

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

IX. Catechumenate

- A.** After the celebration of the rite of acceptance, the inquirers, who are now called catechumens, enter the period of the catechumenate, which is to be ongoing. If, due to limited resources, the baptized candidates seeking full communion are included in the catechumenate, their baptismal status is to be noted and diligently respected. The catechumenate period provides “suitable pastoral formation and guidance aimed at training the catechumens in the Christian life. This is achieved in four ways.” (RCIA, no. 75)
1. A suitable catechesis;
 2. Formation in the Christian life by word and example and the practice thereof by themselves;
 3. Celebration of suitable liturgical rites, most especially celebrations of the Word of God, and the dismissals (also sometimes known as the breaking open of the Word) unless impossible;
 4. By the witness of their lives and the profession of the faith they are to become involved in the apostolic and evangelical work of the Church.
- B. Pastoral Aspect** — The goal of the catechumenate is the conversion of the catechumens to the Christian life.
1. “The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God” (RCIA, no. 76) and the catechumen’s cooperation with that grace. The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong. Therefore its length cannot be set *a priori* and is as long as necessary, several years if need be. (RCIA, no. 76) Care needs to be exercised in this matter lest they lose heart in the arduous journey. (See section II.B. of this manual.) Catechumens and candidates should be clearly embraced and assured that they are already connected to the Church.
 - a) Catechumens are linked to the Church in a special way and are joined to the Church, which already cherishes them as her own. (CIC, c. 206, §1) As members of the order of catechumens, they have the right to a Christian burial (CIC, c. 1183) and may participate in activities proper to Christians, but not those exclusive to the baptized (CIC, c. 206, §2).

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- b) Candidates, by virtue of their valid Christian Baptism, are already one with the Church and seek full communion with her.
2. The catechumens and candidates should already have sponsors who accompanied them at the rite of acceptance / rite of welcome. Catechumens should be encouraged to choose godparents during this period who will give testimony at the rite of sending / rite of election. (RCIA, no. 80) The godparent may be the same person as their sponsor or may be a different person. (See section V.A.3. of this manual.)
3. The parish RCIA team, godparents, and sponsors are the primary examples and support in teaching the catechumens the Catholic Christian way of life by:
 - a) Providing, at each session, experiences of various forms of prayer used in the Catholic tradition such as scriptural prayers, memorized prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, spontaneous prayers, meditation, charismatic prayer and others.
 - b) Witnessing to the faith by living good Catholic lives, sharing stories of God's work in their lives, and praying in hope with and for the catechumens.
 - c) Helping the catechumens recognize ways that God is at work in their lives and encouraging them to follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in their daily actions.
 - d) Modeling Christ's call to love one another by involving the catechumens in the life of the parish and inviting them to participate in charitable acts of service within the community.
4. The parish RCIA team and sponsors, along with the pastor, will work with the catechumens / candidates to discern their depth of conversion and readiness for their election to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. (See section X of this manual, "Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion", for more information.)

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- C. Catechetical Aspect** – The accompanying catechesis of the period of the catechumenate is to support the making of committed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Catechesis achieves this because it “is that particular form of the ministry of the Word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of the faith.” (GDC, no. 82) Since disciples devote “themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers,” (Acts 2:42) all catechesis offered during the catechumenate is to be “gradual and complete in coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the Word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.” (RCIA, no. 75.1)
1. “Catechesis . . . includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.” (*Catechesi tradendae (CT)*, no. 18) The catechesis during the catechumenate should present Catholic teaching so as to “enlighten faith, direct hearts toward God, foster participation in the liturgy, inspire apostolic activity, and nurture a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ.” (RCIA, no. 78) In developing a calendar of catechesis which aims to present the whole of the faith, catechists should strive as best as possible to have sessions arranged systematically and accommodated to the liturgical year. Catechists should present each topic in a systematic way. Catechists are to present the Truth as revealed by God to the Church. Catechists must use official Church teachings that come from the Magisterium of the Church. Solid Catholic sources and publishers are to be used — look for the *imprimatur* or *nihil obstat*.

