



## DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER

### PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RCIA

#### I. STAGES

##### PRE-CATECHUMENATE

During this period of evangelization and pre-catechumenate, the role of the faithful should be stressed. The Christian vocation to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all the world should impel the faithful to show the candidates evidence of the spirit of Christian community and welcome them into their homes, into personal conversation, and into community gatherings. (GI 9) Ideally, the entire parish would share this role; however, pastors of souls might be advised to choose specific members of the parish community to take the lead in showing Christian hospitality to the candidates.

Any reception or service of welcome for the candidates or "inquirers" must be entirely informal. The liturgical rites especially the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens may not be anticipated. (NSC 1)

This period of time is set aside for evangelization so that the true desire of following Christ and seeking Baptism may mature. During this time, priests, deacons, catechists, and lay persons suitably explain the Gospel to the "inquirers." This period may last for several years. Clearly, it is for the local pastor to determine when the "inquirer" is prepared to be accepted into the order of catechumens.

##### CATECHUMENATE

The term "catechumen" should be strictly reserved for the unbaptized who have been admitted to the order of catechumens. Baptized Catholic Christians who have not received catechetical instruction and whose Christian initiation has not been completed by Confirmation and Eucharist or baptized Christians who have been members of another church or ecclesial community and seek to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church should *not* be accepted as catechumens or referred to as such. This is true even when they participate in elements of catechumenal formation. (NSC 2 & 3)

In the celebration of the rite of acceptance, the following is noted:

1. The priest or deacon is the ordinary celebrant.
2. The additional rite of giving a cross may be incorporated into the rite. (RCIA 74)
3. The usual times for celebrating this rite in the Diocese of Fall River will be the VI Sunday of Easter or the second Sunday of the month of November. (GI 18) For extraordinary reasons, a third time may be permitted. Priests should have reference to Chancery before scheduling the rite outside the usual times.
4. There is to be no giving of a new name within the rite of acceptance. In the case of a candidate from a culture in which it is the practice of non-Christian religions to give a new name, application should be made to the Bishop for permission. (GI 33)

The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances. Therefore, nothing can be settled *a priori*. The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough -several years if necessary -for the conversion and the faith of the catechumens to become strong. Ordinarily, this period should extend for at least one year, beginning from the rite of acceptance; however, upon serious consideration the parish priest may permit a six-month period. (RCIA 76 & 77, NSC 6)

##### Catechumens

Catechumens should be encouraged to seek blessings and other privileges from the Church. When possible, they should be invited to leave following the Liturgy of the Word in the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. At this time, the Catechumens along with their sponsors and catechists adjourn to another location for the Lectionary catechesis and "break open the Word" as the Faithful "break the Bread of Life."

Should they die before completion of their initiation, they are entitled to Christian burial. In this case the funeral liturgy, including the funeral Mass, should be celebrated as usual, omitting only language referring directly to the sacraments the catechumen has not received. However, the funeral Mass may be omitted at the discretion of the pastor. (NSC 8 & 9)

The marriage of a catechumen should be celebrated at a Liturgy of the Word and *never* at the Eucharistic Liturgy. (NSC 10)

## II. MINISTRIES AND OFFICES

The Diocesan Bishop is the proper minister for the initiation of adults, including children of catechetical age. He will celebrate the rite of election or enrollment of names for all candidates of the Diocese at the Cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent. (NSC 11)

Parish Priests are to preside over the rite of acceptance of catechumens and when celebrating the sacraments of initiation for adults have the faculty to confirm from the law. (NSC 12) Specifically, the law provides that the priest may confirm:

1. Any adult (or child of catechetical age) at the time the catechumen is baptized (Confirmation and participation in the Eucharist to follow immediately). (see canon 866)
2. Any previously baptized Christian whom he admits into the full communion of the Catholic Church. (see canon 883, 2°)

[For other cases cfr. "Special Circumstances" No. 3 of these guidelines.]

With the help of deacons and catechists, they are to provide instruction for the catechumens; they are also to approve the choice of godparents and willingly listen to and help them; they are to be diligent in the correct celebration and adaptation of the rites throughout the entire course of Christian initiation. (GI 13, v. 35)

Deacons are to assist the priests in the instruction of the candidates and may celebrate the rite of acceptance of the catechumens. (GI 15)

Catechists should have an active part in the instruction of the candidates as well as participate in the rites when possible. In this Diocese they are *not* to perform the minor exorcisms and blessings contained in the rite. (GI 16)

Godparents (for each a godmother or godfather, or both) accompany the candidates on the day of election, at the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, and during the period of mystagogy. Godparents are chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest. The qualifications:

1. They should be persons, other than the parents of the candidates, who are designated by the candidates themselves or by the parish priest.
2. They should have the capability and intention of carrying out the responsibility of godparent and be mature enough to do so. A person of sixteen years of age is presumed to have the requisite maturity.
3. They must have received the three sacraments of initiation and be living a lifestyle consistent with faith and with the responsibilities of a godparent.
4. They must be members of the Catholic Church and canonically free to carry out this office. A baptized and believing Christian may act as a Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent. (GI 10)

## III. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Children of Catechetical Age who have reached the age of reason (7 years of age according to the law, see canon 97, § 2) are considered, for the purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults. (canon 851:1) Their formation should follow the ordinary catechumenate as far as possible, with the appropriate adaptations permitted by the ritual. They should receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens.

