

A Detailed Review of the Liturgical Rites and Norms Pertaining to Catechumens and Candidates in RCIA

Prepared by the Office of Worship, Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

CATECHUMENS / ELECT

- Catechumens are those who are unbaptized and seeking full initiation in the Catholic Church.
- Any unbaptized person over the age of reason (about age 7) who wishes to enter the Catholic Church must go through the entirety of the RCIA and receive all the Sacraments at the Easter Vigil. Children going through RCIA may require a distinct program of preparation from adults (see RCIA 252).
- Inquirers become members of the catechumenate via the Rite of Acceptance (RCIA 41), which can be done multiple times during the year. Information regarding the catechumens should then be officially recorded in the parish's register of catechumens (RCIA 46). Being a catechumen is a canonical state, and entails numerous privileges of the faithful (including full funeral rites).
- The catechumenate should ideally last at least one year from the Rite of Acceptance (*National Statutes for the Catechumenate* #6 – “Ordinarily this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year.”). At a minimum, it should begin no later than September, if a catechumen is to be initiated the following spring. Only the Bishop can approve a significantly abbreviated version of the RCIA for individuals (see RCIA 331).
- Catechumens undergo a number of rites during the year (RCIA 75): celebrations of the Word of God, minor exorcisms, and the blessing and anointing rites of catechumens.
- The catechumens then must participate in the diocesan Rite of Election at the beginning of Lent, thereby becoming members of the “elect.”
- Only catechumens sign the Book of Elect that is presented to the Bishop at the Rite of Election. Every parish must have a Book of Elect.
- The elect should participate in the Scrutinies and Presentations as prescribed during the period of purification and enlightenment (RCIA 138).
- The preparation of the elect will culminate in receiving Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.
- It is not appropriate to withhold or delay Confirmation for any members of the elect (including children) who have gone through RCIA at the Easter Vigil. By Church law, the priest who baptizes a person at the Easter Vigil also confirms him or her.
- Catechesis in the form of mystagogy continues after initiation.

CANDIDATES FOR FULL COMMUNION

- Candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church are non-Catholics who have been validly baptized, and are now seeking to enter the Church and complete their initiation by receiving Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.
- (Note that the RCIA book often uses the word “candidate” to refer to a variety of people, including the elect who are “candidates” for Baptism at the Easter Vigil. So please always be aware of the context. In this section, we are talking solely about candidates for full communion.)
- There is no prescribed duration for the RCIA when it comes to candidates for full communion. It simply depends on the situation. Some may require the same amount of catechesis as catechumens, and so could follow that catechetical track. Others may require

very little additional catechesis, and so their time in the RCIA would be shorter – see RCIA 473: for those already well-catechized, “the rite is arranged so no greater burden than necessary is required for the establishment of communion and unity.” Also *National Statutes for the Catechumenate* #31: “Those baptized persons who have lived as Christians and need only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation within the Catholic community should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the catechumenate.”

- These candidates may participate in the optional Rite of Welcoming (RCIA 411).
- When possible, these candidates should also be invited to participate in the Call to Continuing Conversion (which is combined with the Rite of Election in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend). Candidates do not sign the Book of Elect.
- Candidates are not dismissed during parish Masses like catechumens (RCIA 545 & 560)
- Candidates may celebrate the Penitential Rite (RCIA 459) during Lent.
- RCIA 407 mentions potentially doing the presentations of the Creed, Lord’s Prayer, and book of the Gospels with candidates, but *National Statues* #31 clarifies these should only be done with individuals “who have received no Christian instruction and formation.”
- All candidates must receive the Sacrament of Confession before completing initiation.
- A candidate for full communion who has been properly catechized may be brought into the Catholic Church by a priest anytime during the year via the Profession of Faith, celebration of Confirmation, and reception of Holy Communion (see RCIA 487 for these rites).
- The admission into the Church of candidates for full communion can be done as part of the Easter Vigil (using the combined rite of RCIA 562), but it may also be appropriate to select another suitable time, such as at Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (see *National Statutes for the Catechumenate* #33). It should not be done during the Triduum.
- By law, the priest who administers the Profession of Faith then confirms the candidate. If Confirmation is delayed until a later time, the priest loses the faculty to confirm.
- Information about the (non-Catholic) baptism and the date/minister of reception into full communion should be recorded by the parish in the baptismal and full communion registers.

