

The Importance of the Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word

The importance of the Sunday Mass for all Catholics:

The importance of celebrating the word of God in a communal way is emphasized strongly by the Catholic Church. This is seen both in the instructions for the R.C.I.A. directed toward those preparing to join the Church as well as in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Code of Canon Law directed toward those who are already full members of the Church. While personal prayer and scripture study and reflection certainly are important and encouraged, we cannot forget that we are a people of community. This is why we gather every week on Sunday to celebrate Jesus' life, teachings, death and resurrection, and partake of the gifts of His body and blood in the Eucharist.

The Sunday Mass is very important to the life of the Catholic Christian. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life. "Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church." [CCC 2177]

The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass." "The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day." [CCC 2180]

The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin. [CCC 2181]

Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"If because of lack of a sacred minister or for other grave cause participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is impossible, it is specially recommended that the faithful take part in the Liturgy of the Word if it is celebrated in the parish church or in another sacred place according to the prescriptions of the diocesan bishop, or engage in prayer for an appropriate amount of time personally or in a family or, as occasion offers, in groups of families." [CCC 2182]

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The importance of the Sunday Mass on the RCIA Journey:

In the same way, community is an important part of the formation of those preparing for Christian Initiation. While it is important for each catechumen and candidate to develop and foster his or her personal relationship with Christ through individual prayer, study, and reflection, it is equally important for each of you to pray with and become part of the community.

Part of the role of the RCIA Team is to assist you in understanding and learning to follow the guidelines that the Church has set out for her members. These guidelines are intended to help you to develop the best possible relationship with Christ and the Church and to most fully live out your Catholic Christian faith. Paragraph number 83 in the “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” (the official Church document outlining the process and Rites by which the Church initiates new members), states, “From the very beginning of the period of the catechumenate the catechumens should be taught to keep holy the Lord’s Day.”

The importance of the Sunday Reflection on the Word for Catechumens and Candidates:

While it is of the utmost importance for each catechumen and candidate to attend Mass and participate in the Liturgy of the Word each Sunday, we cannot diminish the importance of reflecting upon the Word of God with the smaller community of catechumens and candidates. This is why the RCIA Team provides an opportunity every Sunday for all in the RCIA process to attend the first part of the Mass and then be led by a team member in a group reflection on the readings for that day. It is very important for every catechumen and candidate to attend these sessions on a regular basis. The learning, sharing and reflection that takes place during the Sunday Reflection on the Word is intended to help the catechumens and candidates not only to learn about and reflect upon the scriptures they hear throughout the period of the catechumenate, but also to form their own habits and methods for reflecting upon the weekly scriptures after their initiation is complete.

For these reasons, we would like to encourage you now, during this time of formation, to begin making the Sunday Mass a priority in your personal lives. We do understand that due to personal circumstances, work schedules, travel, or other reasons, it will not always be possible for you to attend the particular Mass when the reflection on the Word takes place. However, *it is still very important that you attend Mass every Sunday and make some attempt to reflect on the Sunday readings with a sponsor or other appropriate person.* If you are unable to attend the designated Mass and Sunday reflection on the Word for the Catechumens and Candidates, we ask that you attend Mass at another time that you are able.

In this handout, you will find information that will be useful to you in finding other Mass options, both locally and out of the area. We ask that, if possible, you spend some time discussing the Sunday scripture readings with your sponsor or another appropriate person (e.g., Catholic family member or friend). Finally, whenever you are unable to attend the designated Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word with the rest of the RCIA Catechumens and Candidates, we ask that you take the time to fill out the attached reflection page. This will help us to see that you are making the commitment to attend Sunday Mass regularly as part of your formation, and that you took time to reflect on the Scripture readings. If you had any questions about anything in the readings and would like a team member to follow up with you to explain anything, please indicate this on the form so that we can do so. You may turn these in at the evening RCIA session. Additional copies of the forms will be available each week if you need more copies. If you know ahead of time that you will be attending a different Mass and would like some materials to assist you in your personal reflections on the readings, please ask the RCIA Coordinator.

The Importance of the Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word

Why should I make a firm commitment to Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word?

There are a number of reasons why catechumens and candidates need to be committed to attending Mass at the scheduled time and participating in the Sunday Reflection on the Word. The first is the most important reason. The other two, while not of the foremost importance, are worth making mention.

