



ACM
— Association for —
CATECHUMENAL MINISTRY

A Guide to Navigating the
**Order of Christian Initiation
for Adults (OCIA)**

*Helping Parish Leaders Understand
the Transition from RCIA to OCIA*

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Introduction

The **Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA)** is the new translation of what was formerly known as the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**. This guide will help you understand the key changes and provide a roadmap for leading your parish through the transition. With this guide, you'll have the resources needed to confidently implement **OCIA** in your parish while keeping your team and candidates engaged and prepared.

Come and See:

What's Changing and What's Staying the Same

NATIONAL STATUTES

The **National Statutes** for the catechumenate remain a key guiding document for OCIA.

While the new translation may bring some updates in terminology, the core principles and guidelines outlined in the statutes remain unchanged.

STRUCTURE OF THE OCIA RITE BOOK

The **OCIA Rite Book** follows the same structure as the former RCIA book, with one exception.

The National Statutes have been moved from the back of the book to the beginning section following the “General Introduction.” Otherwise, the new translation follows the same structure, maintaining the familiar layout that covers the stages and rites of the initiation process. This new translation brings more precise language but retains the same foundational structure that parish leaders are accustomed to.

ANY MAJOR CHANGES?

While the new translation introduces clearer language, there are no major changes to the actual initiation process.

The shift to OCIA is primarily about terminology and theological precision, rather than a complete overhaul of what your team knows and has been practicing in the **RCIA** process.



A Brief History of OCIA

The **Rite of Christian Initiation** has its roots in the early Church, where adult converts underwent a structured process of initiation. The **RCIA** process, reintroduced in the 20th century, mirrored this early practice. The transition to **OCIA** brings the latest translation to align more closely with the Latin original, maintaining the Church's long-standing tradition of catechumenal formation.

The Four Periods of OCIA

The **OCIA** process guides candidates through four distinct periods of preparation and formation. To understand the OCIA one must know the OCIA Rite book. Within its pages lie the key to the other aspects of the process.

Note: the norm for the OCIA is the journey of the unbaptized adult. For the purpose of this brief explanation those are the individuals being referenced. There are provisions for the baptized later in the OCIA Rite book and these will be referenced at a later time.

01 PERIOD OF EVANGELIZATION AND PRECATECHUMENATE:

This initial stage focuses on inquiry and evangelization, allowing candidates/inquirers to explore their own faith and hear the gospel message before entering into a formal and public relationship with the Catholic Church. This period leads to formal entrance into the Catechumenate by means of discernment and a liturgical rite celebrated within the parish community.

02 PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE:

Beginning with the Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate, when the candidate formally becomes a “catechumen,” this period begins systematically to deliver the deposit of faith. The OCIA rite book provides the rites that help the catechumens open their hearts and minds to leave behind those parts of their lives that need conversion and healing. The tone of this period should be supportive and move the catechumens through the minor rites to become more liturgical. During this period the participants are called to a deeper relationship with the Lord in prayer, are surrounded by the loving support of the community, and hear the Truth. It is a time of learning and conversion. As in each period, three aspects must be present in balance to facilitate conversion. These aspects are: Liturgical, Catechetical, and Pastoral.

03 PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT:

After discernment and prayer this period of the process begins with the rite reserved for the bishop, The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names. In this rite the catechumens are “elected” by the bishop for initiation at this upcoming Easter Vigil. Usually occurring during the first week of Lent, the Catechumens become the Elect. This period is marked by intense spiritual preparation leading up to the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

04 PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGY:

After receiving the sacraments, newly initiated Catholics continue their journey. They are now called Neophytes. They have received the sanctifying graces bestowed by Baptism and strengthened by Confirmation. If we could view them with mystical sight we could see that they have been changed. They have received the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love so have the ability to view their lives in a new way. They are reborn. As with anyone who is young, they need loving support and guidance. The Period of Mystagogy provides this support. Reflecting on the mysteries of the faith and integrating into the life of the Church doesn’t happen magically. Since the promulgation of RCIA, this period has been mostly ignored. With this new promulgation of OCIA the Church has the opportunity to correct this oversight and get this right.

