



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN

GUIDELINES

FOR THE

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

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WHAT IS THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)?

Several decrees from the Second Vatican Council called for a restoration of the catechumenate and its rites. In response the Congregation for Divine Worship prepared the provisional text of the “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” (RCIA) which was published in Latin in 1972 and in English in 1974. From September 1, 1988 the use of the revised “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” is mandatory in the dioceses of the United States. It is a process for transformation and on-going conversion. The “Decree on Missionary Activity” 4 describes it as “not a mere exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the whole Christian life, and an apprenticeship of sufficient duration during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher.” The formation process extends through several periods and is marked by various liturgical rites.

FOR WHOM IS THE RCIA PROCESS?

- Unbaptized adults; (on the registration form for the Rite of Election these are **Code 1**). They are preparing for full initiation through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Those baptized in Christian denominations but not Catholic; (on the registration form these are **Code 2**). They are preparing to come into full communion with the Catholic Church by making a Profession of Faith and receiving Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Those baptized Catholic but have never been catechized; (on the registration form these are **Code 3**). They are preparing to complete their initiation through Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Those baptized Catholic and confirmed as infants (in some countries this is the norm) but haven’t received Eucharist; (on the registration form these also are **Code 3**).
- Unbaptized children who are 8 years old (usually in Grade 3) through Grade 8. (see Appendix II). High school students fall into the RCIA process for adults.

Pastors and Priests who are Parish Administrators have been given the faculty to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Easter Vigil and at Pentecost. This faculty may be sub delegated for a serious cause by the same Pastor or Administrator for use within that parish to individual priests. (This faculty may not be further sub delegated.) A serious cause may be a special language need or in the case of illness of the Pastor/Administrator.

Those who only need Confirmation ARE NOT a part of the RCIA process and MAY NOT be confirmed at the Easter Vigil. Their Confirmation will be on Pentecost Sunday either in the local parish or at St. James Cathedral-Basilica.

DURATION OF THE CATECHUMENATE PROCESS

Since the vision of the Rite is a “gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful” (RCIA, 36), the process is to be long enough to allow the seeds of conversion to take deep root in the person who is seeking to become a follower of the Lord. The purpose of this process is to form people into a way of life, not merely knowing about the Catholic faith. The bishops of the United States state that the period from the time that the catechumens celebrate the Rite of Acceptance until their initiation at the Easter Vigil should last a minimum of one complete year. (National Statutes, 6). Since the Word of God is to be the basis for their formation along with the doctrine and Tradition of the Church, it takes one full liturgical cycle to come to know the major events and aspects of Christ’s life and mission. Therefore, the second period of the catechumenate should be at least one full liturgical cycle.

The baptized but uncatechized Catholic seeking to complete his/her initiation through Confirmation and Eucharist may need this same journey. However, it may be different for those catechized, baptized persons from another Christian faith who are seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. “Their doctrinal and spiritual preparations should be determined through prayerful discernment, that is, it should depend on the extent to which the baptized person has led a Christian life within a community of faith and has been appropriately catechized to deepen his or her inner adherence to the Church” (National Statutes, 30). Having a year-round catechumenate process would give parishes the ability to respond to the various needs of those who come seeking initiation and give the parish community greater opportunities to be involved. It would also be a tremendous vehicle of evangelization making it possible that those who are seeking initiation will be welcomed whenever they come.

PERIODS OF THE CATECHUMENAL PROCESS

First Period: Period of the Pre-catechumenate (Evangelization)

When does it begin? This period begins when the person expresses the desire to begin his or her journey.

What is the goal of this period? “From evangelization,...come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the evangelization, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek baptism may mature” (RCIA 37).

When does it end? When the RCIA Team prayerfully discerns that “there is evidence of the first faith and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ (RCIA 42), the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance for the catechumens and/or the Rite of Welcoming for the candidates is celebrated. This Rite culminates this first period and begins the second period, and may be celebrated more than once during the year. This is especially helpful when all in the group aren’t ready at the same time.

