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(For a detailed history of the catechumenate process, see *Journey of Faith Leader's Book*)



The Process

The catechumenate is rightly called a *process*, rather than a program. Catechists and sponsors guide the spiritual journey of adults and children. It varies according to time, place, and needs of the catechumens. The process is one of faith development. Catechumens grow in their relationship with God, as expressed through Roman Catholic beliefs. The process nourishes relationships between catechumens, catechists, and the parish community.

Inquiry

The first stage of the faith journey is called the *inquiry*. Sessions are informal and center on the life stories that brought each member to this time and place. Questions about faith, God, and God's love are considered. There is ample opportunity to ask questions related to *things Catholic*.

The set of twelve *Journey of Faith for Children* inquiry handouts assist the children through this period. They cover basic questions in the areas of Catholic belief, Mass, the Bible, saints, prayer, and practices.

This is a time for inquirers to learn the ways Catholics worship together and how they bring their Christian faith to life. First impressions of the parish community and those involved with the catechumenate process are important. This stage culminates with the commitment to enter the catechumenate, to prepare for entrance into full membership with the Catholic Church.

Catechumenate

To mark the beginning of the catechumenate is the *Rite of Becoming a Catechumen*. At this point, *inquirers* become *catechumens* (preparing for baptism) or *candidates* (already baptized but preparing for membership in the Church). They publicly state their wish to continue the process of formation, and the community commits their prayerful support. Selected members of the parish community join the process as sponsors and lend their support to the catechumens and candidates.

During this phase, catechesis may take place during the Sunday liturgy. If it does, the catechumens and candidates are dismissed after the *Prayers of the Faithful*. Catechists and sponsors, join them in reflecting on the readings for the day and connecting the Scripture to the faith life of the Church. *Journey of Faith Leader's* and *Participant's* books will be invaluable aids in this process. The 16 Catechumenate handouts aid in the learning process, addressing the specifics of our faith: Church, sacraments, moral life, etc.

The length of this stage is determined by the needs of the catechumen/candidate and the community. It can last anywhere from several months to three years. During this time, catechumens and candidates are exposed to various forms of prayer; they worship with the community, participate in the apostolic life of the Church, and join in community actions.

When they are ready to make a formal request for the sacraments of initiation, and when the catechists and sponsors are ready to recommend them to the bishop and the parish for full membership, the *Rite of Election* is celebrated. This rite is held at the cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent and marks the closure of the catechumenate and the beginning of the *Period of Enlightenment*, the time to prepare for the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday.

Lent

The beginning of Lent signals a 40-day retreat in which the parish community joins those who have been *elected* for full membership (*the elect*) in preparation for the Easter Vigil. On the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays, the *Rites of the Scrutinies* are celebrated during the liturgy. In these prayers, the elect and the faithful are reminded of the need of continued healing, conversion, and reconciliation. Sessions are marked by increased emphasis on prayer rather than on accumulation of knowledge. Aiding the catechists in this process is a series of eight Lent handouts, which focus on the Easter Vigil and preparation for reception of the sacraments of initiation. Many parishes allow time during Lent for a day of prayer designed for the elect and their sponsors.

Mystagogy

The Easter Vigil marks the beginning of a commitment to a lifelong discovery of the Christian message. The 50 days from Easter to Pentecost are called the period of *mystagogy*, a Greek word meaning mystery. The post-Easter period serves as a time for the neophytes, or beginners, to form a closer relationship with one another and come to a deeper understanding of God's Word and the sacraments. They continue to gather, but the sessions now center the apostolic or social justice aspects of Catholic Christianity. Eight Mystagogy handouts help redirect the focus of new Catholics from learning to living. Neophytes are invited to participate in parish life so their faith may continue to be nourished.

The Catechumenate and the Community

The catechumenate process provides a means of renewal for the entire parish community. It is a constant reminder of our roots, heritage, and traditions. Each beginning offers an opportunity for all to re-enter the path of faith, share the life story of God-with-us, and grow into a mature relationship with God and one another.



The Methods

Suggestions for Developing a Catechumenate Process

Catechists are encouraged to use their judgment in developing a process of faith formation suited to the needs of catechumens and candidates. (The materials presented here acts as guides and aids to that end.) Pay special attention to the section entitled *Leader Meditation*. This is a chance for you to focus on your own spirituality. Sometimes, specific readings have been designated for your preparation.

