

Diocese of Covington
RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual
The Parish RCIA Team

II. The Parish RCIA Team

A. The Church instructs that the RCIA process should involve the **whole community**: “The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place *within the community of the faithful*. . . .the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.” (RCIA, no. 4, emphasis added) There should be involvement from the faithful in many aspects of the RCIA process. The catechumens should have an opportunity to meet a variety of people from the parish community who will offer the witness of their Christian lives. Some members of the community should be called to serve on the parish RCIA team, whose role is to assist the pastor and RCIA leader in welcoming, forming, and praying for the catechumens to lead them to become members of the Body of Christ.

B. Discernment and invitation of potential team members

1. Pastors come to know their parishioners through their attendance at weekly Sunday Mass, their participation in parish ministries, and their presence at other various parish worship services. These connections with parishioners are opportunities for pastors to discern potential RCIA team members. Team members should be:
 - a) fully initiated, active, practicing Catholics who are participating in the sacramental life of the Church.
 - b) Catholics who know, believe, and are living their daily lives faithful to the teachings and beliefs of the Catholic Church.
 - c) Catholics who recognize and accept their own ongoing conversion through daily prayer and frequent examination of their relationships with God and others.
 - d) Catholics who are willing and eager to share their faith experiences with others.
 - e) Catholics who have varying gifts and talents needed within the RCIA process.
 - f) Catholics who are willing to learn more about their Church and the RCIA and to commit themselves to the RCIA process.

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- g) Catholics who are able to work pastorally with the participants, sponsors, RCIA team, RCIA director or coordinator, and the pastor. This involves acting in prudence, charity and humility in matters of catechesis and discernment and ultimately submitting to the judgment of the RCIA Director and Pastor in all matters.
 - h) Some team members may need to meet additional requirements based on their specific role on the team. (See section II.E.6.)
2. If someone other than the pastor will be overseeing the RCIA (director or coordinator), the person should be chosen by the pastor, whether the position is paid or volunteer. An application and interview process should be used. Qualifications for this position should include all those listed for any team member. Additional qualifications for a coordinator or director of RCIA are as follows:
- a) Directors or Coordinators of any RCIA program must hold at a minimum the Advanced Certification Certificate from the Diocese of Covington or a B.A. in Theology, and optimally a Masters in Theology or other related degree. Other specialized education or training may be considered with approval from the Diocesan Director of Catechesis and Formation.
 - b) Previous experience working with the RCIA process as a team member or coordinator
 - c) Knowledge of the RCIA process through past education and experience
 - d) Organizational, leadership, communication, and management skills
 - e) Pastoral skills for working with RCIA non-Catholics, team, parish staff, and parishioners
3. *Identifying and Inviting Potential Team Members*
- a) The pastor, RCIA director, or other existing RCIA team members may identify parishioners who are potential team members and recommend them to the RCIA director.
 - b) The RCIA director would meet with the potential team member to discuss the RCIA process and complete the “Interview Questions for a Potential Team Member” form (Sample form can be found in the appendix for this section).

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- c) The pastor, the RCIA director, and possibly other existing RCIA team members should discern together, and the RCIA director should make a recommendation to the pastor for final approval.
- d) Upon approval by the pastor, the RCIA director should extend a formal invitation to be part of the RCIA team.

C. Education of team members

1. The *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) calls for the initial and ongoing formation of catechists. It states, “Programs of formation should be designed to help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to hand on the faith to those entrusted to their care and assist them in living as disciples in Christ,”(NDC, p. 235). In addition to acquiring knowledge and skills, “Catechists are called to continual conversion and growth in their faith and, for this reason, are called to ongoing spiritual formation.” (NDC, p. 236)
2. The *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) states: “Local ordinaries are to see to it that catechists are duly prepared to fulfill their task correctly, namely, that continuing formation is made available to them, that they acquire a proper knowledge of the Church’s teaching, and that they learn in theory and practice the norms proper to the pedagogical disciplines.” (CIC, no. 780)
3. *Diocesan Catechist Certification Process* – **The requirements outlined in this section must be fulfilled only by RCIA team members who will act as catechists – teaching the faith during catechetical sessions.**
 - a) The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that bishops have the primary responsibility for catechesis in the local church and, more specifically, for the formation and certification of catechists (NDC, p. 218). As the bishop’s delegate, the pastor has a more concrete and practical role to play in carrying out this responsibility. The Directory goes on to state that pastors are to ensure that catechists are well formed for their task (NDC, p. 221). At the parish level, the catechetical leader administers the process which includes a supervision component, a mentoring relationship with his/her catechists, assisting the catechists in the assessment of learning needs, monitoring of progress, record keeping, and submission of applications to the Department of Catechesis and Formation for

