

*If the children can answer for themselves, let them answer.*¹

Introduction

More and more older children (between 7-14 years of age) are approaching the Church asking to be baptised. This book is designed to offer resources to catechists and parents; it includes sessions for the children to prepare them to celebrate the sacraments of initiation. Part II of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (the RCIA),² includes a section devoted to these older children – the *Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age* (the CICCAs).³ We say they are of “catechetical age” because they have attained the age of reason.

Some of them are children of lapsed Catholics who discovered the Church through their friends, neighbours or grandparents; others are non-Catholics attending Catholic schools who want to participate fully in the Mass. Whoever they are, the Church tells us they should follow the same process (appropriately adapted) as adults who are asking for baptism.⁴ Part II of the RCIA (from paragraph 242) contains guidance on the initiation of children. Over the past three years, a working party of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales has been meeting to draw up guidelines to help parishes implement the rite adapting it for children. At the time of writing these materials, the working party has completed its draft text and has presented it to the Liturgy Formation Committee of the Conference’s Department for Christian Life and Worship. The final document will be presented to the Department in the autumn and should, hopefully, be published early in 2011. The materials in this book are in keeping with these draft guidelines.

The children’s sessions and the activities are pitched at the 10-11 year age group. They can be adapted for the younger or older children within this age group. Parents of children a little younger than this CICCAs age group sometimes approach the parish for baptism. Children under seven years of age are considered to be “infants” and catechetical preparation is to be geared to their parents. Having said that, children over three or four years of age should be offered some preparation for baptism commensurate with their age and understanding – and you may get some ideas on how to prepare them from these materials. Likewise, you may find that children over the age of 14 approach the parish for baptism – and you may feel that they are too young to join an adult RCIA group. Again, you may find that some of these materials can be adapted for them.

The General Introduction of *Christian Initiation*⁵ envisages adaptations to the Rite; it is equally clear that the preparation for the Rites must also be adapted to meet the needs of people who are preparing to celebrate them.⁶ In the case of children, the preparation materials have to be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children’s growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive. As with adults, children’s initiation can be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments.

We are told that the initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age... and, as with adults, their initiation is marked by several stages and steps (or liturgical rites) as shown on the outline on the following page. (The process is then explained in much greater detail on the pages that follow.)

¹ Hippolytus: The Apostolic Tradition 21

² The RCIA is the exemplar and rule for all Christian Initiation (confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship for England and Wales in 1986. It has been normative for England and Wales (in other words, it is the way people become Catholic Christians) since 1988.

³ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) ¶¶252-329

⁴ Canon 852 no. 1

⁵ *Christian Initiation*, General Introduction (nos. 30-34); available on line: www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/CIGI.pdf

⁶ RCIA ¶13, 16

OUTLINE FOR CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

PERIOD OF EVANGELISATION AND PRE-CATECHUMENATE

This is a time, of no fixed duration or structure, for enquiry and introduction of gospel values, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith.

FIRST STEP: ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS

This is the liturgical rite, usually celebrated on some annual date or dates, marking the beginning of the catechumenate proper, as the candidates express and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ.

PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

This is the time, in duration corresponding to the progress of the individual, for the nurturing and growth of the catechumens' faith and conversion to God, celebrations of the word and prayers of exorcism and blessing are meant to assist the process. Although there is no mention of the Rite of Election in part II of the Rite, it is becoming common practice for the children to be invited to attend the Cathedral for the Rite of Election on the first weekend of Lent.

SECOND STEP: THE SCRUTINY

The second step in the Christian initiation of these older children is the celebration of a Penitential Rite or a Scrutiny.¹ If the catechumens are to be initiated at Easter, this Penitential Rite is celebrated during Lent; if not, it can be celebrated at the most suitable time. (The Rite distinguishes between the process for an adult seeking baptism and a young person. Though there are many similarities in the journey, there are some obvious differences because we need to adapt things to meet the particular spiritual needs that young people have.)

PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

This is the time immediately preceding the elect's initiation, usually the Lenten season preceding the celebration of this initiation at the Easter Vigil (or on Easter Sunday); it is a time of reflection intensely centred on conversion, marked by presentations of the Creed and the Lord's prayer and the preparation Rites for Easter.

THIRD STEP: CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

This is the liturgical rite, usually integrated into the Easter Vigil (or Easter Sunday Mass), by which the elect are initiated through baptism, confirmation and the eucharist.

PERIOD OF POST-BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS OR MYSTAGOGY

This is the time, usually the Easter season, following the celebration of initiation, during which the newly initiated experience being fully a part of the Christian community by means of both pertinent catechesis and particularly by participation with all the faithful in the Sunday eucharistic celebration.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that “from the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages . . . certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1229). This is the way the CICCA, following the RCIA process, describes the stages and steps:

- **Period of Evangelisation and Pre-catechumenate**

This is a time of no fixed duration or structure for enquiry and introduction to gospel values, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith. During this period, the children are called “enquirers”. It is a time when the children should be encouraged to ask questions and explore any pre-conceptions they may have about the Catholic faith. It is a time when we share our way of living in such a way as to attract the children and raise questions in their minds. It is a time when they begin to know the person of Jesus Christ. They should only move forward to the first step of the process when they are ready to do so; and their progress will depend on the help and example of their companions and on the influences of their parents.

The parents must give their consent to the Christian Initiation process and they must promise to do their part in preparing the children for initiation (whether or not they are Catholic). For this reason, the parents may find it helpful to join the parish RCIA group so that they can learn what Catholics believe and how they live; but, of course, there should be no pressure on them to become Catholic.

Many RCIA books advise us to adapt the materials; it is equally true that these CICCA materials should be adapted for the children in your group(s). The materials for this stage include sessions based on:

- A tour of the church
- Ministries in the church
- Myself – why I am here, what am I looking for?
- About Catholics and what we believe (about the Pope, the bishops, about Mary, about the Mass, about Confession). Depending on the child/ren, this session might be used as one session or it might be used over three or four sessions.

The important thing to remember during this period is that this is a time of enquiry and introduction, when questions can be asked and explored. There will be time to look at things in much more detail during the catechumenate period.

References to the paragraphs of the Rite, Scripture, the Catechism and other Church documents are included for the catechist’s reference. You might look up the references and you might encourage some of the older children to look them up in the books or on the web. (You will find many of the documents referred to in these materials on the Vatican website: <http://www.vatican.va> and on the Liturgy Office of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales’ website: <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites> or by searching the web. You will also find on-line versions of the bible: the Good News Bible: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/gnt/> and the New Jerusalem Bible: <http://www.catholic.org/bible/>.)

Sometimes, the enquirers are joined by children who are already baptised in another Christian denomination who are expressing a desire to become Catholic – and you may have older children who were baptised Catholic but who have not been catechised. When this happens, the status of those already baptised should be acknowledged and valued. One way to do this is to allow the baptised children to witness by their example what it is like to be a follower of Christ (assuming they can do this); it will often stimulate a longing in those asking for baptism. The baptised children are called “candidates”.

- **First step: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens**

This is the Liturgical Rite which is celebrated when the children express their belief in Jesus and express their intention to respond to him and to be his follower. This Rite can be held several times a year whenever the children are ready; but in many faith communities, the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens happens on the first Sunday of Advent or at the beginning of Ordinary Time (when the readings focus on the call of the first disciples). The Rite unfolds our basic ritual signs as Christians: the gathering of the assembly, signing with the cross, naming, blessing, laying on of hands and anointing with oil. They are expressions of faith, of prayer, of belonging and are an integral part of our Christian heritage and formation.

This is when, after spending some time enquiring about what the Catholic faith is about, the children say that they want to proceed with the preparation – often expressed when they say they want to know when they can be baptised. Their readiness to take this step should be discerned by the catechists with their parents and the parish priest. It is a good time for the parish priest to interview the children individually (perhaps with one of the catechists or one of their parents) to ascertain that they understand that they are asking to enter into a publicly-recognised relationship with the Church. The Rite suggests that this should be celebrated with a small congregation and should help the children experience a warm welcome. (Depending on pastoral circumstances, you may find that you can achieve this warm welcome best where the session normally takes place or at one of the Sunday Masses.⁷)

After celebrating this Rite, they will be called “catechumens”; and, as such, their status will change. Canon Law tells us that, as soon as a child is a member of the catechumenate, they are accorded various prerogatives which are proper to Christians.⁸ For example, if the child/ren apply for a place in a Catholic school, they should be treated in the same way as baptised applicants.

We have included a session in these materials to prepare the children to celebrate this Rite, which we hope you will find helpful. Bear in mind: this is a preparation session; it is not a practice or a rehearsal. These Rites are powerful forms of liturgical catechesis and it is important to allow the children to experience the Rite and to be led through it to a deeper understanding and commitment.

Any baptised children who might be in the group would not celebrate the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. You might instead combine the Rite with an adapted Rite of Welcome from the Additional (Combined) Rites from the Appendix of the U.S. edition of the RCIA for these children.⁹

- **Period of the Catechumenate**

The same four dynamics of the RCIA which apply to adults belong to this period for children – suitable catechesis, familiarity of the Christian way of life within the Christian community, celebration of suitable Liturgical Rites along the way and participation in the apostolic life of the Church.¹⁰ The spirit of these dynamics has also informed the Pre-Catechumenate period but during this stage the children will become more responsive to the call of God in the presence of their lives, as follows:

1. According to the Rite, the catechumenate period is an extended time in which, through “suitable catechesis”¹¹ the children’s faith is nurtured and their conscience is developed in proportion to their ages.

⁷ For more background and additional ideas for celebrating Rites, you may like to refer to *Celebrating Catholic Rites and Rituals in Religion Class*, Kathy Chateau and Paula Miller, Twenty-third Publications, CT, 2001

⁸ Canon 206 §2

⁹ US RCIA 505-529

¹⁰ RCIA 75: 1-4

¹¹ RCIA 75:1

2. As they become familiar with the Christian way of life, their progress will depend on the help and example of their companions and the influence of their parents. “They will also be supported by their godparents, sponsors and the entire Catholic community.”¹² This is about integrating the children into the community – which is where they are learning how to be a Christian, where will come to know if there is a connection between what they believe and how they live their lives.
3. Celebrations of the Word of God will be included in this period; and they will take part with the faithful in the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, “thus preparing them for their eventual participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.”¹³ The children should become familiar with the symbols and gestures of the liturgies during this catechumenate period.
4. And, since the Church’s life is apostolic, the children 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.¹⁴ A keen social conscience is normally found in children of this age. To join with others of their own age group in activities such as packing food parcels for the elderly and poor at Christmastime, preparing sandwiches for homeless people, engaging in fundraising for CAFOD or the Passage, local hospices or parish projects abroad helps them not only to make new friends but gives them a sense of purpose and meaning to their lives.

This is the time when the children’s’ faith and conversion to God will be nurtured and will grow. The celebrations of the Word and prayers of exorcism and blessing are meant to assist the process. The materials in this resource during this period are based on the liturgical year. There is an assumption that the catechumens will be coming to Sunday Mass and that they will be participating in the Liturgy of the Word¹⁵ and these celebrations of the Word of God will:

1. implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving: for example, the moral teachings of the New Testament, the forgiving of injuries and insults, a sense of sin and repentance, the duties Christians must carry out in the world;
2. give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer;
3. explain to them the signs, celebrations and seasons of the liturgy; and
4. prepare them gradually to enter the worship assembly of the entire community.¹⁶

We have included material you can use during Advent, during Ordinary Time and during Lent (with an explanation of the seasons). Although our sessions include some of the readings of Sundays during these liturgical seasons, we have not been able to include the readings for every week of each of the liturgical years in this material. We have, instead, opted to cover the topics you will want to cover to prepare the children to celebrate the sacraments.