Some elements of the ordinary catechetical instruction of baptized children before their reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist may be appropriately shared with catechumens of catechetical age. Their condition and status as catechumens, however, should not be compromised or confused, nor should they receive the sacraments of initiation in any sequence other than that determined in the rite of Christian initiation (i.e. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). (NSC 18 & 19)

Uncatechized Adult Catholics who have never received catechetical instruction or been admitted to the sacraments of Confirmation or the Eucharist, are not catechumens. However, some elements of the usual catechumenal formation are appropriate to their preparation for the sacraments, in accord with the ritual "Preparation of Uncatechized Adults for Confirmation and the Eucharist." The following should be noted:

1. It is not generally recommended that the sacramental initiation of the baptized be celebrated at the same occasion as the rites for catechumens. If for some pastoral reason it is decided to celebrate the rites together, the status of those already baptized must be carefully respected and distinguished. Thus, the annual celebration of adult Confirmation at the Cathedral is retained, or the baptized candidates may be confirmed in the local parish at the regularly scheduled celebration.
2. The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with candidates for Confirmation and Eucharist is to be carried out at a time prior to and distinct from the celebration of Confirmation and the Eucharist.
3. Priests have the faculty to confirm:
  - a) Adults or children old enough for catechesis (7 yrs. old) — at the time of their Baptism.
  - b) Those validly baptized in non-Catholic Christian churches — at the time of their reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.
  - c) Those baptized but not confirmed in the Catholic Church who, after having been brought up in or having joined a non-Catholic religion, later seek full reception into the Catholic Church. At the time of their reception.
4. A priest may *not* confirm one who was baptized but not confirmed a Catholic, who did not join another religion, and who, after a period of time (often many years) in which he or she was not active in the practice of the faith, now desires to be confirmed and to be actively involved in the Church's life.

In such a case in order to maintain the interrelationship or sequence of Confirmation and Eucharist as defined in canon 842 §2, priests who lack the faculty to confirm should seek it from the bishop, who may, in accord with canon 844 §1 grant the faculty if he judges it necessary. (NSC 25-29, V. AAS 72 (1980) 105-106)

#### IV. ABBREVIATED CATECHUMENATE

Extraordinary circumstances may arise in which the diocesan bishop may allow the use of the abbreviated catechumenate in individual cases. The extraordinary circumstances in question are either events that prevent the candidate from completing all the steps of the catechumenate or a depth of Christian conversion and a degree of religious maturity that leads the diocesan bishop to decide that the candidate may receive Baptism without delay.

The catechumenate of persons who move from one parish to another or from one diocese to another should not on that account alone be abbreviated.

Individual cases should be directed to the Chancery by local pastors for appropriate action.

Candidates who receive formation in an abbreviated catechumenate should receive the sacraments of Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil, if possible, together with the candidates who have participated in a more extended catechumenate. They should also participate in a period of mystagogy, to the extent possible. (RCIA 331, NSC 20 & 21)

#### V. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

In order to signify clearly the interrelationship of the three sacraments of Christian initiation, adult candidates, including children of catechetical age, are to receive Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist in a single Eucharistic celebration at the Easter Vigil or, if necessary, at some other time.

The rite of anointing with oil of the catechumens is to be omitted in the Baptism of adults at the Easter Vigil.

Baptism by immersion is the fuller and more expressive sign of the sacrament and, therefore, is preferred. At least, the provision of the RCIA for partial immersion; namely, immersion of the head, should be taken into account. (NSC 14-17)

#### VI. MYSTAGOGY

After the completion of their Christian initiation, the neophytes should begin the period of mystagogy by participating in the principal Sunday Eucharist of the parish throughout the Easter Season, which ends on Pentecost Sunday. They should do this as a body in company with their godparents and those who have assisted in their Christian formation.

After the immediate mystagogy, the program for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of their 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. (NSC 22 & 24)

## VII. RECEPTION INTO FULL CATHOLIC COMMUNION

Those who have been baptized in another church or ecclesial community should *not* be treated as catechumens or so designated. Their doctrinal and spiritual preparation should be determined according to the individual case.

The rites of presentation of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the book of the Gospels is *not* proper except for those who have received no Christian instruction or formation.

It is preferable that the reception into full communion *not* take place at the Easter Vigil. The reception of these candidates is more appropriately celebrated at the principal parish Sunday Eucharist.

The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with candidates for the reception into full communion is to be carried out at a time prior to and distinct from the celebration of the rite of reception.

There may arise the occasion where there is reasonable and prudent doubt concerning the Baptism of the candidates. If conditional Baptism seems necessary, this must be celebrated privately and with limited rites; namely, the Profession of Faith and Baptism with water using the proper formula. The reception into full communion should take place later at the principal parish Sunday Eucharist. (NSC 30-37)