The Three Aspects of OCIA

"The OCIA is a beautiful symphony of grace with many movements that carry the catechumen closer to the heart of the Trinity."

01 LITURGICAL:

When the Church called for the reinstitution of the ancient catechumenate, it could have promulgated it in different ways. The choice to establish a modern catechumenate within a liturgical rite expresses the heart of the Church's mission. All conversion is first an act of grace, initiated by the One who created us to know and love him in our earthly life and to live with Him forever in heaven. The OCIA is not a program, a class, or a sharing group. The OCIA is a beautiful symphony of grace with many movements that carry the catechumen closer to the heart of the Trinity. It is orderly (ordered) and progressive, calling for catechesis that calls for reflection and ascent. The Lord beckons and then in His merciful kindness gives the catechumen the grace to reflect, change, and embrace the Truth and the Church He trusted it to. The liturgical aspects of this rite are the essential elements that not only give grace as catechumens are prepared to receive it, but begin to form people who can access grace for the rest of their lives through active participation in the Mass and Sacraments. The **Order of Christian Initiation** is deeply rooted in the liturgy of the Church. Each major step is marked by public rites that celebrate the candidates' journey toward full communion and draw them closer to the larger community.

02 CATECHETICAL:

Like **RCIA**, **OCIA** emphasizes the importance of thorough catechesis. In the OCIA rite book, the Church explains clearly what is required of the catechumens as they progress through each period and step. The Church tells the OCIA leaders that they must have a *systematic and organic catechesis*. The OCIA rite book explains what must be discerned regarding growth

in prayer and turning away from sin. OCIA, like RCIA, is not a classroom with teachers giving lectures nor is it a discussion of everyone's feelings. The OCIA process is catechetical, with catechists teaching for conversion. Candidates receive in-depth instruction in the doctrines and practices of the Catholic faith. Catechesis in OCIA is Christocentric and based on Divine Revelation. God reveals Himself to us through Word and Sacrament. Catechesis passes that Truth on faithfully without changing it or dumbing it down to sell it. The Catechetical Aspect of OCIA requires an adult model that faithfully proposes the Truth, allows questions and time for reflection, and invites a response in the form of a closer adherence to Jesus Christ and His Church.

03 PASTORAL:

The OCIA process is a person-to-person endeavor that requires the people of God to participate in the mission of the Church. **Each catechumen is a soul that is unique and loved by God.** God has given us the privilege of helping show the Father's great love for them by our respect of their free will and our desire to share the wonderful things God has done for us in our own lives. The OCIA process requires Godparents and Sponsors to faithfully walk through every part of the journey. OCIA requires the prayers and presence of the community every step of the way. The process requires an atmosphere of welcome and a safe womb where catechumens can face the sins that need to be given to the only One who can forgive and heal them, Jesus Christ. The OCIA calls for ministers who can speak the Truth in love and allow the catechumens to hear the Lord's voice. The process is not just about knowledge—it's also about care. The process is not just about doing "catholic stuff"—it's about a deeply intimate and singular relationship with Jesus Christ. **OCIA** highlights the need for ongoing pastoral guidance and personal support as candidates move through the different stages of initiation.

The Steps of OCIA

The **OCIA Rite** unfolds like a journey that includes three major liturgical steps. Each liturgical step moves the catechumen formally into another Period of the Catechumenate. Each Period prepares the catechumen to make the next formal step, by catechesis and pastoral care. After the formal step, the process helps the catechumen to lean into the graces they have received and move forward to a closer relationship with Christ through full communion with the Church.