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approval and the issuing of the certificate. The catechetical leader also works with the catechists in their ongoing formation process.

- b) To comply with CIC no.780, the Diocese of Covington has established a catechist certification process based on the guidelines of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC, no. 238) which lists the dimensions of formation as being, knowing, and know-how. Therefore, the requirements for certification focus on spiritual formation, knowledge about doctrine and about the persons who are being catechized, and skill in conveying the Christian message. Designed to promote catechists' growth in faith, it also supplies them with the information and ability to fulfill their responsibilities. Participation in the diocesan catechist certification process is not the only way that formation occurs. Active involvement in parish life offers many opportunities for ongoing spiritual development. However, obtaining certification assures that catechists have met basic standards for their ministry.
- c) Certification as a catechist in the Diocese of Covington is a means of publicly recognizing the commitment that a catechist has made to continuous formation in faith, knowledge and skills. It is the bishop who, through his administrative staff, certifies catechists. Attaining certification attests that the catechist has met a standard of preparation and competency that has been established by the diocese and called for in the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Catechists who become certified can be proud of what they have accomplished and feel confident that they are fulfilling the requirements of the local Church for this vital ministry.
- d) Basic Certification Requirements for Catechists in the Diocese of Covington:
 - (1) Catechetical Process (*Five Hours*)
 - (2) Basic Beliefs (*Five Hours*)
 - (3) Introduction to Scripture (*Five Hours*)
 - (4) Introduction to Catholic Spirituality (*Ten Hours*)
 - (5) VIRTUS Training (*if working with children*)

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- e) Once Basic Certification is achieved, catechists may choose four of the following learning modules for General Certification and complete the remaining four for Advanced Certification:
 - (1) Old and New Testaments (*Ten Hours*)
 - (2) Justice and Peace (*Ten Hours*)
 - (3) Christian Morality (*Ten Hours*)
 - (4) Liturgy and Rites (*Ten Hours*)
 - (5) Sacraments (*Ten Hours*)
 - (6) Jesus (*Ten Hours*)
 - (7) Church History (*Ten Hours*)
 - (8) Church: Vision, Mission, Ministry (*Ten Hours*)
 - f) Basic presentation / teaching skills should be a prerequisite or training should be made available to acquire these skills
4. *Education of Team Members About the RCIA Process*
- a) All members of the RCIA team, regardless of whether they are catechists, should have a knowledge and understanding of the RCIA process. All team members should be able to:
 - (1) demonstrate an understanding of the periods of RCIA and the importance and celebration of the major liturgical rites.
 - (2) recognize the differences between catechumens, candidates in RCIA and make adaptations as needed.
 - (3) incorporate active listening into discernment throughout the initiation process.
 - b) Based on each team member's role, the knowledge and skills to lead or assist with the following tasks may need to be acquired through training at the parish level or through various diocesan workshops or other approved courses.
 - (1) Facilitate a dismissal session based on the Sunday scriptures
 - (2) Facilitate a catechetical session based on a sound catechetical process (catechists only)
 - (3) Plan and lead a service of the Word during the catechumenate, including the presentations, anointings and minor exorcisms

