

Introduction to Christian Initiation: An Overview of the RCIA

**Catholic Diocese of Saginaw
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Center for Ministry**



Sacramentos de Iniciación
Sacraments of Initiation

Part I: An Overview of Christian Initiation

Christian Initiation ...

- ... the various stages and periods that constitute the full and paradigmatic form of becoming a member of the Christian community.
- This communal process has a two-fold goal:
 - (1) *personal commitment to Christ in a way of life based on the gospel; and*
 - (2) *integration into the ecclesial community.*

(*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, The Harper-Collins', New York;
Richard P. McBrien, General Editor © 1995)

- The Catholic church recognizes seven sacraments. The number 7 is symbolic of perfection or wholeness.
- We believe that the Lord has left the Christian community with these seven signs of love to touch us during the key moments of our lives and to empower us to be a priestly community.
- When we begin life, **BAPTISM** unites us with the Risen Lord and all our fellow Christians.

- As we mature and more fully begin to accept and live the Christian life, **CONFIRMATION** showers us with the strength of the Holy Spirit to live faithfully for the Lord.
- These two ***sacraments of initiation*** form Christians into a priestly people who can celebrate the liturgy.
- The **EUCCHARIST**, the summit of Christian worship, is a sacred meal that commemorates and re-enacts the Lord's sacrifice on the cross for our salvation. It nourishes our faith and both signifies and brings about our union with God.

[CCC: 1113; 1119-1120; 1122; 1132]

- ... the sacraments of baptism and confirmation ... along with eucharist ... are **sacraments of initiation** which lay the foundation of every Christian life. [CCC 1265]
- **Baptism** – the gateway to the life in the Spirit – gives us new life;
- **Confirmation** strengthens us to live Christ-like lives; and
- **Eucharist** is the food for eternal life. [CCC 1212-1213]
- In short, these sacraments incorporate us into Christian community and enable us to share in Jesus' work.

*(This is Our Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults, M.F. Pennock,
Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN © 1998)*

Christian Initiation and the “Spiritual Journey” of Discipleship ...

- Saint Thomas Aquinas: “Eucharist is the summit of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments.”
- The spiritual journey begins at baptism.
- We are baptized once, confirmed once; but we celebrate (and receive) Eucharist time-after-time, Sunday-after-Sunday, year-after-year. In this sense, the ***sacraments of initiation*** of baptism, confirmation and 1st eucharist are a means to an end.

- We are initiated in order to live a Eucharistic life, to “be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5).
- The process of ***Christian Initiation*** is renewed and revitalized by lives of service. Having been incorporated into the Christ who came to wash the feet of others, the baptized carry out Christ’s command to remember him, not only by liturgical action but by Christian love.
- To put it another way, Baptismal-Eucharistic Spirituality is not something only at Mass. It is the hallmark of the entire Christian life, a life marked by giving one’s self in memory of Jesus who gave himself, who washed the feet of others.

*(The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia - Revised and Expanded,
The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN © 2004)*

Christian Initiation: Four Anchors

("Depths of Meaning")

(Sacramental Guidelines: A Companion to the New Catechism for Religious Educators, by K. B. Osborne, OFM, Paulist Press © 1995)

I: The celebration is primarily a celebration of what God has done and is doing and will continue to do in the lives of those involved. The celebration of Christian initiation is the celebration of God's free and unmerited grace. The response of the Christian individual and of the Christian community is always a matter of secondary importance.

II: The initiation liturgies celebrate, again in a primary way, the ***paschal mystery*** by which Christ saved us. We do not save ourselves; salvation, justification, sanctification, liberation are due entirely to the full efficacy of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

III: The sacraments of initiation are celebrations of the action of the Holy Spirit within the community called church.

IV: The entire Christ, the gathered and worshipping Christian community, are the primary celebrants of the sacraments of initiation. The sacraments of initiation are not celebrated primarily by clergy. The sacraments of initiation can only be understood, when they are experienced as celebrations, and the spirit of celebration should permeate the entire liturgical process.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Its meaningfulness in our lives

HOPE BEGINNING FAITH
SUFFERING

PASCHAL GLORY EUCHARIST REBIRTH
MYSTERY

DEATH CELEBRATION

RESURRECTION LIGHT DYING RISING

DARKNESS DEVASTATION INSPIRATION PROMISE

SACRIFICE LIFE REDEMPTION
PASSING

LOVE NEW LIFE

Paschal Mystery

Paschal Mystery

- The title of a document, *Paschalis Mysterii*, was issued by Pope Paul VI on May 9, 1969. In this document he approved a reorganization of the liturgical year and calendar for the Roman Rite. Its purpose was "to permit the faithful to communicate in a more intense way, through faith, hope and love, in the whole mystery of Christ, which . . . unfolds within the cycle of a year."