Though one doesn't have to be a theology professor or an experienced teacher to be a successful catechist, there are techniques and practical suggestions that can make the experience easier and more enjoyable. While a faith-filled experience is the work of God, it takes planning on the part of the catechumenate team to ensure that the process goes smoothly. It's helpful for all to review the materials prior to the first session.

The team should meet monthly throughout the process. It is helpful if each catechist is aware of topics discussed, materials covered, and questions raised in each session to assure continuity between sessions and among presenters. It is also advisable that catechists contact the following week's presenters to brief them on issues that may need to be addressed.

No one can predict the makeup of any particular group. You may have some children who have had no contact with institutionalized religion, some who were baptized and active in another Christian denomination, and still others who were baptized Catholic but not raised in the Church. Generally all of the students can participate in the same sessions; the major difference will come in the celebration of the rites (see the *Rites* for specific instructions in this regard).

Communication and active listening are the catechist's greatest tool in establishing a sense of trust among participants. Active listening requires *empathy and sensitivity* — an acceptance of the uniqueness of each individual, an understanding of other's feelings, and a willingness to control one's own prejudice and emotions. It requires *attentiveness* — the ability to look at the person and give undivided attention and *receptiveness* — the genuine desire to hear and be open to what is said.

Note to Leaders: Each of the student handouts includes two blank pages entitled My Space. This space was designated for notetaking or whatever the child chooses. If needed, you can use the space for the group activities.



The Rites

Rite of Acceptance Into the Order of Catechumens

This rite marks the first important transition in one's journey of faith — the move from being an interested inquirer to becoming a catechumen. The importance of this step in one's life is rightly recognized by the Church. Sponsors should have been chosen prior to this rite. If the catechumen doesn't have a sponsor in mind, an appropriate person can be selected from a pool of parish volunteers.

Symbolizing movement into the community, those asking to be received as catechumens, along with their sponsors, usually begin the journey at the doors of the Church (*Rite 48*). The celebrant introduces them to the worshiping community, asking, "What do you ask of the Church?" They state their desire for initiation, implying their intent to live, learn, and love with the community. The Sign of the Cross is marked on each forehead, symbolizing the love and strength of Christ that accompanies each person (*Rite 54-55*).

This Sign may also be marked on their ears, that they may hear the voice of the Lord; on their eyes, that they may see God's glory; on their lips, that they may bear the gentle yoke of Christ; on their hands, that their work may witness Christ; and on their feet, that they may walk in Christ's way (see *Rite 56*). At the conclusion of the Signing, catechumens and sponsors are formally invited to enter the Church and to join in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word (*Rite 60*).

Following the readings and homily, it is recommended that the catechumens be called forward and presented with a book of the gospels or a cross (*Rite 64*). They are included in the community's intercessory prayers before being formally dismissed from the assembly to pray and reflect on the Scriptures (see *Rite 65-67*).

For those seeking full communion in the Church who are already baptized (candidates), the *Rite of Welcoming Baptized but Previously Uncatechized Adults Who Are Preparing for Confirmation and/or Eucharist or Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church* is to be used. (See *Rite 507* and following, Appendix 1, for integrating both candidates and catechumens into the introductory celebration rite.)

Rites of the Catechumenate

Other liturgical rites may take place during the catechumenate: celebrations of the Word of God (*Rite 81-89*); minor exorcisms (*Rite 90-93*); blessings (*Rite 95-96*); anointing (*Rite 98-101*); sending (*Rite 106-117*). These rites, although optional, are important for the continuing faith development of the catechumens/candidates and the parish community.

Rite of Election

The importance of this rite is accentuated by the fact that it's celebrated by the bishop (or bishop's

representative), generally on the first Sunday of Lent. The rite marks another transition — one duly noted by a change of title from catechumen to elect. Godparents and/or sponsors have been chosen and approved.

After those requesting election have been presented to the bishop (*Rite 130*) and approved by the entire people of God there present (*Rite 131*), their names are inscribed in the *Book of Enrollment* (*Rite 132*). Intercessory prayers and a special blessing for all the elect follow this sacred moment.

Rites of the Scrutinies

The *First Scrutiny* takes place on the Third Sunday of Lent. Its focus is the gospel of the woman at the well. After special intercessory prayers, the celebrant prays that the elect may be exorcized from the power of sin (*Rite 150-156*). During the week that follows, the *Presentation of the Creed* should be formally made to the elect, preferably after the homily within Mass (*Rite 157-163*).