THE THREE STEPS OF OCIA (UNBAPTIZED)

1. Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate
2. Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names
3. Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

THE FIVE STEPS OF OCIA

(for those who are preparing for Confirmation and the Eucharist and adults who, Baptized as infants, did not receive catechesis)

1. Rite of Welcoming the Candidates
2. Rite of Sending the Candidates for the Calling to Continuing Conversion
3. Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion
4. Penitential Rite (Scrutiny)
5. Order of Reception into Full Communion of the Catholic Church of Those Already Validly Baptized

THE FOUR STEPS OF OCIA (COMBINED RITES)

1. Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate and of Welcoming Baptized but Uncatechized Adults
2. Rite of Sending Catechumens for Election and Candidates for the Calling to Continuing Conversion
3. Rite of Election of Catechumens and of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion
4. Celebration at the Easter Vigil of the Sacraments of Initiation and the Rite of Reception

Each of these steps corresponds to a significant milestone in the spiritual journey of a candidate and is usually celebrated within the parish community.

Minor Rites of OCIA

In addition to the major rites, **OCIA** includes several minor rites that bless and support catechumens along their journey. These rites are usually celebrated within the gathering of the OCIA group rather than a Mass or liturgy. That is why they are referred to here as “minor.”

Minor does not mean that they carry less weight or importance. It is good to remind ourselves that the whole of the OCIA process is delivered in the context of liturgy. Every session should take place in a liturgical envelope, or in other words:

- **should open with prayer,**
- **be in a prayerful environment, and**
- **close with prayer.**

All of these rites can and should be used to achieve this. These rites are part of the liturgical patrimony of the Church and give grace. Many RCIA processes do not use them or even know they exist.

With OCIA all of these rites can be reexamined and put to use. Some of these rites can only be celebrated by a priest or deacon, while others can be led by a designated layperson. **Please read the rubrics in the OCIA rite book to understand who has the ability to lead a particular rite.** Each rite is meant to be used as many times as they are called for.

MINOR RITES OF THE PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE (UNBAPTIZED)

1. Celebrations of the Word of God
2. Minor Exorcisms
3. Blessings of the Catechumens
4. Anointing of the Catechumens
5. Optional Rites during the Period of the Catechumenate: Handing On of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer which may be concluded by the Ephphatha Rite)

- Note:** these are usually used during Purification and Enlightenment but can be used earlier. Please read the rubrics in the OCIA Rite Book.
6. Rite of Sending Catechumens for Election

MINOR RITES OF THE PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT (UNBAPTIZED)

1. First Scrutiny
2. Handing On of the Creed
3. Second Scrutiny
4. Third Scrutiny
5. Handing On of the Lord's Prayer
6. Rites of Immediate Preparation

WHAT DOES OCIA SAY ABOUT CHILDREN?

Many RCIA processes have asked about RCIC. The OCIA, like the RCIA, never refers to “RCIC.” The OCIA, like RCIA, addresses children's initiation in the section entitled: **Order of Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age.** Included in this section are the rites that are appropriate for their journey. Providing a process for children requires an understanding of the adult process, therefore requires that all within the ministry read the OCIA Rite Book. In Chapter II, Part II all of the rubrics and requirements are spelled out.

Practically, the preparation of a process for children has many challenges and requires a lot of flexibility. The bishops have expressed a concern for putting children in large public rites. Canon law defines what it means to be of a catechetical age. Safe environment requirements must be known and met. It is important that each family circumstance is known and respected. The first step is to read the OCIA book and go from there.

Conclusion

The transition from **RCIA** to **OCIA** is part of the Church's ongoing commitment to review and make the liturgical rites of the Church faithful to the original language and meaning of the prayers used in our most sacred actions. This has been done over several decades with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Infant Baptism, the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Mass, and the Roman Missal. Words are important. They form who we are. In the Church we say "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" that is, "the law of prayer is the law of belief." Meaning "we pray what we believe."