Celebration of Rites: **Rite of Acceptance** (RCIA 48-67) for the unbaptized only; **Rite of Welcoming the Candidates** (RCIA 416-432) only for those seeking full communion and those seeking to complete their initiation. If both catechumens and candidates are present, then use the combined **Rite of Acceptance and Rite of Welcoming** (RCIA 505-529)

The prayers in the Rites express the reality of what is being celebrated. For example, the prayer used when signing the forehead of the catechumens is different from that used for the candidates. Because the Church is so conscious of this, the Church has formulated different Rites for each and a combined Rite for both.

Second Period: Period of the Catechumenate

When does it begin? It begins after the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance and/or the Rite of Welcoming. Once the Rite of Acceptance has been celebrated the catechumens are usually “kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the Eucharist begins” (RCIA 75.3).

What is the goal of this period? “The catechumenate period is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity. This is achieved in four ways: 1) suitable catechesis... 2) prayer/community... 3) suitable liturgical rites/celebration of the Word... and 4) involvement in social/apostolic life of the parish. (RCIA 75) “The instruction that the catechumens receive during this period should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ” (RCIA 78).

When does it end? This second period ends with the celebration of the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent and begins the third period--Purification and Enlightenment.

Celebration of the Rites:

Prayerful discernment is necessary before sending the names to the Office of Faith Formation on the registration form for this celebration. In this registration form **Code 1** refers to those seeking baptism, confirmation and Eucharist; **Code 2** refers to the candidates seeking to come into full communion with the Catholic Church through profession of faith, Confirmation and Eucharist; **Code 3** refers to the candidates completing their initiation through Confirmation and Eucharist and those candidates who at baptism were also confirmed but never catechized, thus they are seeking to complete their initiation through the Eucharist.

Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election (RCIA106-116)

Rite of Sending the Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop and for the Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA 434-444)

During the Mass in which these Rites are celebrated, the catechumens and their sponsors will sign the beige scroll and the candidates and their sponsors will sign the blue scroll which will be brought to the celebration of the Rite of Election. These scrolls are sent from the Office of Faith Formation along with other material prior to the celebration.

Rite of Election for Catechumens and Call to Conversion for Candidates (RCIA 547-560) This Rite is celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent.

The celebration of the various Rites within the extensive process of the catechumenate is a way to exteriorly manifest a progressive deepening of conversion along the journey of the catechumens and candidates. It involves choice, decision, and taking a stand. Rituals give witness to what has already happened. We see this very clearly in the Rite of Election of Catechumens and the Call to Continuing Conversion of Candidates Who are Preparing for Full Communion or Completing their Initiation through Confirmation and the Eucharist.

The Bishop in the name of God and of the Church calls the catechumens to the Easter Sacraments. Each catechumen hears his or her name called, hears the testimony of godparents, catechists and the entire assembly affirming their readiness as well as their commitment to support and pray for them. And finally the catechumens themselves in the presence of the whole church give their assent to the call of the Church in the name of Christ to the Easter sacraments. The Bishop in the name of the Church recognizes the desire of the candidates to be confirmed and to come to the table of the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. They join all of us throughout Lent in a spirit of repentance, as together we hear in a new way the Lord's call to conversion and fidelity to our baptismal covenant. Both the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion cannot be celebrated at the local level. They are reserved only for celebration by the Bishop.

Third Period: Purification and Enlightenment

When does it begin? The Rite of Election customarily coincides with the beginning of Lent and begins this period.

What is the goal of this period? It is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the Elect as they search their own consciences and do penance (RCIA 139).

When does it end? It culminates in the Easter Vigil.

Celebration of Rites:

1st Sunday of Lent-**Rite of Election and Rite of Call to Continuing Conversion**

2nd Sunday of Lent-**Penitential Rite** for Candidates only

3rd Sunday of Lent-**First Scrutiny** for Elect only

During the 3rd week of Lent—**Presentation of the Creed**

4th Sunday of Lent- **Second Scrutiny** for Elect only

5th Sunday of Lent-**Third Scrutiny** for Elect only

(For the three Scrutinies the readings are taken from Cycle A)

During the 5th week of Lent—**Presentation of the Lord's Prayer**

Holy Saturday morning - **Preparation Rites**

Easter Vigil -- **Celebration of the Easter Sacraments**

If there are Elect only, they make their profession of faith and baptismal promises alone; the congregation does not renew its baptismal promises at this time. The conferring of the sacrament of Confirmation would follow baptism and then the congregation's renewal of baptismal promises.