For example, we have included a session (which might be used at or around the time of the feast of the Baptism of the Lord) which focuses on the signs and symbols of baptism – of what will happen at their baptism. They will learn that, when they are confirmed, they will share in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that they will be strengthened by the Spirit’s gifts. The way children are prepared for First Holy Communion in most programmes is by taking the children through the different parts of the Mass – and so we have included sessions on how we gather as a community for Mass, how we listen to the Word, how we give thanks and praise, how we take and eat and how we are sent forth at the end of the Mass to bring Christ to the people we meet – and each of these sessions is based on Scripture. There is a session to prepare the children to celebrate the Scrutiny – and, in time, to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It is important to remember that some of the children in these groups may not have met the

¹² RCIA 75:2

¹³ RCIA 75:3

¹⁴ RCIA 75:4

¹⁵ RCIA 81

¹⁶ RCIA 82

bible before. You might find the Good News or the Jerusalem translations are the most easily accessible (yet still accurate) versions for this particular age group. Full Scripture readings are not included in these materials – only the references or short quotes are included. This is done deliberately so that you can choose the most appropriate version of the Scripture; it is also done to encourage the catechists and the older children to look the readings up in their own copy of the bible or on the internet.

The emphasis in each session during this stage of the process continues to be to help the children come to know Christ – or to know him more deeply – which we are told is the aim of all of our catechesis.¹⁷ There is enough material to cover more than one session – or you can pick and choose what you want to cover in one session (depending on the age and ability of the child). How you use the material will also depend on how much time you have to prepare the child for the sacraments of initiation and this will vary according to pastoral circumstances.

The aim of each session is indicated in italics at or near the beginning of each session and it is important to keep this aim in mind when using the materials. In addition, see the Session Notes which are included in this introduction to help you prepare for your sessions.

Rite of Election

The Rite of Election is usually celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. The Rite tells us that the Bishop invites those preparing for baptism to the Cathedral where, in his presence, they will sign the Book of the Elect.¹⁸ Although there is no mention of the Rite of Election in part II of the Rite, it is becoming common practice for the children to be invited to attend the Cathedral with the adults – and the new guidelines from the Bishops' Conference encourage them to do so.

This Rite is a powerful sign that the catechumens have been “elected in Christ”. This is called “election” because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God, in whose name the Church acts. After the Rite of Election, the children will be called “the Elect”. The materials include a session to prepare the children to celebrate the Rite. The Rite assumes that, as with adults, the four dynamics referred to above will help the team and the catechumens (together with the children's parents) in their discernment as to whether “they have listened to the word of Christ, endeavoured to follow his commands more perfectly, shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters in their community and joined with them in prayer.”¹⁹ These are the questions they will be asked at the Rite of Election – and so it is important that, some time before going to the Rite of Election, the parish priest should again interview the children individually (with one of the catechists or one of their parents) to ascertain that they (and their godparents) are ready to be asked these questions.

At the Rite of Election, there is a Call to Continuing Conversion for the candidates (those who are already baptised), who continue to be called “candidates”. Their sponsors will be asked if they have listened faithfully to the Apostles' instruction proclaimed by the Church, if they have come to a deeper appreciation of their baptism, in which they were joined to Christ and to his Church, if they have reflected sufficiently on the tradition of the Church, which is their heritage and joined their brother and sisters in prayer and if they have made progress in a life of love and service of others.

- **Second step: Penitential Rite (the Scrutiny)**

The children are now ready to take the second step in the process. The Elect will celebrate the Penitential Rite (the Scrutiny) and the candidates are now ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (This is a significantly different from the RCIA for adults, whose second step for

¹⁷ *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) ¶15

¹⁸ In Westminster Diocese, this signing of the Book takes place in the parish because the numbers are too great for everyone to sign the Book at the Rite of Election itself.

¹⁹ RCIA 118A

the unbaptised is the Rite of Election and, for the baptised, is the Call to Continuing Conversion.)

If the Elect are to be initiated at Easter, the Penitential Rite is celebrated during Lent; if not, it can be celebrated at the most suitable time. There are three Scrutinies for adults; but only one for children. Though there are many similarities in the journey, there are some obvious differences because we need to adapt things to meet the particular spiritual needs that young people have.

The Rite suggests that the appropriate occasion for these young Elect to celebrate the Scrutiny is alongside the youngsters in the parish, including the candidates in the group, who are celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation for the first time. When this happens, care should be taken to include explanations, prayers, and ritual acts that relate to the celebration of the sacrament with these children. A number of things can result by celebrating the scrutiny at the same time as the sacrament of reconciliation. The young Elect have the opportunity to reflect on the fact that the baptism they will shortly celebrate is indeed a new start; but it does not mean that the things they struggle with now will magically disappear. The waters of baptism are an opportunity to start afresh to develop good relationships with others; but living in a truly Christian way is going to take the rest of their life. They are going to be completely forgiven in the waters of baptism; they are not coming to confession with the others – but, after their baptism, this will be something that they will need as they come to realise that living in a fully Christian way is not always easy.

This resource includes materials to help both groups of children prepare for these celebrations. The unbaptised children can then use the materials to prepare them to celebrate the scrutiny; the baptised children can use the materials to prepare them for the sacrament of reconciliation.

- **Period of Purification and Enlightenment**

The unbaptised children are now called “the Elect” and this period is a time of prayerful preparation for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation. The children will deepen their understanding of baptism and come to a mature appreciation of their faith. This is an opportune time for both them and the baptised children to be involved in appropriate Lenten practices, including the Stations of the Cross, Holy Week services and almsgiving endeavours as they prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation. Lent is more a time of prayer and spiritual recollection (re-collecting all that has happened) than it is a time of catechesis. It is important that prayer becomes a natural part of everyday routine – especially at times of decision-making.

During this period, on-going conversion will be enabled and deepened, such as concern and awareness of rights and wrongs, injustice, social action, being involved in parish activities.

There is an opportunity during this period to present the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer to the young Elect. These prayers are two of the most precious treasures of the Church; they have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church’s faith and prayer. The Creed recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race [and] suffuses the vision of the Elect with the sure light of faith. The Lord’s Prayer fills them with a deeper realisation of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father, especially in the midst of the Eucharistic assembly.²⁰

The candidates may well already be familiar with these prayers. If so, they can share their experience of praying them with the Elect.

- **Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation**

This is the Liturgical Rite, usually integrated into the Easter Vigil (or it is celebrated on an Easter Sunday Mass or any Sunday Mass during Eastertide) by which the unbaptised children are

²⁰ RCIA 147

initiated through baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist. The children should be accompanied by their own godparent(s), chosen by them and their parents and approved by the priest.²¹ The Rite tells us that the bishop or priest who baptises the children will also confer the sacrament of confirmation and the children will for the first time participate in the liturgy of the eucharist.²²

The children who were already baptised are received into full communion with the Catholic Church through confirmation and the eucharist. These children are accompanied by their sponsor(s) – again, chosen by them and their parents and approved by the priest.²³

- **Period of Post-baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogia**

A period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogia should be provided to assist the young people (now called “neophytes” or “new Catholics”) and their companions who have completed their Christian Initiation. Once again, this period can be arranged by an adaptation of the guidelines given for adults.²⁴

In the early centuries, candidates were not fully instructed about baptism, confirmation and eucharist until after they had celebrated them. Even today, we are told that the main setting for the catechesis of the newly baptised is the Sunday Mass during the Easter Season.²⁵ The readings of the Easter season, the readings from the Acts, and the Second Readings from 1 Peter, 1 John and Revelation, are there to help the newly baptised Catholics to reflect on *who they are now, what they are living for, where they are going and what gifts they have to give.*

The children hopefully have had a profound experience of transformation in their lives. During this period, they need to take the time to reflect on these changes, on this transformation. For adults, traditionally, this period is a time of deepening our understandings in the mysteries of our faith. Perhaps for children, it is a time when things begin to “sink in” and they begin to mature. This time is similar to a retreat, a time when they reflect on the events that have taken place, the liturgies they have celebrated – a time when they look forward to living their lives as followers of Jesus in faith, hope and love.

It is very important (as it is with adults in the RCIA) for the children to find ways they can contribute to the parish community. Children can be invited to be readers, they can join the music groups in the parish or they can help to welcome people when they arrive for Mass. Depending on their age and experience, they may be able to help with the children’s liturgy or with first reconciliation and first communion programmes. If they are not attending a Catholic school, they should continue their religious education by attending the Parish R.E. programme if you have one. If you do not have one, their parents should be encouraged to follow one of the published R.E. programmes designed to be used in the family.

If your parish has a justice and peace group, an SVP group or if you support the work of CAFOD or if there are people who support “green” issues, or if your parish supports other charities, you might encourage the children to find out what they are doing and to think about getting involved. The important thing is to ensure that they are involved in what is happening in the parish so that they continue to feel they belong.

²¹ RCIA 283

²² RCIA 281. Note, however, that in many parishes, the pastoral practice is to baptise children of catechetical age and to prepare them to receive their first communion; but Confirmation is deferred until they are 14-15 years of age when they are prepared with their peers. (And, in some parishes, these children are already part of a First Communion programme. They are baptised at Eastertime, celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation some time afterwards and they receive the eucharist for the first time when the rest of the children in the parish do.)

²³ Once again, the pastoral practice is often to prepare the children to receive their first communion; but Confirmation is deferred until they are 14-15 years of age when they are prepared with their peers

²⁴ RCIA 306

²⁵ RCIA 237

Important things to remember about the CICCA

The catechumenal process is not a programme; it is a process. One way of understanding the process is by breaking it down into its three distinct aspects; liturgical, catechetical and pastoral.

- **The process is liturgical²⁶**

The process is moved along by liturgical rites that serve as gateways into the different stages or periods of the process. The process aims to lead participants to become *liturgical people* moving them towards full and active participation in the worshipping community. Liturgy is much more than ritual and it is through the liturgy (the summit which is the Mass) that our relationship with Jesus Christ becomes as intimate as possible outside of heaven. As the children move towards full communion with the Church, nothing is more fundamental to their catechesis, and more crucial to impart to the worshipping community, than the fact that it is through the liturgical rites of the catechumenal process and the sacramental participation to which they point, that a foundational relationship with Jesus is most firmly established.

- **The process is catechetical²⁷**

The word *catechesis* comes from the Greek *katekhein*, which is translated as the re-echoing or echoing down of that which has been received. Catechesis is the process of “echoing” the word of God. Catechesis aims to put people in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ.²⁸

During the Precatechumenate period, the focus is on the delivery of the basic Gospel message and on answering questions. It is a time of enquiry which leads to the first liturgical gateway and the expression of the genuine desire to follow Christ and to seek baptism (or, if they are already baptised, may come into full communion with the Church). The period of the Catechumenate is typically the longest period and most catechetical of the initiation process. A systematic and organic delivery of the doctrine of the faith aims to ensure that, by the second liturgical gateway, the children sufficiently understand and desire to live the faith; and, that as catechumens, they may choose without hesitation to enrol their names among the elect (or, as candidates, they may confidently continue their progress towards full communion with the Church). By the time they reach the third liturgical gateway and they celebrate the sacraments of initiation, they must be ready to make their profession of faith.

- **The process is pastoral²⁹**

The pastoral work of the process is accomplished through the love and labour of many people, including the clergy, catechists, hospitality people, sponsors, prayer intercessors and parishioners. The catechumens and candidates learn who God is, what his plan is, how to follow him as a member of the Christian Community. Through the pastoral attention of others, participants are informed about Christ, and formed in him, so that their experience of the community of believers becomes an “apprenticeship of the entire Christian life”.³⁰

- **In summary, the RCIA process**

In summary, the RCIA process seeks to prepare the children not merely to assent to truths but to fall in love with the eternal Lover – and to desire to know him as only the lover knows the beloved.

