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Using the *Leader's Manual*

THE ASSOCIATION for Catechumenal Ministry (ACM) exists to foster the full implementation of the Christian initiation process. This *Leader's Manual* is one of ACM's ON THE JOURNEY series of books intended to be used for the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) promulgated by the Church in the years following the Second Vatican Council. This *Manual* is designed to be a practical help and a comprehensive guide for those in RCIA leadership, both clergy and laity. Together with its two main companions in the ON THE JOURNEY series—the *RCIA Catechist's Manual* and the *RCIA Participant's Book*—this *Leader's Manual* should enable a parish to successfully implement the liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral aspects of the Christian initiation process, in light of the guidelines given by the Church in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (called in this text the “RCIA ritual book” or the “ritual book” and cited as “RCIA,” followed by a number referring to the particular paragraph in the ritual book). The user of this *Manual* should have a copy of the ritual book close at hand in order to read the paragraphs referenced throughout this *Manual*. Although this *Manual* may be used as a reference tool, it is intended to provide an RCIA leader with a much more systematic and thorough understanding of the catechumenal process if read in chapter order.

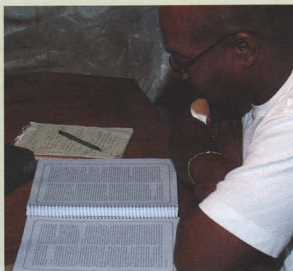
THE PURPOSE OF SECTION ONE: MAIN TEXT

The chapters in this *Manual's* main section provide the RCIA leader, the person responsible for directing and coordinating the Christian initiation process

for adults in the parish (the pastor, or another priest of the parish, a deacon, or a paid or volunteer layperson delegated this task by the pastor) with a clear and thorough explanation of its practicalities. The remaining chapters of the Introduction establish the foundation for understanding the necessity of each of the aspects of the RCIA process: liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral. This foundational material is followed by an in-depth and pragmatic set of chapters explaining each of these aspects, oriented to the needs of the leader. This *Manual* is intended to be used as a companion volume to ACM's *Catechist's Manual*, and for this reason there are fewer chapters on the catechetical aspect of the process, since the *Catechist's Manual* effectively completes the discussion of the catechetical aspect. The main section of this *Manual* concludes with a portrait of a new Catholic as a means to maintain focus on the evangelical goal of the entire endeavor.

The RCIA leader

should not peruse this *Manual* and become discouraged because his or her parish Christian initiation process seems to fall short of the Church's expectations. The RCIA ritual book was promulgated by the Church as a guide for parish catechumenates that normally takes years to develop to the point of full implementation. This *Manual* is intended to flesh out the ritual book and give the RCIA leader a complete understanding of how to develop the process in an orderly way, based on known goals. In addition to serving as a guide to the leader, the *Manual* can be a tool for training other individuals, perhaps mostly lay volunteers, in the multitude of roles that are necessary



to fulfill what the Church envisioned in promulgating the ritual book. This *Manual* can also serve as a tool to allow the leader to delegate significant tasks, especially in the areas of training and coordination of specific elements of the RCIA process. The Association for Catechumenal Ministry prepared this *Manual*, therefore, to take its place with the essential books that every RCIA leader needs: the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (the ritual book), and the *General Directory for Catechesis*.

The main text often refers to the "RCIA leader." The Association for Catechumenal Ministry does not assume by use of this phrase who this individual is within the parish. The leader could be the pastor, another priest of the parish, a deacon of the parish, a religious brother or sister, or a paid or volunteer lay person. Many parishes have co-leaders; it is not uncommon for a deacon and his wife, or a lay married couple, to be co-leaders. In the few instances where the *Manual* reads, for example, "the pastor and the RCIA leader," the purpose is to emphasize the pastor's overall responsibility. It is not intended to suggest that the pastor might not himself be the RCIA leader.

Because this *Manual* is designed for use by parishes, the RCIA leader is reminded to take cognizance of the paragraphs in the ritual book that pertain specifically to the bishop's role in the Christian initiation process. These include: GI 12-14; RCIA 32-33 (conferences of bishops), RCIA 34.1, 125, 207, and 251; and, in the United States, NS 5, 11, 12, 13, 23, and 29. Each diocese will handle these differently, and the pastor and RCIA leader should obtain and follow the diocesan guidelines for Christian initiation.