If there are Elect and candidates; after the baptism of the Elect, there would be the profession of faith of those seeking full communion with the Catholic Church, followed by the candidates' and entire congregation's renewal of baptismal promises, the sprinkling of holy water throughout the congregation, and then the conferring of the sacrament of Confirmation (RCIA 580-591).

Fourth Period—Post baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

When does it begin? Easter Sunday

What is its goal? "This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in

deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity” (RCIA 244).

Neophytes and candidates should meet weekly throughout Easter time. They can be given a place of honor in the church during the Easter season. On the Sundays in Easter time, some may be willing to give a very short witness to what the process has meant for them. This could be a powerful evangelization tool. They should be helped to discern where and how they can become an integral part in the parish’s ministries and outreach. Members of parish organizations and ministries should be invited to the sessions to inform the neophytes and candidates about their ministries and organizations and invite them to participate.

When does it end? Formally it ends on Pentecost Sunday (RCIA 249). “After the immediate Mystagogy or post baptismal catechesis during the Easter season, the process for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation, with at least monthly assemblies of the neophytes for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community” (RCIA, Appendix III, “National Statutes for the Catechumenate”, 24). It is important that the newly initiated be integrated into the parish’s ongoing faith formation for all of its parishioners. The Bishop meets those who were initiated at the Easter Vigil for the celebration of the Mass of Neophytes and Candidates (RCIA 251)

As stated in RCIA 11, “the diocesan bishop is the proper minister of the sacraments of initiation for adults, including children of catechetical age, in accord with Canon 852:1”. Our numbers make this impossible. However, each year during Easter the diocese provides a very joyful, meaningful celebration of the Eucharist for the Neophytes and Candidates, their godparents, families, friends and members of the RCIA team at St. James Cathedral Basilica. This gives the Bishop who celebrated the Rite of Election an opportunity to now celebrate the Eucharist with the neophytes and candidates.

Discernment

Readiness of Those Entering the RCIA Process

The RCIA respects the unique journey of faith of the individual. A key dimension of this balance between individual conversion and the structured periods of the Catechumenate is **discernment**. Prior to each transition to a new period of the process (as indicated in each period above), there is a period of discernment to help the catechumens and candidates identify their readiness to make the commitments required of the next formation period.

Indicators of readiness:

- Readiness and willingness to commit oneself to growth in Christian life should be present.
- Academic development (Catechesis), faith expressions, actions, and attitudes, (i.e., how we act, live and what we do and say in our lives).
- Mass attendance, formation session class attendance (catechesis), rites, rituals, service, active participation within the community of the faithful
- Evidence of the gift of faith and response to it.
- Verbalization, action and/or expression of one's life of faith.

Discernment Process for RCIA Participants

The place to begin in discernment is true self-knowledge, an exercise of continually searching both the head and the heart to deepen awareness of the self. Discernment is about recognizing and responding to God's invitation to continually embrace the reign of God. One should be opened to a posture of decision-making that reflects a God-focus. Discernment should be approached with a heart opened to God's stirrings and movements. The posture of one in discernment is the posture of obedience and surrender.¹

Marked by:

- Readiness and willingness to commit oneself to growth in Christian life should be present.
- Decision by the catechumens to identify their readiness to make the commitments to transition to the next period of the process, allowing:
 - No automatic promotions.
 - A decision that comes from within (head & heart)
 - Time frames according to the needs of the individual's conversion and faith development growth.
 - Workshops and/or classes to assist in the discernment process (study, prayer, formation and transformation)

¹ "The RCIA Transforming the Church" A Resource for Pastoral Implementation, Thomas H. Morris, Copyright 1989 by Thomas H. Morris, Paulist Press

Role of the Parish in the RCIA Process

I. Announcement of the RCIA within the Parish

- a. A short, concise, easy to read and attractive informational brochure could be placed at the doors of the Church, instructing people as to the goals, requirements and expectations of the Church for the baptism of adults and children of catechetical age.
- b. Parish announcements and bulletin invitations to participate in the process of RCIA should be made throughout the year. The RCIA process must be available year round.