THOSE WHO WERE BAPTIZED CATHOLIC BUT NEVER CATECHIZED

- These individuals (also called “candidates” by the RCIA book) were baptized Catholics, but for whatever reason were uncatechized and have not received the Eucharist or Confirmation.
- They will often be able to participate in RCIA catechetical programs alongside catechumens and candidates for full communion. They may also participate in the Rite of Welcoming and other optional rites for candidates.
- They must receive the Sacrament of Confession before completing initiation.
- They do NOT make the same Profession of Faith made by candidates for full communion (the one found in RCIA 491). Rather, the “profession” for those who were baptized Catholic but never catechized consists of renewing their baptismal promises. This renewal can occur either at the Easter Vigil, or before receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- They may receive their First Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil (or another appropriate Mass), but they may NOT be confirmed by a priest. Only the Bishop may confirm those who were baptized Catholic but never catechized. The only exception would be if the Bishop officially delegates a priest to confirm on a case-by-case basis.
- As such, these individuals will usually be confirmed by the Bishop at one of the diocesan “Adult Confirmations” in May or June. (It would be best for their First Communion to be received prior to the Adult Confirmation Mass). Please ensure that their names are submitted when materials for the Adult Confirmations are sent to pastors in the spring.

CONFIRMATIONS – WHO MAY CONFIRM WHOM

- By Church law, the priest who baptizes a member of the elect at the Easter Vigil must then confirm that same individual during that Mass.
- Similarly, a priest who accepts a baptized, non-Catholic candidate into the full communion of the Catholic Church via the Profession of Faith should then confirm that individual.
- Both the situations described above also apply to children of catechetical age (7 or older) who go through RCIA. Even though it may seem preferable for a child to be confirmed with his or her peers, Confirmation should not be delayed for a child who is a member of the elect or a candidate for full communion.
- A priest may not confirm anyone who was baptized Catholic and never catechized. Only a Bishop may confirm these individuals (typically at the Adult Confirmations) unless specific permission is given to the priest by the diocesan Bishop.
- Children who are over the age of reason and who were baptized Catholic but never catechized need to be confirmed by the Bishop. Rather than send such children to the Adult Confirmation, they would join a regularly-scheduled parish Confirmation with their peers. Catechesis could be done with their peers or through RCIA, depending on the need. In the case of a child who begins late in the catechetical cycle, if additional time is needed to ensure he or she is adequately prepared, it may be better to join the next parish Confirmation class.
- Any priest can confirm a baptized Catholic who is in danger of death.
- **[* A couple additional, specific categories exist, as explained in *National Statutes #28*:**
 1. - Individuals who were baptized Catholic but then formally apostatized from the Church through a total repudiation of Christianity. (Note: If the individual was aware at the time of apostasy that the act carries with it *latae sententiae* excommunication [cf. Canon 1364], then the individual must have the excommunication lifted by the Bishop.)
 2. - Individuals who were baptized Catholic but who then (through no fault of their own) were instructed in or adhered to a non-Catholic religion.

In either case, a priest bringing such a person back into the Church via Confession and a Profession of Faith has the faculty to confirm that individual at the same time (but it would be preferable to send the individual to be confirmed by the Bishop at the Adult Confirmation.) Since these situations can be complex, if any doubt or question exists about a particular scenario, please contact the office of the Vicar General for clarification.]