²⁶ See RCIA 40, 75.1, 75.3, 79, 128, 134, 237

²⁷ See RCIA 38, 75.1, 78, 126, 235, 292

²⁸ *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) 80

²⁹ See RCIA 42, 45, 75.2, 75.4, 107, 234, 236

³⁰ GDC 67

- **Doctrine**

In simple terms, doctrine is what the Church believes and teaches. It is the underpinning of faith. It is sometimes talked about as a ‘body of teaching’ because, like a body, it has many different parts linked together in a single purpose of enabling life, in this case, the life of faith. This is what it means in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when Catholic doctrine is described as ‘organic’. Like a body, doctrine develops – and the doctrine included in the sessions should be sufficient, but appropriate to the age of the children. The teaching of the Church unfolds in history and it will unfold gradually in the life of these children. The *Catechism* also makes clear that faith is more than doctrine: the Church’s faith is ‘confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy and lived in the observance of God’s commandments and in prayer.’³¹

- **Talking to children about God**

Children first meet God by hearing adults speaking about God and to God in prayer. Their picture of God will depend on the adults in their lives. Adults’ words and actions help to form their understanding of God. They hear stories told of what God does and says. They can then begin to talk about and to God themselves. The children should become familiar with the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course they will learn how to make the sign of the cross and its accompanying words “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” – but the General Directory for Catechesis asks for all catechesis to be Christocentric *and* Trinitarian.³² We do this in these materials by sharing the Scriptural imagery of God throughout – for example, God, the father as a loving parent and as creator; Jesus as a friend, who cares for us, forgives us and shares himself with us – the one who shows us what God is like; and Holy Spirit as fire, wind, helper and guide in prayer. The words of the prayers included in the resources help children to speak to God as Father through Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

- **The context of Scripture with children**

These materials introduce children to Scripture in ways that enable them to understand its meaning so that they can recognise God in their lives and to build up a relationship with the God who seeks them. It is important, therefore, to use translations appropriate to their age and experience. Scripture references are given in the text and we encourage you to read the Scripture from the Bible in your session. We would also encourage you to invite the children to look the Scripture passages quoted so that they familiarise themselves with the Bible. You may find that the Jerusalem or the Good News translations of the Bible are the most user-friendly version for the children in your group. For the younger children in your groups, consider using *God’s Story*, which is available in three books offering a progression in the language and style of presentation to encourage the children in their understanding and learning.³³

- **The context for catechesis with children**

Children of catechetical age are dependent on their parents or guardians and are greatly influenced by their social surroundings. The conversion of children, which is different from that of adults, involves an aspect of socialisation. Therefore, catechesis of children depends on forming and nurturing relationships in the context of family, community and peer groups. The Rite tells us that the formation they receive will depend on the help and example of these people.³⁴ It is important to remember that parents have the primary responsibility to journey in faith with their children – and the formation of these children will depend on the example, and influence of their parents. They not only give their consent to the Christian initiation process (whether or not they are Catholic); they also promise to do their part in preparing their children for initiation. The period of initiation provides a good opportunity for the family to have contact with priests and catechists in the parish.³⁵

³¹ CCC 26

³² GDC 99

³³ *God’s Story told by the People of God*, National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education Publication, Rejoice Publications, Chelmsford, 2002.

³⁴ RCIA 244

³⁵ RCIA 244.2

- **Catechetical method**

The psychological, educational and sociological sciences have contributed much that might be helpful in the development of a methodology for catechesis. A variety of methods is possible and desirable; indeed, according to *Catechesi Tradendae*, a plurality can be a sign of vitality and ingenuity.³⁶ Francis Kelly proposes what he calls the *ecclesial method* because it emerges from his reading and comparison of the basic documents of the Church on catechesis. He offers these thoughts:

Preparation: The room where you meet should be prepared in advance; catechists should be ready for the children when they arrive. There should be a “sacred space” ready as a focal point for prayer and attention which can be used to lead the participants into the session with a carefully prepared prayer. The bible and the cross are powerful symbols; the focal point might also include something which relates to the theme of the session and a candle. These and the use of the colours relating to the liturgical season will all help in the learning process. The purpose of this time of preparation is to create the conditions for the deepening of God’s Word in the children’s hearts.

Proclamation: The purpose of this part of the session is to clearly proclaim the truth to be taught – the central step of the method. It begins with telling people what they will be learning during the session, then proceeds with the announcing of God’s Word. It is this aspect that, from the start, gave us the word *catechesis* – coming from the Greek word meaning to echo, to resound the Word of God. This is expressed in the Scriptures and in the Church’s living Tradition.

Explanation: This part of the session offers the opportunity to draw out the meaning of the Word. It should invite active engagement of the children so that the relevance of the Word to their life story and to contemporary issues can be brought to light. This will foster that ‘maturity in faith’ which is a major goal in catechesis. The explanation will, of course, be in the light of the Church’s understanding of the Word; but the catechist is challenged to find appropriate ways to ‘inculturate’ the message making creative use of audiovisual aids, role-playing, personal research and writing – all adapted to the age and ability of the children in the group. This is time when the children’s doubts and questions need to be honestly addressed. A skilful catechist will know whether this is best done privately or if a group reflection would be helpful.

Application: Knowledge is to enhance life, and for Christians, knowledge should lead to transformation. In biblical and ecclesial terms, what we are hoping for as a result of catechesis is a life of “witness” and “service”. This part of the session begins to address what this truth means for the children. It involves a deeper level of conversion and a commitment to expressing this conversion in his or her lifestyle. This is the time when the catechist facilitates a response to the call to be a witness of the person of Jesus; it is the time when the children reflect on how what they have learned is relevant to helping them live the Gospel in their own lives, how they can apply what they are learning in their everyday lives.

Celebration: The catechetical process began in prayerful attentiveness and openness to the Word of God; it should end in prayerful gratitude and praise to God. Creative catechists will find ways to bring the session to an end in an inspiring way. This step should bring together the other four steps and given the session a unity that will facilitate the kind of total response which catechesis should seek – cognitive, affective and behavioural. It should raise the children to an expression of loving gratitude to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The sessions are written in such a way that catechists are led through this process. The Session Notes give practical suggestions on the preparation or celebration in the sessions; they give further explanations to the catechist on how to proclaim the truth to be taught, how to draw out the meaning of the Word, and how to explore what the truth means for the children.

³⁶ *Catechesi Tradendae* (Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Catechesis in our Time) 16 October 1979, CT30

For an in-depth explanation of this catechetical methodology, see “the Ecclesial Method” in *The Mystery We Proclaim* by Mgr. Francis Kelly (Our Sunday Visitor Books, 1993, pp. 137-148) or visit the website: http://www.diocese-kcsj.org/_docs/The_Ecclesial_Method_of_Catechesis).

- **Activities**

The activities vary from questions you might ask, discussions you might have or things for the children to think about – tools to make the sessions inter-active and to consolidate what they are learning. They also invite the children to participate, to be active – so, for example, they will be asked to take pictures or to draw pictures of the church they are attending. They are invited to interview people involved in parish ministry, to look up Scripture or Catechism references, to do word searches or crossword puzzles and to spend time in the church making the gestures we talk about, such as genuflecting, blessing themselves, etc. Most importantly, we invite the children to think about the changes that are taking place in them, the choices they are now making as they come to know Christ more deeply, as they progress in their desire to follow Jesus. We invite them to think about their responses to God, to be aware of how the Holy Spirit is moving them. Activities are included in the text in brown and there are activity sheets for each session (apart from the ones where the children are being prepared for the Rites). Catechists will, of course, want to add or adapt activities to suit the children depending on the age and ability of the children.

- **Conversion at different stages of development**

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ requires conversion. The vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is that the initiation of children as well as adults is a process of conversion. A longing for a relationship with God and a change of heart are at the centre of the initiation process. In other words, initiation is not primarily learning everything you ever wanted to know about being Catholic. It is about deepening one’s relationship with the living God, it is about changing one’s attitude, actions and life style and becoming more like Jesus Christ.

Since the Rite says that the Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age,³⁷ it is important to bear in mind the different developmental stages of these children. James Fowler and Kathy Coffey offer some insights you might find helpful.³⁸

James Fowler is well known for his work on the different stages of faith. He says that children from 8-12 years of age will learn doctrines, traditions and stories of the believing community. God continues to retain the beard he might have had in their earlier childhood. They need a concrete picture. They are beginning to be able to stand in someone else’s shoes, to understand the perspective of others and thus compose a world based on fairness and justice. (The idea of “if you are nice to me, I will be nice to you” is common.) The leaders of the community (teachers, priests and other adults) of the community are given special honour – so, the example of those adults is important.

Kathy Coffey talks about how children of 7-8 years of age are natural ritual-makers; and, through participation in ritual, they come to understand more than they can articulate. Like Fowler, Coffey says that children of this age display a great curiosity about formal conceptions of God – and those concepts are directly related to their interpersonal relationships, especially to the parents’ absence or attention.

As they get a little older (9-12 years of age), they are becoming concrete thinkers and they can reason about their lived experience and can generalise about cause and effect relationships.

³⁷ RCIA 243

³⁸ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, Crossroad, New York, 1991; Kathy Coffey, *Children & Christian Initiation – a practical guide*, North American Forum on the Catechumenate, Denver 1998.

Their growing relationship with Jesus enables them to make connections between him and their daily lives – and Jesus turns into a personal guide for them.

Convention and “what’s done” is all-important to the youngsters after they are about 12 years old (and sometimes well into adult life) and going with the crowd and what the crowd exerts much influence on them. As they move into the teenage years, they begin to deal with other issues, including puberty, identity questions, their own emotional roller-coaster and the growing recognition of suffering in the world. Unless spirituality is relevant to these issues, it will take second place. Scripture must have a bearing on what is happening in their lives or it is likely to be dismissed. Developing a keen sense of right and wrong, they willingly make short-term commitments to service projects.

The GDC reminds us that conversion is not a simple process. There are activities which prepare people for catechesis and activities which derive from catechesis. The moment of catechesis itself falls between these. It is that moment in which conversion to Christ is formulated and which provides a basis for deepening faith in him.³⁹

The GDC also tells us that nothing – not the method or the texts, or any other part of the programme – is more important than the *person of the catechist* in every phase of the catechetical process. The gifts given to the catechist by the Spirit to witness faithfully and live accordingly are the very soul of catechetical ministry.⁴⁰ The catechist uses an abundant store of resources, including the use of Gospel stories, the teachings and miracles of Jesus, the inspiration from the lives of the saints, the weakness of great sinners – and their own faith stories – to implant a yearning for God and a desire to know him as only the lover knows the beloved.

The children’s progress in formation

How do you know when a child of catechetical age has been catechised and is ready to be baptised (and to receive first communion and/or to be confirmed)? The Rite does not give us learning outcomes; it talks instead about how the children’s progress in the formation they receive will depend on the help and example of their companions and on the influence of their parents.⁴¹ RCIA 244 tells us that both these factors should therefore be taken into account:

1. Since the children to be initiated often belong to a group of children of the same age who are already baptised and are preparing for confirmation and eucharist, their initiation progresses gradually and within the supportive setting of this group of companions.
2. It is to be hoped that the children will also receive as much help and example as possible from the parents, whose permission is required for the children to be initiated and to live the Christian life. The period of initiation will also provide a good opportunity for the family to have contact with priests and catechists.

Christ’s teaching is not only about intellectual knowledge; it must apply personally. It is important to remember that conversion is not the same as personal maturity. Conversion can be described as a shift in the way we interpret and experience things. It is about a *way of life* – not just a way of *thinking*.

³⁹ See GDC 63

⁴⁰ GDC 156

⁴¹ RCIA 244

Who is involved in initiation ministry?

To help children as God works in their lives, you need people to love them and hear them and walk with them. The programme calls for a partnership between all those involved:

Sponsors journey through all the stages with the catechumens. Adult sponsors normally act as godparents; but sponsors of child catechumens are not always their godparents – and are always adults. A child catechumen should have an adult sponsor; but they should also have children of their age to accompany them on their spiritual journey.

The parish community supports the children by their prayers and by their example. To the extent possible, the Liturgical Rites can take place during Sunday liturgies so that the parish community gets to know the children and shows their interest in them. The Sunday liturgy is the best example of Christian community the children will ever see. By participating in parish activities, the child catechumens and their families see how Christians live and work with one another; and the child catechumens can meet and interact with their peers.

The parish priest will preside at the Rites of Initiation and will baptise (and confirm) the children and will preside over their first communions. He is the parish's chief catechist – the person who is accountable to the bishop and the universal church for the state of catechesis in the parish. The parish priest should meet and talk to the children and should be involved in the discernment with the catechists as to the readiness of the children to celebrate the sacraments.

The parents are the first and best educators of their children. It is in the family that children first experience human love. It is where the children learn moral values and begin to honour God.⁴² The family will influence their children long after they have celebrated the sacraments of initiation and so it is very important to support them through this process and on-going into the future. Parents of children of catechetical age may well be Catholics who are returning to the Church after an absence, they may be married to a non-Catholic and they may have been practicing with their partner; you cannot assume that they have taught their children to pray or that they have taught them about Jesus. When they ask for their children to become catechumens, they are asking for your support and you should make that support clear to them when you first speak to them.

