



RCIA

INTRODUCTION



The Sacraments express and realise an effective and profound communion among us, for in them we encounter Christ the Saviour and, through him, our brothers and sisters in faith.

When we celebrate the Eucharist it is the living Jesus who brings us together, forms us into a community, allows us to adore the Father. Each one of us, in fact, through Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, is incorporated into Christ and united to the entire community of believers.

Therefore, if on the one hand it is the Church that “makes” the Sacraments, on the other, it is the Sacraments that “make” the Church, that build her up, by generating new children, by gathering them into the holy people of God, by strengthening their membership.

Pope Francis, General Audience, 6 November 2013

Purpose of this resource

The purpose of these sessions is to provide support to parishes in journeying with young people (ages 9 to 16) who wish to explore and develop their faith with a view to receiving the Sacraments of Initiation. This resource accompanies the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The goal for this journey is a conversion of heart.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), which is the basis of this resource, was designed for adults who, having heard 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 1*).

This resource, however, is designed specifically for young people across two age groups: 9 to 12 years and 13 to 16 years, and adapts the principles of the RCIA to be age-appropriate for young people. (*See RCIA 242–249*). The sessions contained in this resource will invite young people to enter into this journey of conversion and faith by developing a relationship with Christ, as the Spirit opens their minds and hearts. This will happen in many ways, through:

- Prayer
- Listening to witnesses of the faith and sharing stories
- Suitable catechesis, supported by celebration of the word
- Participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the parish
- Participation in the mission of the Church through service
- Feeling a sense of belonging by developing relationships within the parish community.

Throughout this journey of faith and conversion, young people will pass through a number of phases, experiencing liturgical rites while focusing on developing a relationship with Christ and the parish community.

INTRODUCTION

The journey for the unbaptised unfolds in the following way:

1. **Period of Evangelisation and Precatechumenate (Inquiry)**
 - First Step – Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens
2. **Period of the Catechumenate**
 - Rite of Election

(Although there is no mention of the Rite of Election in part II of the RCIA which deals with initiation of children who have reached catechetical age, it is recommended that the children be invited to attend the Cathedral for the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent.)

3. **Period of Purification and Enlightenment**
 - Second Step: Penitential Rite (Scrutiny)
 - Third Step – Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation
4. **Period of Mystagogy**

Who is this resource for?

The journey towards Christian Initiation is for a young person who, having experienced the movement of the Spirit in their heart, is now seeking to live a Christian life within the Catholic community. Each person will have a different background and a particular experience with Christianity.

Some, who have been baptised in another tradition, may not have received any catechesis and may have never practiced their faith. Others, who have previously been baptised in another tradition, may have been catechised and actively practising their faith, but are now seeking full communion with the Catholic Church.

Some will come with no previous experience of any faith at all. This resource provides a framework for guiding young people who are unbaptised, as well as those who have been baptised in another Christian tradition, and will show the journey to full initiation in the Catholic Church through the various periods and Rites.

It is designed to assist catechists who accompany a young person on their journey of faith.

Period of Evangelisation and Pre-catechumenate (Inquiry)

RCIA 36–40

The Period of Evangelisation and Pre-catechumenate or Inquiry is a time for young people to explore and question their faith, uncover the basic message of the Gospel and discern how they can live this in their lives. It is a time of discovery with no fixed structure or duration. RCIA 35 describes this as a time, of no fixed duration or structure, for inquiry and introduction to the gospel values, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith.

First Step:

The Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

RCIA 41–69, 250–266

The Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens is the liturgical rite marking the beginning of the catechumenate. The young person expresses their intention to respond to God's call and the Church accepts. Therefore, it is important to celebrate this rite with the community. If the young person is only comfortable celebrating with family, close friends and their sponsor/catechist, the rite may be celebrated with this smaller subset of the community.

“ It is important that this rite be celebrated with an actively participating but small congregation, since the presence of a large group might make the children uncomfortable.

RCIA 250

The second option is to hold the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens during the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. To commemorate the Rite of Acceptance, the young person may be presented with a Catholic Youth Bible and a Mass book.

For those already baptised in another Christian tradition

The candidates who have already been baptised in another Christian tradition are invited to come forward during a Mass and receive a blessing. They do not participate in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

Period of the Catechumenate

RCIA 75–104

The Period of the Catechumenate is a time for catechumens and candidates to deepen their faith and relationship with Jesus. It is a time for suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life (*RCIA 75*).

At the heart of the Catechumenate period is conversion of heart, the conversion to Christ.

