

DIOCESE OF COLORADO SPRINGS

**GUIDELINES FOR THE
RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS
AND CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE**

INTRODUCTION

“The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local Ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 64).

“In the sacraments of Christian initiation, we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord’s death and resurrection... The three sacraments of Christian initiation [Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist] closely combine to bring us, the faithful of Christ, to his full stature and to enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world” (*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), General Introduction, 1-2).

The mission of the Church is inseparable from that of Christ and the Holy Spirit. “In her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 738). The RCIA is the ordinary way by which adults are made fully members of the Church and, thus, participants in the mission of the Church.

These guidelines do not replace the RCIA. Rather they are intended to emphasize and clarify certain administrative and canonical issues. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is always the principal document to be used in bringing new members into the Catholic Church.

PART 1: THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE RCIA

1. Unbaptized adults and children of the age of reason.

These are the ones for whom the RCIA was designed – those who seek membership in the Body of Christ through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. These are the ones who will enter the order of **catechumens**.

For those who are married, proof of valid marriage must be obtained – or, if the marriage is invalid, it must be validated, or the couple must separate – before admission to the catechumenate. Those in an irregular union may take part in the catechetical instruction, but may not be called to the catechumenate.

The parish priest is to administer all the Sacraments of Initiation – ordinarily at the Easter Vigil.

2. Those baptized in another Christian denomination and seeking full communion with the Catholic Church.

These are called **candidates**. Although not strictly full participants in the RCIA, these may receive their catechesis together with the catechumens. Care must be taken to distinguish and respect the baptized status of the candidates. They should not be seen as catechumens. Candidates are already members of the Body of Christ, although imperfectly.

Proof of valid baptism in a Christian denomination must be presented by those seeking candidacy for full communion. **(Please see the list of those denominations and communities whose baptism is not valid.)**

For those who are married, proof of valid marriage must be obtained – or the marriage must be validated, if necessary – before admission to candidacy. Those in an irregular union may take part in the catechetical instruction, but may not be called to candidacy.

Candidates are to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their receiving the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist.

It is most desirable that candidates be received into the Catholic Church on a day (Sunday) other than the Easter Vigil. The parish priest is to administer Confirmation and the Eucharist, together with the Profession of Faith.

3. **Baptized, but uncatechized, adult Catholics.**

These are the ones who have been baptized into the Catholic Church, but have little or no formation in the Faith. Usually these have not been confirmed nor have they received the Eucharist.

These are neither catechumens nor candidates, but they may receive their catechesis together with the catechumens and candidates. Again, these are to be distinguished from the catechumens and the candidates.

Proof of baptism in the Catholic Church must be obtained if these are to receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist.

For those who are married, proof of valid marriage must be obtained – or the marriage must be validated, if necessary – before they receive Confirmation and the Eucharist.

The priest may not validly confirm previously baptized Catholics unless he has the faculty from the bishop to do so. These Catholics may receive the Eucharist after sufficient catechesis. Ordinarily they are to be confirmed by the bishop at the cathedral on Pentecost Sunday. If they are unable to come to the cathedral, they may be confirmed by the bishop together with the parish Confirmation class.

These Catholics should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before Confirmation and First Holy Communion so as to be properly disposed to receive the sacraments.

PART 2: OTHERS

1. **Adult practicing Catholics who have not been confirmed.**

These ordinarily do not participate in the RCIA. They are to be prepared for Confirmation in the same way as are the young *confirmandi*.

The priest may not validly confirm previously baptized Catholics unless he has the faculty from the bishop to do so. Ordinarily they are to be confirmed by the bishop at the cathedral on Pentecost Sunday. If they are unable to come to the cathedral, they may be confirmed by the bishop together with the parish Confirmation class.

These Catholics should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before being confirmed so as to be properly disposed to receive the sacrament.

2. Orthodox Christians who wish to enter the Catholic Church should be properly catechized, but **they make only the Profession of Faith**. The sacraments of the Orthodox Churches are valid and are not to be repeated. Proof of reception of the sacraments in the Orthodox Church must be obtained.

They should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before making the Profession of Faith.