II. Interview

- a. An initial pastoral interview with each inquirer is necessary to deal with the issues of impediments and to assist in the discernment process. This interview needs to be done early in the process because some cases may need to be referred to the Tribunal. At this interview inquirers who are seeking full initiation will need to be informed that they will have to present their birth certificate as soon as possible, and those who will become candidates will need to acquire their baptism certificates, also, as soon as possible. A file should be set up for each inquirer.
- b. When the priest or catechist enables the inquirer to become aware of any obstacles or impediments, a careful pastoral explanation ought to be given to the inquirer in order to challenge the person to change his/her lifestyle in accord with the gospel and precepts of the Church. In addition, pastorally, the person needs to be shown a way provided by the church to work at removing any impediments.
- c. Notations should be filed to assist with follow-up sessions to help the inquirer along the pathway of continual conversion.

III. RCIA Parish Team

- a. The vision of the catechumenate process calls for team involvement. It is no longer the former "one-on-one" except in very unusual circumstances.
- b. Members of the RCIA Team should complete the fifty-hour Diocesan Living and Leading by Faith Catechist Formation course for their specific role, which includes Creed, Scripture/Prayer, Sacraments, Morality and Overview of the RCIA Process.

- c. Special attention should be given to the methodology appropriate for each of the four periods, e.g. balancing the “breaking open of the word” and the “doctrinal preparation” during the catechumenate period. Catechists need to be informed, trained or re-trained to combine and balance the “breaking open of the word” and the “doctrinal preparation” during the process.

Roles of Pastor, Staff, and Parish Ministers

Assembly: Prayerfully supports those in the RCIA process, seeks out ways to begin to integrate them into the spiritual/social outreach of parish life, and is present for the celebration of the Rites. The parish community serves as an apprenticeship for the catechumens and candidates in the way it prays, serves and reaches out.

Godparents: Those who present the catechumens and candidates to the Bishop at the Rite of Election and Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion, and thus will be the sacramental godparent at the Easter Vigil.

Hospitality: It is important that all feel welcomed and at ease. Serving light refreshments can contribute to community building, sharing and a sense of acceptance and trust.

Pastor: He should become familiar with the catechumens and candidates and to the extent possible be a part of the process.

Sponsors: Persons who accompany the catechumens and candidates throughout the process by their prayer, support and presence to the extent possible. Several of the Rites ask that the sponsors give their testimony regarding the readiness of the catechumen/candidate. Sponsors are to be involved more directly in parts of the process. A suggestion could be to conduct a tour of the Church explaining all the liturgical appointments, meaning of each of the stained glass windows, statues or images of saints in the Church with a brief biography of each; teach them how to make the Stations of the Cross, how to pray and meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary, explain the meaning of and then accompany them to a Holy Hour with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and benediction etc..

Sacramental Registries

The appropriate data for each person who received the Easter Sacraments must be entered in the registry of each sacrament beginning with the heading “Easter Vigil, the date, and the name of the celebrant”. When entering the fact of Confirmation in the sacramental register, the following should be included: (Reverend Name of Priest, delegated, c.

884§1) The Registry for Full Communion is a special registry for the data of those who were received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Accountability

- a. The RCIA process for adults and its adaptation for children must be seen as a mandate of the Catholic Church and not merely as an urgency of the Diocese (RCIA *“General Introduction”*, 2, 3).
- b. “The Bishop, in person or through his delegate sets up, regulates and promotes the program of pastoral formation for catechumens...” (RCIA, Introduction, 12). In the Diocese of Brooklyn, the Bishop’s chief delegate is the Diocesan Coordinator of the RCIA.
- c. An evaluative set of questions can be prepared by the Diocesan Coordinator of the RCIA as part of the annual Parish Spiritual Report to be responded to by the Pastor and RCIA Coordinator of the parish.
 - i. The aim of the questionnaire is two-fold:
 1. To hold the entire RCIA team accountable to the proper preparation and celebration of the RCIA
 2. To enable them to evaluate their parish preparation and celebration of the RCIA. The goal would be to improve in the future.
- d. The Territorial Episcopal Vicar will inquire of the Pastor about the state of the RCIA in his parish.