1. *The Church is a Community. We Celebrate as a Community. The RCIA is a Community-based Faith Formation.* This document speaks to the importance of community in prayer, worship, and the celebration of the Word of God in the eyes of the Church. This is the truest and most important reason for participation in the Sunday Reflection on the Word. We hope this reason will be written in your heart as part of your more complete understanding of the Church and its relationship to Christ. It is our hope that in reading this information and reflecting upon it, you will come to understand your participation in the Sunday Reflection on the Word not as an obligation to the RCIA process or to the RCIA team, but an obligation to Christ and to yourself as his follower. You owe it to yourself to be fed and nourished by his Word in this special way during your formation and preparation for the sacraments of initiation, and you owe it to Christ to have the fullest possible understanding of his Word when you say yes to him in those sacraments. And you owe it to Christ and to yourself to continue in that commitment throughout your life as a Catholic Christian after your initiation is complete. The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist (and the Sunday reflection on the Word for the catechumens and candidates) should be viewed not as a burden, but as a blessing; not as an obligation, but as a privilege.
2. *Witness to the Community* The catechumens and candidates play a role as witnesses to the rest of the community. The parish community sees you coming of your own desire as adults to seek out the Catholic faith and committing to participation in the process to become members of the faith community. This is an affirmation of their own faith and an inspiration to them. If you do not attend Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word, this is a visible sign which may be interpreted by the community as saying that this is not a matter of high importance.
3. *Common Courtesy* A member of the RCIA team has taken the time to prepare ahead of time and be there to lead the Sunday reflection on the Word session. That person normally will attend mass twice on that day so that he or she can receive the Eucharist at another mass. It is a matter of courtesy to be present to participate, since they have given up their time for you.

The Importance of the Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word

Finding a Mass Time Locally or when Traveling:

[Insert here the Sunday Mass schedule for your parish](#)

If none of these times fits your schedule on a particular weekend, you may also attend a Mass at any other local Catholic parish. Mass Times for Churches in our Diocese can be found on the Diocesan web site at www.covingtondiocese.org. On the home page, scroll down to the “News and Information” box on the right-hand side and click on “Parish Mass Schedule”. This is updated once a year and published in the Diocesan newspaper, *The Messenger*.

If you are traveling out of the area over a weekend and need assistance finding a Catholic Church / Mass times in the area where you will be staying, you can go to www.masstimes.org and click on “Enter Main Page”. This site allows you to find a Catholic Church based on zip code, city and state, or other criteria, and will provide you with the Mass times for the Churches, along with other information such as address, phone number and directions.

If you are in a remote area where a Catholic Church is not readily available, or if you are ill or for some other serious reason cannot attend Mass at all on a given Sunday, it is still advised that you spend some time reading the scriptures for that particular Sunday and spend some time in prayer and reflection (as a group, if possible, if you are with other Catholics). The Sunday readings for each lectionary cycle can be found listed in the back of the New American Bible which you received at your Rite of Acceptance / Welcoming. There is also a chart to show which liturgical cycle (A, B, or C) to use, based on the calendar year. Please see a team member if you need assistance in using this information. Readings can also be found on the US Conference of Catholic Bishops web site: www.usccb.org by clicking on “Readings” in the bar at the top of the page and then choose the correct Sunday date on the clickable calendar provided.

Personal Reflection on Sunday Liturgy of the Word – Catechumens and Candidates

Name: _____

Date: _____

Church Attended: _____

Mass Time: _____

Celebrant: _____

This is what stood out for me in the readings and why:

One way I might put the message of these scriptures into action in my life is:

Questions I had about the readings this week:

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Catechumenate Curriculum Outline
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Note: Sessions are intended for the entire group of participants after celebrating the Rite of Acceptance / Rite of Welcome.		Subtopics	US Catechism for Adults Suggested Reading / Reference	Other Resources for this Topic (See bottom of page for general resources)
	TOPIC Objective			
C01	CREATION AND ORIGINAL SIN <i>Understanding that God created humans in His image, yet gave us the gift of free will</i>	Creation Beings (Angels vs. humans) Free Will (Fall of angels / angels & demons) Original Sin (Fall of humans) Sin / Concupiscence	Ch 6	
C02	TRINITY / GOD THE FATHER <i>Understanding of God as imminent and transcendent</i>	Introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity Discussion of God the Father • as the first person of the Trinity • as our Father Images of God the Father from Scripture	Ch 5	
C03	INCARNATION / GOD THE SON <i>Understanding of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity and True God / True Man</i>	The Incarnation as part of God's saving plan after the fall (salvation history) Jesus as: • Second person of the Trinity • Word made flesh • True God / True Man (Divinity and humanity of Christ) • Fulfillment of the Old Testament • Priest, Prophet, King (Christ the King) • Redeemer • The Good Shepherd • Teacher / Messiah	Ch 7	Catholic Update: "The Four Faces of Jesus" (C0513)
C04	SALVATION / REDEMPTION BY THE CROSS <i>Understanding of what Christ did for us on the Cross</i>	Christ's Obedience to the Cross Redemption / Salvation Our participation in the saving work of Christ	Ch 8	

