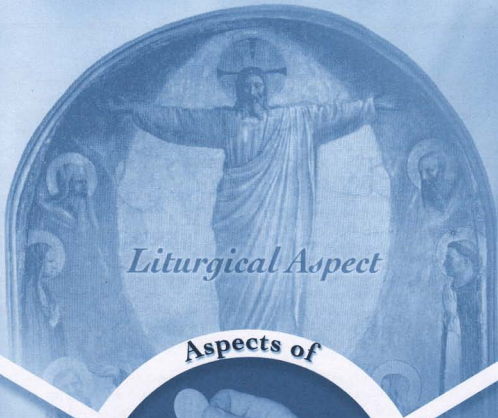
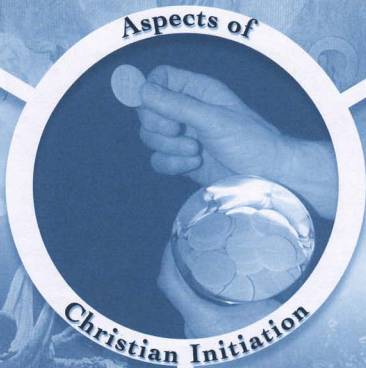


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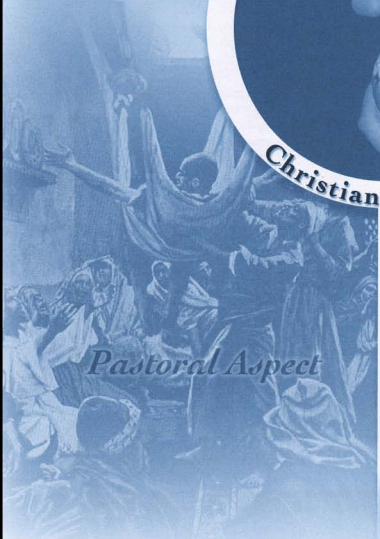


*Liturgical Aspect*

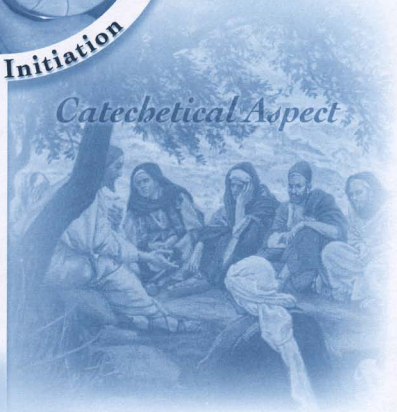


**Aspects of**

**Christian Initiation**



*Pastoral Aspect*



*Catechetical Aspect*



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

**R**CIA is a privileged and, in many ways, challenging 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 insertion into a profoundly countercultural liturgical way of life to realize union with a divine Spouse). In other words, to the degree that the RCIA 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, as called for in no less than five 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 catechumenal 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 this is an individual conversion journey for each inquirer. The RCIA team's primary task is not to run a program but to be present to help facilitate conversion. 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.

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 in-

quiry 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, directors 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 catechumenal process is divided into four periods: 1) the Precatechumenate up to the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming, 2) the Catechumenate proper up to the Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion normally held 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 one's 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 liturgical rites 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):

The sacraments [in the catechumenate of the early Church] were seen as a totality coextensive with the Church's life itself...The liturgy was not seen as a matter of exquisite ecclesiastical ceremony 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 toward 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 toward a new degree of communion in faith that would leave both convert *and* community irrevocably changed (Kavanagh, 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. 53, 56; italics in original).

The liturgical aspect in each particular period is the driving force behind the whole process and the primary means of inserting those along this journey into the mystery of Christ. In the first period, the Precatechumenate, 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. Singing hymns, which is a form of prayer, can help draw the heart up to God and facilitate conversion.

The first liturgical rites, 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 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 Continuing Call to 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 insertion 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).

The third gateway, reception of the sacraments of initiation, fully inserts participants into the mystery of Christ. This is the climax of the catechumenal process, and it is not by accident that it occurs during the Easter Vigil, the Church's greatest and most solemn feast of the year. 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 summit 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 liturgical rites of the catechumenal process, and the sacramental participation to which they point, 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).

This *Manual's* focus is on the catechetical aspect of the RCIA process, and it is the mission of the other sections in this book to elaborate on this facet of RCIA formation. However, a brief overview at this point can serve as context for what follows.