THE PURPOSE OF SECTION TWO: APPENDICES

The entire section of appendices of this *Manual* is copyable, and is also provided on CD-ROM (found in the front pocket of this *Manual*) to allow for unlimited printing or downloading for modification to a parish's needs. The appendices contain all forms that would normally be used for participants, as well as other useful forms to assist RCIA leaders in recruiting and working with team members, godparents, and sponsors. These forms are designed to be appropriate for international use. In addition, the appendices provide a wealth of text

and ideas for many different components of the RCIA process, such as letters, advertising, bulletin items, prayers, liturgy reminders, and retreat suggestions. These are things that facilitate the full implementation of the catechumenal process, but would ordinarily take an RCIA leader a great amount of time to develop. Any of the material in these seven appendices may be modified in whatever way a parish RCIA leader deems appropriate. The CD-ROM contains only these seven appendices, not the entire *Leader's Manual*. The PDF documents on the disc are programmed to allow a user to highlight the text on-screen and move it to a hard drive, or simply to print a document with its formatting intact.

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ACM has also made available on this CD-ROM the introduction to ACM's website, known as a "flashpage." This sequence of photographs and text (taken from the Rites of the RCIA process), is copyrighted material in this electronic format. It is provided on this CD-ROM at the request of users of the website who have expressed

interest in showing it to groups, or even to entire parish congregations for the purpose of inspiring and recruiting people to participate in the RCIA process as participants, team members, godparents or sponsors, or simply prayer intercessors.

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THE PURPOSE OF SECTION THREE: SEMINAR HANDOUTS


The seminar handouts are not intended to be an integrated part of the preceding two sections of the *Leader's Manual*. Instead, they are provided for those who take advantage of ACM's Team Training and Catechist Training Seminars, or who view them in a recorded format. These highly practical handouts are also used to complement ACM's RCIA distance-education modules (to be published soon), which are designed for those who cannot attend ACM's live seminars or who do not have access to a recorded version. The twenty Team Training

handouts provide a comprehensive and highly detailed walk through the three aspects (liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral) of the Christian initiation process. The seventeen Catechist Training handouts break down the work of the catechist into three parts—method, content, and themes for each of the periods of the RCIA process—providing an in-depth picture of what it means to teach for conversion, and how that teaching serves the liturgical and pastoral aspects of passing on the faith.

Both sets of handouts make significant use of sacred Scripture and relevant magisterial documents to illustrate points and develop themes, thereby remaining closely tied to the living sources that grant universal authority and ensure fidelity to the work of serving God's newest chosen ones in the life of each local church.

THE RCIA OVERVIEW CHART

The foldout Overview Chart found in the front pocket of this *Manual* looks daunting at first, but the idea is to provide a picture of the whole process, from start to finish. Many parishes have found this chart valuable for training their RCIA teams. Across the top are the names of each of the periods of the RCIA process and the status of the participants, as well as terms used to identify them at any given stage. Notice that no time frames are specified except for the period of purification and enlightenment, which normally coincides with Lent, and the neophyte year, normally extending from one Easter to the next. All of the references quoted in the chart are taken from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA ritual book); as with all ecclesiastical documents, the numbering refers to paragraphs, not pages. Down the side, the journey of each possible type of participant is tracked (unbaptized in green, baptized uncatechized in red, and baptized catechized but not Catholic in blue), as well as the responsibilities of the Church in each period of the catechumenal process. The dark bars denote the major liturgical gateways of the process, and continue to use the color scheme, with the combining of red and blue to make purple in the case of baptized participants, since both of these categories of people can go through the same gateway Rites. Each period is divided into the three aspects: liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral. This has been done to make



information in the guidelines of the ritual book more accessible, and to undo some of the confusion that arises when using it. When reading through this *Manual*, the Overview Chart should be kept open to aid in grasping the larger context of the particular subject at hand.