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TOPIC <i>Objective</i>				
C05 HOLY SPIRIT <i>Understanding of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity and as the one who sanctifies us</i>		Holy Spirit as third person of Trinity Holy Spirit as a gift from Christ Scriptural images of the Holy Spirit Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost	Ch 9	Holy Spirit Chaplet available at no cost from Holy Spirit Center in Cincinnati
C06 MORNING OF REFLECTION ON PRAYER <i>Understanding of how and why we pray</i>		Discussion and experiences of various forms and types of prayer	Ch 35 & 36	
C07 ETHERNAL DESTINY <i>Understanding of our eternal destiny in light of our relationship with God</i>		Final Judgement (Individual /General Judgement) Heaven / Hell / Purgatory Communion of Saints Second Coming	Ch 13	
C08 CHURCH <i>Understanding of the Church as a community established by Christ</i>		Four Marks of the Church Church as the Body of Christ / People of God Teaching Authority of the Church (Magisterium) Explanation of Church Councils / Examples Apostolic Succession Hierarchy History / Evolution (Splits, schisms, Protestant Reformation)	Ch 10 & 11	
C09 PASHCAL MYSTERY / LITURGICAL YEAR <i>Understanding of how our liturgical celebrations reflect the Paschal Mystery</i>		Paschal Mystery Liturgical Calendar Lectionary / Cycles	Ch 14	Liturgical Calendars from Liturgy Training Publications

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TOPIC <i>Objective</i>				
C10 INTRODUCTION TO SACRAMENTS / SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM <i>Understanding Baptism as giving us new life in Christ and as initiation into the Church community</i>		What is a sacrament? Introduce the seven sacraments and how they are grouped (initiation, healing, in service of communion) Sacrament of Baptism (rite, symbols) Baptism gives us new life Baptism makes us members of the Church	Ch 15	
C11 SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION <i>Understanding Confirmation as the completion of baptismal grace and necessary to complete initiation into the full communion of the Church</i>		Confirmation as the completion of baptismal grace Sacrament of Confirmation (rite, symbols) Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit	Ch 16	
C12 EUCCHARIST (1) <i>Understanding the Eucharist as the sacrificial gift of Christ to the Church</i>		Sacrificial nature of the Eucharist / Paschal Mystery Last Supper / Institution of the Eucharist by Christ / Christ's gift of self Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (why we genuflect to tabernacle)	Ch 17	
C13 EUCCHARIST (2) <i>Understanding the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life</i>		Walk-through of Liturgy of the Eucharist (mass prayers) Receiving the Body of Christ and becoming the Body of Christ in the Eucharist Living out the Eucharist in our daily lives <i>Reception of the sacrament at Mass ("mechanics" of receiving the Body & Blood) is covered at Lenten retreat</i>	Ch 17	

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TOPIC Objective				
C14 RECONCILIATION <i>Understanding of God's mercy and the grace of the sacrament of Reconciliation</i>	God's Mercy Origin of the sacrament (from scripture) Grace offered through the sacrament Mortal vs. venial sins Forms of Sacrament (individual, communal, gen. absolution) Reception of Sacrament (examination of conscience, rite, penance)	Ch 18	Going to Confession Pamphlet from Our Sunday Visitor	
C15 ANOINTING OF THE SICK <i>Understanding the role of suffering in the Christian life and the healing presence of Christ in the sacrament</i>	Role of sickness and suffering in Christian life Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick (rite, symbols, meaning) Graces received and spiritual / physical healing offered	Ch 19		
C16 HOLY ORDERS <i>Understanding the ordained priesthood and other religious vocations</i>	Ordained Priesthood vs. priesthood of the people through baptism Sacrament of Holy Orders (rite, symbols, levels of ordination - deacon, priest, bishop) Hierarchy of ordained ministry (Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons + cardinals, etc & role of each) Diocesan Priests vs. Religious Order Priests Consecrated life (brothers / sisters)	Ch 20		