Godparents represent the church, which is larger than the family. They accompany the children at their baptism and promise to continue to support them and they promise to help and support the parents in their Christian duty to raise their children in the faith.

Catechists prepare the children to celebrate the sacraments and they support their parents. It is important for catechists to communicate with the parents, with the sponsors, with the children and with the parish priest throughout the process.

The **catechist** teaches to others, not only *subject matter*, but a *Person*. One of the RCIA leader's manual reminds us that catechesis seeks to pass on more than information; it seeks to pass on a *relationship*. It goes on to say that no catechist will be effective without the love which is centred in and upon the person of Jesus Christ. The catechist must live for love: be love, be witness to love, and teach love. Love is the core, love is the purpose, love is the centre, love is the fruit of the catechist's every thought and effort. Thus, the catechist's zeal for conversion, for helping others to desire a closer union with Jesus, arises not from knowing Sacred Scripture, the *Catechism*, the RCIA ritual book and the magisterial documents from cover to cover. Instead, this zeal comes from having himself or herself already experienced and returned God's love, from personal desire and commitment to plumb the riches of the knowledge of God, to love him passionately, to be a servant to those whom God has sent.⁴³

⁴² CCC 2207

⁴³ RCIA Leader's Manual, Association for Catechumenal Ministry (ACM), Maryland, 2006

Session notes. These notes are intended to help you prepare for your sessions. Adapt the ideas; make them your own and be creative! The notes follow the ecclesial method (*preparation, proclamation, explanation, application and celebration*). The notes include *prayer and music suggestions*, they include *what you will need for the session* and sometimes include advice on *running the session* and they include Catechism references (CCC).

Period of Enquiry (or Pre-Catechumenate) Myself – and why I am here

Preparation: Make sure the space where you will meet is warm and welcoming. Keep the sacred space simple – perhaps only the bible, a cross, a nice cloth and a candle this time. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“Jesus said: “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)
We light this candle to remind us that Jesus is here with us as we meet today.

You might play some quiet music in the background during the prayer and let it continue while you offer the children (and adults) name tags and introduce people to one another.

Proclamation: The aim of the session is to hear a little of one another’s stories and what brought the children to the Catholic Church. Use the activity sheets or the questions in the book to stimulate discussion about why they are there and what they are looking for as they begin their faith journeys. Then tell the story of creation from Genesis (1:26-31) and Psalm 139 about how we have made to be like God, who knows us better than anyone else.

Explanation: We believe that God created the world and all life in it. We believe that we are made in God’s image; we have been made to be like God – and this divine image is in everyone (CCC 1700, 1702). As the children begin on their Christian journey, they are introduced to our way of life. In this first session, it is important to engage the children in conversation – asking them what they think the Scripture means and what it tells them about God. Talk about other new beginnings, what they have been like and how they came to know the people they have met – introducing them to the concept of coming to know God (or, in the case of children who already know God, to know him better).

Application: We believe that God is omnipresent; God is all around us. We thank and praise God for our world each time we come to Mass. This may be the first time they have talked about God like this. Be aware of this and be aware and sensitive to the fact that you may be introducing a profound concept about the sacredness of life when you talk about how God knew them from the moment they began to grow in their mother’s womb.

Celebration: Your closing prayer might be something like this:

“God, our heavenly Father, we ask you to help us to become aware of your presence in the world. Help us to believe that you hold us safely in your hands and help us to discover you in the beauty of creation. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Suggested music: *The Wonders I see* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*); *You have called us* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*); *I am Special* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*)

Running the session: Listen very carefully to what the children say in this session. Some of them may be shy; others may be bursting to share what they are thinking and may need to be reminded that others have something to say. Be encouraging and be ready to share a little of your own story with them about why you want to help them prepare for their baptism, why you are looking forward to accompanying them on their faith journey.

For this session, you will need: quiet music, the words to the song(s) you choose, copies of the activity sheets, pencils or pens, a prayer focus with a candle, a cross, cloth and a bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session).

A tour of the church

Preparation: Make sure that the church is available, that it is warm and that the lights are turned on to make the visit welcoming for the children. You might like to begin the visit by gathering around the holy water font and teaching the children how to make the sign of the cross. Prayerfully, remind the children that we believe that Jesus is *really* present in the church; the church is God's house and this is why we are reverent in the church.

Proclamation: The aim of the session is to learn what is in the church building, how we pray in the church and why we do the things we do in the church. You might begin at the door of the church and explain that this is where the community gathers to pray. We believe that Jesus is present as we gather for he promised that where two or three are gathered in his name he would be in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). Talk about the people who greet them and welcome them. Show them the ambo (or the lectern), the sanctuary, the altar, the crucifix, the tabernacle and the sanctuary lamp, the votive candles, the baptismal font, the confessional or reconciliation room, the statues and the stained glass windows, say a "Hail Mary" when you get to the statue of Mary and encourage the children to repeat it after you. When you show them the votive candles, tell them why Catholics light candles and pray for people or for special causes and consider giving the children the chance to say a prayer and light a candle. You might end your tour by walk around the church looking at the Stations of the Cross and telling its story. How much detail you go into will depend on the age and ability of the children.

Explanation: Using the materials in the session and what you know about your church (when it was built, who the patron saint is, who or what the stained glass windows represent, etc.), explain to the children what all the different things mean – pointing out that the *sacred art* we find in the church helps us to raise our hearts and mind to God in prayer (CCC 2502). Make sure you genuflect in the church and explain why we do this. When referring to the images of the saints, explain that we are part of a Church which is on earth and in heaven and we ask the saints to intercede for us. If any of the children share a name with one of the saints, make the link. Again, depending on the age and ability, you might suggest that they find out more about the saint they (or someone they know) are named after.

Application: Talk to the children about the many ways that we come to know Jesus through what we see and what we do in the church. Use the activity sheets to see how much they have learned by getting them to name and explain the different things they have seen. You might suggest that they take pictures on their digital cameras and make a tour of the church for others – or, if they have the skills and the equipment, you may suggest that they make a video tour of the church. These are all ways of consolidating what they have learned.

Celebration: Use an abbreviated and/or adapted version of the Stations of the Cross as a closing prayer, and sing verse 1 of the *Stabat Mater* (*Celebration Hymnal* 57) or Taizé chant *Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom* (*Laudate* 253) at the beginning and at the end or after each Station.

Running the session: Some of the children may already be going to Mass and they may be familiar with what they will see during the tour. If so, invite them to participate in giving the tour enlarging on what they have to say as necessary. Make sure the children are aware that all that they have learned about in the church helps them to worship and glorify God.

For this session, you will need to be well prepared so that you can explain what you will see in the church. You might want to print a simplified Stations of the Cross for the children; and, if you are going to sing a response after the Stations or say the Hail Mary and the Lord's Prayer, you might want to print those words out too. You might want to do some research on the statues and stained glass windows. You will need music and long matches if you are going to light candles. (Long matches are specified for safety reasons if the children are going to light candles.) If you are going to suggest that the children take pictures, you will have to remind them to bring a camera to the session or have a camera they can use.

Ministries in the parish

Preparation: You might want to invite some of the people involved in ministries to this session to talk to the children about what they do. The sacred space might include symbols of some of the ministries (i.e., a chalice, a hymn book, flowers, etc. in addition to the bible, a coloured cloth, the crucifix and the candle). Light the candle as you say:

"We light this candle to remind us that Jesus is here with us as we meet today.
God gives each of us many gifts and our gifts differ from one another.
Having all these different gifts, we pray for God's grace to let us use them in his service.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen."

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn about the various ministries people have (how people use their gifts in the service of the community). Read a passage from Romans 12:4 or 1 Corinthians 12 about how the body has many parts, but the parts don't all do the same thing. The session begins by explaining what the priest's part is and then introduces the other ministries the children will be meeting as they become part of the community.

Explanation: The Catechism tells us how different ministries exist to assist the work of the common priesthood of the faithful (which all of share in through our baptism (CCC 1591). That includes servers, readers, commentators and members of the choir, for example, who exercise liturgical functions (CCC 1143). The materials explain the various roles people play and give some background (historical and liturgical). You might ask some children in the parish who are servers, or who are in the choir or are musicians or readers to come to the session to talk to these children about their ministry. You might also ask the priest and some adults to talk about their ministry. Make sure the priest or the sacristan explains the liturgical year and how the colours we use are linked to it – and get into the habit of asking the children to notice what colour is being used when they come to Mass. The materials offer some interview questions the children can use during the session or as and when they meet people in the different ministries.

Application: Encourage the children to think about what gifts they have and how they might like to contribute now and in the future. For example, they might like to help to welcome people or to help with the collection now. If they are musical, they can join the choir or the music group now. If one of them is a good reader or if the idea of being a server appeals to them, they might be encouraged to think about offering their services after they are baptised. God has given us gifts and, when we agree to use our gifts for the service of others, we are responding to Jesus's call to be more like him.

Celebration: You might invite each child and each adult to light a votive candle and place it on the table in your sacred space – and, as they do, they might thank God for one of the gifts they have; they might say how they think their gift helps to share the light of Jesus. You might finish with the song *Share the Light* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*), which talks about how we should share the light, the word, the love and the smile of Jesus – all of which show the way and all of which share God's Spirit in our lives.

Running the session: Make the session as inter-active as possible – giving the children a chance to talk and to respond to what they hear from the ministers – and make sure that the ministers do not talk for too long or go into too much detail (depending on the age and ability of the children). Save time at the end of the session for them to fill out the activity sheet.

For this session, you will need: the words to the song(s) you choose, copies of the activity sheets, pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session), symbols of the different ministries; votive candles, long matches and ministers representing at least some of the ministries..

About God

Preparation: Keep your sacred space simple – perhaps only the bible, a cloth, a cross and a candle this time (although you might want to include some images of God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit). For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“God of all creation, you embrace us with the love of a mother and father.
You send your own son, Jesus, to save us.
Through the power of your Holy Spirit, you raise us to life everlasting.
Your life is a mystery that we will celebrate and proclaim forever and ever. Amen.”

(Prayer of Trinity Sunday taken from the Sunday Weekly Leader Guide)

You might play some quiet music in the background during the prayer or you might sing the hymn *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us* (Daniel Iverson, *Celebration Hymnal* 666).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn a little bit about God and how God is revealed through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit. Begin by reading Isaiah 55:1-11 in the Bible and invite the children to listen to the images Isaiah gives us of God. Then read the quote from John 6:46: “No-one has seen the Father except the one who comes from God: he has seen the Father” and Colossians 1:15, which tells us that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” The materials offer a variety of images because we have no adequate language for God, who is beyond any single image we have. These materials *about God* might be used over several sessions if the children are to work thoroughly with all the Scripture passages which are included.

Explanation: Catholics believe that there are three persons in one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, and the Spirit who reveals him (CCC 689). The children will explore images of Father, Son and Spirit – and they learn what the Church teaches. It is important to remember in the conversations that take place that the conversion process has begun and the seeds of faith are just beginning to grow in the children. The activity sheets for this session invite the children to do Scripture searches to help them learn about the three persons of the Trinity and to become familiar with finding their way around the bible.

Application: The children are getting to know the Trinity (or getting to know it at a deeper level) and they may be beginning to develop a relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This will bring them to the first step of the process where they can say they believe in God, that they want to respond to the call to be a witness of Jesus and that they are willing to be led by the Spirit.

Celebration: You might read the letter to the Romans 8:14-17:

“Brothers and sisters, everyone who is guided by the Holy Spirit is a child of God.
We have been adopted by God and when we pray, “Abba, Father”,
It is the Holy Spirit and our own spirit telling us we truly are God’s children.
And if we are God’s children, we will have eternal life like Jesus,
Who is God’s Son.”

(Translation taken the Sunday Weekly Leader Guide, Trinity Sunday, Year C)

And, finish by teaching the children the “Glory be” prayer. If you want to use music, you might sing Horae Diurnae’s *God be in my head, and in my understanding* (*Celebration Hymnal* 205) or *God, beyond all names* (Bernadette Farrell, *God, beyond all names*)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets, pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, the cloth, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and enough bibles for each child and each adult.