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- (4) Invite and train parishioners in the responsibility to sponsor catechumens and candidates on the RCIA journey
 - (5) Incorporate opportunities for social outreach ministry for catechumens and candidates
 - (6) Promote parish reflection and welcome in the mystagogical period by planning sessions for neophytes and parishioners
 - (7) Design ways to lead the assembly into effective participation in the rites
5. Other resources to assist RCIA team members in developing their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith:
- a) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
 - b) *The Compendium to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*
 - c) *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*
 - d) *General Directory for Catechesis*
 - e) *National Directory for Catechesis*
 - f) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (www.usccb.org)
 - g) EWTN and other Catholic media outlets

D. Spiritual Formation of Team Members

1. The spiritual formation of catechists was addressed by the Office of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in the document “Guide for Catechists” promulgated by Pope John Paul II in June 1993. Section II of the “Guide for Catechists”, entitled “The Catechist’s Spirituality” addresses the spiritual formation of any catechist and its wisdom and instruction can be applied to the members of the RCIA Team, whether serving as catechists or in another team role.
2. “Catechists must have a deep spirituality, i.e. they must live in the Spirit, who will help them to renew themselves continually in their specific identity.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 6) The catechist’s spirituality “should bear the marks of: openness to God's word, to the Church and to the world; authenticity of life; missionary zeal; and devotion to Mary.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 6)

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- a) Openness to the Word – “The office of catechist is basically that of communicating God's word, and so the fundamental spiritual attitude should be one of openness to this word, contained in revelation, preached by the Church, celebrated in the liturgy and lived out in the lives of saints. This is always an encounter with Christ, hidden in his word, in the Eucharist and in our brothers and sisters.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 7)
- b) Openness to the Church – “As People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church requires from catechists a deep sense of belonging and responsibility, inasmuch as they are living and active members of it; . . . The catechist's service is never an individual or isolated act, but is always deeply ecclesial.” “Openness to the Church . . . is expressed in the attachment and obedience to the Roman Pontiff, the center of unity and the bond of universal communion, so also to the Bishop, the father and guide of the particular Church.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 7)
- c) Openness to the World – “Catechists, therefore, will be open and attentive to the needs of the world, knowing that they are called to work in and for the world, without however belonging completely to it (cf. Jn 17:14-21). . . they must be thoroughly involved in the life of the society about them. . . But they must keep a supernatural outlook on life and trust in the efficacy of God's word, which does not return to Him without "*succeeding in what it was sent to do*" (Is 55:11).” (Guide for Catechists, no. 7)
- d) Authenticity of Catechesis Through the Life of the Catechist – “The work of the catechists involves their whole being. Before they preach the word, they must make it their own and live by it. . . The truth of their lives confirms their message.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 8) Therefore, catechists must have a lived faith which includes a life of prayer, participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and service to the Church and the larger community.

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- e) Missionary zeal – “. . . catechists should have a strong missionary spirit - a spirit that will be all the more effective if they are seen to be convinced of what they say and are enthusiastic and courageous, without ever being ashamed of the gospel.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 9)
 - f) Devotion to Mary – “One can say with reason and joy that Mary is a *"living catechism"*, *"mother and model of catechists"*” (Guide for Catechists, no. 10) “The spirituality of catechists . . . will be enriched by a deep devotion to the Mother of God.” (Guide for Catechists, no. 10)
3. The following are suggested means by which a catechist may achieve the spiritual formation as described above:
- a) Participate faithfully in Mass and Holy Communion on Sundays and holy days of obligation
 - b) Participate in Mass and Holy Communion daily when possible or meditate on the daily Mass readings
 - c) Make a weekly holy hour or visit to the Blessed Sacrament
 - d) Seek regular spiritual direction from the pastor or parish priest or another qualified spiritual director
 - e) Fulfill the Precepts of the Church
 - f) Pray the Holy Rosary and / or pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet (daily if possible)
 - g) Pray the Morning Offering to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (daily if possible)
 - h) Pray the Morning and Evening Prayer from the “Liturgy of the Hours”
 - i) Pray the Angelus (three times daily at 6:00 am, Noon, and 6:00 pm)
 - j) Engage in daily spiritual reading
 - k) Make an examination of conscience and Act of Contrition daily, upon retiring
 - l) Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a month
 - m) Attend a weekend retreat annually
 - n) Engage in study of and devotion to the lives of the saints, accompanied by regular prayer for their intercession