The *Second Scrutiny* takes place on the Fourth Sunday of Lent. Its focus is the gospel of the man born blind. Again, after intercessory prayers, the celebrant prays that the elect may be exorcized from the powers of sin (*Rite 164-170*).

The Fifth Sunday of Lent brings the *Third Scrutiny*. This Sunday focuses on the raising of Lazarus. Intercessory prayers from all the community and prayers of exorcism from the celebrant again follow (*Rite 171-177*). During the week after this rite, the *Presentation of the Lord's Prayer* should be formally made to the elect, preferably after the reading of the Gospel of the Lord's Prayer according to Matthew. Following the homily, which centers on the meaning and importance of the Lord's Prayer, the celebrant calls on the worshiping community to silently pray for all the elect. Before their dismissal, the celebrant bestows a special blessing upon the elect (*Rite 178-184*).

Rites of Preparation

When it's possible to bring the elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer, these rites may be considered for use in immediate preparation for the reception of the sacraments (*Rite 185* and following). If either the *Presentation of the Creed* or the *Presentation of the Lord's Prayer* has not been celebrated already, they could be included now. An *Ephphetha Rite* (opening ears and mouth

to symbolize the hearing and proclaiming of the Word) is a fitting preparation rite, as is the rite of *Choosing a Baptismal Name*. Any or all of these rites set the stage for the highlight of the catechumenate experience — the reception of the sacraments of initiation.

Rites of Initiation

Months of sharing the journeys of faith of the elect, the sponsors, and their catechists culminate in this very special parish celebration. Holy Saturday is the night to celebrate, and the Church celebrates in style. In the early Church the Easter Vigil lasted until dawn; today's Vigil lasts but a few hours (between two and four). It is the most glorious celebration of the entire liturgical year.

This night begins in total darkness. The parish community may assemble outside for the blessing of the fire. As the celebrant processes into the church, proclaiming the *Light of Christ*, each person lights a taper from the new Easter candle that has been ignited with the new fire. Soon the Church is aglow with tongues of new fire. The Liturgy of the Word begins with only the light of the candles. There are seven readings from the Hebrew Scriptures provided for the occasion, although it is not necessary to proclaim all seven. Psalms are interspersed between each reading.

With the singing of the *Gloria*, the altar candles and electric lights are lit and the Church bells are joyously rung. Then comes the New Testament epistle, the glorious *Alleluia*, the gospel, and the homily. The stage is set for the rites of initiation!

The liturgy of baptism begins with the calling forth of those to be baptized. A litany of the saints follows, and then the celebrant blesses the baptismal water by plunging the Easter candle into the pool. Baptism follows, and each of the newly baptized is clothed with a white garment. Then the whole assembly renews their baptismal vows, and the celebrant ritually sprinkles all with the newly blessed waters of baptism.

Once the baptismal rite is concluded, candidates for reception are called forward to profess their belief in the holy Catholic Church. They are joined by the newly baptized, and the rite of confirmation is celebrated with laying on of hands and anointing with chrism.

As the initiation rites conclude and the eucharistic prayer for Holy Saturday begins, new Catholics take

the place of the catechumens and candidates who worked and prayed so hard in preparation for this night. They, their sponsors, godparents, and family members lead the Church to the festive eucharistic banquet. The goal of initiation is this Eucharist — sharing at the table and being sent forth.

Alleluia! Amen



Materials

You will need many materials to make the journey complete. Most of the items can be found in and around the household. These items can be modified according to the age of your group. Here is a list of the supplies you will need:

- Rocks, small to medium size
- Photos of kids
- Instant camera
- Old holiday cards
- String/yarn
- Cardboard (brown and white)
- Construction paper
- Index cards
- Paper (8 1/2" x 11")
- Posterboards
- Scissors
- Crayons, permanent markers
- Watercolors
- Paper punch
- Baby doll and dress
- Bowl
- Oil
- Foam wreaths
- Easter supplies — grass, eggs, chicks, bunnies
- Florist wire
- Tacky glue
- Safety pins
- Bandages
- Hangers
- Craft sticks
- Wooden and gold crosses
- Loaf of bread
- Bottle of grape juice
- Children's Bible
- Candles
- Tape — transparent and masking

• Lesson One •

Journey of Faith

"Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by [God]" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #153).

Leader Meditation

A reading from John 14:1.