Role of the Clusters in the RCIA Process

While the RCIA process is normatively a parish based experience, there are some aspects of the process that can be shared within a cluster:

The choice to sponsor the weekly catechetical instruction (second aspect of the weekly RCIA formation process) on a cluster basis may be prompted by a variety of reasons, including the need to share resources and personnel. However, if a cluster- wide weekly formational session is begun; the following guidelines must also be observed:

- Members from each of the participating parish RCIA formation teams must be present and active in each of the cluster sessions.

- The sponsors for each of the catechumens and candidates must be strongly encouraged to attend and participate in each session.

Other forms of cluster collaboration in the RCIA process

Clusters may:

- Dialogue and act as resources to strengthen programs in need of help.
- Host RCIA catechist and sponsor training and formation meetings.
- Share materials and the way in which to implement these materials.
- Provide on-going spiritual support for RCIA teams.
- Organize RCIA catechists so they could “guest present” a topic for which they are well prepared at another parish within their cluster.
- Provide a retreat day for participants in the RCIA process within their cluster.
- Invite the RCIA parish leaders to cluster meetings to share well-planned and successful RCIA strategies.
- Support the role of each parish in sending and transporting the neophytes to the Bishop’s Mass of the Neophytes after they have become fully initiated Catholics.
- Support the parish teams in forming successful periods of Mystagogy.
- Dialogue with pastors and parish RCIA teams to provide adult faith formation activities in the parishes in order to absorb the neophytes in on-going Mystagogy during their first year as Catholics and beyond.

Role of the Diocesan Bishop in the RCIA Process

“Bishops are the chief stewards of the mysteries of God and leaders of the entire liturgical life in the Church committed to them. This is why they direct the conferring of baptism, which brings to the recipient a share in the kingly priesthood of Christ. Therefore, bishops should personally celebrate baptism, especially at the Easter Vigil. They should have a particular concern for the preparation and baptism of adults.” (RCIA, General Introduction, 12).

“The bishop, in person or through his delegate, sets up, regulates and promotes the program of pastoral formation for catechumens and admits the candidates to their election and to the sacraments. It is hoped that, presiding if possible at the Lenten liturgy, he himself will celebrate the rite of election and, at the Easter Vigil, the sacraments of initiation.... Finally, when pastoral care requires, the Bishop should depute catechists, truly worthy and properly prepared, to celebrate minor exorcisms (RCIA 90-94) and the blessings of the catechumens (RCIA 95-97).

The Bishop directs the conferring of Baptism:

- a. The Bishop is to ensure the availability of the RCIA process in every parish throughout the Diocese.
- b. The Bishop is to require pastors, priests, deacons and the entire RCIA team and pastoral staff of each parish to become familiar with and implement the RCIA process in its full integrity in every parish of the Diocese. The Bishop also encourages these same individuals to promote the “pastoral and personal care of the catechumens” (RCIA, Introduction, 13) throughout the entire RCIA process.
- c. The Bishop, through the work of the Diocesan Coordinator of the RCIA, will provide a systematic and ongoing formation program for all RCIA teams, especially the catechists “who have an important office for the progress of the catechumens and for the growth of the community” (RCIA, Introduction, 16).

The Bishop personally celebrates Baptism:

- a. The Bishop (or his representative) will celebrate the Rite of Election and the Mass of the Neophytes for all the catechumens (and candidates) of the Diocese.
 - i. It also pertains to the Bishop “to ratify, personally or through a delegate, the admission of the elect” (RCIA, Introduction, 34.6).
- b. The Bishop will also celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation for Adults at the Easter Vigil in one parish of the Diocese each year.

The Bishop demonstrates particular concern for the preparation and baptism of adults:

- a. “It pertains to the Bishop in his own Diocese to set up the formation program of the catechumenate and to lay down norms according to local needs” (RCIA, Introduction, 34.1).

- b. He will ensure that the norms governing the RCIA Process as found in the ritual book, the National Statutes approved for use by the all dioceses of the United States and any particular norms established by the Diocesan Bishop are implemented and enforced in every parish in the Diocese.

