

# Frequently Asked Questions Concerning the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

Adult Initiation Committee, Archdiocese of Indianapolis

(This document is also available at <http://archindy.org/worship/rcia-faq.html>.)

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## A. THE CATECHUMENATE

### 1. How long should the period of the catechumenate last?

The U.S. Statute for the RCIA #6 calls for at least a 12-month period between the acceptance into the order of catechumens and the celebration of baptism. More specifically, it recommends that the period begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year or at least that it last from the Easter season of one year until the next.

Even though the majority of parishes in the U.S. do not strictly observe this statute, it is important to recognize one of its underlying principles; namely, that there is no such thing as a “one size fits all” adult initiation process. The statute refers mainly to those catechumens who are *uncatechized*-- who are “starting from scratch.” Oftentimes these people may need and deserve a longer period of formation and preparation. A more extended period may also be needed for those who were baptized (Catholic or non-Catholic) but then received little or no catechesis and were not “raised in the faith.”

On the other hand, the statute clearly does not refer to those who were baptized and catechized and have been “active” in another Christian tradition. They usually require a shorter period of preparation so that they can “come to the table of the Eucharist” as soon as possible. (See B. RECEPTION INTO FULL COMMUNION.)

### 2. May the catechumenate be celebrated in an abbreviated form or may the sacraments of initiation for adults be celebrated apart from the Easter Vigil?

Only in individual and exceptional cases such as serious illness or an extraordinary depth of conversion and religious maturity. The bishops of the Church who restored the RCIA were very concerned that those to be initiated not be deprived of the spiritual riches of a multi-stage catechumenate in harmony with the liturgical year. For this reason, the permission of the archbishop is required to use an abbreviated form of the RCIA, to dispense from any of the scrutinies, or to celebrate the rites outside of the usual times. Good pastoral judgment should always precede such requests. (RCIA 34, 331-369; U.S. Statutes 20)

### **3. Who is the proper minister of baptism?**

The proper minister of baptism is a bishop, priest or deacon. However, in a case of extreme necessity any person with the right intention may baptize if an ordained minister is not available. (canon 861)

### **4. May lay catechists preside at the minor exorcisms and the blessing of catechumens?**

Yes. The archbishop has deputed catechists who are truly worthy and properly prepared to give the minor exorcisms and blessings (RCIA 34).

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### **5. Who is the proper minister of the Rite of Election?**

The archbishop is the ordinary minister of the Rite of Election. If for pastoral reasons the parish priest is to preside at a celebration of the Rite of Election, he is to obtain specific delegation from the archbishop. (RCIA 12 and 34).

### **6. Is the celebration of the three Lenten Scrutinies an essential part of the RCIA?**

Yes. Just as sacramental and non-sacramental penitential celebrations are important for the already baptized, so are the scrutinies important for those preparing for baptism. In fact, only the bishop may dispense from their celebration for serious pastoral reasons. (RCIA 343)

### **7. At what point in the Sunday liturgy are catechumens to be dismissed for catechesis?**

Catechumens are to be dismissed from the assembly following the homily but before the Creed and General Intercessions because the recitation of the Creed and the task of intercessory prayer are the duties and privileges of the baptized. (For dismissal examples and texts, see RCIA 67, 136, and 155.)

## **B. RECEPTION INTO FULL COMMUNION**

### **1. Is the Easter Vigil the only time to complete the initiation of the already baptized?**

No. The RCIA provides a combined rite “for pastoral reasons and in view of the Vigil’s being the principal annual celebration of the Church.” (RCIA U.S. Statutes 34) But it also states that “it is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil lest there be any confusion of such baptized Christians with the candidates for baptism, possible misunderstanding of or even reflection upon the sacrament of baptism celebrated in another Church or ecclesial community, or any perceived triumphalism in the liturgical welcome into the Catholic Eucharistic community.” (RCIA U.S. Statute 33)

A key point to remember is that all validly baptized people are already members of the “order of the faithful” even if various circumstances prevent some of them from being in full communion with the Catholic Church. As soon as a baptized person is prepared and ready to enter into this communion, that person has a right to profess (or renew) faith in the Catholic Church, be confirmed, and be admitted to the Eucharist without delay.