After meditating on this Scripture passage, try a personal *Faith Check*. When you pray, do you truly believe your prayers are being heard? Do you trust they will be answered? The better you understand your own faith, the easier it will be to transfer this to the children.

Preparation

Even Jesus understood that we sometimes have doubts, which can help, in an odd way, the growth of our faith. Faith grows just as minds and bodies grow — a little at a time.

Prepare your *Faith Journey Map*. Tape four poster boards together lengthwise. Use this map in your activity section throughout the Inquiry sessions. Scatter the following words on the map, leaving room for the children to add their own creative work under each heading: Faith; We Believe; At Mass; God's Memory Book; Understanding God's Word; The Saints; Mary; Our Church; Church People; Prayer; Tradition; We are the Church.

Scripture Sharing

Select a special area of the room as a Scripture Sharing area. If possible, set up the area away from activity centers. There will be fewer distractions this way. Place chairs in a circle or have a carpeted area where the children can sit in a circle on the floor.

Choose one of the Scripture passages from page two of the handout or read Genesis 22:1-16. If the children are very young, tell the story in your own words. Older children can be selected to do part or all of the reading. Encourage the children to share their feelings about the passage.

Discussion

- Using the questions on page one of the leaflet, discuss people we trust in our everyday life. Why do we trust these particular people? How do we know we can trust them? What happens when someone we trust lets us down?

- We can be sure that God will never disappoint us. This is a promise Jesus made to us in the Bible. Ask the children to share stories of times they prayed for something. Were their prayers answered? If they don't think so, see if you can help them sort out why they feel that God didn't give them an answer.

- Discuss the four ways to help your faith grow stronger. How does reading about God help your faith grow? What about praying or doing good works? Loving others?

Faith Journey Activity

Have the children illustrate a Scripture story that reminds them of faith. They can use the story you read in your Scripture Sharing or one they remember themselves. Tape their drawings in the space near the word *Faith* on the *Faith Journey Map*. Since you will be removing their work at a later time, be sure to use a minimum of tape. (Masking tape is easier to remove.)

Answer to Rebus is FAITH.

• Lesson One •

The Sacraments

“Sacraments are ‘powers that comes forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant” (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1116).

Leader Meditation

A reading from Matthew 28:16-20.

Preparation

Jesus promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Through the Holy Spirit, he remains active and alive. Through the sacraments, there are “visible signs” of the Lord’s presence in the Church and our lives. Each sacrament we receive not only increases the Lord’s presence but also increases our own awareness of that presence. Jesus becomes, in a very real way, a part of each spiritual milestone in our life. We don’t walk our journey of faith alone — Jesus walks with us every step of the way. Your headings for this section include: The Journey; Baptism; Confirmation; Eucharist; Penance; Anointing of the Sick; Marriage; Holy Orders; Old Testament; New Testament; Early Church; Christian Living; Social Justice; God’s Greatest Gift; Life.

Stepping Stones on the Journey. Remove the children’s work from the journey map. Staple each child’s work together with a cover sheet, making a book of their Inquiry as a keepsake. Beneath the remaining words now left on the map, add seven large stones, cut from brown construction paper. Title each stone with a different sacrament name. Explain to the children that, at their baptism, Jesus joins them on their journey and remains with them through the sacraments. Cut out girl and boy figures, one for each child in your group, to use during the journey. Leave the faces and clothing for the children to add during their activity time. This is one option.

If you choose to do the second activity (see paragraph two under Faith Journey Activity),

you will need pictures/images of the children and Jesus, stones large enough for a child’s foot, cutouts of the shape of Jesus’ foot, and representations of the sacraments.

Scripture Sharing

Read or tell in your own words the story of Jesus’ birth, Luke 2:1-20. Encourage the children to talk about what Jesus’ birth means to them. Then explain that Jesus came to be with them forever. They’re about to learn all the special ways Jesus will be a part of their lives.

Discussion

- After reviewing the section *How Do You Say, ‘I Love You?’*, start a discussion of ways to express love for family and friends. Write their answers on the board for later use.

- Move on to the section *How Does Jesus Say, ‘I Love You?’* Let the children read over this. Each child should read the ways Jesus said “I love you” when he was in the world. Then discuss the similarities/differences between their expressions and those of Jesus.

- Explain to the children that the sacraments are Jesus’ way of loving and being with us during all the important times of our lives. It’s important that they understand Jesus is always with us. Through the sacraments, Jesus celebrates with us as we grow in the faith.

