

Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized in to his death? Though baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.

ROMANS 6:3-5

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

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RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

I. INTRODUCTION

“The Rite of Christian Initiation presented here is designated for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God’s help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully.” (RCIA, *Study Edition*, 1)

II. RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS IS NORMATIVE

- IA 1. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as approved for the dioceses of the United States by the USCCB on November 11, 1986 and confirmed by the Apostolic See on February 19, 1988 is normative in the Archdiocese. It is to be fully integrated in all parishes of the Archdiocese. The rite applies to all individuals seeking initiation who have attained the age of reason. The rite is to be adapted for particular circumstances to account for age and exceptional circumstances with special attention to retaining the elements of the rite.**
- IA 2. The National Statutes for the Catechumenate approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) on November 11, 1986, and confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship on June 26, 1988, for particular law for the dioceses of the United States are to be observed by all parishes in the Archdiocese (see *CIC*, c. 788 §§1-3).**

III. PERIODS AND STEPS FOR THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)

- IA 3. The periods and steps for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults are to be followed as articulated in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.**

“The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God’s grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place. This journey includes not only

the periods for making inquiry and for maturing, but also the steps marking the catechumen's progress, as they pass, so to speak, through another doorway or ascend to the next level." (RCIA, *Study Edition*, 5-6)

An Outline for Christian Initiation of Adults

PERIOD OF EVANGELIAZATION AND PRE-CATECHUMENATE FOR INQUIRERS (REMOTE)

This is a time of no fixed duration or structure, for inquiry and introduction to Gospel values, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith. The persons participating in this period (stage) are known as inquirers.

First Step: Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

This is the liturgical rite, usually celebrated as inquirers are ready on an appropriate Sunday, which will allow for the one-year catechumenate. The Rite of Acceptance marks the beginning of the catechumenate proper, as the inquirers express and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ.

Inquirers who choose to celebrate the Rite of Acceptance become known as catechumens. A catechumen is an un-baptized person preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation in the Catholic Church namely, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE (PROXIMATE)

This is the time, in duration corresponding to the progress of the individual, for the nurturing and growth of the catechumens' faith and conversion to God; celebrations of the word and prayers of exorcism and blessing are meant to assist the process.

Second Step: Election or Enrollment of Names

This is the liturgical rite, celebrated by the Archbishop, scheduled for the first week of Lent, by which the Church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness for the sacraments of initiation and the catechumens, now the elect, express the will to receive these sacraments.

PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT (IMMEDIATE)

This is the time immediately preceding the elects' initiation, usually the Lenten season preceding the celebration of this initiation at the Easter Vigil; it is a time of reflection, intensely centered on conversion, marked by celebration of the scrutinies and presentations and the preparation rites on Holy Saturday.

Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

This is the liturgical rite, usually integrated into the Easter Vigil, by which the elect are initiated through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. In emergency situations or in special circumstances, the Rite of Initiation may be celebrated at another appropriate time. The Liturgy Office is to be consulted.

PERIOD OF POSTBAPTISMAL CATECHESIS OR MYSTAGOGY

This is the time, usually the Easter season, following the celebration of initiation, during which the newly initiated Neophytes experience being fully a part of the Christian community by means of pertinent catechesis, and particularly by participation with all the faithful in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration.

IV. CATECHETICAL PROCESS

The Period of Inquiry (pre-catechumenate) is a time of evangelization: Constantly and faithfully the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he sent for the salvation of all. During this period the inquirers are given a suitable explanation of the Gospel, are rooted in the fundamentals of Christian teaching and are assisted in their discernment of initial conversion to change their lives. *Signs of initial faith are:* practice of daily prayer, a sense of Church, a willingness to embrace Gospel values and so transform their lives. It is also a time for the inquirers to have *their questions* about God, Christ, the Church, its structure and teachings explained and to help them express their desire to change their lives.

During the Catechumenate Period it is important to remember that the primary focus of initiatory catechesis is the liturgical cycle and the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. In one full liturgical cycle the Church remembers and celebrates the life and mission of Christ from his incarnation through his passion, death, resurrection and ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical year is primary content of catechesis for sacramental initiation. It is for this reason that the USCCB require that the catechumenate be extended for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation (see *NSC*, 6).

During the Purification and Enlightenment Period the Church invites the Elect to: pray with us, fast with us, give alms, do mercy, do justice with us, to repent with us and be reconciled, be enlightened and refreshed by the Gospel with us. They are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ with us, and to practice dying and rising with us during these forty days. For the Elect this should be a time of grace and joy, a time of their final spiritual preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery. The catechesis of this period centers on the meaning of the scrutinies, presentation of the Lord's Prayer and the rites of Holy Saturday.