About Catholics

Preparation: You might add an icon of Mary or a rosary to your sacred space this time with the bible, the cloth, the cross and a candle. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray: “Gracious and loving God, look upon our community of faith with love. Help us to witness to God’s love by loving everyone under the leadership of the Pope, the bishops, our priests and catechists. We ask you this through Christ, our Lord. Amen” You might play some quiet music in the background during the prayer or you might sing the *Circle Song* (Bernadette Wilson, *Share the Light*).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn a little bit more about what Catholics believe about the pope, bishops, the Virgin Mary, Mass and confession. The Pope is a symbol of the universal Church – a reminder that we are all one in the body of Christ. He appoints a bishop to look after one portion of the faithful of the Church in the diocese and this is the person of authority in the church that they are likely to meet – so we look at the symbols of his office. We look at the Mass and signs and symbols and gestures which help to bring us closer to God. Jesus said that he would be present when two or three were gathered in his name (Mt 18:20) – and the children are introduced to the different ways he is present in the Mass. The children hear the story of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) and learn a little bit about Mary and how we learn more about the life of Jesus as we say the rosary. And, lastly, we learn a little bit about Confession, why Catholics believe this is important and how they celebrate the sacrament.

Explanation: There is a lot of information in this session and you may choose to use it over more than one session with the children. Familiarise yourself with what the Catechism says about the different topics covered so that you are ready to answer the children’s questions in the light of the Church’s teaching: Catholics and the pope and bishops (CCC 882-896), Catholics and Mary (CCC 963-975), Catholics and the Mass (CCC 1328-1419) and Catholics and Confession (CCC 1422-1470). You might use photographs or a power point presentation to share images of the different topics with the children.

Application: Use the activity sheets or the questions in the book to stimulate discussion. This will help you to know where they are so that you can pitch your explanations accordingly. The information in this session will help the children feel more familiar with the Church’s teaching and will foster a sense of belonging. After spending the time they have spent so far enquiring what the Catholic faith is about, the children will usually say they want to proceed with their preparation – often expressed when they ask when they can be baptised – and they can move to the first step of the process, the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

Celebration: After learning about the Annunciation and if you feel the children are ready to learn the rosary, you might say a decade of the rosary as your closing prayer. As they prepare for the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, you might find the song *You have called us* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) good to use and you might invite spontaneous prayers of intercession from the children.

Running the session: This session is intended to be an introduction to some of the things that we believe as Catholics; it is not meant to give an exhaustive explanation of the topics. Remember: The RCIA process aims to lead participants to become “liturgical people” moving them towards full and active participation in the worshipping community. The liturgical aspect in each stage is the driving force behind the whole process and the primary means for those along this journey to enter into the mystery of Christ. This session leads up to the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens – when the child will enter a publicly-recognised relationship with the Church. Ensure that you spend time (and that their parents and the parish priest get involved in) discerning their readiness to take that first step.

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets, pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, the cloth, the cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session), whatever music you have chosen and an icon of Mary and a rosary (or rosaries).

Preparing for the first step: The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

In this session, the children will be prepared for the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (often called the Rite of Welcome). Begin, as always, with a prayer to remind the children that they are in the presence of God, who loves them very much. The Rites are powerful forms of liturgical catechesis which will lead the children to a deeper understanding and commitment and *the aim of the session is to prepare them – not to rehearse – for the Rite.*

Their readiness to take this step should have been discerned by the catechists with their parents and the parish priest before they prepare to celebrate this rite. By way of preparing them, you might explore with the children times in their lives when they have been welcomed somewhere (perhaps at a new school, or a football team, at a friend's house or in your parish). You might ask them what helped them feel they belonged. Was it their school uniform or the football kit? You are leading up to the discovery that these things “marked” them to show that they belonged to those places or groups. At the Rite of Acceptance, they will be called by their name(s) and they will be marked as a sign of belonging. Tell them that the priest will speak to them and their parents – telling them how happy the Church is that they are there.

Reflect back to when they first began the CICC – and how they were asked why they had come along. They might have said they wanted to become Catholic or that they were just curious. They might have said that their parents decided that they should be baptised or they might have said that they wanted to be baptised or to receive their first holy communion. Invite the children to think about how they would answer the question now. Invite them to think back, too, about how they are coming to know Jesus – or to know him better – since they began this part of their faith journey. Reflect on whether they have become more generous, more thoughtful. And ask them if they think about what Jesus would do before they decide what to do. Ask them if they are more like Jesus.

At the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the children's senses will be signed with a cross; they will be “marked” as followers of Jesus and this will show that they (have come to) believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The sign of the cross is important to Catholics. We begin our prayers by marking ourselves with it – as a sign of our total response to the life and death of Jesus, from head to toe. We bless ourselves with holy water as we enter the church to remind us of our baptism. Tell the children that, when they make the sign of the cross, they should remember that it is a sign of love – a reminder that Jesus died on the cross for them.

Tell the children that all their senses will all be marked with the cross and explain why this will be done. For example, their ears will be marked to help them hear and listen to the words of Jesus; their eyes will be marked to help them see the words of God; their lips will be marked to help them speak as Christ would speak; their hearts will be marked so that they will become the home of Christ; their shoulders will be marked so that they will be strong like Christ, their hands and feet will be signed so that they will touch others with the gentleness of Christ and that they will walk in the way of Christ. Since this is a preparation, not a practice, do not mark the children in this session. Being marked with the cross can have a profound impact on us; that experience should be reserved for when they celebrate the Rite.

After this Rite, the children will be catechumens. You might end the session with the prayer they will hear at the end of the Rite:

“Lord, you have filled these children with the desire to become perfect Christians.
As they grow in wisdom and knowledge, respond to their hopes and answer our prayers.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord, Amen.” (RCIA 265)

The Rite suggests that this celebration should take place with a small congregation and should help the children experience a warm welcome. (Depending on pastoral circumstances, you may find that you can achieve this warm welcome best at one of the Sunday Masses – or you might find it more suitable to celebrate the Rite in the place where you normally meet.) It is important to explain to the children when and where the Rite will be celebrated.

The Period of the Catechumenate: Advent

Preparation: Your sacred space might include an advent wreath (or three purple candles, one pink candle and one white one in a circular shape) with the bible and a cross. For your opening prayer, you might light one of the purple candles while you pray:

“God of love, you give us this time of Advent to help us to prepare for Jesus’ coming at Christmas. Open our eyes and help us to be alert so that we will be able to recognise Jesus when he comes among us.”

For music, you could sing *Kindle a flame* (Celebration Hymnal 342), *Light the Advent Candle* (Children of God) or you might sing *Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus, come!*

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn that, during Advent, we hear that we should be alert because we do not know the time when Jesus will come again. Advent begins the new liturgical year and the children learn that through the year, the Paschal Mystery (the life, death and resurrection) of Jesus unfolds. (For your own background reading, read about the Paschal Mystery (CCC 1168-1173)). Advent wreaths and Advent calendars help us to mark the time as we wait to celebrate Jesus’ coming on Christmas. The children will hear John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-8) in this session, who tells everyone to change their lives and to prepare the way for Jesus. We also hear John the Baptist (John 1:6-8, 19-28) giving us a preview of what it will be like when Jesus comes.

Explanation: We pray during Advent, *Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus, come!* We are praying for his return and, yet, we believe that Jesus is already here with us (CCC 671). One of the things we do during Advent is to watch for signs of Jesus’ presence in our lives. This is particularly important for these children as they prepare for baptism – as they grow in their relationships with Christ and as they become more and more aware of his presence in their lives. John the Baptist told people to change their lives and to be baptised. The children need to think about what they are doing to prepare the way for Jesus in their lives. People listened to John the Baptist. Ask the children if they are listening to what their priests and catechists are telling them about a new way of living as a follower of Jesus. This is a time for them to think about what changes they have to make in their lives; it is a time for them to think about how they are coming to know Jesus and what they are doing to be more like him.

Application: In this session, the children will hear that, when people asked John the Baptist what they must do, one of the things he said was, “You must share with each other. If you have two coats, give one to someone who has no coat at all. Give food to those who are starving.” (Luke 3:10-16) Ask the children what this means for them, what kind of things they are being asked to share with others and what this means in terms of a life of “witness” and “service.” In some parishes, people collect food, clothing, toys, etc for needy people. This is one way they can prepare for the coming of Jesus in their lives. John the Baptist is preparing people for Jesus, who is already with them; but they do not recognise him. He is preparing us, too, to recognise Jesus, who is already with us. Ask the children how ready they are for the Lord and how aware they are of his presence with them.

Celebration: You might begin with a prayer along these lines: “God, you love us so much that you want to live among us and to share your life with us. Make us ready to welcome you by following your ways and by living in peace with one another. Come and live in our hearts! We ask you this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. Sing *Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus, come!* or *To you, O Lord, I lift my soul* (Marty Haugen, *Gather us in* based on Psalm 25)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet, which suggests making an Advent wreath (and, if you are going to do this during the session, you will need 4-5 candles: 3 purple, 1 pink and 1 white, a wreath (or a styrofoam circle and some greenery from fir trees or from a holly bush in your garden or from a florist to make a wreath) for your prayer focus with its advent wreath, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Christmas

Preparation: If this session takes place just before Christmas, your sacred space can include the Advent wreath with the bible and a cross – or you might bring a nativity set to go with your candle, bible and cross. For your opening prayer, you might light all the candle(s) while you pray:

“God in heaven, we are filled with the new light by the coming of your Word among us.
May the light of faith shine in our words and actions.”

You might sing *Away in a manger* or another Christmas carol the children know.

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on Christmas, a great mystery of our religion. Read part of the Gospel of Christmas to the children (Luke 2:8-13) telling them about how the angel told the shepherds not to be afraid, that the Saviour has been born and they will find him in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The materials include a prayer based on Isaiah 9, the first reading for Christmas Day. We have taken the opportunity to include something about the Feast of the Holy Family, which comes right after Christmas. Read Acts 18:8) about how a great many families became Christians and were baptised because of what Paul told them about Jesus being the Son of God.

Explanation: The nativity story is well known by most children – even if they are not Christians. These children may be celebrating Christmas in a very different way this year; they may be involved in acting out the nativity story in the parish or they may be seeing it for the first time. The *Sunday Weekly Leader Guide* offers a dramatisation of the Gospel which you could use in your session. By this point, they will be beginning to understand the great love God has for us as expressed in this event. This is the focus of the session: God’s great love for the world – and God’s great gift to the world. Into a world of darkness, a child is born bringing light and peace. As the reading from Luke proclaims, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. A Saviour has been born for you.” Introducing the Feast of the Holy Family will help the children think about how Jesus was part of a family just like they are.

Application: God has visited his people. He acted far beyond all expectation – he has sent his own ‘beloved Son’ so that thus we might know God’s love (CCC 422, 458). In this session, the children learn a little about the religious significance of Christmas. There is a Christmas word search for them to do and, if the session is held just before Christmas, you might suggest that they make Christmas cards using images of the nativity that they can download on the computer emphasising the religious aspect of the feast. Talking about the Feast of the Holy Family, introduces the children to the idea of the *domestic church*. It is in the family that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family can be witnesses of a holy life, self-denial and active charity. The home is the school of human enrichment. This is where children learn endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life (CCC 1657).

Celebration: You might begin with a prayer along these lines:

“God in heaven, you never forget we need you and that is why you sent your Son, Jesus, to be born as a baby like one of us. We thank you for such a tremendous gift and praise Jesus, who is mighty God and Prince of Peace, forever and ever. Amen.”

(Prayer of Christmas Day taken from the Sunday Weekly Leader Guide, Year B)

Sing *The First Noel* or another Christmas carol the children know.

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils or pens, your Advent wreath or a nativity set for the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen. If you are going to make Christmas cards, you will need card, colouring materials and access to images. If you are going to act out the Christmas story, you might want costumes.

Epiphany of the Lord

Preparation: Your sacred space might include a nativity set (especially if you have the wise men in your set) to go with your candle, bible and cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“God in heaven, give us the grace to come to know Jesus more deeply and, by the way we choose to live our lives, to help others to know him through us. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

A music suggestion might be *We three kings of Orient are*.

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on those ‘Aha!’ moments, those moments when the children suddenly understood something in a way they had not understood it before – and to think about what gifts they bring to God as they journey towards their baptism. The readings we are using in this session are the ones that are always used on the Feast of the Epiphany – first, the one from Isaiah (60:1-6) which tells the people of Jerusalem that their “light has come!” The light is the epiphany of God and the Israelites are being told to stand up to welcome him because the glory of God shines forth in this light. We then proclaim the Gospel of Matthew (2:1-12) which tells the story of how the wise men followed the light of the star which they had seen and how it led to Jesus.