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TOPIC Objective				
C17 MARRIAGE & HUMAN SEXUALITY <i>Understanding sacramental marriage within God's plan for human sexuality</i>		Brief introduction to Theology of the Body Meaning of sacramental marriage in God's plan Sacrament of Marriage (rite, symbols, ministers of sacrament) Marriage as a covenant	Ch 21	Theology of the Body
C18 MORALITY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY <i>Understanding how to live out our sexuality within God's plan</i>		Chastity Co-Habitation Contraception / NFP Reproductive Technologies Marital fidelity Divorce / Annulment Same Sex Attraction	Ch 21 & 30	Theology of the Body, pamphlets are available on individual topics from <i>Our Sunday Visitor</i> and other publishers
C19 MARY <i>Understanding of Mary's role as Mother of God, model of faith, and intercessor</i>		Immaculate Conception Virgin Mother Mother of God Mary's role in salvation history Assumption / Mary as Queen of Heaven Mary as intercessor	Ch 12	

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TOPIC <i>Objective</i>				
C20 <i>Understanding how signs, symbols and devotions direct us to Christ</i>	SACRAMENTALS AND POPULAR DEVOTIONS <i>Understanding how signs, symbols and devotions direct us to Christ</i>	Eucharistic Adoration Rosary Holy water, incense, candles Medals, icons, statues, pictures Stations of the Cross Novenas Divine Mercy Chaplet	Ch 22	Rosary Pamphlet Holy water bottles Prayer cards Catholic Update on Sacramentals (C0213B)
C21 <i>Understanding our social responsibility as Christians</i>	SOCIAL JUSTICE <i>Understanding our social responsibility as Christians</i>	Life and dignity of the human person Call to family, community and participation Rights and responsibilities Option for the Poor and Vulnerable Dignity of work and rights of the workers Solidarity Care for the environment	Ch 24 & 31	
C22 <i>Understanding our use of God's gifts</i>	STEWARDSHIP <i>Understanding our use of God's gifts</i>	Everything is a gift from God Sharing our gifts of time, talent, and treasure Stewardship of the Earth Stewardship within the Church	Ch 24 & 31	
C23 <i>First-hand exposure to Social Justice and Stewardship in action in our community</i>	ADULT INSIGHT DAY <i>First-hand exposure to Social Justice and Stewardship in action in our community</i>	Insight Day sponsored by Catholic Charities including visits to various ministries in Newport and Covington. <i>This will take place on a Saturday morning in close proximity to the presentation of lessons 24 and 25 on Social Justice and Stewardship.</i>	n/a	

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TOPIC Objective				
C24 <i>LENTEN RETREAT</i> <i>Final spiritual preparation for reception of the Easter Sacraments</i>		Reflection on the Sacraments of Initiation Reflection on the personal journey to the sacraments <i>This will take place on a Saturday morning during Lent and may also include preparation for a Scrutiny Rite</i>	n/a	
C25 LOVE OF GOD <i>Understanding our covenant relationship with God</i>		God's love for us and our response Discussion of the first 3 commandments	Ch 25,26,27	
C26 CHRISTIAN MORALITY I <i>Understanding Christian Morality</i>		What is morality? Human dignity & Community What makes an act moral? What is Virtue? Cardinal & Theological Virtues Beatitudes	Ch 23 Ch 28 - 34	
C27 CHRISTIAN MORALITY II <i>Understanding Christian Morality</i>		What is Sin? Relational vs. Legal Model Mortal and Venial Sin Social sin What is Conscience? Forming one's conscience	Ch 23 Ch 28 - 34	

Liturgical Catechesis

Liturgical catechesis follows the liturgical year as it presents the life of Christ in its cycle of seasons and feasts. Very often liturgical catechesis and Lectionary-based catechesis are understood as synonymous terms. This is not the case. Liturgical catechesis bases itself on the liturgy, the sacraments, the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year as well as the biblical readings used in these celebrations as the origins of catechetical topics. The entire mystery of Christ is made present and manifested to us in the liturgy of the Church. Dogma is proclaimed and celebrated within the liturgy before the very eyes of and in the Christian assemble. Hence the methodology of liturgical catechesis makes for a complete exposition of the faith while situating and directing the participant in a seamless tapestry – liturgy of the Word and its inherent themes, preaching drawn from those themes, the essential symbols of the Church and Christian life – presenting a complete doctrinal expose that is logically explored an more easily ingested, owned and committed to one’s heart, mind and soul because of the continual connection that is made between the doctrine and the return to it every time that liturgy is celebrated throughout life. For example, every time the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated, former catechumens nurtured in a liturgical catechesis methodology will remember not only Jesus’ baptism, but everything they learned about baptism that they explored on that feast day since both were so integrally intertwined. Catechesis that flows from the liturgical year and the celebration of Sunday within that yearly cycle is a very comprehensive presentation of and a more effective formation in the truths of our faith.