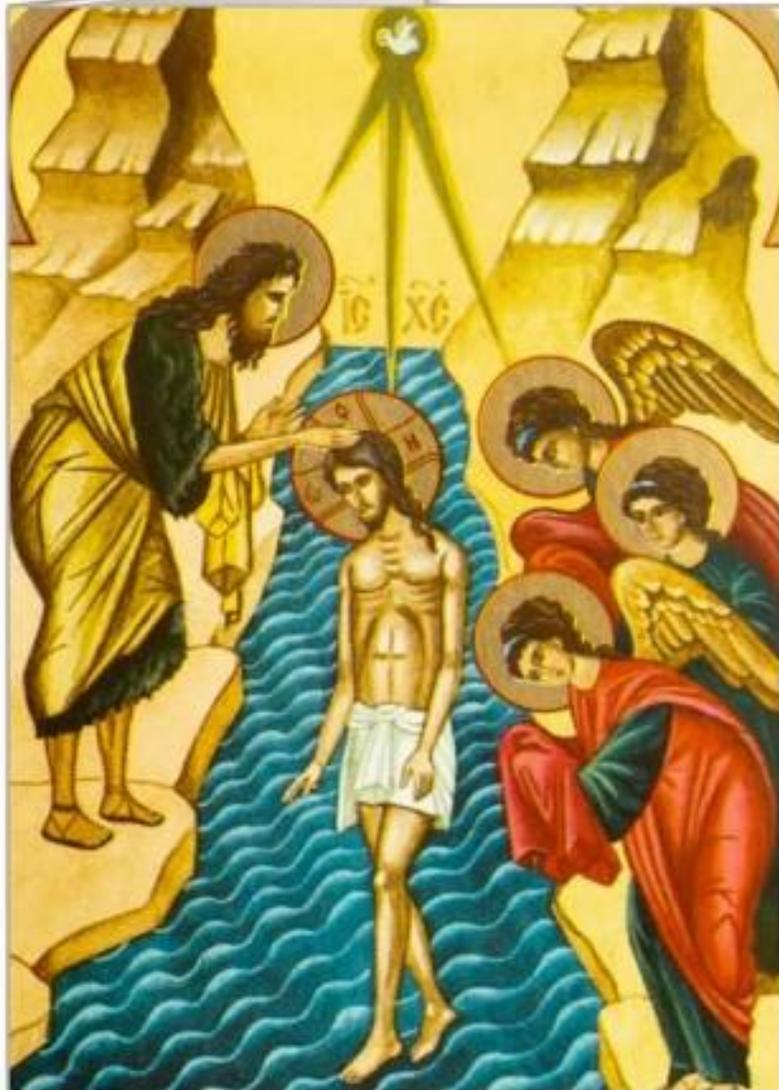
Paschal Mystery is a general term to describe the redemptive work of Christ, especially the events of the Last Supper and the Passion, reaching their climax on Easter Sunday.

(Etym. Latin paschalis, from pascha, Passover, Easter; from Greek pasha; from Hebrew pesah, Pesach.)

Well-fashioned disciples of the Risen Lord are shaped and taught through good liturgy:

lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi.

[Translation: “as we worship, so we believe, so we live”].



Christian Spirituality

In the rituals [of Christian initiation], the community celebrates what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do for the one(s) who is [initiated]. This action of God becomes clearer when we relate this to Jesus' own baptism, when the clouds were opened, the Spirit came down on Jesus, and God said, "This is my child."

In each baptism, the heavens open, the Spirit comes down, and God says to the one who is baptized, "This is my son. This is my daughter. I am well pleased."

It is surely this loving action of God in Christ that we, the Christian community, celebrate in each and every baptism.

Table Discussion

What new insight have you gleaned given this presentation on Christian Initiation?

Part II: Christian Initiation & the Rite of Baptism of Children

Jerry Green

The Praxis of Infant Baptism



Table Discussion

What new insight have you gleaned given this presentation on the Rite of Baptism for Children?