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

2. All catechesis should be:
 - a) Centered on Christ: The heart of all genuine catechesis is the person of Jesus (CT, no. 5)
 - (1) “The primary and essential object of catechesis is. . . "the mystery of Christ.” (CT, no. 5)
 - (2) “. . . the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.” (CT, no. 5)
 - (3) “The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.” (CCC, no. 25)
 - (4) All that we teach comes from Christ through the Church. “It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God.” (John 6:45)
 - (a) Catechists are to be like John the Baptist:
 - (i) “The voice of one crying out in the desert, Make straight the way of the Lord.” (John 1:23)
 - (ii) “Behold, the Lamb of God.” (John 1:36)
 - (iii) “He must increase; I must decrease.” (John 3:30)
 - (5) “This catechesis leads . . . not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.” (RCIA, no. 75.1)

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- b) Driven by Scripture: Scripture itself instructs us: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17)
- c) Intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity of the Church (CT, no. 23 & NDC, no. 33)
 - (1) “The history of salvation, from the creation of the world to its redemption and eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ, is celebrated in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist.” (NDC, no. 33) This is why the Liturgy is “the privileged place for catechizing the People of God.” (CCC, no. 1074)
 - (a) Those participating in the catechumenate are to be drawn into the mystery that the liturgy and Sacraments celebrate and impart.
 - (b) The goal is for the participants in the catechumenate to appreciate, encounter, and embrace the presence of Christ in the Sacraments thereby developing a strong desire to participate in the Sacraments.
 - (c) The grace received through the reception of the Sacraments will drive and sustain their ongoing journey of discipleship.
 - (2) The Church instructs catechists to accommodate the catechumenate to the liturgical year (RCIA, no. 75.1) therefore, participants must experience many liturgical celebrations, most importantly the Sunday Mass, “for faith gathers the community for worship, and worship renews the faith of the community.” (NDC, no. 32)
 - (3) Catechists should emphasize the need and encourage the regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation, Confession) so that lifelong conversion will be assisted by the graces given in this sacrament.
 - (a) The catechumens will have their first experience of this sacrament after their Baptism.

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- (b) Candidates who have been validly baptized must celebrate this sacrament before they are received into full communion with the Church.
- (4) All sponsors and team members should be living witnesses to the sacramental life of the Church by their commitment to Sunday Mass attendance and frequent reception of the Sacraments.
- d) Clearly directed toward living morally
 - (1) There should be catechetical sessions addressing the topic of Catholic morality, including current cultural issues, and a complete, firm, and direct explanation of Church teaching regarding these issues (e.g., contraception, pre-marital sex and co-habitation, pornography, abortion, end-of-life issues, etc.) Catholic morality should be integrated into the context of other catechetical topics.
 - (2) Sponsors and team members should be carefully screened to ensure that they are living a moral life in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church and thus will be living witnesses to the Christian moral life.
 - (3) Catechesis should direct participants to the importance of the moral life. This may be a major point of conversion for some in their lives as they approach Christ and seek to follow Him fully.
 - (4) Pastoral care should be used to communicate to participants that, in our humanity, we may falter at times in the moral life; however, the mercy of God and the grace of the Sacrament of Penance are our recourse at these times.
- e) Directed to a life of prayer, helping the participants turn more readily to God. (RCIA, no. 75.2)

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- f) Associated with life experiences
 - (1) Catechesis should connect to the life experiences of the participants to anchor the faith in their very lives, thus making it concrete for each individual.
 - (2) Participants should have the opportunity to integrate the faith into their lives through their own questions.
 - (a) Catechists should allow time for questions at all sessions.
 - (b) Catechists should make themselves available for follow-up questions outside of the regular sessions.
 - (3) Catechesis ought to include personal witness from the lives of team members and sponsors in order to demonstrate the connection between faith and life.
 - (a) In sharing their own life stories, catechists must remember that there is a distinct line between teaching the truths and practices of the faith and giving personal witness. Both have a place in the RCIA process, but one needs to be sure to make the distinction.
 - (b) A catechist “will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ's teaching and the lessons of His life.” (CT, no. 6)
- g) Accommodated to the learning styles of the participants (e.g., visual, audio, kinetic (hands-on) learning styles).