In the process of moving toward this full communion, there are at least three categories of candidates, depending mostly on the level of catechesis they have received:

**Those baptized in another tradition, but who received little or no catechesis.** It is appropriate for such persons to be catechized along with the catechumens, even though it is important to respect their baptism and the seed of faith that led to it. Even though they should be received into full communion as soon as they are ready, it is not inappropriate for them to renew their baptismal promises and profess their faith in the Catholic Church, and then to join the newly baptized for Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

**Those who were baptized and catechized in another Christian tradition and have been involved either in that tradition or even in a Catholic parish.** There is usually no need for such persons to participate in an extended process. The length of time for catechesis will vary depending on many factors, but when they are prepared and ready, they should be admitted into full communion as soon as possible as described in RCIA Part II, Chapter 5 rather than at the Easter Vigil. Some parishes have designated particular feasts or seasons of the year for these celebrations such as the Baptism of the Lord or Pentecost.

**Those baptized as Catholics but who then received little or no catechesis and no other sacraments.** It may also be appropriate for these people to “attach” themselves to the catechumenate and complete their initiation at the Easter Vigil. However, since they are already baptized Catholics, they renew their baptismal promises with the whole assembly instead of specifically professing their faith in the Catholic Church. Also the permission of the bishop is needed for the priest to confirm them. (See C. CONFIRMATION below.)

**Note: As a general rule, active Catholics who have already been fully participating in the Eucharist should not be confirmed at the Easter Vigil (See C. CONFIRMATION below.)**

### **2. Do the candidates for full communion sign the Book of the Elect?**

The Book of the Elect is reserved for the “enrollment” of the names of those who are elected for baptism. The RCIA does not call for such an enrollment for the candidates for full communion

since they have already been baptized. Signing of the Book of the Elect is clearly a “pre-baptismal” gesture, and its intent is weakened if baptized candidates also sign it.

### **3. Do candidates for full communion participate in the scrutinies?**

No “combined rite” is provided for the Lenten season. Instead, RCIA 459-472 has an optional “Penitential Rite” that may be used for the candidates since the scrutinies are reserved for the members of the elect preparing for baptism. During the first part of the celebration of the scrutinies, the candidates for full communion might be called forward as a separate group and specific prayers might be added for their continued conversion. (See RCIA 470B) But the pre-baptismal content of the prayers of exorcism themselves makes it clear that they are to be prayed only over the elect.

### **4. Are baptized but uncatechized candidates for reception into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church obligated to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation prior to their profession of faith?**

Candidates should receive a thorough catechesis on the sacrament of reconciliation and be encouraged in the frequent celebration of the sacrament (RCIA U.S. Statutes 27 and 36). The *requirement* for reconciliation is the same as for all Catholics. They would need to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation if they were guilty of serious sin (RCIA 482).

### **5. Are candidates for full communion dismissed with the catechumens?**

Catechumens are dismissed following the homily, but before the Creed and General Intercessions because the recitation of the Creed and the task of intercessory prayer are duties and privileges of the baptized. It is not foreseen that already-baptized candidates for full communion be dismissed with the catechumens, but neither is it forbidden in the official documents. Pastoral discretion should be exercised in making the decision of whom to dismiss for catechesis, taking into account the benefit of the catechesis for those who participate in it.

### **6. Are there special considerations for receiving Orthodox Christians into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church?**

Yes. Normally, a baptized Orthodox Christian is to be received into the corresponding Eastern Rite of the Roman Catholic Church (*Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches* 4). However, if the newly received person is married to a Catholic in a different Rite (e.g. Roman), he or she may either remain in the Eastern Rite or transfer to the Rite of the spouse. (canon 112.2)

## **C. CONFIRMATION AND THE RCIA**

### **1. When is confirmation to be administered as part of the RCIA?**

In accord with the ancient practice followed in the Roman liturgy, adults are to be confirmed immediately after being baptized, unless serious reason stands in the way" (RCIA 215; canon 866; RCIA U.S. Statutes 35). This also applies to children of catechetical age"(U.S. Statutes 18-19). (See # below.)

When candidates are received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church they are to be confirmed at the time of their profession of faith and reception. Their confirmation is not to be deferred (RCIA U.S. Statute 35 and canon 885.1).