THE TABS FOR THE RCIA RITUAL BOOK

Implementation of the Christian initiation process necessitates the extensive use of the RCIA ritual book by both clergy and laity. The ritual book is one of the Church's most complex liturgical publications. The tabs included in the front pocket of the Leader's *Manual* have been created to allow significantly-greater ease in navigating this most fundamental of texts. The tabs are designed to work with English-language versions of the book that are published in the United States. U.S. editions of the RCIA ritual book include certain appendices that are not found in all English-language editions. In most cases for non-U.S. editions, the tabs for the Combined Rites and the National Statutes will not be applicable, although all other tabs will be used.

SERVING THE WORK OF CONVERSION

As a final note to set the tone for the rest of this *Manual*, it is important to place this work in proper relation to its goal: helping the RCIA leader to be at the service of the Holy Spirit's work of conversion. The catechumenal process seeks to impart an understanding of the Catholic faith in such a way as to transform the life of the catechumen or candidate, not only resulting in a change of status with respect to the Church,

but also a change of status with respect to God. The process is intended to be life-changing. Although conversion, seen as a progressive process, involves various stages of change, simply stated, it involves a turning *from* something and a turning *towards* something else, that is, towards Jesus Christ (see GDC 53). Whatever an inquirer's original reason for coming to RCIA, it is a good one; it is the reason God has used. However, by the end of the Christian initiation process, this original motivation must have been cultivated, encouraged, and purified so that an inquirer can come to the conviction that he or she cannot imagine living the rest of his or her life outside of the Church.

A fully-implemented catechumenal process, making available the liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral aspects that the Church knows will bear fruit, is at the heart of the Church's mission to evangelize, to teach, and to sanctify. It calls forth a significant and consistent effort from the clergy and laity directly involved, and an evangelical attitude within the welcoming parish community. If undertaken, the personal investment implied in this *Leader's Manual* places the RCIA leader in communion with all those down through the centuries whose sacrifice to prepare a Godly welcome for those as yet unknown allows them to echo the words of St. Paul: "*For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you . . . and for all who have not seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Col 2:1-3).

The Church and Her Mission

“THE WORLD was created for the sake of the Church” (CCC 760, quoting *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2, 4, 1). Such a statement, found in the writings of the early Church Fathers and quoted in our own day in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, strikes the person reading this for the first time as getting it backwards. We tend to think that the Church was created for the sake of the world, for the sake of saving the world from sin and death. While it is true that the salvation of souls is certainly primary to her mission, many today miss the point that the early Church seems to have understood more clearly: that all of creation was authored for communion with God. The Church is not merely an afterthought, God’s way of solving the problem of original sin; rather she had been foreshadowed from the beginning of the world. She is, as St. Paul says, part of that “*plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God*” (Eph 3:9) and, through her, “*the manifold wisdom of God*” (Eph 3:10) has been made manifest.

In her and through her, all men and women have access to a share in God’s life. She is the sacrament of salvation; apart from her there is no salvation (see LG 17). This does not mean that salvation is only for those in the Church but means that salvation is only possible because the Church exists and extends the mystery of Christ throughout time, making the merits of Christ available to all people. The Church is absolutely essential to God’s plan and she has received from Christ

everything that he accomplished for our salvation. He has entrusted to her alone the fullness of grace and truth. She is the trustworthy steward (see 1 Cor 4:2) and dispenser of the mysteries or sacraments, which redeem men and women and help them to become holy. She preserves and authentically interprets the Deposit of Faith, the truth that God has revealed, for all generations. She “is the visible plan of God’s love

for humanity,’ because God desires ‘that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit’” (CCC 776, quoting Pope Paul VI, Address to the College of Cardinals, June 22, 1973, quoting AG 7 § 2 and citing LG 17).

Understanding the true nature of the Church reveals her missionary character. She has been sent into the world to preach the Gospel and bring all people back into communion with God. Her soul burns with

Divine charity for the salvation of souls, and with the angels in Heaven she rejoices when one sinner repents (see Lk 15:10). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council explained that “the Church has an obligation to proclaim the faith and salvation which comes from Christ, both by reason of the express command which the order of bishops inherited from the apostles, ... and also by reason of the life which Christ infuses into his members” (AG 5), “*from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied,*





when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4:16). The Church's missionary character flows directly and immediately from her very nature, as Pope Paul VI, citing the words of the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1974, memorably wrote: "[T]he task of evangelizing all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the Church" (EN 14).