GODPARENTS AND SPONSORS

- Catechumens have godparents, while candidates have a sponsor (one sponsor per candidate). The requirements for both roles (outlined in Canon 893.1 and Canon 874.1) are the same:
 1. have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function
 2. normally be at least 16 years old
 3. be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith as a practicing Catholic
 4. not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared
 5. not be the father or mother of the one being baptized or confirmed
- In the case of Baptism, there may be one male godparent, one female godparent, or one of each (Canon 873). Thus there may be two godparents, but never both male or both female.
- A baptized non-Catholic can only function as a witness of Baptism – not a godparent.
- There is a preference (though not a necessity) that a Baptismal godparent also serve as a Confirmation sponsor. Anyone being confirmed only has a single sponsor.

GODPARENTS AND SPONSORS (CONTINUED)

- Please note that at the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion, only one godparent or sponsor may sit with the catechumen or candidate. (The same is true at diocesan Confirmation Masses.)
- Baptized non-Catholics can function only as “witnesses,” not godparents. A Catholic may do the same for a person being baptized in another ecclesial Community (# 98, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993)
- An Eastern Orthodox may for a just cause act as godparent—together with a Catholic godparent—at the baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the godparent is a suitable one. A Catholic may be godparent in an Eastern Orthodox Church, if he/she is so invited. In this case, the duty of providing for the Christian education binds in the first place the godparent who belongs to the Church in which the child is baptized (*Ibid.*, 98).

IRREGULAR MARRIAGES AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED TO MARRIAGE

- By law, any individual who is in an irregular marriage (i.e., invalid marriages) may be admitted into the order of the catechumenate. However, no person (catechumen or candidate) in an unresolved irregular marriage can be admitted to the Rite of Election nor is to proceed to Baptism or entrance into full communion.
- Please note that non-Catholic couples who were validly married either civilly or in a non-Catholic church do not require another marriage ceremony of any kind upon entering the Church. If either spouse was unbaptized, the marriage automatically becomes sacramental upon that spouse receiving Baptism.
- Likewise, if one of the spouses in the previous example received a declaration of nullity for a previous marriage, their current marriage would not need to be convalidated (since the previous “marriage” never actually occurred).
- Please consult with the Diocesan Tribunal with any additional specific questions regarding irregular marriages, validity, annulments, etc.

BAPTISMAL RECORDS

- When a baptismal certificate cannot be obtained, an affidavit can be completed by at least one witness or by the one who was baptized, if that person was an adult at the time of his/her Baptism (see Canon 876). The Office of Worship can provide an affidavit form for such situations upon request.
- In the case of adopted children, there is a particular procedure for recording and disclosing such Baptisms, outlined here by the USCCB: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law/complementary-norms/canon-877-3-recording-the-baptism-of-adopted-children.cfm>. As noted below, Baptism should not be conferred until an adoption is legally finalized.
- See below for how to approach and record conditional Baptisms.

CONDITIONAL BAPTISMS

- As noted in the *National Statutes* #37, situations may arise when it is not possible to ascertain beyond “a reasonable and prudent doubt” the validity of the Baptism of a candidate for full communion. This may involve questions of water, the Trinitarian formula, or proper intent.
(*Conditional Baptisms continued on next page*)

CONDITIONAL BAPTISMS (CONTINUED)

- As specified in Canon 869.2, after thorough investigation, if serious reason to doubt the Baptism's validity remains, then a conditional Baptism should be conferred – but only after carefully explaining the rationale to the person (and the parents, if applicable).
- According to *National Statutes* #37, when conditional Baptism is found necessary, it “must be celebrated privately rather than at a public liturgical assembly of the community.” The candidate's profession and reception into full communion “should then take place later” at a separate liturgy with the other candidates for full communion.
- Liturgically speaking, a candidate requiring conditional Baptism should not be treated as a catechumen. In other words, a conditional Baptism should not be done at the Easter Vigil. Ideally, it should be resolved before the Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion, so that the individual is not treated as a catechumen.
- Someone who has received conditional Baptism should still receive the Sacrament of Confession afterwards, confessing all the sins of his or her life, as any candidate would.
- Both the original (questionably valid) Baptism and the conditional Baptism should be recorded as such in the parish register.
- **[Someone with a dubious Catholic Baptism who is then conditionally baptized must be confirmed by the bishop.]**