### **2. Who has the responsibility to confirm?**

Any priest who baptizes someone who is of catechetical age or older, or receives someone into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church, by law has the responsibility and faculty to confirm that person (canons 883 and 885).

Priests who do not exercise a pastoral office but participate in a catechumenate do require a mandate from the diocesan bishop if they are to baptize; but they do not then require any additional mandate or authorization in order to confirm. They have the faculty to confirm from the law, as do priests who baptize in the exercise of their pastoral office (U.S. Statute 12).

### **3. May a priest confirm a baptized but uncatechized Catholic?**

A priest who wishes to confirm a baptized but uncatechized Catholic must explicitly request this faculty from the diocesan bishop (canon 884.1). The only exception is in the case of a baptized Catholic who has without fault been instructed in a non-Catholic religion or in the case of the re-admission to communion of a baptized Catholic who has been an apostate from the faith (U.S. Statutes 28, 29).

### **4. Is the Easter Vigil an appropriate time to request permission to confirm active Catholics who have already been fully participating in the Eucharist?**

No. Active Catholics should be confirmed by the archbishop either at the specially designated annual celebration at the cathedral or on another occasion.

Baptism is at the center of the Easter Vigil. The celebration should focus primarily on those who are being baptized and may also include those who have journeyed with the catechumens in a period of formation and are now completing their initiation through Confirmation and Eucharist. (See B1 above)

**5. If candidates being received into full communion have already been confirmed in the Church of their baptism, do they need to be reconfirmed?**

The Roman Catholic Church accepts only the confirmation of the Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic Church. All others need to be confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church. If there is doubt, pastoral ministers should consult with the chancery.

**6. Is it permissible at one celebration for one priest to baptize and another to confirm?**

No. The faculty to confirm is granted only to the one who baptizes. If there is a large number to be confirmed, the presiding minister may invite other priests to assist him in the anointing according to the norms prescribed in RCIA 14.

## **D. BAPTISM OF CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE**

### **1. How are children of catechetical age initiated into the Church?**

Children who have attained the use of reason are of “catechetical age,” normally around seven years. For purposes of Christian initiation, they are considered to be adults.(canon 852.1 and RCIA U.S. Statute 18). Their formation should follow the general pattern of the catechumenate as far as possible.

The permission of at least one of the parents is required before such children are accepted into the catechumenate and before they are initiated into the Church. Parents are encouraged to participate in the process of formation to whatever extent they are able and to offer the support and example the children will need (RCIA 254).

Pastors should be reminded that once a child has reached the age of reason the *Rite of Baptism for Children* is no longer the proper ritual book to use. Part II, Chapter I of the RCIA (252-329) is the appropriate rite.

### **2. Are children of catechetical age to be confirmed and celebrate the Eucharist at the time of their baptism?**

Yes. It is not permissible to delay their first communion and confirmation until a later time. In the dioceses of the United States it is clearly expected that when such a child is baptized, the child is to be confirmed and share in the eucharist at the same celebration, normally the Easter Vigil. (RCIA U.S. Statute 14, 18, 19; RCIA 8 and 256)

While this may cause concern for consistency in religious education programs in which children baptized in infancy are not confirmed until a later age, this in itself is not a sufficient reason to postpone confirmation. The integrity and unity of the three sacraments of initiation as well as the grace conferred in their administration are maintained by not delaying confirmation or eucharist (RCIA 215; canon 866).

### **3. Should children enrolled in the catechumenate be included in the Rite of Election held for adult catechumens?**

The Rite of Election for Children is an optional rite (RCIA 277-290) designed specifically for their state. However, these children may also be included in the Rite of Election for adults, especially when their parents are also catechumens.

## **E. RECEPTION OF CHILDREN INTO FULL COMMUNION**

### **1. How are baptized children of catechetical age received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church?**

Because children of catechetical age are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults (canon 852.1), the Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church is used. (RCIA 473-504) Depending on the level of prior catechesis, their formation may be similar to unbaptized children preparing for the initiation sacraments (RCIA 252-259) or to uncatechized adults preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist (RCIA 400-410). These children may be received into the church and confirmed either at the Easter Vigil or at another time. Children of parents being received into full communion are ordinarily received into the Church with their parents.