According to Scripture, God *"desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all"* (1 Tm 2:4-6). Scripture also attests to the necessity of Baptism (see Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5). Thus, the Church's mission to evangelize does not stop with the preaching of the Gospel, but leads to Baptism by which men and women are incorporated into the Body of Christ and invited to share in communion with God through the Church.

Therefore, the person who hears the Gospel, and believes, embarks upon a journey, a process of conversion, that takes place over a period of time and leads ultimately to the reception of the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, by which the person becomes a mem-

ber of Christ's Body, his Church; Confirmation; and the Eucharist (see GDC 65). The Church expects that in order to be formed in the Christian life, the individual "should be admitted with liturgical rites to the catechumenate" (AG 14). What takes place in the catechumenate—the liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral activity of the Church's members—is essential to aid those who respond to God's call to live the Catholic life to experience a "sticking"—unalterable—conversion: one that causes a person to say, "I can't imagine not being Catholic." The Catholic way of life invites each person to live his or her life with the hope of becoming a saint and with the intent of drawing others to live this life also. The catechumenate is vitally important to the life of the Church because it is here that the seeds scattered by the Divine Sower take root, so that in time they will yield an abundant harvest.

It is the sincere hope of all those who have contributed to this *Manual* that its contents will lead parishes to implement the RCIA process in such a way that those who are initiated through the catechumenate will experience the fullness of what the Church desires for those who come to her for guidance, formation, and saving graces.



A Brief History of the Catechumenate

THIS CHAPTER provides a brief introduction to the history of the catechumenate: how it developed in the early Church, why it fell out of use, and why the Second Vatican Council called for its restoration as the primary way to facilitate conversion to Christ and prepare individuals for entrance into the Church.

ORIGINS AND DECLINE OF THE CATECHUMENATE

By the 4th and 5th centuries of the Christian era, the usual way that adults became Christian was by participation in a process of formation in the Christian life called the catechumenate. We know something about the catechumenates of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and others because homilies which they gave to catechumens or neophytes have been preserved. From these writings and other early documents it is evident that most bishops maintained a catechumenate, with regional variations regarding the initiation liturgies that were celebrated, length of time and so forth.

The people of this time were either pagans or Catholic Christians (though the term "Catholic" was not used in the way it is now because other Christian denominations did not as yet exist). The two religions coexisted but not without struggle and persecution. Up until the early 4th century, not only baptized

Christians but also catechumens were persecuted and martyred because they professed the Christian faith. Therefore, it was a significant decision even to become a catechumen at this time.

While some Roman emperors during the

Church's early life were more benevolent than others, official persecution of Christianity did not end until the Edict of Milan was issued in 313 A.D. and Christianity became a religion protected under Roman law. With this new-found freedom, the Church's life changed. People came to be baptized in great numbers, generally through a catechumenal process, and the Roman world quickly became Christian. One could say that the blood of the martyrs from the Church's early centuries conquered the pagan world and brought



millions of souls to Christ and his Church.

The age of Christendom dawned and Christian culture began to flourish. Emperors and later kings and queens greatly respected the authority of the Pope, even though these two authorities did not always coexist harmoniously. Despite these conflicts, by about 1000 A.D. the entire Western world became Christian and, in the main, submitted to the Church's authority. As Europe became more fully Christian, use of the catechumenal process declined in great part because the need for it simply disappeared, as almost



all those receiving Baptism were infants, not pagan adults. While the need for conversion for which the catechumenate had been designed did not disappear, the role of the catechumenate was taken over by a society that embraced the Gospel and was united to the Church in her mission to evangelize the world.

RESTORATION OF THE CATECHUMENATE

For most of the second millennium, the catechumenate did not function in any significant way, except in a few mission territories. Large-scale Baptisms prepared for by some catechesis, or private instruction leading to Baptism, were generally the way new adult Catholics were received into the Church, even in many areas of the world newly-evangelized by missionaries. However, when the Second Vatican Council convened, the predominantly Christian world, imbued with Catholic culture, had disappeared under the onslaught of the Protestant "Reformation" in the 15th and 16th centuries, and of the secularizing trends of the "Enlightenment" beginning in the 18th century, both of which in their own way helped create a world in which a new kind of paganism replaced the Christian cultures in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. Whole nations that were once Catholic had become at least indifferent if not hostile to the Church and the message of the Gospel that she preached.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Council Fathers drew upon the Church's treasury to revive the ancient practice of the catechumenal process, which had been so successful in overcoming the paganism of the Roman Empire, to establish a modern version. They called for the "catechumenate for adults... to be restored and brought into use" (SC 64) and for "rites for the Baptism of adults... to be revised" (SC 66). The

