and exploration of the experience of the initiation sacraments are an important aspect of *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children. Life-long faith development is expected and provided by the parish. Neophytes continue to participate in the parish religious education processes available for their age group.

## **SELECTION/DISCERNMENT**

Those involved in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults adapted for children 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 inquire about the Catholic faith. Any person who is interested in learning more of the Catholic faith should be considered for the OCIA. Through discernment and prayer, those serious about joining the faith are to be encouraged to continue their journey. All adults involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults adapted for children are required to be in full compliance with the Diocesan Safe Environment Policy.

## **FORMATION/TRAINING**

Those involved as OCIA team members are to have a familiarity with the entire Order of Christian Initiation of Adults and as adapted for children 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, 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 educational opportunities regarding the implementation of the OCIA.

## **EVALUATION**

The pastor, pastoral staff and OCIA team should engage in a yearly evaluation and comprehensive review of their process and all aspects of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults adapted for children.