Presented below are possible catechetical themes during the liturgical year utilizing the methodology of liturgical catechesis. However, the doctrinal themes suggested here are just that, suggestions, because within every liturgy there is the potential to explore a myriad of doctrinal themes. This is not an exhaustive list.

Liturgical Day / Season	Possible Catechetical Topics
Advent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eschatology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death • Judgment • Heaven • Hell • Purgatory 2. The coming of Christ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incarnation • The Second Coming (Parousia) 3. Prayer 4. The Liturgical Year / Calendar
Immaculate Conception	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christ saves us from our sins 2. Mary’s unique experience of salvation 3. Christ saves us from our sins through the Sacraments and the Sacrament of Penance in particular
Fourth Sunday of Advent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Christian message unfolds 2. The Annunciation 3. The coming of the Son of God in time

Liturgical Catechesis

Liturgical Day / Season	Possible Catechetical Topics
Christmas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Incarnation 2. Salvation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness of sins • Divine life dispensed through the sacraments
Holy Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christ's sanctifying the everyday 2. The fourth commandment 3. The family as a place for the manifestation of God
Mary, Mother of God	Mary's unique role in salvation history as the mother of Jesus Christ who is both human and divine
Epiphany	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God's universal offer of salvation 2. Where can we encounter God? 3. Implications of the Incarnation
Baptism of the Lord	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christ the new Adam 2. The Sacrament of Baptism
Ordinary Time between the Baptism of the Lord and Ash Wednesday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Faith 2. The Kingdom of God 3. Discipleship 4. Call of the Apostles and hierarchical structure of the Church 5. Sacrament of Holy Orders 6. Prayer
Ash Wednesday	Twofold meaning of Lent: Baptismal and Penitential
Lent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Morality 2. Natural Law 3. The Decalogue 4. Sacrament of Penance 5. Discipleship
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christian view of suffering 2. Jesus as the Messiah
Holy Thursday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Eucharist as a sacrifice and a memorial meal 2. Holy Orders / Institution of the priesthood
Good Friday	The Paschal Mystery
Holy Saturday	The mystery of Salvation
Easter Sunday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Paschal Mystery 2. Resurrection 3. Paradigm of the Paschal Mystery in the Christian's life
Divine Mercy Sunday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forgiveness and Reconciliation 2. Sacramentals and devotions

Liturgical Catechesis

Liturgical Day / Season	Possible Catechetical Topics
	3. Indulgences
Easter Season	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Eucharist 2. Presence of Christ in the Church and the Sacraments
Ascension of the Lord	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mystical Body of Christ 2. Where the head has gone the body must follow
Pentecost	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Holy Spirit 2. The birth of the Church 3. Confirmation
Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eucharist 2. Eucharistic Adoration 3. Viaticum
Trinity Sunday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mystery of the Triune God 2. Humanity created for communion in the image of the Triune God
Ordinary Time from Trinity Sunday to the First Sunday of Advent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Miracles 2. Marriage and Theology of the Body 3. Anointing of the Sick 4. Prayer 5. Catholic Social Teaching 6. Ecumenism 7. Sacraments as encounters with Christ
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Salvation comes through Christ 2. Resurrection of the body 3. The sanctity of the body 4. Mary's unique Grace given to her by God
All Saints Day	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communion of Saints 2. Canonization 3. Universal Call to Holiness 4. Eschatology
All Souls Day	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communion of Saints 2. Purgatory 3. Prayer for the dead 4. Eschatology

REFLECTIONS ON THE YEAR-ROUND CATECHUMENATE

A Message to the RCIA Teams of the Diocese of Lansing
from the
Christian Initiation Advisory Committee



Introduction

This paper is the fruit of several discussions held among veteran RCIA directors in the Diocese of Lansing from May through November of 2005. They were called together by the Christian Initiation Advisory Committee for the Diocese of Lansing, which wanted to study the effectiveness of establishing a year-round catechumenate in parishes. Three major realities gave impetus to these conversations.

First, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults calls for such a year-round process. “The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful...suited to the spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God’s grace” (RCIA, 4-5). It is a journey made up of four distinct periods and marked by the celebration of several rites. The pre-catechumenate period, or period of inquiry, is of great importance and should not be omitted (RCIA 36). Essentially, the initiation process balances two ideals: the Church’s evangelical desire to hand on the tradition it has received and each inquirer’s desire to be formed in that faith tradition.

Second, inquirers approach Catholic faith communities throughout the year, whenever the Spirit prompts them. This is not limited to the academic year nor to a nine-month model of catechesis.