Would any priest baptize without reading and using the Rite of Infant Baptism or would he officiate at a wedding without using the Rite of Christian Marriage? Would any faithful minister just wing it, while saying Mass? We know the answer to that is no. Yet RCIA/OCIA teams and many priests and deacons have never read the RCIA Rite book. How has this happened?

The new translation of OCIA is an opportunity to begin anew. Read the Rite Book. Compare what is there to what you are doing. Read the whole book because the norm for the process is the unbaptized adult, so much of the instructions for catechesis and pastoring are in the introductions and rubrics for those people. **The Church exists to pour grace on the world and when we don't use all of the rites available to the catechumens and candidates, we rob them of those graces.**

Hopefully you will be happily surprised because while the name and language may be new, the heart of the process remains the same. Everyone, with careful reading of the OCIA will probably find some new gems that will enhance your process and maybe even solve some of your problems. This guide gives you a general overview and hopefully will help you be prepared to lead your parish confidently through the **Order of Christian Initiation for Adults**.

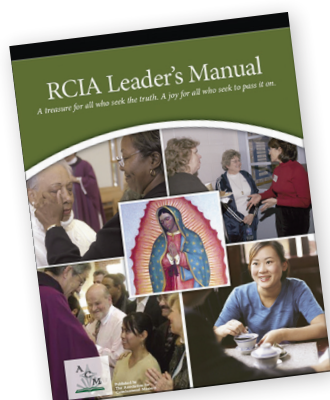
You are in a blessed ministry on the cutting edge of the Church, because you stand in the door of the church looking out into the darkness, with arms opened wide to embrace those the Lord calls. The Church has given us a way to be true disciples, teaching, sharing the joys and sorrows of conversion, and bringing others to full communion with the only answer to every human need and problem.



OCIA is a happy opportunity for growth.

Get essential resources for your OCIA process.

Confidently transform the lives of candidates and catechumens through OCIA. Find resources, training, and support to help your OCIA team thrive.



Leader's Manual

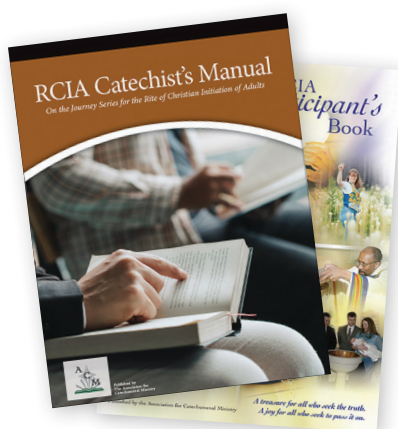
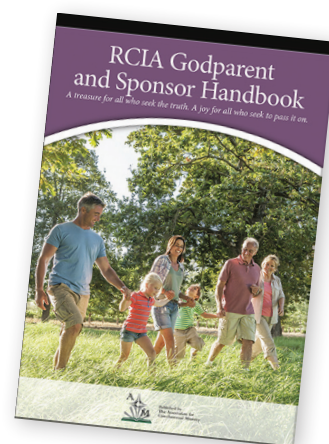
A comprehensive aide for OCIA leaders. Topics include:

- Creating a welcoming parish environment
- Recruitment and training of OCIA teams and sponsors
- Discerning the **stages of conversion**
- Handling annulments, issues of baptismal validity, etc.

Includes **copyable forms**, sample letters, sample retreats, and more practical resources.

Godparent & Sponsor Handbook

A straightforward and effective manual to help OCIA leaders guide godparents and sponsors in their roles. This handbook includes **60 session plans** and an **at-home retreat** incorporating Lectio Divina.



Catechist's Manual and Participant's Book

Present the faith systematically with this practical and easy to understand guide. Includes **60 session plans** with:

- Scripture and Catechism references
- Music and prayer suggestions
- Discussion questions

Participant's book includes a USB flash drive and the ability to produce unlimited copies. Includes **380 handouts** on topics like doctrine, lives of the saints, the Liturgical year, and more.

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