This happens in four ways.

1. **Catechesis** The session plans contained in this resource will assist catechists by providing a pathway for sharing stories, reading and reflecting on the gospel, deepening relationships with Jesus and learning the teachings of the Catholic Church.
2. **Community** The support of sponsors, godparents, catechists, peers, Mass buddies and the parish community enables the young person to become familiar with the Christian way of life. It is in community that the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith and in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ (*RCIA 75*).
3. **Liturgical rites** Suitable liturgical rites gradually purify and strengthen the young person while also marking the progression of phases on the journey to full initiation.
4. **Mission** Young people should have opportunities to work with others to live out the mission of the Church, by spreading the good news of the gospel.

The Rite of Election and Enrolment of Names

RCIA 105–115

The Rite of Election is where the Church makes its ‘election’, formally acknowledging the catechumens’ readiness for receiving the Sacraments of Initiation, and the catechumens (now the elect) express their desire to receive the sacraments. This ritual is designed for those adults and children over the age of reason who are not yet baptised, although there may be a blessing of baptised candidates preparing for full initiation during the Rite of Election.

2 PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

This step is called election because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God, in whose name the Church acts. The step is also called the enrolment of names because as a pledge of fidelity the catechumens inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for initiation.

RCIA 106

This Rite is usually held on the first Sunday of Lent in the Cathedral. If it is not possible for the young person to attend the Cathedral, or if the Rite is being celebrated outside of Lent, a Rite of Election can be held at the local parish. The Rite of Election closes the Period of the Catechumenate and marks the transition to the period of Purification and Enlightenment, a time of more intense preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation.

With deliberate will and an enlightened faith they [the catechumens] must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church, a resolve they will express publicly in the actual celebration of the rite.

RCIA 107

During the Rite of Election, the godparents and catechists give witness to the catechumen's intention to be a follower of Christ and their readiness to receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

Purification and Enlightenment

RCIA 125–136

The period of Purification and Enlightenment is a time for reflection and prayer and a time to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus. This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance (RCIA 126). The word intense comes from Latin and means to “stretch out for”.

This period asks the elect to stretch out for a new understanding, a new vision, and to break open the tomb of self-centredness which is the final obstacle blocking the free passage of divine life (Brenda Hixon, *RCIA Spirituality*, 1997).

The Purification and Enlightenment sessions in this resource focus on a deep discernment of self, an examination of conscience, the presentation of the Creed and the Our Father, and, if held during Lent, the Lenten liturgies. It is a time to listen to the voice that says “Follow me”, all the while being supported by the community.

Second Step

The Penitential Rite (The Scrutinies)

RCIA 267–279

The rite calls for at least one Penitential Rite (Scrutiny) to be celebrated during this period. The guidelines of the adult scrutinies (RCIA 128–133) may be followed and adapted to the needs of the child or young person.

The Penitential Rite (Scrutiny) helps the young person to examine their lives and see where they need to make changes. Through the intercessions, the community prays that the elect might open their hearts in gratitude, recognise their weaknesses and find the strength to live as followers of Jesus.

The rite of the Sacrament of Penance can be offered during this time for those who have already been baptised. *Our Family Prays*, produced by Liturgy Brisbane, has a simple liturgy for celebrating the Sacrament of Penance on page 106.

Third Step

The Sacraments of Initiation

RCIA 280–305

The stage of Purification and Enlightenment concludes when the catechumens receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist and become fully initiated members of the Catholic Church.

Mystagogy

RCIA 234–241, 306

The word Mystagogy means ‘mystery’ in Greek. The fourth period is the time when the newly baptised (neophytes) begin their lifelong commitment to living a Christian life. It marks a shift from learning about faith to living faith in everyday life and a shift from looking within to looking outside, to the community.

This period includes contemplation of the scriptures, sharing the Eucharist through Sunday Mass and involvement in the parish community and ministry of the Church.

RCIA Team

The journey of conversion requires a team of people to walk with the young person. This is a relational journey so a sense of connectedness and belonging in the parish is crucial to the developing faith of the young person.

Parish Community

Members of the parish community have a pivotal role to play as they give witness to living the Christian life through their wholehearted participation in ministry and liturgy, and by demonstrating hospitality and concern for others.

Parish Priest

The priest is the liturgical leader of the parish community. The priest may not be involved in every aspect of the journey, however the priest needs to have a pastoral interest in the young person and be involved where possible.