V. MYSTAGOGY

IA 4. After the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, the newly baptized (Neophytes) and those received into full communion are to continue their journey of faith in the period of mystagogy (see RCIA, *Study Edition*, 244).

Participation in the Masses of the Easter Season deepens their grasp of the paschal mystery through meditation on the Gospel (especially the readings of Cycle A), sharing in the Eucharist, and doing works of charity. The period of Mystagogy is important for the newly baptized because it is a time for further instruction and a time for the community and the neophytes to grow together in understanding the mysteries of the faith. It is a period for the neophytes to reflect on what they have experienced at the Easter Vigil. It is the opportune time for the community to express its support and to welcome these new members (see RCIA, *Study Edition*, 244 and 247).

VI. POST BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS FOR NEOPHYTES

IA 5. Special contact shall be maintained with these new members of the Church throughout the entire year that follows their initiation, providing continued incorporation into the life and mission of the Christian community. Pastors and adult faith formation directors are to provide opportunities for ongoing faith formation of the neophytes (see RCIA, *Study Guide*, 245-48; for resources for ongoing faith formation of the Neophytes, contact the OCFE office and/or see the Sacraments and RCIA Q & A handbook).

VII. RECEPTION OF CANDIDATES FOR FULL COMMUNION INTO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The candidate for full communion may be defined as:

- A person who is baptized in a Christian tradition other than Roman Catholic.
- A baptized Catholic, not catechized, who may participate in some aspects of the RCIA with exceptions made to recognize their status as a baptized member of the community.

IA 6. “The baptized Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation adapted to individual and pastoral requirements. The candidate should learn to deepen an inner adherence to the Church, where he or she will find the fullness of his or her Baptism.” (RCIA Study Edition, 477)

Catechetical Formation of the Candidates

- A program of training and catechesis suited to the needs of the candidate includes contact with the community of the faithful and those liturgical rites outlined in the Rite of Christian Initiation.
- The period of catechesis is best coordinated with the Liturgical Year.
- The Candidates for Full Communion may participate in the Dismissal Rite with reflection on Sunday Readings with Catechumens.
- The celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation with candidates for reception into Full Communion is to be carried out at a time prior and distinct from the celebration of Confirmation and the Eucharist.

Celebration of the Rite of Reception into Full Communion

- Reception of candidates into full communion of the Catholic Church ordinarily takes place during the Sunday Eucharist, outside of Lent, as soon as they are catechized. While the Rite of Reception is best celebrated apart from the Easter Vigil, it may be celebrated at the Easter Vigil.
- The Rite of Reception into Full Communion of the Catholic Church is to be celebrated as outlined in the RCIA under

“Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion of the Catholic Church” (RCIA, 473-498).

- The pastor by virtue of his office is the minister of the Rite of Christian Initiation and is to fully initiate catechumens and candidates for full communion except in the cases that the Archbishop has reserved to himself (see *NSC*, 11-13 and 28).

VIII. SPONSOR/GODPARENTS

IA 7. A sponsor is a person who serves as a witness, guide and companion for a catechumen, or a candidate preparing for full communion into the Catholic Church. A godparent is someone chosen by the catechumen or candidate to assist at the various liturgical rites beginning with the Rite of Election. The sponsor may continue to serve as the godparent for the catechumen or candidate.

7.a. The sponsor:

- acts as a personal connection between the catechumen/candidate and the community until the rite of election;
- provides support and encouragement;
- answers questions the catechumens/candidates may have;
- is available to listen and share personal faith stories;
- prays with and for the catechumens/candidates;
- introduces the catechumens/candidates to other members of the community;
- participates in catechumen/candidate sessions, prayer gatherings, ceremonies and instructions whenever possible;
- may be selected as a godparent.

7.b. The godparent:

- is chosen by the catechumen;
- frequently serves as sponsor;
- accepts a lifetime commitment to help the neophyte keep his/her baptismal commitment;
- must be reasonably informed on current church teaching;

- assists at the various liturgical rites as outlined in the ritual text.

IA 8. A godparent or sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic who is free to celebrate the sacraments and not bound by any canonical penalty (see *CIC*, c. 874 §§3-4).

IA 9. A godparent or sponsor must be at least sixteen (16) years of age (see *CIC*, c. 874 §2).

IA 10. A parent (natural, adoptive, foster or step) or legal guardian may not serve as the godparent or sponsor for his or her child (see *CIC*, c. 874 §5).