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

3. There are two *primary* opportunities for catechesis during the catechumenate period:
 - a) Weekly catechetical sessions in which certified catechists appropriately acquaint the participants in the catechumenate with dogmas and precepts.
 - b) Dismissal catechesis – also referred to as Sunday reflection on the Word or breaking open the Word – in which an RCIA team member connects the Scriptures proclaimed at the Sunday liturgy to the faith of the Church, and the participants are afforded time to share the call of the Lord which they hear in the readings of the particular Sunday.

4. Participants in the catechumenate should, over time, begin to make the connection between the content of the dogmas and precepts of the Church, the Sacred Scriptures as presented in the lectionary cycles, and the liturgical prayer, celebrations, and seasons of the Church. This connection will, at times, be made directly by a catechist or team member as planned in advance. At other times, the connection may simply happen more spontaneously as the participants recognize the connection or as the discussion leads in a particular direction.
 - a) Other opportunities for catechesis can and should be used (e.g., an “Adult Insight Day” retreat provided by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Covington, adult faith formation opportunities provided by the Diocese or other neighboring parishes).
 - b) Suggested resources for catechesis can be found in Section XIV of this manual (Suggested Resources). Some samples of catechetical curriculum can be found in the appendix of this section.

D. Liturgical Aspect – From the very beginning of the catechumenate the participants are expected to participate in weekly Sunday Mass. (See “The Importance of the Sunday Mass and Reflection on the Word” in the Appendix of this section.) Liturgical rites specific to this period sanctify the participants, leading them “into the life of faith, worship, and charity belonging to the People of God.” (RCIA, no. 76) In these liturgical rites, the participants encounter Christ and are transformed by His grace. The rites, sacramentals, Catholic prayers and devotions, and retreat experiences are necessary for their conversion.

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

1. *Rites Belonging to the Period of the Catechumenate* – Within the period of the catechumenate, there are rites that should be celebrated, culminating in the rite of sending which closes this period.
 - a) The most frequently celebrated rite during the catechumenate is the celebrations of the Word of God: “first: celebrations held specifically for the participants; second, participation in the liturgy of the Word at the Sunday Mass; third, celebrations held in connection with catechetical instruction.” (RCIA, no. 81) A model for such celebrations can be found in the RCIA ritual book paragraph nos. 85-89. These celebrations as stated in RCIA, no. 82 have as their purpose:
 - (1) To implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving;
 - (2) To give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer;
 - (3) To explain to them the signs, celebrations, and seasons of the liturgy;
 - (4) To prepare them gradually to enter the worship of the assembly of the entire community.
 - b) Other rites during the catechumenate include minor exorcisms (RCIA, nos. 90-94), blessings (RCIA, nos. 95-97), anointing of the catechumens (RCIA, nos. 98-103), and the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election (RCIA, nos. 106-117) / Rite of Sending of the Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop and for the Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA, nos. 438-445). **Minor exorcisms, blessings (except “C” and “I”), and anointings are intended for catechumens only. They are not to be celebrated with candidates for it is demeaning to their status as members of the Christian faithful, which they have by virtue of their valid Christian Baptism.**
 - (1) Minor exorcisms may be celebrated any time during the catechumenate period to “draw the attention of the catechumens to the real nature of Christian life, the struggle between flesh and spirit, the importance of self-denial for reaching the blessedness of God’s kingdom, and the unending need for God’s help.” (RCIA, no. 90)