Catechists

A catechist should be a person of faith and an active member of the parish community, as their role is to facilitate the catechumen's journey to initiation. It is important that catechists have good listening and communication skills and that they are familiar with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. They should have an understanding of liturgy as well as some knowledge of Church teachings.

Mass Companions and Peers

As this journey is a relational journey, it is important to have the support of Mass companions and peers who will accompany the young person. It is through their witness and continued support that the young person is able to begin to live a Christian life.

Sponsors and Godparents

A sponsor is someone who accompanies a young person seeking admission as a catechumen, from their initial inquiry, through the Rite of Acceptance, until the end of the Catechumenate period.

A godparent is the person, chosen by the catechumen, who accompanies the young person through the Rite of Election, Sacraments of Initiation, Period of Mystagogy and indeed throughout their life.

The sponsor may also serve as the godparent, however the catechumen may choose a different person (a godmother, godfather or both) to accompany them from the Rite of Election onwards.

The sponsor is called to be:

- A companion to the young person. Their role is to keep in touch with the young person and to share conversations about faith;
- A source of information about the Catholic Church and its beliefs. This can include sharing prayers, rituals and teachings of the Church;
- A participant in the liturgies of the RCIA and catechetical sessions;
- A link with the parish community. The sponsor can introduce the young person to the community and let them know of activities that are available in the parish.

A Godparent is called to:

- Assume their public role at the Rite of Election;
- Be a witness to the faith;
- Pray for the young person;
- Accompany the young person for the remainder of their journey to initiation;
- Be a companion in their Christian life.

Those designated as godparents must be members of the Catholic Church, over the age of 16, and must have received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. A baptised Christian, who does not belong to the Catholic Church, may act as a Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent. The role of the sponsor and godparent is to be a companion for the young person, an important source of information and guidance as well as someone who demonstrates living the Christian life.

Family

The family can play an important role in the young person's journey of faith and it is hoped that families will provide support and encouragement. Not all families are interested in being part of this journey and some may even oppose the young person's initiation into the Catholic Church. In situations like this, support, awareness and pastoral sensitivity is needed.

The first meeting – A pastoral conversation

When a young person or their family make contact to inquire about becoming Catholic, it is important to take time to have a pastoral conversation in person. This initial contact is important to understand the background of the young person and is the first step towards building a relationship with them.

It may be better to meet at the young person's home or the parish office, depending on the individual. It is important, especially for the younger ones, to meet with the parents to ensure that they have given consent for this process to begin. Normal safeguarding procedures need to be observed at all times.

In building a relationship with a young person it is important to ask questions which explore their faith experience and to identify their reasons for seeking initiation into the Catholic Church. Such questions might include:

- What are you seeking?
- What experience do you have with the Catholic Church? Have you been baptised in the Catholic faith or any other Christian tradition?
- Has anyone helped you to approach the Church?

It is also important to determine whether the parents are interested in being involved in this process.

Session plans

This resource includes adaptable session plans for each of the RCIA periods. The sessions are designed to help a catechist walk the journey with a young person.

The sessions encourage the catechist and young person to:

- Engage in prayer and quiet meditation;
- Share stories (witness to their faith);
- Focus on the word of God;
- Break open the word and explore the topic with discussion questions;
- Develop familiarity with prayer;
- Learn how to live a Christian life;
- Listen to music that is age-appropriate.

It is important to allow the young person to guide the discussion. The plans given in this resource can be the backbone of each session, however the Spirit often moves the discussion in other directions. Catechists need to be open to this.

Opportunities for personal reflection and consolidation

Activity Book for 9 to 12 years

Activity Books to accompany the session plans can be purchased at www.crossroadsrcia.org.

Each session provides an opportunity for the child to respond to the scripture reading and prayer in their Activity Book. This tool will help them record their faith journey.

Journals for 13 to 16 years

It is recommended that each young person be provided with a blank journal at the beginning of the Inquiry period.

Each session provides an opportunity to write reflections in their journal. This section is referred to in the session plans as “Living it out in the everyday”. Each session plan provides an opportunity to write reflections and to recall the disappointments and joys of the past week and to gain insights into these. It is also an opportunity for young people to record their faith journey and to reflect on the workings of God in their lives.

Discernment

Discernment is where we become aware of the presence of God. It is about recognising and responding to God’s invitation.

Discernment is an important part of this journey. It is important to check in regularly with the young person asking them:

- How is it going?
- How are you feeling?
- Is this making a difference in your life?

These questions can help the young person to discern God’s presence in their life and can provide an opportunity to address any concerns or questions that have arisen.