IA 11. While a spouse or fiancé may serve as the godparent or sponsor for his or her spouse or fiancé, best pastoral experience discourages this role (see *CIC*, c. 874 “Commentary” p. 1063).

IX. EASTERN CHURCH CANDIDATES

IA 12. Candidates from separated Eastern Churches are required to transfer to their respective Eastern [Catholic] Church in communion with Rome. If candidates from separated Eastern Churches continue to desire to become Roman Catholics in the full expression of the Roman Rite the only requirements are: presentation of a baptismal certificate or other documentary proof of Baptism (see *CIC*, c. 852 and 876) and the making of a Profession of Faith.

IA 13. Questions regarding transfer of Rite from Eastern Churches are to be addressed to the Archbishop’s office.

Resources with further information may be obtained from the Liturgy Office and the Chancellor’s office.

X. IRREGULAR MARRIAGES

IA 14. The canonical marital status of adults who present themselves for Christian Initiation through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is to be addressed as soon as possible in the Pre-Catechumenate. All canonical issues need to be resolved before the Rite of Election.

XI. RCIA DIRECTOR AND TEAM EDUCATION AND FORMATION

- IA 15. All Clergy and Lay Ecclesial Ministers who are named as Directors or Coordinators of the parish RCIA process are to become fully familiar with the rite and the related national statutes.**
- IA 16. It is expected that the directors/coordinators will become certified in the Archdiocesan Liturgical Ministry Institute (LMI) with an emphasis on the RCIA or have attended the annual archdiocesan RCIA Institutes. It is further recommended that all RCIA parish team members also participate in the LMI or the archdiocesan RCIA Institutes.**

XII. MINISTERS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

- IA 17. The proper minister of Christian Initiation is the diocesan bishop**

Priests who by virtue of law have the faculty to baptize adults also have the faculty to fully initiate catechumens and candidates for full communion into the Church. Priests who do not exercise a pastoral office but participate in the catechumenate process require a mandate from the diocesan bishop (*NSC*, 12 and 13). A delegation of faculties from the Archbishop is required to confirm a baptized and catechized Catholic.

XIII. PLACE OF CELEBRATION

- IA 18. The major liturgical rites of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults are properly celebrated in a parish church or associated mission stations of the catechumen or candidate. The celebration of these rites outside a parish church or associated mission station is not permitted except in the case of emergency or necessity.**

XIV. LITURGICAL RITES

IA 19. All of the rites prescribed in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults are to be celebrated. Optional rites are to be given due pastoral consideration and celebrated as needed in particular circumstances.

IA 20. Full initiation of adult and child Catechumens is to be observed in all parishes of the Archdiocese.

“The sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist are interrelated in such a way that they are required for full Christian initiation.” (*CIC*, c. 842 §2; and *NSC*, 14)

IA 21. The ritual of Dismissal is to be observed for all catechumens. Candidates for Full Communion may participate in the Dismissal Rite and in the Reflection Period.

The Rite of Christian Initiation reminds the Church to “kindly dismiss” the catechumens (*RCIA, Study Edition*, 75.3). “The group of catechumens goes out but does not disperse. With the help of some of the faithful, the catechumens remain together to share their joy and spiritual experiences.” (*RCIA, Study Edition*, 67A) They are dismissed to “reflect more deeply upon the word of God” which they shared with the liturgical assembly (see *RCIA, Study Edition*, 67B). The catechumens should reflect on the liturgy just celebrated: the liturgical season, the scriptures and their meaning in dialogue with sound biblical scholarship; the Catholic symbols; the rituals; the community; and how these apply to their own lives.

IA 22. The three scrutinies are to be celebrated during the Parish masses on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent using the readings from the *Lectionary, Year A* (see *RCIA, Study Edition*, 146).

“The scrutinies, which are solemnly celebrated on these Lenten Sunday are rites for self-searching and repentance and above all a spiritual purpose. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good.” (*RCIA*, 141)

IA 23. The celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation for the elect is to take place at the Easter Vigil.

IA 24. Baptism by full immersion as a fuller and more expressive sign of the sacrament is normative in the Archdiocese. In situations when immersion is not possible, the Rite of Christian Initiation calls for partial immersion (see *NSC*, 17).

IA 25. In very exceptional circumstances, the Sacraments of Initiation may be celebrated at other appropriate times, e.g.: the Vigil of Pentecost (see *NSC*, 14).

XV. DOCUMENTATION

See Sacramental Records Policies: SR, V, “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).”