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- E. Organizing the RCIA team** – The RCIA team may be large or small depending on the size of the parish and the number of catechumens / candidates that the parish usually has in the process. If the team is large, it may be helpful to assign specific roles or tasks to various team members both to keep the process organized and to give each team member a sense of purpose and direction. Each RCIA Director is encouraged to develop a team structure that works for the specific parish and should ensure that all team members are familiar with the duties of their role or position and are properly prepared and trained to carry them out. Below are some possible roles that may be assigned to members of the RCIA team.
1. *Evangelization Coordinator* – Coordinates all efforts to publicize / promote the RCIA process
 - a) within the parish to educate the faithful about RCIA and encourage them to evangelize to their family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.
 - b) to the general public to inform the larger community about the Catholic Church and invite them to *come and see*.
 2. *Precatechumene Chairperson* – Primary team member responsible for the precatechumenate period. Responsibilities may include, but would not be limited to:
 - a) Maintaining contact with inquirers from the time of their initial interview until they celebrate the rite of acceptance and formally enter the catechumenate period
 - b) Inviting inquirers to parish liturgical celebrations and social events
 - c) Meeting with inquirers periodically to help them discern their call to the Church and to answer questions that may arise as they become familiar with the parish community and Catholic worship
 - d) Assisting the RCIA leader in discerning the readiness of the inquirers to celebrate the rite of acceptance and enter the catechumenate period
 - e) Other duties as needed based on parish needs
 3. *Catechumenate chairperson* – Primary team member responsible for the catechumenate period. Since the catechumenate period is the main focus of the RCIA process and the longest period, this position will usually be held by the pastor or RCIA leader.

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- a) Develop an ongoing curriculum for catechumenate sessions and assemble materials and resources for each session.
 - (1) Identify topics to be covered and general resources / materials to be used:
 - (a) Materials for use by catechists in delivering the sessions
 - (b) Handouts or resources for catechumens, candidates and sponsors (e.g., CCC, United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Association for Catechumenal Ministry (ACM) participant handouts)
 - (2) Provide a list of topics and subtopics to catechists so they know what they are expected to cover in each session.
- b) Develop a schedule for catechumenate sessions each year:
 - (1) Identify a time and reserve a location / meeting space for the sessions.
 - (2) Assign catechists for each topic; act as a resource for catechists, providing topic content and resources for developing lesson plans.
 - (3) Have all necessary materials on-hand for each session.
 - (4) Coordinate with hospitality chairperson regarding refreshments or other hospitality needs.
 - (5) Track attendance and arrange for make-up sessions if needed.
- c) Coordinate Sunday reflection on the Word (Sunday dismissal) sessions:
 - (1) Select Mass time for dismissal.
 - (2) Identify a location for the catechumens and candidates to meet for the dismissal session and provide any necessary materials.
 - (3) Identify team members to lead each session and provide any necessary materials for them to prepare for the sessions.
 - (4) Coordinate details of dismissal with presiding priests, musicians, and others involved in liturgy.

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- d) Lead or identify a leader for each catechumenate session to welcome, greet, open and close the session.
 - e) Schedule and plan any minor rites, blessings or exorcisms during this period.
 - f) Plan other catechetical and faith-sharing opportunities throughout this period (e.g., retreats).
 - g) Build relationships with catechumens and candidates and identify any issues, needs or concerns regarding their faith journey; use this in discernment of their readiness for rite of election.
 - h) Communicate with team members and sponsors regarding any issues or concerns that have come to their attention regarding the catechumens and candidates.
4. *Reflection and Discussion Leader* – Leads group prayers, spiritual reflections and discussions which are not catechetical in nature. Examples may include, but would not be limited to:
- a) Precatechumenate reflection / discernment sessions
 - b) Sunday reflection on the Word (dismissal) sessions (See more info in E.5. below.)
 - c) Group reflections or discussions during retreats
 - d) Reflections to prepare for the Scrutiny Rites
 - e) Reflections after major or minor rites
 - f) Other non-catechetical discussions, reflections or sessions as needed
 - g) In order to act in this role, a team member should be on the team for at least one year, attending the above sessions regularly and observing more experienced members of the team in preparation for this role. Catechist Certification is not required, but team members in this role should be encouraged to attend other RCIA workshops or formation opportunities as available and/or suggested by the RCIA leader.