### **2. How are children below the age of reason received into full communion?**

Presuming the children are being received into the Church at the same time as one or both parents, nothing is required of them. However, their original baptism should be carefully recorded in the baptismal register with a note of their becoming Catholic through their parents' initiation into the Church. It is presumed that they would be confirmed and celebrate eucharist along with the other children of the parish at the customary time

### **3. Are children who are completing their initiation through confirmation and eucharist expected to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation?**

Children who were baptized as Roman Catholics are expected to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation before their first reception of the Eucharist (canon 914 and RCIA U.S. Statutes 27).

Children who were baptized, but not as Roman Catholics, and are now preparing for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church should be adequately prepared and encouraged to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation sometime before their formal reception into the Roman Catholic Church (RCIA 482; RCIA U.S. Statute 36).



## F. MARRIAGE ISSUES

(See also FAQ's from the webpage of the Metropolitan Tribunal <http://archindy.org/tribunal/faq.html>.)

### **1. Should inquirers who need a declaration of nullity be accepted into the RCIA process?**

Inquirers who need a declaration of nullity from their previous marriage are free to enter into the catechumenate. However, they cannot be accepted for the Rite of Election or the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion until the declaration of nullity is granted. Initiation ministers should uncover the need for a declaration of nullity through personal interviews **early in the process**. Inquirers in need of a declaration of nullity who are received into the catechumenate must clearly understand at the outset that they may not be initiated until the declaration is received.

A catechumen or a candidate who is not now invalidly remarried nor intends to remarry is not in need of a declaration of nullity to be accepted for the Rite of Election or the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion and consequently, the sacraments of initiation. However, the implication of future attempts to remarry without a declaration of nullity must be carefully explained before the discernment for the rite is completed.

### **2. If an inquirer, catechumen, or candidate for full communion is engaged to be married, should the initiation process be abbreviated to allow for initiation before the marriage is celebrated?**

No. The process of formation required for Christian initiation should not be abbreviated simply for the goal of being a fully initiated Roman Catholic in time for the wedding. It may be more appropriate to concentrate on the preparation for Christian marriage and postpone or extend the catechumenate. Christian marriage is a serious vocation and its preparation should not be neglected or weakened because of one's participation in the catechumenate. It is pastorally wise to refer such a person to the pastor who can then assume responsibility for seeing that the inquirer, catechumen or candidate has the opportunity to complete the initiation process. (For information on the marriage liturgy for catechumens, see RCIA U.S. Statute 10.)

### **3. If a catechumen or a candidate for full communion is in an irregular marriage that needs to be convalidated, when should this be done?**

The convalidation of an irregular marriage should normally be completed before the sacraments of initiation are celebrated. One cannot enter into the full sacramental life of the Church unless one is completely free to receive the sacraments. It is pastorally advisable to convalidate the marriage as early in the process as possible except in cases involving the Pauline Privilege or papal dissolution in Favor of the Faith. In these cases, consult the archdiocesan tribunal for further information.

## **G. RECORD KEEPING**

### **1. Where do we record the names of catechumens after the "Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens" is celebrated?**

Because catechumens are joined to the Church and are part of the household of Christ (RCIA 47), their status is taken seriously. Their names should be recorded in a parish register of catechumens along with the names of the sponsors, the minister and the date and place of the celebration (RCIA 46).

### **2. Where do we record the names of the neophytes after the sacraments of initiation are celebrated?**

Their names are recorded in the parish baptismal register along with notation of their confirmation and first eucharist.

### **3. Where do we record the names of the baptized Christians who enter into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church?**

The names of the person received into full communion with the Catholic Church by means of a profession of faith are to be recorded in the parish baptismal register under the date of profession together with the date and place of their baptism and other information required.

### **4. Where do we record the convalidated marriages of those baptized or received into the church?**

These names are recorded in the parish marriage register and also in the baptismal register of the parish where the baptism or reception took place.

### **5. May computer databases be substituted for written sacramental records?**

No. While parishes may use computer databases or indexes to track or duplicate sacramental records, the written registers themselves are the only official records and must be maintained. (canon 535)