Finally, as initiating communities, we are called to accompany each inquirer on a journey of faith which works in God’s time and with God’s grace.

The conversations of the subcommittee surfaced a number of major concerns regarding a year-round catechumenate:

- 1) What is the current model of Christian initiation in most parishes of the diocese?
- 2) What does a year-round catechumenate look like?
- 3) How long should catechumens be in formation?
- 4) How will the year-round catechumenate model better serve those to be initiated?
- 5) When should catechumens be initiated?
- 6) How will an RCIA director coordinate an on-going process?
- 7) How can a parish begin to transition to this model?

A Common Parish Scenario

Perhaps the following scenario is typical in your parish.

The RCIA “class” began in September, since the staff follows approximately the same schedule as the religious education program. Three unbaptized inquirers were present for the first session along with two baptized persons from the Protestant tradition. The sessions met each week for four weeks.

Then, another unbaptized inquirer presented herself. The RCIA director worked with this new inquirer in one-on-one sessions to help her “catch up” with the other group. The parish celebrated the combined Rite of Acceptance/Rite of Welcome with this initial group in late October in an attempt to make the catechumenate period as long as possible in order to “fit in” all the topics which had been planned.

Two weeks after the combined Rite of Acceptance/Welcome, two more people called the parish. Again the RCIA director did one-on-one sessions in order to catch them up to the catechumens and candidates. They were also placed into the Thursday night catechumenate sessions. A couple of weeks later, yet another inquirer was added to the

catechumenate in the same catch-up manner. A second combined Rite of Acceptance/Rite of Welcome was scheduled for a Sunday in Advent. During the middle of November another person called the parish with interest in becoming Catholic. Others called after Christmas to “register for classes.”

Some Pastoral Issues

Because many parishes attempt to adhere to the school year model generally established for religious education within parishes, the whole RCIA process is often crowded into a September-June schedule. Within nine months, some RCIA directors attempt to accomplish all four phases of the RCIA process (inquiry, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment, and mystagogy). The process then becomes only another program. By doing this, the director will always be faced with a type of “catch-up” formation which forces a late-enrolling inquirer into doubling up on sessions in order to be “in sync” with the rest of the “class.” Worse yet, the inquirer will not be allowed the careful discernment which the Rite allows and demands.

There are competing issues. On the one hand, there is a practical mind set that the Christian initiation process should be planned for the academic calendar year like the religious education program. It generally follows that all candidates must be initiated at the Easter Vigil. On the other hand, each new inquirer needs to be interviewed and welcomed into the RCIA process without having to wait for a new group to form or for the next scheduled process to begin.

The constant flow of new inquirers into a parish RCIA process is a blessing to our Church. How we respond to each individual and the pastoral needs of each person is actually the starting point for developing a year-round catechumenate.

The Initial Interview

The starting point of formation is based upon the very important initial interview. At this time, the spiritual, practical, and formational needs of each inquirer are assessed. 1) What is the baptismal status of the inquirer? 2) What are the reasons he/she is inquiring about the Catholic faith? 3) Are there any marriage or annulment issues which might need to be addressed? 4) What is the inquirer’s present understanding of God? 5) Is there support or objection in the rest of the family?

The Period of Inquiry or the Pre-catechumenate Period

Since inquirers present themselves at many different times during the year, one of the initial goals of beginning a year-round catechumenate might be to establish more than one on-going inquiry groups. What is paramount is that no one is ever asked to “wait” for a more convenient time to begin this period.

The inquirers will undoubtedly have many questions about our Church and its practices. Inquiry sessions are based on those questions, not on a preconceived topical format which is more suitable to an educational model. These sessions are informal – a well-catechized couple might be utilized for one-on-one discussions in a home setting or sessions could be led by a welcoming, trained catechist. The sessions could be held every week to address the needs of the inquirers as they arise.

The goal of the pre-catechumenate is to establish initial faith (cf. RCIA 36, 37). Concerned, pastoral care for individual inquirers is necessary. It is imperative that each inquirer enters the next phase of RCIA, the catechumenate, only when he is ready. Readiness is determined by conducting a second interview with each inquirer. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults explains how to identify this readiness:

The prerequisite for making this first step [into the Order of Catechumens] is that the beginnings of the

spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates. Thus there must be evidence of the first faith that was conceived during the period of evangelization and the pre-catechumenate and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. Consequently, there must also be evidence of the first stirring of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community. The candidates should also be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical rite of acceptance” (RCIA 42).