Explanation: The children may or may not be familiar with the story of the Epiphany. We are trying to tell them, that although the Christmas festivities are over, we continue to contemplate God becoming man because our faith is meaningless without taking on board the reality that God became man to save us and make us like himself. In Christ, salvation has come for everyone – Jew and Gentile alike – and, through evangelisation, the Church brings the Good News of Jesus Christ to all humanity (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 16). The word “epiphany” means sudden realisation or comprehension of the meaning of something. In our case, the Epiphany is the incarnation and the knowledge that God’s saving love has been revealed to us in Jesus. You might act out the story of the Epiphany and ask the children what they heard, what they saw, what it must have been like for the kings as they knelt and worshipped Jesus. You might ask them if they have knelt and worshipped Jesus at the crib in their parish during the Christmas period. If it is still there when you do this session, you might take them to the crib and pray for a while.

Application: The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East (together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee) (CCC 528). In this session, the children are invited to think about the ways in which they are guided in their lives – and who it is that guides them. They are probably becoming more aware that they are coming to know Jesus better and that he is influencing their lives – helping them to see things in a new light and it is important for them to have the time to think about what gift they want to give to Jesus, what they can do to be more like him (emphasising again our life of “witness” and “service” as followers of Jesus).

Celebration: You might begin with a prayer:

“Let us pray that we will be guided by the light of faith.
Father, you revealed your Son, Jesus, to the nations by the guidance of a star.
Lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen.”
(Opening Prayer of the Mass for the Epiphany of the Lord)

Sing *The little drummer boy* (available on many Christmas CD’s) or *We Sing your Glory* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) or one of Gloria’s they might be familiar with from Christmas or from the Mass.

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils, pens or crayons, your nativity set for the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen. If you are going to act out the story of the Epiphany, you might want costumes.

The Baptism of the Lord

Preparation: Your sacred space might include some of the symbols of baptism and confirmation (a bowl of holy water, a baptismal candle, a white robe or shawl and some oil) to go with your candle, bible and cross. For your opening prayer, you might pray:

“God in heaven, you revealed Christ as your Son by the voice that spoke over the waters of the Jordan. Help us to follow in his path of service to others and to reflect the glory of his kingdom even to the ends of the earth, for he is Lord for ever and ever.”

(Opening Prayer of the Mass for the Baptism of the Lord adapted)

Music suggestion: you might sing *Water of life, cleanse and refresh us* (Stephen Dean)

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on what happens in baptism and confirmation – and to learn about the meaning of the signs and symbols. In the Gospel of Matthew (3:13-17), we hear about how Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptised and, when he came out of the water, he saw the Spirit of God coming to him in the form of a dove and he heard a voice from heaven saying “This is my beloved Son with whom I am very pleased.” We also hear the reading from Isaiah (42:1, 6-7) which is used every year on this feast, where God says to Isaiah, “I, your God, have called you. I have taken you by the hand.” God chose Isaiah to open the eyes of the blind, to free those in prison and to give light to those in darkness.

Explanation: Jesus' public life begins with his baptism by John in the Jordan. The Holy Spirit comes upon him and a voice from heaven proclaims, “This is my beloved Son.” (Matthew 3:13-17; CCC 535-537). At our baptism, we are promised that the Holy Spirit will give us the strength to be more like Christ. God calls us by name to show us that he loves us. We heard the story of Isaiah where God calls him and asks him to do something. There are many stories in the Bible where God calls people by name and gives them something to do – and God has something for each and every one of us to do. In this session, the children will learn what will happen at their baptism and at their confirmation. You might show the children a clip of Jesus' baptism from one of the films about him if you have the facility to do this. It is important that they understand the signs and symbols of baptism and confirmation. It is also important for them to understand the baptismal promises they will make and what they mean – so spend time with them reflecting on the promises and how they will live out their lives as Christians.

Application: As they prepare for baptism, they are being asked again and again if they are becoming more like Jesus, if they are being enlightened by him. In baptism, our sins are forgiven. We die to our old lives and we are called to a new life – a life in Christ. We are leaving behind selfish ways and we are called to a life of service. The Spirit gives us many gifts to help us to be loving and peaceful, to be patient and kind, to be respectful. Get the children to think of some concrete examples of how they are using these gifts.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment suggesting that we hear God telling us that we are his children and he wants each of us to be his faithful friend.

“Gracious and loving God, You sent down your power and your Spirit on Jesus to be the light of the world. Lead us by the same light so that we may see how you are asking us to witness to you and to serve you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Take some time to pray silently suggesting to the children that they ask the Holy Spirit to inspire them, to help them to be aware of their gifts and to know how they can use them to serve others and close your prayer with the song, *You have called us* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) or *I will choose Christ* (Tom Booth, *Never too young – by request*)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils or pens, a bowl of holy water, a baptismal candle, a white robe or shawl and some oil for the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen. If you are going to show a clip of film showing Jesus' baptism, you will need the equipment and the DVD for this.

Come and see

Preparation: Your sacred space might include the candle, bible and cross on a white cloth this time, together with a place setting or two for a meal and some flowers to one side on your prayer focus. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“Loving God, through Jesus, you call us to love you and everybody in this world.
Make us wide awake to your voice and always prepared to do what pleases you.
We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.”

(Prayer of the Day Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B Sunday Weekly Leader Guide)

Music suggestions: you might sing *Gather us in* (Marty Haugen, *Gather us in*), *Let us build a house* (Marty Haugen, *All are welcome*) or *Gather your people, O Lord* (*Laudate* 462).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on how Jesus is present as he invites us to “come and see” at the beginning of Mass. He began his public ministry by inviting his disciples to come and see, to gather together as a community. In the liturgical year, Ordinary Time follows on from the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord; the Gospels at this time remind us that, just as Jesus called the disciples to follow him, he calls us to follow him. We read the Gospel of John (1:29-34) or John (1:35-42). John the Baptist is with his disciples and he sees Jesus walking by and he says to them, “Look, there is the Lamb of God! He is the one who takes away the sins of the world.” The disciples ask Jesus, “Where do you live?” and he says “Come and see” – and they went immediately and followed Jesus.

Explanation: Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ himself, who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration (CCC 1348). Remember that John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus. He called Jesus the “Lamb of God” and by doing this, he was preparing the disciples for what would happen to Jesus, how he would be sacrificed like a lamb. These children are preparing for the sacraments of initiation and these next sessions will be looking at the different parts of the Mass by way of preparing them to receive the Eucharist for the first time. Our focus in this session is to teach them about the Introductory Rite of the Mass and how we come together not as individuals but as a community. We sing an opening hymn, we make the sign of the cross together, we acknowledge our sinfulness and we praise God together – and all these things make us ready as a worshipping community to celebrate the Mass and to listen to the word of God. The activity sheet suggests that you teach the children more about the sign of the cross. They were marked with it at the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens; explore with them how we mark ourselves with the sign of the cross as we begin Mass – and explore what else we do to make ourselves ready for the Mass.

Application: The children need to learn that the Mass will be an essential part of their lives as Catholics. They should know about how the Church tells us to prepare for the Mass (CCC 1385); and they need to know that the Church obliges us to go to Mass on Sundays and feast days (CCC1389). Use the place settings in your prayer focus to explain that, just as they prepare for a celebration meal, they need to prepare themselves for Mass.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment to thank God for the gift of the Sabbath, and then

“Gracious and loving God, you said that where two or three are gathered, that you would be present with us (Matthew 18:20). Help us to be aware of your presence among us as we gather in your name. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

You might finish with *Though we are many/Make us a sign* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) or *Come gather and praise* (Monica Brown, *Praise & Blessings*)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session), a white cloth, plates, cutlery, glasses, flowers, napkins and whatever music you have chosen.

Listen to me

Preparation: Your sacred space might include the candle, bible and the cross, together with the Lectionary from the church (if you can borrow it) instead of the bible for this session. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“God, our Guide, we thank you for sending Jesus to be our friend and teacher.
We want to listen to his words and to do what he asks.
Help us to be true to our promise. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.”

Music suggestion: you might sing *Alleluia, we will listen* (Paul Inwood, *Children at Heart*)

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on how Jesus is really present as he speaks to us in the Scriptures during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass. Read Isaiah (58:7-10) who tells us what we should do to help people know and love God. He says we should feed the hungry, cloth the naked, house the homeless and we should not say unkind things about people. He says if we do these things, we will shine with the brightness of God’s light. Jesus also tells his disciples that they are the “light of the world” in Matthew’s Gospel (5:13-16) – and he says his followers must let his light in them shine for others.

Explanation: The *Liturgy of the Word* includes "the writings of the prophets," that is, the Old Testament, and "the memoirs of the apostles" (their letters and the Gospels). After the homily, which is an exhortation to accept this Word as what it truly is, the Word of God (CCC 1349). The readings chosen for this session again emphasise to the children that they will receive the light of Christ at their baptism, that we can be the light for others, who will see the light of Christ shining in us in the good works we do. For Catholics, the Bible is God’s Word. The Word we read in the Scriptures is the Word of God and Jesus Christ is the Word of God in reality. We suggest that you introduce a meditation of the Sunday Gospel (or the Gospel included in this session). The activity for this session is a Scripture search to find the places where Jesus said that we should listen to him.

Application: We listen not only with our ears, not only with our minds; but we listen with our hearts too. God speaks to us in our hearts because he wants, above all, to speak to us of his love and care for us. This is the language of the heart. We want the children to learn to listen to God with an openness in their hearts, an openness to hear and receive what is being said. Explain to the children that this is why we sign our foreheads, our mouths and our hearts with small cross just before the Gospel is proclaimed. This is the time to talk to the children about how what they hear in the Gospel is relevant to them in their lives, to challenge them to apply what they are learning in their everyday lives.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment to thank God for the gift of the Sabbath, and then

“Gracious and loving God, you said that where two or three are gathered, that you would be present with us (Matthew 18:20). Help us to listen to you speaking to us when we hear the Gospel each. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

You might finish with *Listen to Jesus* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*); *Circle Song* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) or *Feed us with your Word* (Paul Inwood, *Children at Heart*)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (or the Lectionary open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Let us give thanks and praise

Preparation: You might include a chalice with some unconsecrated wine and a paten with an unconsecrated host on your sacred space with the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“Gracious and loving God, we come to Mass to thank you for your gifts to us: the gift of life, of love, of friendship, of genius, your gifts of all good things – and we know that you bless us in many ways. Help us always to come to Mass in a spirit of thanksgiving and praise to you. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.”

Music suggestions: *Lord accept the gifts we offer* (Sr. M. Teresine, *Laudate* 604; *Celebration Hymnal* 377) or *Thank You, Lord* (Paule Freeburg & Christopher Walker, *Stories & Songs of Jesus*)

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn about offering ourselves and our gifts to God with Jesus. Read the story of John (6:1-15) about how people noticed that Jesus gave thanks and praise to his heavenly Father. We place on the altar gifts of bread and wine and the priest says, “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation.” These are words of thanksgiving and praise. The bread and wine represent all that God gives to us. It is as if we gather ourselves up at this point bringing everything we have and all that we are, to place them on the altar as an offering, a gift to God. After the gifts are prepared, we pray the Eucharistic Prayer – the great prayer of thanksgiving and praise. The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all he has given us (CCC1360).

Explanation: The presentation of the offerings at the altar takes up the gesture of Melchizedek and commits the Creator's gifts into the hands of Christ who, in his sacrifice, brings to perfection all human attempts to offer sacrifices. From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share with those in need. This custom of the *collection*, ever appropriate, is inspired by the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich (CCC1350-1). The bread we offer represents our daily routines, our daily efforts. The wine represents the richness of our life, our laughter, our fun, our adventure – and we offer it all to God. Jesus will make himself our offering and will make us part of his offering of himself to the father.