Ongoing Formation of Staff and RCIA Team Members

Realizing that parish staff changes may impact the quality of the RCIA process and that on-going formation is important for all, the following are recommended:

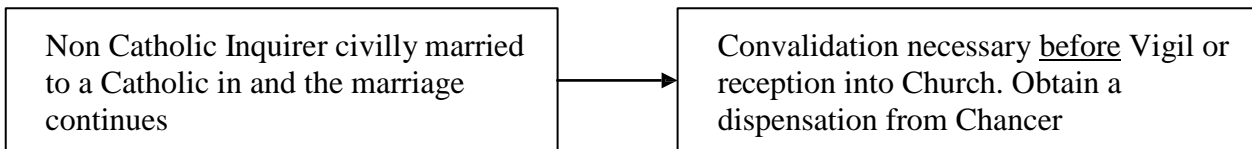
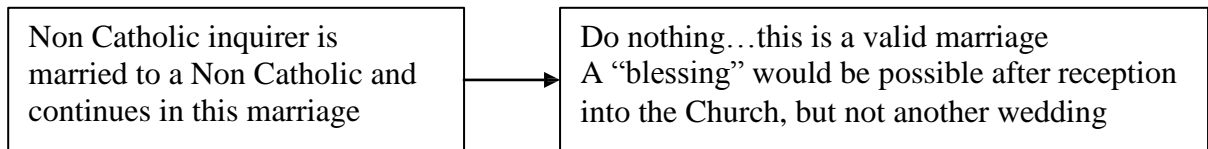
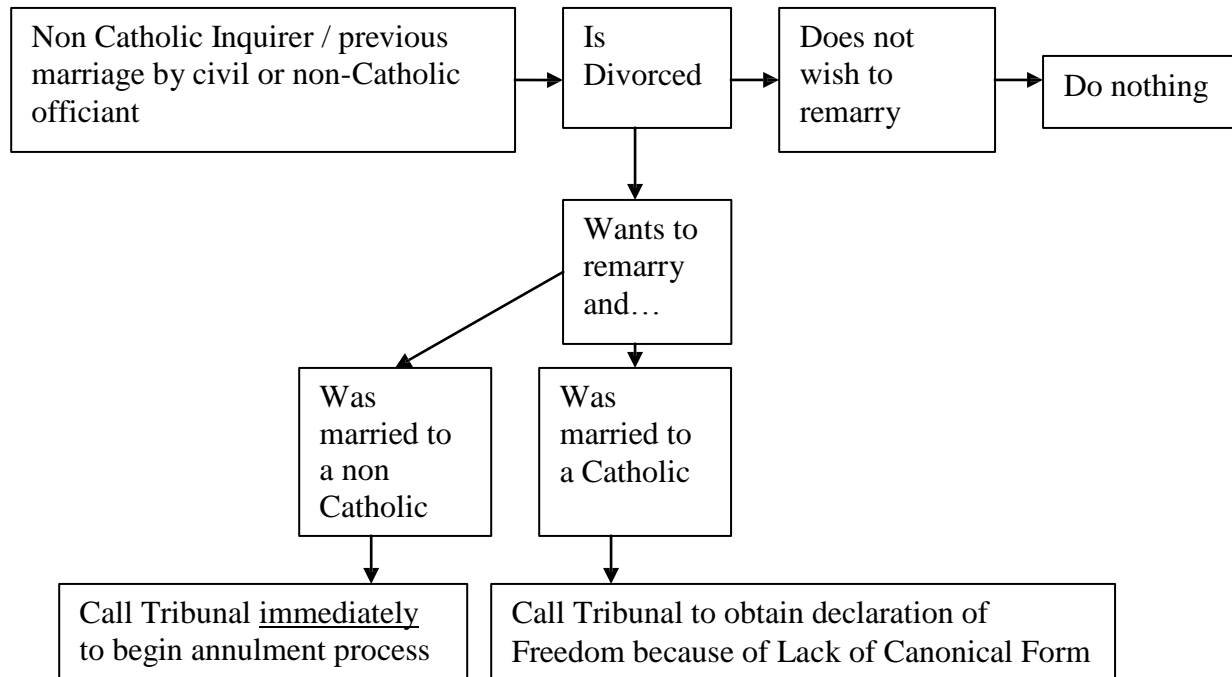
- New staff and catechists must complete the formation requirements through the fifty hour Diocesan *Living and Leading by Faith Catechetical Formation Curriculum* which is for Catholic School teachers, volunteer catechists, those involved with the youth and RCIA.