Part III: Christian Initiation & the RCIA



Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

What RCIA is not...

- It is not an adult confirmation program.
- It is not an adult education program.
- It is not a marriage preparation program (even if one person in the couple is not Catholic).
- It is not CCD for adult Catholics who “dropped out” after confirmation.
- It is not a place for sponsors or spouses to “catch up” on facts of the faith.
- It is not a small faith sharing community.
- It is not a support group for dealing with emotional distress.
- It is not a class.
- It is not a club.
- It is not a “program” for making Protestants into Catholics.

(The Way of Faith by Nick Wagner)

“Something Old, Something New ...”

[...and more to come?]

- Let’s look at Page 9 of the RCIA Workshop Booklet:

History of the Initiation Process

[from the former North American FORUM on the Catechumenate]

What RCIA is ...

The Roman Ritual Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults:

- ❖ was the last of the sacramental rites revised after Vatican Council II;
- ❖ is a restoration of the ancient practice of initiation into the Church: a process of discerning and ritualizing stages of conversion; and
- ❖ is one (1) rite ... divided into various periods that respect the individual's journey of faith (these periods of initiation formation are marked by community celebrations that serve as transitions or steps throughout the rite).

These various periods are a process of formation to the gospel of Christ ...

✓ ***Process:***

a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end ...

(“discernment process”)

✓ ***Formation:***

a process by which an individual is “formed” into the fullness of the Christian life and becomes a true disciple of Christ ...

❖ The “Mystery of Salvation”

❖ The practice of “Theological Virtues”:

- a. faith
- b. hope
- c. love

❖ The practice of “Christian Virtues” ... an habitual and firm disposition to do good (e.g. human, moral, social, etc.)

katechein

Greek ... translation:
“to echo”

- **Catechism** ... a manual of religious instruction using simple language and a question-and-answer format.
- **Catechist** ... someone commissioned by the Church “to hand down” its faith tradition.
- **Catechumen** ... an unbaptized person undergoing instruction and formation in preparation for {Christian initiation}.
- **Catechumenate** ... the 2nd period in the process of Christian initiation (after a period of initial inquiry about the faith) ... when catechumens publicly state their intention before the Church (to enter into the process of instruction and formation) to become a {Catholic} Christian.

We have to be passionate about using the RCIA as a conversion process and only a conversion process!

(NW)

Table Discussion

What new insight have you gleaned given this presentation on what the RCIA is not and what the RCIA is (*plus “Something Old, Something New”*)?

Part IV: The Four Pillars of the RCIA

- **Evangelization** (RCIA #36) ... faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he sent for the salvation of all.
- **Conversion** (RCIA #1) “The rite of Christian initiation ... is designed for adults, who ... consciously and freely seek ... [to] enter the way of faith and conversion.”
- **Discipleship** ... is the whole matrix of activities and values derived from close association with Jesus ... is identification with the ‘dying and rising’ of Jesus ... and issues of imitation of Christ (initiated at Baptism and nourished at the eucharistic table).
- **Apprenticeship** ... how Catholics “mentor” inquirers/catechumens by their (1) welcome, (2) engagement, (3) teaching/application of faith, and (4) prayer.

Table Discussion

What new insight have you gleaned given this presentation on the Four Pillars of the RCIA?



Part V: The Four Periods of the RCIA

Period of Evangelization & Precatechumenate

“Inquiry”

Linda Milco

Period of the Catechumenate

This is the time, in duration corresponding to the progress of the individual, for the nurturing and growth of the catechumen's faith and conversion to God; celebrations of the word and prayers of exorcism and blessings are meant to assist the process.

Father Jim Bessert

- RCIA: Introduction #7/2:

The second period, which begins with the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens and may last for several years, includes **catechesis** and the **rites** connected with catechesis. It comes to an end on the day of election.

- **RCIA: Period of the Catechumenate #75:**

The catechumenate 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 (4) ways:

#75:1

KERYGMA

- A suitable catechesis is provided by priest or deacons, or by catechists and others of the faithful, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.

"Catechesis"

▣ The term is often times misunderstood! (Mary Birmingham)

-often considered as a means of the teaching of religion (primarily the explanation of the doctrines of the Church)
-it means much more ... it encompasses a broader understanding ... it means to proclaim the person of Jesus Christ and to have the proclamation resound in the hearts and minds of all who will listen and to have them echo back with faith and understanding what they have heard
-this proclaiming, resounding and echoing is catechesis

#75: 2

KOINONIA

- As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspirations in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation ...