The Catechumenate Period

By providing on-going inquiry groups, each inquirer has the opportunity to celebrate the Rite of Acceptance when he is ready to blend into a year-round catechumenal group, and to experience, in an entire liturgical year, the annual exploration of the many facets of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

This model allows for weekly “catechesis in harmony with the liturgical year”(RCIA 75.1). This is contrary to the idea of conducting topical sessions which fit neatly into an academic model. Paragraph 6 of the *National Statutes for the Catechumenate* states the ideal:

The period of catechumenate, beginning at acceptance into the order of catechumens and including both the catechumenate proper and the period of purification and enlightenment after election or enrollment of names, should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation. Ordinarily 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 (NSC 6).

An inquirer can enter a year-round catechumenate conducted with lectionary-based sessions easily and logically at any time of the year. In contrast, if topical sessions are the norm it is often difficult for an entering inquirer to catch up to the rest of the class, since it is often the case that one class builds upon another.

The RCIA Director

With the exception of two or three parishes in the Diocese of Lansing, RCIA is not a full-time ministry. The director’s time is generally limited — either because the person is part-time, or because the full-time person has other major responsibilities. In addition, some RCIA directors in the diocese are volunteers. RCIA Directors can never run a year-round catechumenate alone, nor should they.

The RCIA Team

Directors need to develop an RCIA team that is formed in the vision of the RCIA. Several members should be credentialed for catechetical ministry. Only with a dedicated team of ministers and volunteers can multiple or simultaneous sessions be established to begin a year-round catechumenate.

Some of these dedicated folks may be trained to address the special needs of inquirers. Others can be trained in mystagogical techniques and in the special, more sophisticated needs of the neophytes.

A common practice is to run all or most of a parish’s Christian initiation activity at the same time. But often, the process of formation does not so easily fit into this mold. While it is true that inquiry sessions and the catechumenate could run on the same evening, it must be noted that the needs of inquirers and catechumens/candidates are entirely different. Therefore sessions need to be separate from one another.

Parallel sessions might be a way for all participants to benefit from the interaction of those who are learning about our faith. All the people might interact at a common snack time to get to know one another. The two parallel sessions may occasionally meet for a presentation of the Sunday scriptures, and then break into their separate groups for

discussion. However, the inquiry sessions should always be fashioned from the initial faith questions of the inquirers. Again, inquirers move into the catechumenate sessions only when they are ready.

The Initiating Community

RCIA does not involve just the director and the team. We make disciples one at a time, and the entire initiating community is involved in the process. Making disciples simply means bearing faithful witness to the Christian way of life and helping inquirers understand the paschal mystery. If, as a community of believers, we are doing that, the RCIA process can't help but be successful.

The goal of the initiation process is simply to follow Jesus' command to "go and make disciples." Often, our parish communities succumb to secular convictions that "bigger is better." We get caught up in the numbers game where "how many new inquirers do you have" seems more important than "How are we as a faith community spreading the Good News of Christ?"

If our inquirers see in each of us a faith-filled Catholic Christian — in our RCIA sessions, in our participation in the sacramental life of the Church, by our invitation to parish functions, by speaking with conviction in the workplace — these inquirers will, no doubt, desire membership in our faith community.

Some may not be ready to make that commitment. Have we failed? Of course not! The time spent telling the Good News to inquirers is God's time, and is never in vain. We have presented our 2,000 year old faith to them and have invited them to know the living God and to discern if the Catholic faith is where they might find him.

Inviting the Inquirer

There is an emerging feeling that parishes do not do the right kind of "marketing" for the RCIA. When the parish truly becomes the initiating community, one does not require an advertising campaign. Inquirers best respond to a personal invitation. Campaigns to attract new parishioners become unnecessary; indeed, the idea that everyone is "finished at Easter" and "new sessions begin only in the Fall" does damage to our efforts to evangelize at all times.

Forming on-going inquiry sessions changes the spirit of evangelizing that must permeate our lives and the type of "advertising" we do. With sessions which are designed for each inquirer, called in God's time, we allow inquirers to understand that when they are ready, we as an initiating community are ready.

Whom should you invite? Check your parish records — which spouses of currently practicing parishioners might be invited to learn what the Catholic faith might offer them? Would a simple ad in the local newspaper or parish bulletin every two or three months inviting people to "come and see" be beneficial?

What inspires people to ask about our faith? Ask any recent neophyte and the answer will probably include a personal invitation from a spouse or friend, an experience of gracious hospitality, a well-prepared Sunday liturgy, a moving funeral Mass, or a joyful wedding celebration. Sometimes without knowing it, we are evangelizing at funerals, weddings, picnics, discussion groups, or to non-Catholic families enrolled in our schools. At all times, our very lives bear witness to the faith we proclaim.