Faith Journey Activity

Create a garden of kids, with Jesus in the middle. Use illustrations or actual pictures of your children. This will allow them to visualize the end. Let them help you place the stepping stones along the journey. Let them finish the figures of themselves and place these at the beginning of the stepping stones. Or, place real stones in a row leading to an image of Jesus. Each stone should be parallel to a sacrament. Cut out some footprints of Jesus so they can “see” his presence with them. As they pass a sacrament, allow the child to step on/remove/or advance a stone from or to a garden. Distribute the books you prepared with their Inquiry activities. Don’t forget to add the previous week’s journal entries and pictures to your *Faith Journey Map*.

• Lesson One • What Is Lent?

"In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present. During his earthly life Jesus announced his paschal mystery by his teaching and anticipated it by his actions. When his Hour comes, he lives out the unique event of history which does not pass away; Jesus dies, is buried, rises from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father 'once and for all.' His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is — all that he did and suffered for all — participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1085, see also #1084–1090).

Leader Meditation

A reading from Matthew 16:21-23.

Preparation

Take down the children's work from the catechumenate sessions and staple them into booklets. Title the booklets, "We Learn About Jesus." Prepare your map for a Lenten Journey with eight sections: Lent Begins; Choosing Jesus; Love Cannot Sin; The Creed; The Way of the Cross; The Lord's Prayer; Holy Week; and A New Journey.

Prepare scripts using the temptation dialogue between Jesus and Satan. Set up a portion of the room to represent the wilderness. Allow time in your *Scripture Sharing* so each child has a chance to play a part. For the activity, bring in the following

items: Lenten cards with images of Jesus, purple construction paper, crosses made with craft sticks, glue, and ashes and palm branches.

Scripture Sharing

The story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is the basis for today's *Scripture Sharing*. Read the passage once, then invite the children to take turns acting out the dialogue. Follow up with a discussion about how it felt to be tempted (or to be the tempter).

Discussion

- Read the section, *Three Ways to Resist Temptation*. Tell stories, either personal or fictional, of people being tempted. Encourage the children to discuss ways they would resist the temptation in each story.

- Allow time for the children to list three things they can do during Lent to bring them closer to Jesus. Discuss their answers.

- Discuss the symbols of Lent. What, if anything, do ashes mean to them in everyday life; the color purple; palm branches. What other symbols of Lent can they find in the church? In their own homes? (A crucifix, a Bible; pictures of Jesus' Passion, etc.)

Faith Journey Activity

Give the children the items you brought and ask them to use them as illustrations of today's lesson. Let them use their imaginations. Hang the posters under the heading, *Lent Begins*.

• Lesson One • Conversion: A Lifelong Process

“A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and...love” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2179).

Leader Meditation

A reading from Hebrews 2:1-4.

Preparation

For this section, you will need maps with the following titles: Conversion, The Laity; Special Gifts; Family Life; Discernment. This week's suggested activity is a mobile displaying times when Jesus joins us on our journey. Cut out simple forms for a dove, Bible, Church, the bread & wine, and folded hands. Punch a small hole in the top of each form. Print the words “Spirit,” “Word of God,” “Our Parish Family,” “the Eucharist,” and “Prayer” on the board. Prepare a 10” strip of heavy cardboard with the words “Growing Together” and punch five holes at two-inch intervals. You will need different lengths of yarn to hang your figures.

Scripture Sharing

Read or tell in your own words one of the passages telling of the call of the apostles, Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11. Explain that Jesus is

saying the same thing to them: “Come, Follow Me.” They are setting out to follow Jesus with their parish family.

Discussion

- Using the section *A Time to Remember*, review what has been learned about Jesus. Give them time to answer the questions on the leaflet, then discuss their answers.
- Move on to the section *Keep on Growing*. Ask what they remember about the stories mentioned in this section.
- Review the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit with the children, then give them time to answer the questions in the leaflet.
- As members of God's family, the children will be guided by the Holy Spirit to become active Christians. What can they do for others to show their love for God?

Faith Journey Activity

Place the items you cut out on the work table. Ask each child to choose one item and label it according to one of the words on the board. Using the lengths of yarn and your “Growing Together” banner, create a mobile of ways Jesus will lead them and help them to grow in the faith. Display a sample mobile under the heading *Conversion*.