

CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

The process and rituals outlined in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, mandated by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1988, are the normative way by which adults and non-Catholic children of catechetical age are prepared for the sacraments of initiation in the Diocese of Raleigh. Specific diocesan policies and procedures for Christian initiation are to be found in the *Sacramental Guidelines* of the Diocese of Raleigh.

In order to provide inquirers, catechumens, and candidates with the necessary catechesis into the mystery of salvation and life of faith, integration into the local parish community, and an introduction to baptismal ministry of the people of God, most parishes use a team approach to Christian initiation.

It is important to keep in mind that the “adult” for whom the *Rite of Christian Initiation* is intended is the individual who has attained the age of reason, usually identified with the age of seven. Please refer to the *Sacramental Guidelines* for the definitions of other terms used here.

PARISH CHRISTIAN INITIATION TEAMS

We are reminded first that “the initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful” (*RCIA*, n.4). Therefore, the work of initiation is really the work of the entire parish community. However, in most parishes Christian initiation teams are given responsibility for directing the stages in the initiation process: pre-catechumenate/inquiry, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment, mystagogy. With the pastor/pastoral administrator, team members are usually also involved in planning the ritual celebrations which provide the liturgical framework for Christian initiation of adults.

All team members should be individuals who witness our faith in Christ in their daily lives and in their participation in the life of the parish. Teams are ordinarily composed of a director and as many other people as the parish may need to guide the process in the parish. Exact size of the team will depend on parish circumstances.

Ideally teams should include

- ◆ someone who can help with catechetical aspects of the Christian initiation process
- ◆ someone who is knowledgeable about the liturgical life of the church
- ◆ someone who can help the participants develop their personal prayer life and discern the path God puts before them
- ◆ someone who can help build a sense of community within the group, provide for socializing, and introduce participants to the larger parish community
- ◆ someone who can introduce participants to opportunities for participating in works of charity in the parish or larger community
- ◆ someone who will help keep the entire parish involved with the process

It is important that the director have an overall vision and understanding of the process of Christian initiation within the parish and that at least one member of the team be a person with strong organizational skills.

Many parishes are seeing an increasing number of children over the age of seven who for one

reason or another were not baptized as infants. These children would follow the process of Christian Initiation of Adults with adaptations suitable for their age. Parishes usually respond to the needs of these children by adding additional people, who have special knowledge and skills for working with children, to the initiation team.

PROCESS

The journey of those who come to the Church asking questions about our beliefs and practices and continue to the point of becoming fully initiated members of our community of faith, is marked by periods of inquiry and maturing in faith that are celebrated by liturgical rituals. The frame of this process may be viewed as follows (rituals for the already baptized are shown in brackets):

<i>period</i>	<i>liturgical rituals</i>
Evangelization & Precatechumenate-- a time when the inquirer comes to first faith, begins to lead the spiritual life, and develops some sense of Church	Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens [Rite of Welcoming]
Catechumenate-- a period of at least one year for formation of minds and hearts, guiding the individuals into more fully leading the Christian life	Celebrations of the word of God Minor exorcisms Blessing of catechumens Presentations Sending of the catechumens for election Election or Enrollment of Names [Call to Continuing Conversion]
Purification and Enlightenment-- the Lenten period of final preparation for the Easter sacraments	[Penitential Rite] First Scrutiny Presentation of the Creed Second Scrutiny Third Scrutiny Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer Preparation rites Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation
Mystagogy-- a time for the newly baptized and the community to deepen their understanding of the Paschal mystery, share in the eucharist, and continue in works of charity	Sunday Masses

In order to accomplish all of the above the director and team need to be attentive to a number of different tasks including the following:

- ◆forming the team
- ◆advertising and inviting
- ◆designing the process from inquiry through mystagogia
- ◆scheduling
- ◆budgeting
- ◆recruiting, training, and supporting sponsors
- ◆conducting regular interviews with inquirers, catechumens, and candidates
(It is suggested that the original interview include questions which will help surface marriage situations which need to be referred to the Tribunal.)
- ◆communicating with team, all participants, and parish
- ◆evaluating the Christian initiation process in the parish

Parishes have successfully used various models to structure the process of growth in faith and some very good resources are available to assist the team. It is important to remember that this is not a matter of “teaching catechism”. Session content should focus on how we live our faith according to Scripture and the basics of belief found in the Creed. Be aware of the concepts of adult learning and the levels of maturing faith.

RELATIONSHIPS

The rites celebrated throughout the process lead the participants into a life of faith, worship, and charity and are integral to Christian initiation. For this reason it is important for team members to work closely with the priests and deacons who lead the public worship of the parish and with parish liturgy committees responsible for helping to plan such celebrations.

The team should also strive to develop an understanding and appreciation of the Christian Initiation process in the parish as a whole. All parishioners should understand that they are important to the welcoming and forming in faith of those who come seeking baptism or full communion. It is important to keep the parish informed about what is happening and who the people are. Every effort should be made to involve the inquirers, catechumens, candidates, and neophytes in the life of the parish and to involve the parish in the process. The parish, not just the team, accompanies this spiritual journey.

BASIC RESOURCES

In preparation for their ministry Christian initiation team members in each parish should become familiar with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, the *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, and the diocesan *Sacramental Guidelines*. (It should be noted that the diocesan *Guidelines* conform to the *National Statutes* in calling for the period of the catechumenate to extend for at least one year.) The *Rite* and the *National Statutes* are found printed together in the Study Edition of the *Rite*. Those who are new to this ministry will find that the introductory notes (*praenotanda*) to the *Rite* guide not only the ritual celebrations, but also the process of faith formation that precedes each ritual celebration.

The Office for Lay Ministry and the Office of Liturgy provide consultation, training, and support for parish Christian initiation teams. In the spring 1996 these offices began offering an annual

workshop on various topics of concern to those involved in Christian initiation ministries in the parish. A bimonthly newsletter called *Christian Initiation Notes* is distributed to parishes from the Office for Lay Ministry.

It is strongly recommended that parishes provide for the formation of their teams by sending team members to *Beginnings* or *Beginnings and Beyond* institutes sponsored by the North American Forum on the Catechumenate. Individuals are also encouraged to become members of the Forum by writing to *The North American Forum on the Catechumenate*
3033 Fourth Street, NE
Washington DC 20017-1102

Members receive the Forum Newsletter and may use the Forum Book Service.

There are numerous books and articles available concerning Christian initiation of adults, as well as a variety of materials to serve as resources for inquirers, catechumens and candidates. Team members are welcome to consult the materials held by the Freeman Media Center and those which are shelved in the Lay Ministry Office. Of particular interest to new parish directors of Christian initiation and their teams is the following: Bruns, William R. *Guiding Your Parish through the Christian Initiation Process: A Handbook for Leaders*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger, 1993.