Council also urged bishops to "take steps to reestablish or to modernize the adult catechumenate" (CD 14). Immediately following the closing of the Council in 1965, the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship began to prepare new guidelines and liturgies, based heavily on ancient catechumenal practices, adapted for the modern situation of the universal Church. In 1972, this Congregation published the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* (OCIA), known in its published form in most English-speaking countries as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), and parishes around the world began to implement the revised Christian initiation process. An official English translation of the ritual book was approved for publication sixteen years later, in 1988, referred to in this *Leader's Manual* as the RCIA ritual book.

While the catechumenate is certainly not the only answer to the rising paganism, secular humanism, and relativism of our day, it is an effective means of conversion within our neo-pagan world because it aids participants in establishing a solid relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church as it forms them in the Christian life. According to the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the restored catechumenate is "a process of formation and ... a true school of faith" (GDC 91; see NDC 3, 35D) that is to serve as the model for all forms of catechesis. The *General Directory* also states that the catechesis that takes place in the catechumenate is "the necessary link between missionary activity which calls to faith and pastoral activity which continually nourishes the Christian community" (GDC 64). And it underscores that "[t]his is not, therefore, an optional activity, but basic and fundamental for building up the personality of the individual disciple, as it is for the whole Christian community" (GDC 64).



Introduction to Christian Initiation: A Liturgical, Catechetical, and Pastoral Process

THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION PROCESS is a privileged and, in many ways, challengingly complex form of adult formation. Its complexity flows from the need for the process to be authentically truthful (implying catechesis that is far removed from the easy sound-bite answers and errors of the culture), authentically personal (implying pastoral flexibility and sacrificial effort to call forth from people deep conversion), and authentically unitive (implying entering into a profoundly countercultural liturgical way of life to realize union with a Divine Spouse). In other words, to the degree that the process is complex, it is so because it must be *fully human*, so that it may be fully open to the Divine. The restoration of the ancient catechumenal process, which was called for in no less than five of the sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council, is a reflection of the Church's wisdom in going back to a tried and true practice in order to lovingly bring people into her fold.

The Christian initiation process is not a program. Programs have a fixed length of time and a determined course of studies. No one can "program" the Holy Spirit as he moves individuals to conversion; each person's conversion journey is unique. While a parish may do things systematically and make a calendar of events each year, it must also pay close attention to the fact that, for each inquirer, the conversion journey is unique to him or her. The RCIA leader's primary task is not to "run a program" but to be present to help facilitate conver-

sion. For this reason, it is not desirable to call what parishes do "the RCIA program" as this invariably creates a false impression for all involved, and tends to imply that the journey of the participants is an isolated endeavor within the community of faith. Rather,

Catechesis is understood to be concerned with conversion in Christ and with how to live continuously in such a manner not only prior to but after initiation as well... Catechumens are viewed not as anonymous attendants at private educational inquiry classes, but as public persons in the local church. Their faith, progress, and prognosis in communal faith-living are the concerns of the entire local church met for solemn public worship (Fr. Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B., *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, Liturgical Press, 1978, p. 128; see also pp. 120–122).

One way to understand the Christian initiation process is by breaking it down in its three distinct aspects: liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral. *All three are equally important.* It is an

injustice to those considering or seeking union with the Church for a catechist to be unambiguously catechetical to the detriment of the liturgical aspect, or be wonderfully pastoral despite offering poor catechesis. In order for RCIA to be what it has the potential to be, leaders and catechists can benefit greatly from understanding the implications of its liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral dimensions to make available the fullness of the process as intended by the Church.