“Community”

▣ “One becomes a Christian by living with Christians.”

(Thomas Morris)

-knowledge of and encounters with the people in the community provide a basis for the life with the community after initiation

-we are not initiating them into our catechumenate; we are initiating them into the Body of Christ

-after they become more and more exposed to the Christian way of life (community) they will then be more attentive to the ways of true discipleship

#74/3:

LEITOURGIA

- The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing. Celebrations of word of God are arranged for their benefit, and at Mass they may also take part with the faithful in the liturgy of the word, thus better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the eucharist ...

“Liturgical Catechesis”

- The RCIA is a (One) liturgical rite – thus the context for the “catechesis” assumed in the RCIA is a liturgical framework:
 1. the rites
 2. the liturgical year
 3. celebrations of the word
 4. symbols and gestures
 5. sacred song

#75/4:

DIAKONIA

- Since the Church's life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.

“Apostolic Service”

- ▣ The life of apostolic service is the way that the challenges prompted by communal, liturgical, scriptural, and doctrinal formation are put into practice.
- ▣ Apostolic service is not simply a matter for discussion; it is to be lived.
- ▣ Apostolic service assumes that the catechumens are “walking the walk – talking the talk” of the disciples of Jesus and are with them feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and visiting the sick and lonely.

“Suitable Pastoral Formation & Guidance”

- The opening paragraph (#75) described this period of the catechumenate as a time of “suitable pastoral formation” and “guidance”
- The framework of this “suitable pastoral formation” is identified in #75: 1-4
- “Guidance” refers to the art of apprenticing catechumens into the way of Christian living within the Catholic communion.

A Pastoral Reflection

- ▣ The catechumenate is meant to be a period of significant duration (lasting a minimum of one full calendar year) ...
- ▣ This period is sometimes described as an “apprenticeship” in the Christian life – since it is to be a complete and long-term experience of all its dimensions, including: catechetical formation, liturgical celebrations, gradual growth in the community’s life of faith and charity, and participate in apostolic activity.

- **Gathering regularly for celebrations of God's word with the faithful, catechumens are gradually transformed by the gospel to:**

- deepen their grasp of the faith;**
- reorder their lives, and**
- engage in the mission of Christ in the world.**

A Final Reflection ...

“Christians are made, not born.”

Tertullian (3rd c. theologian)

One does not become a Christian simply by saying he or she wants to be a Christian (although this is an important step in the process) any more than one becomes a doctor by enrolling in medical school. Both decisions are life-shaping decisions. One is “formed” into the life chosen.

(Thomas Morris)

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

Father Jim Bessert

- ◎ RCIA #138 - The period of purification and enlightenment, which the rite of election begins, customarily coincides with Lent. In the liturgy and liturgical catechesis of Lent the reminder of baptism already received or the preparation for its reception, as well as the theme of repentance, renew the entire community along with those being prepared to celebrate the paschal mystery, in which each of the elect will share through the sacraments of initiation. For both the elect and the community, therefore, the Lenten season is a time for spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery.

- **RCIA #139 - This 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. This period is intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior. The celebration of certain rites, particularly the **scrutinies** (see nos. 141-146) and the **presentations** (see nos. 147-149), bring about this process of purification and enlightenment and extend it over the course of the entire Lenten season.**

The focus of this period is two-fold:

- The proximate preparations of the elect for the Easter sacraments through:
 1. Prayer
 2. Penancealong with the challenge of the local parish (community) to enter more deeply the cycle of the paschal event through the witness of the elect and their “conversion” journey.
- The celebration of the Season of Lent and the certain rites that help bring about this “purification” and “enlightenment” :
 1. Scrutinies
 2. Presentations
(Creed & Lord’s Prayer)
 3. Preparation Rites for Initiation (on Holy Saturday):
 - a. Recitation of the Creed
 - b. Ephphetha Rite
 - c. [Choosing of a Baptismal Name]

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis

Anne Marie Graham

Table Discussion

What new insight have you gleaned given this presentation on the Four Periods of the RCIA?

Part VI: RCIA -
Part II "Rites for Particular
Circumstances"

Part VII: Closure ...

“Recapturing the Richness of the RCIA”

[Panel Discussion with the Diocesan RCIA Steering Committee]