Application: Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, made present every time Mass is celebrated, the distance between God and us is bridged. The damage done by sin is overcome. God and his people are made one in Christ. Peace is restored between God and his people – and between us. It is our task, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to make that peace as real and visible as possible in this world. The children are invited to think about some of the sacrifices they have made for others or that others have made for them – and to think about, when the sacrifice is in the context of love, it changes into gift. The Activity Sheet invites them to write a prayer of thanks and praise to God.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment to thank God

“Gracious and loving God, through your goodness, you give us bread and wine to eat and to drink; you give us your Son in Holy Communion. Help us always to be thankful for this wonderful gift and help us always to be generous to those who need our love and our help. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

You might finish with All that I am, all that I do (Sebastian Temple, *Laudate* 600; *Celebration Hymnal* 23). Using hymns used in the parish is a good way to teach them the hymns. The more familiar they are with the hymns sung and the prayers said, the more they will feel they belong and the more they will be able to join in the praise and worship in the Mass.

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a chalice and paten with unconsecrated wine and host, a candle, a cross and bible (open to the Scripture passage used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Take and eat

Preparation: You might include a chalice with some unconsecrated wine and a paten with an unconsecrated host on your sacred space with the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you living among us in the sacrament of your body and blood. May we offer to our Father in heaven our promise of love. Help us to know to share our food as you do with all who are in need. Help us to experience the peace of the kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

Music suggestions: *God’s Greatest Gift* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) or *This is my Body* (*Laudate* 627, *Celebration Hymnal* 730).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on how Jesus is present in a unique way in the bread and wine, which are transformed into his body and blood in the Eucharist. Read the story of the Passover (Exodus 12:3-14) and then read the story of the Last Supper (Luke 22:14-20). At the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, “Take and eat.” He said, “Take and drink” and he said that they were to do this *in memory of him*. Jesus asks us to gather to share the memory of his life, death and resurrection; and we experience here and now his saving presence among us. The children will learn about the link between the Passover and the Last Supper. They will learn about the miraculous change that takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit, how the bread and wine are transformed into Jesus’ body and blood.

Explanation: From the beginning Christians have celebrated the Eucharist. In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*. This presence is called “real” because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present (CCC1356-8, 1374). The children learn about this by hearing about how the Jewish people remember and celebrate the events of the Exodus. They recognise the hope and joy of God’s desire to bring the same freedom to their lives today as he did in the past. They learn that Jesus is asking us to have his “Jewish” memory; we, too, do more than recall a series of past events (CCC 1363). We experience here and now the saving presence of Jesus among us and we look forward with hope to the future. One of the ways we remind ourselves of this and show our respect for it is to refrain from eating anything for an hour before Mass if we are going to receive communion (CCC 1387).

Application: The children will learn that Jesus’ words are also a command to do the same with our lives as he did with his – to make our lives a gift, a service of love to others. It is important to give the children the time and space to think about how they will do this. We have talked a lot about becoming more like Jesus; encourage them to think about concrete examples of what this means in their lives. As an activity, the children might write a prayer thanking Jesus as they prepare to receive him in Communion.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment in prayer

“Lord Jesus, you come to us – Body and Blood – in Holy Communion. Help us always when we say “Amen” as we receive you to remember that we are saying “yes, I believe” or “Yes I see myself as part of the Church” or “Yes, I am your disciple. We ask this through you in the Spirit, Amen.”

You might finish with *God’s Greatest Gift* (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*) or with one of the post-Communion hymns you use in your parish.

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a chalice and paten with unconsecrated wine and host, a candle, a cross and bible (open to the Scripture passage used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Go out and do the same

Preparation: You might keep the sacred space simple this time with only the candle, bible, a cloth and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“Father, may the food we receive in the Eucharist nourish us and lead us to you. Keep within us the vigour of your Spirit and protect the gifts you have given to us so that we can use them for your service. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Music suggestion: *Go and Tell* (Paul Inwood, *Children at Heart*).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to reflect on how we are sent out at the end of Mass to be Christ’s witnesses in our world. We begin this session by proclaiming the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20) – the great commission. The last thing Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended into heaven was that they should go out and do the same as he had done. Jesus told the disciples to “preach to all nations”. The children may have heard about missionaries who go out to foreign places to preach – and, of course, their priests preach to them in the parish. Jesus said that the disciples should teach people to keep his commandments – and so this is a good time to teach the children the Ten Commandments. The Church continues to teach people today through religious education in schools and catechesis in parishes, in talks and classes that are offered to children and adults. Catholics believe that each and every Christian is called to proclaim the Good News by virtue of their baptism.

Explanation: The Mass concludes with the *sending forth* (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God’s will (CCC 1332). In the great commission, Jesus tells the disciples to go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands he gave to them. The disciples of Jesus are still doing this today. At the end of Mass, we are sent out to be Christ’s witnesses in the world. We have been nourished by God’s Word and by Christ’s Body and Blood and we are ready for our mission. This task is not one we have to attempt on our own.

Application: Because Christ, in the power of the Spirit, is acting in us, we will have a special concern for those people and those situations which were closest to the heart of Jesus – the sick, the poor, the well-being of children, the quest for peace and forgiveness. The children should be invited to think about how they will love and serve the Lord. They have been asked this question in different ways during their preparation for baptism; it is very important that they can find concrete examples of what they can do (and what they are already doing). For example, they might visit the sick, help the homeless, help an old or disabled person; they might befriend someone who needs a friend. The session includes a comparison of the “steps” in the life of Christ with the “steps” in the Mass to help the children understand the order of the Mass. The session also includes the Ten Commandments and how they can be interpreted in the lives of the children.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment in prayer

“Loving God, you told the world about the coming of your Son, Jesus, through the disciples and Jesus’s early followers. Now it is our turn. Inspire us and enthuse us as we go out to the people we meet to pass on the Good News. We ask this through Jesus and in the Spirit, Amen.”

You might finish with *Go make a difference* (Steve Angrisano & Tom Tomaszek, *Never too young – by request*) or you might use the blessing *May God bless and keep you* (by Christopher Walker, *Laudate* 653).

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets with pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross, the cloth and bible (open to the Scripture passage used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

We celebrate the Eucharist

Preparation: You might keep the sacred space simple this time with only the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you pray:

“God always true, after you raised Jesus from death, you still let him work for us though we cannot see him. Let us hear his voice as he speaks to us secretly in our prayers. Let us feel him near us when we gather together in the church. Never leave us, but keep close to us through Jesus, who lives with you forever and ever. Amen.”

(Prayer of the Day Third Sunday of Easter Year A Sunday Weekly Leader Guide)

Music suggestion: the *Emmaus Song* (Monica Brown, *Praise & Blessings*)

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to think about how we come to recognise Jesus in the Mass by reflecting on the story of the walk to Emmaus. We begin this session by proclaiming that Gospel (Luke 24:13-35). It is the story of how the disciples finally came to recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread after they had walked with him all the way to Emmaus. In this session, we explore how we come to recognise Jesus when we celebrate the Eucharist.

Explanation: Just as Jesus joined the disciples as they were walking along, we gather together at the beginning of the Mass and we believe Jesus is there with us. They did not recognise Jesus and we sometimes find it difficult to recognise him too. Jesus opens the Scriptures for the disciples telling them that everything that happened to him had been foretold; and when we listen to the Scriptures, we are invited to be aware that he is speaking to us. When they got to Emmaus, they invited Jesus to stay with them; we, too, need to invite Jesus to spend time with us. They finally realised that the stranger was Jesus when he blessed and broke the bread. We are invited to go to his table, to recognise him in the bread and wine we are offered. The disciples set out immediately for Jerusalem to tell the others the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead; and we are sent out at the end of Mass to tell others the Good News – to love and serve the Lord.

Application: This reflection and the knowledge the children will gain from it will, hopefully, enhance their participation in the celebration of the Mass – and lead them to a deeper awareness of Christ’s presence in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist. This session provides another opportunity to help the children realise the importance of coming to Mass, of being part of the community, of their need to be nourished by Scripture and the Eucharist so that they can live the Gospel in their lives. (It also offers another opportunity to remind them that the Church obliges the faithful to take part in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feast days (CCC1389)).

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment in prayer

“Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us and make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. The disciples recognised you in the breaking of the bread. Help us to recognise you in the Eucharist – and lead us to enjoy the light of your presence for ever. Amen.”

You might finish with *Go, the Mass is ended* (*Celebration Hymnal* 203, *Laudate* 652)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets with pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to the Scripture passage used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Preparing for the Rite of Election

The aim of this session is to prepare the children for the Rite of Election. Begin, as always, with a prayer to remind the children that they are in the presence of God, who loves them very much. This Rite is a powerful sign that the catechumens have been “elected in Christ”. This is called “election” because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God, in whose name the Church acts.

The Rite of Election is usually celebrated on or about the first Sunday of Lent. The Bishop will ask the children’s godparents whether “they have listened to the word of Christ, endeavoured to follow his commands more perfectly, shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters in their community and joined with them in prayer” (RCIA 118A).

In order to prepare the children to celebrate the Rite, you might ask them these questions and help them find examples to show the changes that have taken place in them. For example,

- Ask them if listening to God’s word has made any difference in their lives.
- We are inclined to think about ourselves first; but Jesus was always thinking of others. Ask the children if they can think of any examples of how they think of others first since they have begun this preparation to become Catholic. As they come to know Jesus better and better, are they living as he asks us to? and
- Ask them if they are coming to Mass regularly. Have they made friends in the parish? What is it like for them to pray with the parish community?

When their godparents and they have answered these questions, they will be declared members of the elect, chosen to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at Easter time. Ask them to think about what it means to be chosen. Ask them what it feels like when they are chosen by someone to do something special? Ask, too, how it feels to be chosen by God to become a Catholic? Tell them that the bishop(s) will greet them when they leave the Cathedral. Tell them that the Christian community is very happy that they have come this far on their journey and that they want to become Catholic – to fully belong to the Catholic Church.

Take some time to pray at the end of the session. Invite the children to think about what they are asking of Jesus and his Church as they prepare to take the next step on their journey towards baptism. And then, pray one of the prayers they will hear at the Rite of Election:

“Father of love and power,
it is your will to establish everything
in in Christ and to draw us
into his all-embracing love.
Guide the elect of your Church,
strengthen them in their vocation,
build them into the kingdom of your Son,
and seal them with the Spirit of your promise.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

(taken from the Rite of Election RCIA 122B)

If you want to use some music, some suggestions from the *Celebration Hymnal* are: *Centre of my life* 543, *Gather us in* 253, *Here in this place* 253 and *Praise to you, O Christ, our Saviour* 416.

They are now ready to take the second step in the process. The catechumens, now called the “elect” will celebrate the Penitential Rite (the Scrutiny). (If any of the children are already baptised, they are now ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.)

Preparing for the second step: The Scrutiny (or the Penitential Rite)

The aim of this session is to prepare the children for the Scrutiny (or the Penitential Rite). This is the second step in the Christian initiation of these older children. If the children are to be initiated at Easter, this Penitential Rite is celebrated during Lent; if not, it can be celebrated at the most suitable time. The Rite suggests that the appropriate occasion for these young people to take this step is alongside the youngsters in the parish or the candidates who are in this group who are celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation for the first time. If this is going to happen, you need to explain the difference between what is happening with the two different groups.

Begin this preparation session, as always, with a prayer to remind the children that they are in the presence of God, who loves them very much. Remind the children that baptism is a new start on their journey of faith. The waters of baptism are a new beginning, an opportunity to start afresh; but living in a truly Christian way takes an entire life.

This celebration of scrutiny aims to help the children develop a sense of sin and to strengthen all that is “upright, strong and good” in them (RCIA 141). This sense of sin is to do with recognising that we have limitations, that we are not yet perfect, that we have all sorts of areas of life that need to be developed if we are to become fully alive human beings, to use an age-old description of what it means to be a Christian. One of the prayers in the scrutiny states this so well. It says, “Even though they try to live as your children, they sometimes find this difficult.” Further on in the same paragraph, it says, “If they stumble on the way and do not please you, help them up with the power of your hand, that they may rise again and continue on their journey to you with Jesus Christ our Lord” (RCIA 276).

The Rite offers a number of Scripture choices (RCIA 273). We have chosen the story of how Jesus healed the blind man (John 9:1-41) for the preparation session; the parish priest may well choose another passage when he celebrates the scrutiny with the children. In this story, when the blind man was healed, he could see with his eyes; but he could also see in another way. He saw that Jesus came from God. He said a sinner could not do such a miraculous thing. But the Pharisees – even at the end of the story – found it impossible to “see”. We can be blind about our faults and our weaknesses. Even when people point them out, we sometimes refuse to see.