The RCIA ritual book divides the Christian initiation process into four periods: **1)** the period of evangelization and the precatechumenate, up to the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming; **2)** the period of the catechumenate, up to the Rites of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion (normally celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent); **3)** the period of purification and enlightenment (which normally coincides with Lent); and **4)** mystagogy, which traditionally spans the seven weeks of the Easter season, followed by the neophyte year, which lasts until the first anniversary of initiation. It is useful to discuss the nature and scope of these periods in light of the three aspects.

**THE FIRST ASPECT OF THE PROCESS:
LITURGICAL FORMATION (SEE RCIA 40,
75.1, 75.3, 79, 141, 147, 247)**

The RCIA process is dynamically moved along by liturgies that serve as gateways into the major periods of the process. Beginning with the Rite of Acceptance for unbaptized catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming for baptized candidates, and going through all the subsequent minor Rites and major gateways, liturgy propels the process and motivates conversion. Grace comes with every gateway and every liturgical moment. The sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—are the powerhouses for the whole process. This grace—all that it means to be reborn in Christ, to be infused with the theological virtues, to become a co-heir with Christ, to be sealed with a deeper and stronger configuration to the Crucified One, and to come to the Table of the Lord among his people—abundantly provides the ongoing impetus for the conversion process.

For all involved in RCIA, it is crucial to understand the Catholic sacramental and liturgical sense of reality (see GDC 85; NDC 35):

The sacraments [in the catechumenate of the early Church] were seen as a totality coextensive with the Church's life itself... The liturgy was seen not as a matter of exquisite ecclesiastical ceremonial to occupy clergy and religious but as the way a Christian people live in common... [The Rites of initiation] were a unified sacramental discipline through which

both convert and community moved in the Spirit from what each had been towards what each was capable of becoming under grace in that same Spirit—a movement shot through with both pain and glory, with affirmation and renunciation, exorcism and celebration towards a new degree of communion in faith that would leave both convert and community irrevocably changed (*The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, pp. 118, 120–121; italics in original).

The RCIA process aims to lead participants to become “liturgical people,” moving them towards full and active participation in the worshipping community around the one Table:

[H]ere is the last and most decisive reason why teaching through worship is superior to all other forms of Christian teaching. *The liturgy gives what it teaches.* It not only presents the mystery of Christ concretely; it also lets us immediately participate in this mystery. If there is anywhere in Christianity that a true initiation into the mystery of Christ takes place, it is here (Johannes Hofinger, S. J., and Francis J. Buckley, S. J., *The Good News and Its Proclamation*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, pp. 55–56; italics in original).

The liturgical aspect in each particular period is the driving force behind the whole process and the primary means for those along this journey to enter into the mystery of Christ. In the precathechumenate, the liturgical aspect is at a minimum. There are no formal liturgical rites during this stage, because the inquirer has not yet entered a publicly-recognized relationship with the Church. While no formal liturgy takes place at this stage, prayer is an important part of evangelization. For example, singing hymns, which is a form of prayer, can help draw the heart up to God and facilitate conversion, for “to sing belongs to lovers” (St Augustine, *Sermo* 336, 1).

The first major liturgies, the Rite of Acceptance and the Rite of Welcoming, establish (for a catechumen) or deepen (for a candidate) a relationship between the Church and the participant and are the gateways into the period of the catechumenate.

There are numerous liturgical moments in the catechumenate period that impart grace to participants and help them continue along the path of conversion. Blessings, minor exorcisms, anointings, and celebrations of the Word (which can also be called Liturgies of the Word) are all designed to introduce those in the catechumenate into the liturgical life of the Church and the benefits of the graces of liturgy.

The next gateway, the Rite of Election for catechumens and the Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion for candidates, begins the intense period of preparation for the sacraments of initiation. Participants are greatly helped by the Scrutinies (for catechumens) and the Penitential Rite (for candidates), as well as the Presentation Rites and Preparations Rites, all directed towards their final preparation for complete Christian initiation and entering into life with God. Lent becomes a rising crescendo of liturgical graces, the war against sin at the height of its strength (see Rom 5:20).

By the third gateway, reception of the sacraments of initiation, participants fully enter into the mystery of Christ. This is the climax of the catechumenal process, and by design occurs during the Easter Vigil, the Church's greatest and most solemn feast of the year. The RCIA ritual book says: "In the sacraments of Christian initiation we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ's death, burial, and Resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's death and Resurrection" (GL 1; see AG 14). This third gateway gives birth to the new "fledgling Catholics" or neophytes who, while enjoying the fruits of all the sacraments like the rest of the faithful, are still watched over and cared for in a special way during the course of their first year.