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- (2) Blessings of the catechumens are given any time during the catechumenate as a “sign of God’s love and the Church’s tender care.” (RCIA, no. 95) The blessings offer the catechumens the gifts of courage, joy, and peace as they continue their journey into the Church, even though they are not yet able to receive the graces of the Sacraments. Blessings “C” or “I” could be given to candidates.
- (3) “During the Period of the Catechumenate, a rite of anointing of the catechumens, through the use of the oil of catechumens, may be celebrated wherever this seems beneficial or desirable.” (RCIA, no. 99) The minister of this anointing is a priest or deacon. It is necessary that the catechumens understand the significance of this anointing which “symbolizes their need for God’s help and strength” (RCIA, no. 99) to continue undeterred in taking the next step of professing their faith and holding fast to it throughout their lives.
- (4) There are two different rites of sending: the rite of sending of catechumens for election (RCIA, nos. 106-117) and the rite of sending the candidates for recognition by the bishop and for the call to continuing conversion (RCIA, nos. 438-445). The different rites highlight the distinction between the unbaptized and the baptized. In a parish where there are both catechumens and candidates, these rites may be celebrated as a combined rite (RCIA, nos. 530-546). “In the catechesis of the community and in the celebration of these rites, care must be taken to maintain the distinction between the catechumens and the baptized candidates.” (RCIA, no. 506) In the Diocese of Covington the rite(s) of sending are traditionally celebrated in the parish on the first Sunday of Lent, followed later in the day by the celebration of the rite of election and call to continuing conversion at the Cathedral with the Bishop (covered in section X of this manual). If the rite of election takes place in the parish, the rite of sending is not used.

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- (a) Rite of Sending of Catechumens for Election:
 - (i) The rite is celebrated at a liturgy of the Word or at a Sunday Mass. It may be celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent or at a suitable time prior to the rite of election.
 - (ii) The readings for the first Sunday of Lent are most appropriate. The homily should help catechumens and the faithful to make the connection between the proclamation of the Word, the spiritual journey on which the catechumens and candidates have been traveling, and the rite of sending them for election. After the homily the catechumens are presented by a catechist or a pastoral minister closely related to their formation. The priest then invites the godparents, sponsors, assembly to give affirmation of the catechumens.
 - (iii) The presider, the deacon or a catechist, following the ritual book (RCIA, nos. 106-117), presents the catechumens to the assembly. The presider then recommends them to the bishop who will call them to the Easter Sacraments.
 - (iv) The catechumens are asked to sign the Book of the Elect using the enrollment of names (RCIA, no. 132), before the intercessions for them. This signing signifies their pledge to complete the RCIA process.
 - (v) Intercessory prayers over the catechumens follow and they **must be dismissed**.
- (b) Rite of Sending the Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop and for the Call to Continuing Conversion:

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
Catechumenate

- (i) The candidates are presented to the presider who addresses the assembly asking for their affirmation as well as that of the sponsors. He then addresses the candidates, reminding them that the community and their sponsors have spoken in their favor.
 - (ii) Intercessions for the candidates invite the community to keep them in prayer, followed by a blessing over the candidates.
 - (iii) If the Eucharist is to be celebrated, the candidates **may be dismissed**.
- 2. Sacramentals, Catholic prayers, and devotions should be introduced to the catechumens during this period to prepare them for living a life of prayer within the Catholic Church.
 - a) Sacramentals such as the Sign of the Cross before praying, blessing with holy water, Advent wreath prayers, ashes on Ash Wednesday, statues, relics, etc., should be accompanied by proper catechesis and connection to the Sacraments and the Church's liturgical calendar/year.
 - b) Teaching Catholic prayers and devotions such as the Liturgy of the Hours, Stations of the Cross, Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic Adoration, the rosary, prayers before and after meals, and other basic Catholic prayers will deepen the catechumens' identification with living a life of Catholic prayer in union with the universal Church, the Body of Christ.
- 3. Retreats for the catechumens can provide a more relaxed atmosphere for a mix of catechetical instruction, instruction on prayer, and experiences of different forms of prayer. Retreats offer a time for more private reflection and discernment of God's call in their journey of faith.