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5. *Sunday reflection on the Word (dismissal) leader* – Lead catechumens and candidates when they are dismissed after the homily at Sunday Mass for reflection on the Word. Facilitate the discussion: be prepared with a knowledge and understanding of the day’s scripture, opening and closing prayers for the session, and thought-provoking questions appropriate to the theme of the readings to stimulate discussion.
6. *Catechist* – Delivers instruction during catechetical sessions. **In the Diocese of Covington all catechists are required to complete basic level catechist certification prior to delivering instruction and continue working toward general and advanced certification in order to continue as RCIA catechists. (See section II.C. “Education of Team Members”.)**
7. *Hospitality Chairperson* – Offer hospitality to the catechumens, candidates, and sponsors when they gather. Ideas include, but would not be limited to:
 - a) Be a welcoming presence at catechetical sessions, retreats, etc.:
 - (1) Arrive early & welcome catechumens, candidates and sponsors as they arrive.
 - (2) Assist participants in finding whatever they need (e.g., restrooms, food & drink, handouts, pen or pencil, extra Bible or Catechism, etc.).
 - b) Provide or coordinate the provision of food, drink, and associated supplies.
 - c) Assist everyone in the group (catechumens, candidates, sponsors, and team) in becoming acquainted (e.g., planning icebreaker activities, using nametags, etc.).
 - d) Attend to details of comfort such as the room temperature or seating arrangements.
 - e) Bring any “hospitality” concerns, issues or ideas to the RCIA Coordinator.
 - f) Other duties as needed based on parish needs
8. *Sponsor Coordinator* – Coordinates all activities related to sponsors:
 - a) Discern possible sponsors from the parish:
 - (1) Ask for input from pastor.
 - (2) Interview potential sponsors when identified or recommended.

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- b) Develop and deliver sponsor training.
 - c) Maintain contact with sponsors throughout the RCIA process:
 - (1) Identify any questions or concerns they have.
 - (2) Obtain input regarding the person they are sponsoring for discernment of their readiness to continue to next period.
9. *Mystagogy chairperson* – Primary team member responsible for the mystagogy period.
- a) Assist RCIA leader in planning and scheduling activities during the mystagogy stage of the RCIA.
 - b) Maintain contact with neophytes during the neophyte year.
 - (1) Contact the neophytes during the mystagogy stage (Easter through Pentecost).
 - (2) Maintain regular (at least once a month) contact with the neophytes from Pentecost through the following Easter.
 - (a) Assure them of our continued prayer and support (remind team and sponsors to continue praying for them).
 - (b) Ask them how things are going; find out if they are getting involved in parish life / ministries.
 - (c) Remind them of Sunday Mass attendance, opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and other parish liturgies and devotions (e.g., Eucharistic Adoration, parish missions, special Masses, Holy Days of obligation).
 - (d) Invite them to ask any questions they may have now that they are practicing the faith they learned and received in their RCIA journey.
 - (3) Much of this contact (reminders, etc.) can be done with email or mailings, but there should be some personal contact (either by phone or in person as you see them in the community or at Mass).

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10. *Prayer coordinator* – Works with members of the team and/or other members of the parish to create a network of faithful who will regularly pray for the catechumens and candidates throughout the RCIA process; would establish this group and send reminders or specific prayer requests as needed.
11. *Other positions or chairpersons as needed* – Each parish, based on size and resources, will have its own needs. The above ideas are practical suggestions that could be used in most parish settings. Smaller parishes may not need all of these positions. Larger parishes with more resources and a larger number of catechumens and candidates may require additional organizational structure.

Notes