The neophyte year begins with seven weeks of mystagogy, that is, post-baptismal catechesis. During this period, neophytes are invited to participate in the main Sunday Mass of the parish as a group, and the readings during these seven weeks have been selected by the Church to meet their needs.

It is important to communicate to both current and future Catholics that liturgy is much more than ritual, and that it is through the liturgy (the sum-

mit of which is the Mass) that our relationship with Jesus Christ becomes as intimate as possible outside of Heaven. As RCIA participants move towards full communion with the Church, nothing is more fundamental to their catechesis, and more crucial to impart to the worshipping community, than the fact that it is through the liturgies of the catechumenal process, and the sacramental participation they eventually provide, that a foundational relationship with Jesus is most firmly established.

THE SECOND ASPECT OF THE PROCESS: CATECHETICAL FORMATION (SEE RCIA 38, 75.1, 78, 139, 245)


Catechesis, stemming from the Greek verb *katekhein*, can be defined as the re-echoing or echoing down of that which has been received, developing "in women and men a living, explicit, and active faith, enlightened by doctrine," and concerning "itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith" (CD 14; CT 19; see DCG 17).

The three major liturgical gateways of the RCIA process help to define the methodology and scope of catechesis during each of the four periods. During the period of evangelization and the precatechumenate, the focus is mainly apologetic and evangelistic, with a delivery of the basic Gospel message and unreserved answering of questions:

From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love. The whole period of the precatechumenate is set aside for this evangelization, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek Baptism may mature (RCIA 37).

The precatechumenate prepares for and is ordered to the first liturgical step, which is the Rite of Acceptance for the unbaptized or the Rite of Welcoming for the baptized.

In the period of the catechumenate, the focus



moves to a systematic, organic catechesis involving the complete delivery of the essential elements of the Deposit of Faith, laying the flesh on the bones of the Gospel laid out in the previous period. Describing the Deposit of Faith, the Second Vatican Council stated:

What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in its doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that it itself is, all that it believes (DV 8). Tradition and Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church (DV 10).

The catechumenate period is typically the longest period of the Christian initiation process; for catechumens it “may last for several years” (RCIA 7). The United States bishops have stated that it “should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation,” specifying that “[o]rdinarily 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” (NS 6). The ritual book does not prescribe a specific length for candidates in the catechumenate, but rather requires that “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” (RCIA 478). It is the most densely catechetical period of the Christian initiation process. Catechesis is to be “gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the Word” (RCIA 75). Instruction received during this period, “while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart towards God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ” (RCIA 78). This systematic and organic delivery of the Deposit of Faith seeks to ensure that, by the second liturgical gateway, participants sufficiently understand and desire to live the faith, that they may choose without hesitation to enroll their names among the elect or, if candidates, confidently


continue their progress towards full communion with the Church. These liturgies call forth power and grace to nourish the elect (unbaptized) and the candidates (baptized) during the next period.

During the period of purification and enlightenment, the catechist places stronger emphasis on the spiritual and mystical life in preparing participants for the sacraments. The RCIA ritual book’s guidelines for this period (which normally coincides with Lent) as well as the liturgies associated with them, direct catechists to shift the focus of teaching from an exposition of the Deposit of Faith to spiritual, reflective, and meditative preparation for the reception of the sacraments of initiation, seeking to foster a state of repentance and to effectively arouse the life of prayer and the practice of self-denial and charity. Before they receive the sacraments of initiation, “the elect must have the intention of achieving an intimate knowledge of Christ and his Church, and they are expected particularly to progress in genuine self-knowledge through serious examination of their lives and true repentance” (RCIA 142).

In the period of mystagogy, or post-baptismal catechesis, the focus is on a deepening of the neophytes’ understanding and practice of the sacramental life, in light of now being able to receive the fullness of sacramental grace, and to present ways to synthesize all that they have learned, applying it to their lives. The rest of the neophyte year would then be devoted to substantiating, strengthening, and deepening their understanding of the faith that will lead to more committed and mature Christian lives. “The distinctive spirit and power of the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community” (RCIA 247).