NOTE: If an Eastern Rite Catholic wishes to become a Latin Rite Catholic, please consult the chancellor of the diocese for direction.

PART 3: OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Parish RCIA Coordinator and Team.

Every parish should have a qualified RCIA coordinator and team to oversee, together with the pastor, the entire RCIA. The pastor will determine the specific duties of the coordinator and team in each parish.

The pastor must ensure that the coordinator and team have received sufficient training to fulfill their work.

2. Sponsors and Godparents.

“A sponsor accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates’ moral character, faith, and intention” (*RCIA*, Introduction, 10).

“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 persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest” (*RCIA*, Introduction, 11).

Ordinarily there are two godparents for Baptism (one of each sex), and one sponsor for Confirmation.

The sponsor and the godparent may be the same person, or the candidate may choose both a sponsor and a godparent.

A sponsor or a godparent must:

- be at least 16 years of age;
- be confirmed and have received the Eucharist;
- be a practicing Catholic and qualified to fulfill the duties of the role;
- NOT be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

If a spouse or fiancé is chosen as a sponsor, it is recommended that another sponsor that is the same sex as the candidate also be chosen.

A baptized member of a non-Catholic denomination is not to act as a godparent except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a WITNESS of the baptism.

PART 4: THE RITE

The parish priests, deacons, RCIA coordinator and team must be thoroughly familiar with the RCIA and each of its periods and steps. Each of the periods and steps should be celebrated according to the instructions of the RCIA. At the beginning of each RCIA cycle, the pastor should review the RCIA with the coordinator and team.

PART 5: RECORD KEEPING

1. Rite of Acceptance. When an inquirer is admitted to the order of catechumens, his/her name – together with the name(s) of the sponsor(s), the minister of the Rite of Acceptance, the date and place of the celebration – is entered into the parish Register of Catechumens.

2. Rite of Election. The names of those catechumens who will receive the Sacraments of Initiation are entered into the Book of the Elect. That book is to be brought to the cathedral for the Rite of Election. At that time the bishop will sign the Book of the Elect.

The Book of the Elect is to be kept permanently in the parish archives.

3. The Sacraments of Initiation. The Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion of each catechumen are to be recorded in the appropriate parish sacramental registers.

The Profession of Faith, made by a candidate for full communion, is to be recorded in the parish Baptismal Register, with the notation of the baptism (in another denomination) and of the Profession of Faith.

NOTE: When there is doubt as to the reception of valid baptism, the candidate is to be baptized *conditionally*. The conditional baptism is recorded in the parish Baptismal Register.

PART 6: ISSUES REGARDING MARRIAGE AND THE RCIA

1. The Right to Catholic Marriage and Burial. Catechumens have the right to marriage according to the rite of the Catholic Church.

If the catechumen is to marry a Catholic, the Catholic must request a dispensation from disparity of worship.

If the catechumen is to marry a baptized non-Catholic or a non-baptized person, no dispensation is needed.

Catechumens also have the right to the Catholic funeral rites.

2. Determining the validity of the marriage of catechumens and candidates. The status (valid or invalid) of the marriage of anyone seeking admission to the Catholic Church is to be done at the very outset of the RCIA cycle.

One may not be admitted to the order of catechumens or as a candidate for full communion if he/she is in an invalid marital union. Potential catechumens and candidates must be informed of this situation from the outset. No date for reception of sacraments may be set until the marriage is regularized.

3. The divorced – but not remarried. These may be admitted as catechumens and candidates, but they must be informed clearly that they may not enter validly into another marriage unless the current marriage ends with the death of the spouse or is declared invalid by the diocesan tribunal.

4. Cohabitation. No one in a situation of cohabitation may be admitted to the order of catechumens or as a candidate until that sinful situation is ended.

PART 7: PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities are to be admitted to the RCIA, and they are to be encouraged to participate to the fullest degree possible. Only if a person with disabilities is seriously impeded from participating in the parish RCIA is he/she to be initiated individually or with a group of similarly disabled persons. Every effort should be made to accommodate the needs of any disabled person wishing to enter the Church.