Beginning a Year-Round Catechumenate: Assessment and Planning

Perhaps building a year-round catechumenate needs to evolve over a three-to-five-year period. The first step would be to obtain leadership support from your pastor or pastoral coordinator. If there is currently no RCIA team, one would need to be trained. Some of these team members would be trained in specific areas, for example those issues relevant to the period of inquiry. A willing hand is not enough. Anything can come up in an inquiry session, and some training in canonical issues is essential.

Gather the parish staff and RCIA team to discuss the following questions.

1) Become acquainted with the Rite. What does it say about the initiation of adults?

Is it a “a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful”(RCIA 4)?

Is it “suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God’s grace” (5)?

2) Assess what is contrary to the Rite in your current process and celebration of the rites.

Does your schedule tend to restrain the necessary discernment?

When are the rites celebrated?

What rites are celebrated?

How often do you celebrate the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens?

How often do you celebrate the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates?

How long is your catechumenal period?

3) Distinguish carefully among those who are inquiring.

Are they unbaptized catechumens?

Are they baptized into another Christian denomination? Are they candidates for reception into full communion with the Catholic Church?

Are they baptized, but uncatechized Catholics?

What rites are celebrated with each?

What rites are never celebrated with those already baptized?

4) Examine how your parish nurtures the inquirer.

How are inquirers invited to “come and see?”

Are initial interviews of each inquirer being conducted?

How are inquirers placed into the first phase of the RCIA? Must they wait?

Are inquirers being interviewed again before the Rite of Acceptance/Rite of Welcome?

5) How would you change your parish process? What would you do differently this year? Next year?

How can the parish begin to transition to a year-round catechumenate?

Train a functional RCIA team?

Add additional inquiry sessions; train more leaders for inquiry sessions?

Can you celebrate more than one Rite of Acceptance/Rite of Welcome during the year?

Can you begin to develop a year-round catechumenate utilizing lectionary-based catechesis as opposed to topical-based catechesis; will it run from Easter to Easter?

6) How do you provide for the initial and ongoing formation of clergy, directors, catechists, and team members?

Do you attend diocesan workshops?

Have you participated in a “Beginnings and Beyond” experience?

7) When do you initiate catechumens?

Will the Church “lose” prospective members if they cannot be initiated at the next Easter Vigil?

At what other times might they be initiated?

8) How often is the parish receiving candidates into full communion?

How do you discern their readiness?

How do you provide “suitable catechesis?”

Are the candidates interviewed again before being initiated?

9) Does our parish respect the period of mystagogy?

How do we continue to form and mentor our neophytes?

Do we have a mystagogy team?

How do we develop a period of mystagogy which celebrates the new sacramental life of the neophytes, provides for continued study, and incorporates them more fully into the community of faith (RCIA 244-251)?

10) Do we interview often and well?

Who conducts these interviews?

When are they done? Before the Rite of Acceptance/Welcome? Before the Rite of Election? At any other times?

11) Is the initiating community itself well formed in celebrating the rites?

How do we provide catechesis to our assemblies?

Do we create worship aids?

Are our rites celebrated fully?

12) If we only have a small group of inquirers in our parish, how do we collaborate with other parishes?

Can we conduct common inquiry sessions?

Can we conduct common catechumenate sessions?

Should we consider common retreats before the rites?

Do we participate in a common Easter retreat with the vicariate or with several other parishes?

13) How do we select and train our sponsors and godparents?

How are each invited?

What resources are available?

Have they attended diocesan workshops?

Have they attended nearby institutes

14) How do we keep in touch?

Does the telephone number and e-mail address of the parish RCIA director appear on the parish web site and in the parish bulletin? (This will provide inquirers with a way to approach the parish when they are ready to do so.)

Do we use weekly or bi-weekly e-mails to maintain better contact with inquirers, catechumens/candidates and neophytes?

Does the team meet regularly with the pastor?

In the Final Analysis. . .

It takes a lifetime to become a disciple of Christ and to appreciate the Catholic Tradition. The catechumenate was not designed to cram a lifetime of catechesis into one year and certainly not in seven months. The process of Christian initiation is intended to be strong experience of faith formation — not a class of information.

If one attempts to treat this faith journey as only a learning experience, the neophyte will be armed with knowledge, but little else. If, however, the inquirer has been invited to experience the love of Christ, if the catechumen has been formed by a community of faith and by its liturgies, and if the neophyte has richly experienced the sacraments of the Church, then, with the grace of God, faith will bloom for a lifetime.

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