THE THIRD ASPECT OF THE PROCESS: PASTORAL FORMATION (SEE RCIA 42, 45, 75.2, 75.4, 120, 244, 246)

The RCIA process is a growth in intimacy as much as in knowledge. Fr. Aidan Kavanagh, in *The Shape of Baptism*, refers to the catechumenal process as “a structure for Christian nurture” (*The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, p. 182). Along with the powerful liturgical moments of the process



and the catechetical endeavor, there is also an intense pastoral activity, which must be initiated from the first time an inquirer expresses interest in the Church. This activity operates with the knowledge that each participant will vary in his or her background, lifestyle, motivation, and state in life. Those doing the RCIA apostolate steep themselves in the lives of participants, with gentleness, prudence, and a genuine desire to open their hearts wide to any whom the Spirit draws (see 2 Cor 6:11).

The pastoral components of RCIA are the *people* who participate, some intimately and others from a distance, in Jesus' work of conversion and discipleship. The pastoral work of the catechumenal process is accomplished through the love and labor of many people, including the clergy, catechists, hospitality people, sponsors, small-group leaders, prayer intercessors, and parish members:

Christian initiation during the catechumenate is not the concern of catechists or priests alone, but of the whole community of believers and especially the godparents, so that from the outset the catechumens will have a sense of being a part of the people of God (AG 14).


This pastoral work is a people-to-person endeavor—all the people serving this one person for the Lord. The pastoral aspect of RCIA involves both information and formation. By instruction and by the experience of authentic fellowship, the catechumens and candidates learn who God is, what his plan is, and how to follow him as a member of the Christian community, “which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith” (GDC 68):

[T]he people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ (RCIA 9).

Through the pastoral attention of others, participants are informed about Christ, and formed in him, so that “the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens [and candidates] to obey the Holy Spirit more generously” (RCIA 4). As with liturgy

and catechesis, the pastoral aspects change as participants move through the periods of the process. The precatechumenate is a time of inviting people to come and see, of determining their motivation, and moving them from the initial stages of faith—an encounter with Jesus, turning away from sin, and finding a home in the Church. During the next period, the catechumenate, the pastoral aim is to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit in moving the participants from initial motivation to firm conviction, with strong elements of fellowship and spiritual guidance. The period of purification and enlightenment serves as a time of strong support, spiritual direction, and encouragement for participants to examine their conscience, intensify their life of prayer, and increase in works of charity. In the period of mystagogy, new Catholics receive help to become more open to the pursuit of holiness by deepening their spiritual life through the communal experience of the sacraments, and by strengthening relationships in their new parish family. For the remainder of the neophyte year, the pastoral focus is to provide continued support and encouragement in living out a full Catholic life in a parish setting where they feel comfortably at home. The process aims not just at making non-ignorant Christians; it also facilitates transforming them into outwardly-focused Christians growing in an authentic Catholic worldview, sure in the conviction that the fullness of the truth has been revealed and can be shared with joy.

In summary, the RCIA process seeks to prepare people not merely for assent to eternal truths, but more so to fall in love with an eternal Lover. If participants are falling in love with the Person of Jesus, then it is only reasonable that, like anyone we love in the human order, they would want to *know* him more. Without the teaching and converting aspects of the liturgy and the loving witness of the community, formal instruction runs the risk of becoming just information, instead of light for the path of faith in Christ (see CCC 89). The catechumenal process, a balance of liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral aspects, thus becomes an engine of conversion today, as it was centuries ago, fulfilling the intention of its restoration by the Second Vatican Council (see SC 64–66). The Church can be understood as the earthly configura-



tion of Jesus Christ—to be a member of the Church is to be configured to Christ. Striving by grace to follow Christ makes great demands on any disciple; which are not obligations imposed from outside, although one of the Church's missions is to articulate those demands for our guidance and growth. The Christian initiation process invites a beautifully

simple view of the matter: the reason to be a Christian is to be perfectly configured to Christ—to be a saint. The reason to be a Catholic is because within the Church subsists the fullness of the means to become a saint—through her graces, her teachings, her people, and her Head, enabling those who so will to be perfected in love.