That directors and catechists meet regularly with diocesan personnel to talk-over RCIA issues, diocesan practices, new perspectives, etc.

- That the Diocesan Coordinator of RCIA plan spiritual renewal opportunities and educational forums on RCIA topics in locations and at times that would allow for maximum participation for those who are only able to attend on weekends and/or evenings.
- That the Diocesan Coordinator of RCIA advises parish personnel about RCIA related conferences, retreats, etc. that are planned by others in the near geographic area.

FLOWCHART FOR CANONICAL ISSUES

ARISING DURING RCIA PROCESS



Appendix I

BAPTISM ISSUES

- A person is baptized already in non-Catholic denomination:
 - If the baptism is Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist or Eastern Orthodox, nothing need be done. These are generally valid baptisms and the person would be received into the Church without being baptized. Some other baptisms are valid as well. Among these are those of the Old Catholic Church and the Polish National Church. Please check with the Chancellor's Office.
 - Orthodox Sacraments are all valid, so an Eastern Orthodox person simply makes a profession of faith since the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist were administered at Baptism.
 - All others need Confirmation and Eucharist.
 - If a person is baptized in any other denomination the baptism may not be valid. If the fact of the baptism or the validity of baptism is doubtful, the person should be baptized conditionally.
 - A conditional baptism takes place before the Vigil, not at the Vigil, and is done in a relatively quiet way, that is, it should not take place, for example, at a Sunday Mass. At the Vigil then, the person is to be confirmed and will receive the Eucharist.
 - If a Catholic baptism certificate cannot be located, consult the Chancellor's Office who can help with a "search."
 - Remember that often Baptists do not baptize infants. They are merely "dedicated" and when they do this, it is often invalid since the Trinitarian formula is frequently not used.
 - Validly baptized non-Catholic children under the age of 7 are received into the Church at their First Holy Communion when they are around 7 and then proceed in the regular religious education program with the other children.

Questions may be referred to the Office of the Chancellor at (718) 399-5990.

Appendix II

THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION ADAPTED FOR CHILDREN

Since September 1988, children of catechetical age who were not baptized as infants, may not be baptized according to the rite for infant baptism, but rather enter into the RCIA process adapted for children as stated in the “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) part 2, chapter1, “Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age”:

Accordingly, as with adults, children’s initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments. Also as with adults, their initiation is marked by several steps... Corresponding to the periods of adult initiation are the periods of the children’s catechetical formation that lead up to and follow the steps of their initiation.

The above applies to unbaptized children who are eight years old (usually 3rd grade) up to the 8th grade. High school students fall into the RCIA process for adults.

DURATION OF THE CATECHUMENAL PROCESS

As with the adult rite, sufficient time is needed for formation into a way of life, not merely knowing about the Catholic faith. A minimum of three years is expected since “The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need.” When with prayerful discernment it is decided that the child is ready to receive the sacraments of initiation, at one celebration, the child is baptized, confirmed and receives First Eucharist at the Easter Vigil or during the season of Easter.

A FAMILY MINISTRY

It is extremely important that there be an initial interview with the family/guardian of the child.

“Children seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative. Such children are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation in conscience but they cannot yet be treated as adults. At this stage of their lives, they are dependent on their parents or guardians and are still strongly influenced by their companions and their social surroundings.” (RCIA 25)

SPONSORS/COMPANIONS

“The children’s progress in the formation they receive depends on the help and example of their companions and on the influence of their parents” (RCIA 254). Some suggestions for sponsors/companions:

- Catechumenal children may have classmates or friends who are members of the parish, and their family may be willing to sponsor the child. Family-to-family sponsorship can be very enriching.
- As a class, children in the same grade level from the Catholic School or Religious Education Program may serve as sponsors/companions.