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 *Precatechumenate period*, 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 *Catechumenate period*, 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 is typically the longest period of the Christian initiation process. It is also the most densely catechetical. 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 toward 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 toward full communion with the Church. These rites 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 ritual book's guidelines for this period (which normally coincides with Lent) as well as the rites 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. Aidan Kavanagh, in *The Shape of Baptism*, refers to the catechumenal process as "a structure of Christian nurture" (Kavanagh, 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 1 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 him, and formed in him, so that their experience of the community of believers becomes an "apprenticeship of the entire Christian life" (GDC 67). As with liturgy and catechesis, the pastoral aspects change as participants move through the periods of the process. The *pre-catechumenate* 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 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 con-

science, 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 that we love in the human order, they would want to *know* him more. Without the teaching and

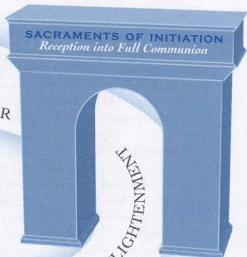
converting aspects of the liturgy and the loving witness of the community, formal instruction runs the risk of becoming just information, instead of light for the path of faith in Christ (see CCC 89). The catechumenal process, a balance of liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral aspects, thus becomes 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 configuration of Jesus Christ — to be a member of the Church is to be configured to Christ. Yet inner being in Christ has its demands; 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.

# The Catechumenal Process (RCIA)

MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

## MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

*Devoted to post-baptismal catechesis, this period is a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community.*



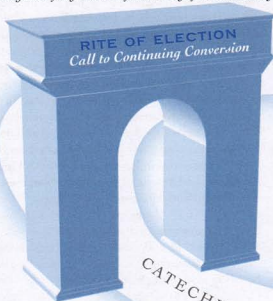
PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

## PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

*Coinciding with Lent, this period consists more in interior reflection than in instruction. It is intended to enlighten the minds and hearts of participants with a deep knowledge of Christ the Savior.*

### Minor Rites in the Period of Purification and Enlightenment

- Penitential Rite (Candidates)
- Scrutinies (Catechumens)
- Presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer
- Preparation Rites



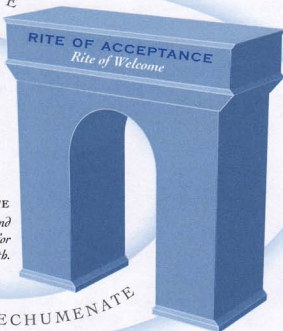
CATECHUMENATE

## CATECHUMENATE

*This is an extended period for pastoral formation and guidance aimed at training participants in the Christian life; it includes a thoroughly comprehensive catechesis on the truths of Catholic doctrine and moral life.*

### Minor Rites in the Period of the Catechumenate

- Celebrations of the Word of God
- Minor Exorcisms (Catechumens)
- Anointings (Catechumens)
- Blessings
- [Presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer]



PRECATECHUMENATE

## PRECATECHUMENATE

*This is a time for inquiry and evangelization, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith.*

*Start*



# What's Inside the *RCIA Catechist's Manual*?

*Edited by Barbara A. Morgan and William J. Keinig*

## *↪ User-Friendly*

- Table for matching *Catechist's Manual* lesson plans and *Participant's Book* handouts
- Efficient and clear two-page lesson plans – one page for catechist preparation, one page for teaching, prayer, and group discussion

## *↪ Scriptural*

- Over 1,000 Scripture citations provided to prepare and teach the lessons
- Balanced use of the Old Testament and the New Testament

## *↪ Liturgical*

- Suggested Liturgies of the Word for each lesson plan, and seasonal substitutes
- An innovative appendix for liturgical catechesis offering doctrines as found in the Church's liturgical prayers

## *↪ Musical*

- Between 5 and 20 suggested hymns and songs for each lesson plan, selected to complement the subject
- Hymns and songs referencing over 450 selections from a great diversity of Christian music styles

## *↪ Flexible*

- Three examples of how to arrange the order of teachings, from the precatechumenate to mystagogy
- Can be adapted for many other aspects of adult education such as general adult formation, catechist training, retreats, Bible studies, faith-sharing groups, sacramental preparation, etc.

## *↪ Comprehensive*

- Designed for systematic and organic catechesis, with hundreds of references to the *Catechism*
- Presents the full splendor of the Catholic faith

## *↪ Approved*

- *Nil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*
- Field-tested by many RCIA directors and catechists

*"Unique, innovative, comprehensive, faithful, and totally affordable. What else do you need to know? The bar has been raised in catechetical materials. These books represent a new paradigm by which all others will be judged. These books are a catechist's dream."*

—Walt Bechtell, RCIA Director,  
Mother of Sorrows Parish, Murrysville, Pennsylvania



## Compact and helpful introduction includes . . .

- How catechesis changes in the four periods of the RCIA
- How to use the lesson plans most effectively
- How to determine the order of teachings in the RCIA
- How to teach the relationships among doctrines

## RCIA process overview chart to help train RCIA teams

## Sixty lesson plans each with . . .

- Scripture, Catechism, and key terms for catechist preparation
- Suggested Liturgy of the Word, songs, and closing prayers
- Single-page bulleted explanation of the truths being taught
- Application questions for group discussion

## Helpful appendices to facilitate liturgical catechesis



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Office: 301-203-1334  
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