OTHER SITUATIONS

- **A Catholic who becomes Protestant (without formal defection) and then wants to return to the Church** needs only go to confession. There's no need for a profession of faith.
- **Eastern Orthodox Christians** need only make the formal profession of faith without any liturgical rituals (RCIA 474)
 - Please note that an Orthodox who becomes Catholic will automatically become a member of whichever Catholic Eastern Rite his/her current Orthodox Church corresponds to — so the person should be put in touch with that community. If the person wishes to become Roman Catholic, there is a formal application process to transfer to the Latin Rite.
- In speaking of the initiation of children of catechetical age, RCIA 252 says, “They seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative.” RCIA 260 further states that for the Rite of Acceptance, “the children's parents or guardians should be present. If they cannot come, they should indicate that they have given consent to their children.” **Technically, according to Canon Law, anyone over the age of 7 can decide to be baptized or become Catholic of his or her own volition, but it would always be prudent to consult parents and guardians and seek their consent – especially if a minor is seeking to do so against the parents' will.**
- **For an adopted child to be baptized or brought into the Church**, the adoption must be legally finalized. This is necessary because if the adoption for some reason falls through, the child would be faced with the serious situation of not knowing he or she is a Catholic, and/or not having anybody to raise them in the faith. (See above under “Baptismal Records” for how to record such Baptisms.)
- **For a child below the age of reason who was baptized non-Catholic:**
 - If the child is under the age of reason, at least one parent must make a profession of faith for him/her. If neither parent is Catholic, this cannot happen. In this case, one might ascertain if the child really already has the use of reason (potentially true for a 6 year old). If that is determined, then he/she can make a profession of faith on his/her own and

be brought into the Church by making the profession of faith, being confirmed, and receiving Communion. It is recorded as normal.

- If the child has not attained the age of reason (e.g., a child who is 4 or 5) and neither parent is Catholic, that child would have to wait until he/she has attained the age of reason OR until after a parent has made the profession to become Catholic, in which case the parent can then make the profession on behalf of the child. (If family members are all being initiated at the same time, a parent must make the profession first, and then the parent can make the profession on the child's behalf). In this case of a child below the age of reason, both Communion and Confirmation for that child have to wait until the usual age (Confirmation in this case must be conferred by the Bishop).

- **How to make the profession on behalf of a child below the age of reason:**

- ◆ **If it's just the child being brought into full communion**, one could do the following outside Mass:

Option 1

- Use the Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith from the *Rite of Infant Baptism* no. 56-59 (replacing references to baptism in the introduction with ones about full communion with the Catholic Church). The parent(s) says the "I do's" on behalf of the child as they would for an infant.
- Then, the Profession of Faith from RCIA 491 ("I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church...") is said by a parent (who must be Catholic at that time) on behalf of the child.
- Then the reception formula from RCIA 492 ("N., the Lord receives you into the Catholic Church...") is said by the minister.

Option 2

- Alternatively, one could use Chapter VI of the *Rite of Baptism of Children*, entitled "Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child into the Church"

- ◆ **If a family is entering full communion together**, one would use RCIA Part II, Chapter 5 within Mass as usual, first receiving the parents and any others who have reached the age of reason. Then the aforementioned steps (Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith from the *Rite of Infant Baptism* answered by the parent, Profession of Faith from RCIA 491 said by the parent, reception formula from RCIA 492) are done for the children.

- ◆ In any event, the child needs to be present. Such a juridic act of entry into full communion also needs to be recorded in the baptismal register (and any register of reception into full communion) as proof of the child's reception into the Catholic Church.

- **For someone who is mentally handicapped to receive the Eucharist**, it requires at least an ability to distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary food. One should err towards there being any chance that person understands – but it is left to the pastor's judgment.
- **The mentally handicapped have a right to Confirmation**, per Canon 889. Unlike with the Eucharist, there is no requirement for understanding for the reception of Confirmation. Those who do not have the use of reason are not required to be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to make a profession.

Any additional questions may be directed to the Office of Worship.