RITES

“Rites should be celebrated with the active participation of a congregation that consists of a suitable number of the faithful, the parents, family, members of the catechetical team and a few adult friends.” (RCIA 257) Some parishes have the children participate in the same liturgical celebrations as the adults, especially if a parent or both parents are catechumens. Whenever possible, the whole family needs to be involved as a family unit—even extended families if time and distance permit.

DIOCESAN OPPORTUNITIES

Through the direction of the Coordinator of the RCIA, the diocese will offer study days and workshops, catechist formation etc, to facilitate the implementation of the catechumenal process for children.

PERIODS OF THE CATECHUMENATE

1st Period: Pre-Catechumenate (usually 1 year in duration)

As with the adults the catechumenal process has four periods marked by liturgical celebrations.

During this period candidates (and their families) are to receive help and attention, so that they may cooperate with God’s grace. (RCIA 38, 254)

- Provide opportunities to meet with parents/guardians and children seeking initiation
- Interview parent/guardian and child to become familiar with the “status” of their faith
- Procure documents: birth certificate, statement of guardianship, adoption papers

- Provide opportunities for the family's growth in faith
- Provide for sponsors/companions as peer support as suggested earlier in this document
- Form a group of candidates to begin their formation.
- If very small numbers, candidates could be placed in age-appropriate normally scheduled Religious Education classes or Catholic School classes over a period of one year.
- As this period draws to an end, a meeting of parents/guardians, child and staff serves to prayerfully discern the readiness of the child to be received into the Catechumenate.

Liturgical Rite:

- Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (RCIA 267)
This rite brings the 1st period of the pre-catechumenate to a close and begins the 2nd period.

2nd Period: Catechumenate (usually 1 ½ years in duration)

There are various models for this period which will be presented throughout the year.

The important elements are:

- Sunday Liturgy of the Word for children
- Instruction on the living of faith (doctrine, customs, prayer in both a classroom and in situations which allow for peer and multi-generational gatherings).

Blessings are signs of God's love and tender care. Anointing with oil symbolizes the need for God's help and strength. During this prolonged period (1 ½ years), anointing with the oil of catechumens and blessings provide the opportunity to receive from the Church courage, joy and peace. (RCIA 95, 99)

Liturgical Rite:

- The Rite of Election brings the 2nd period to a close and begins the 3rd period. This rite though optional (RCIA 277) is celebrated each year at St. James Cathedral on the Saturday following Ash Wednesday.

3rd Period: Purification and Enlightenment (40 days of Lent)

- Provide more opportunities for prayer for the Elect, especially within the community of faith.
- Each week of Lent could be devoted to "breaking open" the rite that was celebrated on the previous week.

Liturgical Rites:

- The Penitential Rite (Scrutiny) is proper to this period allowing all those involved to hear the comforting message of pardon for sin and to offer praise to

God, for the Father's mercy (RCIA 295-301).

- Presentation of the Creed during the third week of Lent.
- Presentation of the Lord's Prayer during the 5th week of Lent.
- It is encouraged that the Elect gather on Holy Saturday morning to celebrate one or more of the Preparation Rites (RCIA 185, 186).
- Celebration of the Easter Sacraments at the Easter Vigil or a Sunday during Easter time (RCIA 304, 305, 306) The Elect receive the 3 sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist.

4th Period—Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy (50 days of Easter)

This period can be arranged by an adaptation of the guidelines for adults (RCIA 244-251).

- Sunday Masses with the neophytes offer the faithful the witness of those who have chosen to “put on Christ” and offer the neophytes the loving support of the community of faith.
- Catechetical sessions continue through this period. In classrooms and informal gatherings the neophytes continue to grow in faith and continue to discover their place within the community of the church.
- The Bishop celebrates Mass at St. James Cathedral Basilica with the neophytes during the Easter season. It follows that the newly initiated should be encouraged to gather with the Bishop in this celebration of the Eucharist (RCIA 250).
- To close this formal period, a celebration should be held near Pentecost Sunday (RCIA 249).
- Since the language and reality of lifelong catechesis are encouraged in many church documents, plans and opportunities should be in place for the ongoing formation of the neophytes.