We suggest that you act out this story in your group and ask the different people how they feel, what they believe. One person can be the blind man, one can be Jesus; the others can be the blind man’s parents, the Pharisees and the disciples.

Take some time to pray at the end of the session. Ask the children to think about how they see things differently now that they have come to know Jesus? Ask them how he has helped them to see some things they need to change in their lives. And then lead them in this prayer:

“Father of mercy, you led the man born blind
to the kingdom of light through the gift of faith in your Son.
Free these children from everything around them that blinds them.
Set them firmly in your truth, children of the light for ever.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

(adapted from RCIA 155A)

If you want to use some music, one suggestion is *Open my eyes* (Jesse Manibusan, *Never too young – by request*).

The children will now move into the final stage, Purification and Enlightenment – the time of prayerful preparation before they celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation.

Lent

Preparation: You might have a purple cloth in your sacred space with the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you play some quiet music. Then begin:

“Lord God, you sent Jesus to help us see things your way. Help us to keep from being blind; help us to love others as much as we love ourselves. We make this prayer through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

You might sing *Open my eyes* (Jesse Manibusan, *Never too young – by request*).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn about how Lent is a time of preparation for Easter – It is a time to remember Jesus’ total giving. Begin by reading from the Gospel of Mark 10: 45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.” Lent is the Church’s season for discerning and doing good. We all learn to grow by trying to follow what is good and rejecting what is bad. This means we have to be generous and self-giving like Jesus. If people want to be followers of Jesus, they have to be prepared to notice what others need and try to do what they can to help. Read the Gospel of Matthew 4:1-11 about how Jesus was tempted and hear that Christians reflect on how we can overcome temptations during Lent by prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Explanation: As the children prepare for their baptism, they can join the other Christians in the Lenten observances. For example, you might encourage them to go to the Stations of the Cross in the parish during Lent or to read some Scripture or the life of a saint every day. Explain to them about giving up things and tell them to be careful not to give up one thing (like Coca Cola) and replace it with something else (like Lemonade) – or to give up watching TV but listen to the radio instead! That is not the point. Explain that giving something up without meaning has no value. The point is to deepen their love and faith in Christ. Suggest that they might promise to do something rather than giving something up – something which will help them to be more like Jesus. Explain, too, about the temptations we are faced. We are inclined to think of ourselves first; explore with them the reading of Jesus’ temptations and help them come to realise that we rely on him for help, for the grace to overcome our temptations.

Application: There is an activity sheet for each week in Lent. Each week, they are invited to make a promise to do something to become more loving like Jesus. Each week, there is a cross with a heart on it. The first week, the heart is quite small and they are invited to do make a special effort to get along with someone they often argue with – or to be kind to someone they don’t like – something which will make them more loving. They might offer to be more helpful at home. Each week, the heart gets bigger until it is so big that they can hardly see the cross poking out from behind it. It is a way of explaining that Jesus gave his all for us on the cross out of love. They are invited to think each night before they go to bed about whether they have kept their promise, to ask for help if they have not and to thank God for the grace they have been given if they have. It is a way of encouraging them to learn how to exam their conscience each night as part of their night-time prayers – and a way to get them to think about walking the walk of a Christian, and not just talking the talk of one!

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment and then by introducing the Lord’s Prayer in one of the ways it is introduced at Mass:

““Lord God, bless all who ask for your forgiveness. Bless all those who receive these ashes. May they keep this Lenten season in preparation for the joy of Easter.”

You might finish with *Abba, Father, send your Spirit* (*Celebration Hymnal* 8, *Laudate* 293)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets with crayons, coloured pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a purple cloth, a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment: A time of prayer and reflection

Preparation: You might add a nicely presented (or decorated) copy of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer for this session to your sacred space with the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you play some quiet music. Then begin:

“Father, we thank you for the gift of today. We thank you for the gift of one another.
We ask you to help us be aware of your presence among us and we ask you to bless us.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

You might sing *Praise him!* (Anonymous, *Celebration Hymnal* 601).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn about some of the Catholic prayers and to give the children the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Read the Gospels of Matthew (6:7-14), Matthew (7:7-8) and Matthew 6:5-6 where Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray the Lord's Prayer and where he teaches us that we should ask for what we need. Read Mark's Gospel (14:32-36) about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He teaches us to be willing to accept God's will – as he did when he was praying. Prayer has been defined as *conversation with God* – and the children may have had many conversations with God the Father, with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. They will hopefully have learned different types of prayers by this time. The Church tells us that during the weeks after the celebration of the scrutiny, the children should be presented with the Creed and with the Lord's Prayer. This is the time when the Church tells us that they should be *given* these prayers (RCIA 134-136).

Explanation: Read Part Four of the Catechism on prayer – in particular the section about how Jesus teaches us how to pray (CCC 2607-2615), the section on the Lord's Prayer (CCC 2759-2856) and Part One on the Creed (CCC 198-1064). The Lord's Prayer sums up all of the prayer life that the new Catholic will make the heart of their life. This prayer is an important part of the spiritual preparation for the Eucharist. We pray the Lord's Prayer just before we receive Communion. The children are now ready to say this and the Creed because they have become expressions of what they believe. When they have learned the Creed by heart, *they will give it back* by proclaiming it to the group (which may meet specially to do this a day or two or a week before they are baptised). The group might include their parents, the catechists, the priest(s) and some of the parishioners.

Application: Get the children to spend some time writing a letter to God telling him how they feel about calling him their Father. Get them to choose their favourite part of the prayer and tell him that in the letter. If there is anything challenging in the prayer, tell them to tell him that too. This kind of exercise will help them to make the prayer their own. Then get them to look at the Creed and break it down into lots of statements. In the group, talk with one another what you mean when you say, “I believe in God” or “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son” etc. At their baptism, they will be asked if they believe these statements of faith and so it is important that they have the chance to think through what they believe. This is, of course, a summary of what they have been learning throughout their preparation for baptism. The activity suggests that they take copies of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed and decorate them. If they do not already know the prayers by heart, they might be encouraged to learn them now.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment and then by introducing the Lord's Prayer in one of the ways it is introduced at Mass:

“Jesus taught us to call God our Father, and so we have the courage to say:
Our Father who art in heaven . . . “

You might finish with *Abba, Father, send your Spirit* (*Celebration Hymnal* 8, *Laudate* 293)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets with crayons, coloured pencils or pens, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Preparing for the third step: Celebrating the Sacraments

The aim of this session is to take some time in final preparation before the children celebrate the sacraments. This is the final step in the Christian initiation of these older children. Begin this preparation session, as always, with a prayer to remind the children that they are in the presence of God, who loves them very much. Remind the children one again that baptism is a new start on their journey of faith. They have been preparing for this moment for some time now – in fact, ever since they came to the parish and said that they thought they would like to become Catholic. Ever since the Rite of Election and the celebration of the Scrutiny, they have been spending more time in prayer and have made the Lord's Prayer and the Creed their own.

By way of their final preparation, you might do something practical with them. If they are being baptised at Easter (either at the Vigil or on Easter morning), they might help to prepare the paschal candle. If the candle has not been painted, you can use the simple transfer from the supplier. (If they are not being baptised at Easter, you might show them the Paschal Candle and explain the symbols.) The Paschal candle is the primary visual symbol at the Easter Vigil, the symbol of Christ himself, risen triumphantly from the dead, shining as the true light to the nations. The Alpha and Omega appear on the candle; they are the first and last letters of the Classical (Ionic) Greek alphabet. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:8); this would be like referring to someone in English as the "A and Z" – or the beginning and the end. There is a cross on the candle marking Christ's victory over death; and, in the quadrants of the cross are marked the four numerals of the current year. In Christ's journey from eternity to eternity, we are privileged each year to rejoice again at his supreme miracle of redemption and resurrection. Finally, five grains of incense are inserted at the centre and arms of the inscribed cross and held in place by wax nails, honouring Christ's five wounds. You might get the children to put a grain of incense from a small bowl into one of the brass studs which will be put into the candle. It will help them to see that they are associated with the candle that will proclaim the Resurrection. You might think about asking the children to be the taper bearers at the beginning of the Vigil (if they are being baptised then), giving the light from the paschal candle to the gathered people to light their candles.

Alternatively, you might get the children involved with making an Easter Garden in the church. The garden is a focal point that helps us in remembering the meaning of the events that took place in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus that first Easter. It's not a model of exactly what it looked like – so a few stones can suggest the tomb, the cross with white cloth suggest the resurrection and flowers can represent the garden.

There are always questions to be answered about what will happen, what people should do and where they should go. Although this is not meant to be a formal rehearsal, the parish priest and the catechists might take the children through the flow of the liturgy – especially where they will be central figures. You might bring the children to the font, for example, inviting the children to spend a few minutes anticipating what it will be like to be baptised in the water of the font and to rise to new life in Christ.

Take some time to pray at the end of the session. And then lead them in this prayer:

"Gracious and loving God, these children have completed a long preparation and are ready for baptism. They will receive new life from God who is love: they will become Christians. Before they make their profession of faith in our presence, let us in their presence publicly and with a deep sense of responsibility renew our own profession of faith, which is the faith of the Church."

(adapted from RCIA 288)

Those Christians present profess their faith; and the children are then invited to return the Creed to them by professing either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed to them.

If you want to use some music, one suggestion is the refrain to *Oh Lord, you are the centre of my life* (Paul Inwood, *Celebration Hymnal* 543)

The Easter period (Mystagogy)

Preparation: You might enhance your sacred space with the candle, bible and the cross by adding some flowers or, if it is possible, to have last year's Paschal Candle. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you play some quiet music while you pray:

“O God, you want the whole world to believe in you and in Jesus, who you sent to save us. Show us how to believe and teach us what we should believe. Though people may laugh at us for believing, give us courage to stand up for you and to live as we should. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

(Prayer of the Day Second Sunday of Easter Year A Sunday Weekly Leader Guide)

Music suggestion: You might sing the refrain to *You are the centre of my life* (Paul Inwood, *Celebration Hymnal* 543).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to take some time to reflect on Easter, and to think about the children's call to mission now that they are baptised Catholics. Read the Gospel for the second Sunday of Easter: John 20:19-31, and invite the children to listen for echoes of their experiences of the Easter Vigil (or Easter morning Mass). In the early centuries, candidates were not fully instructed about baptism, confirmation and Eucharist until after they had celebrated them. So the readings of the Easter season, the readings from the Acts, and the Second Readings from 1 Peter, 1 John and Revelation, are there to help them to reflect on *who they are now, what they are living for, where they are going and what gifts they have to give.*

Explanation: A period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogia should be provided to assist these young neophytes (the newly planted, newly incorporated into the mystical Body of Christ) and their companions who have completed their Christian Initiation. This period can be arranged by an adaptation of the guidelines given for adults (RCIA 306). We are told that the main setting for the catechesis of the newly baptised is the Sunday Mass during the Easter Season (RCIA 237). It is very important to encourage the children to come to Mass so that interaction between them and the faithful is made easier and more beneficial (RCIA 236). Special places should be reserved for the neophytes and their godparents and the homily and general intercessions should take account of the presence and needs of the neophytes (RCIA 238).

Application: Christians are called and empowered to renew the face of the earth. The Lord asks us to love as he does . . . to make ourselves the neighbour of those furthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself (CCC 1825). The children will do this in two areas in particular – in and through your families and at school– to bear witness to the love of God so that the afflicted and the needy find there the generous friends they need. We are called to transform our schools and to be of service to all in our communities. If your parish has a justice and peace group, an SVP group or if you support the work of CAFOD or if there are people who support “green” issues, or if your parish supports other charities, you might encourage the children to find out what they are doing and to think about getting involved. The activity sheet invites them to think of some of the ways they will contribute to their community. It is important to ensure that they are involved in what is happening in the parish so that they continue to feel they belong.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment and then by introducing the sung version of the Lord's Prayer to the children (*The Lord's Prayer*, Paule Freeburg & Christopher Walker, *More stories and songs of Jesus*). You might then invite the children to pray some prayers of intercession.

Music suggestion: finish with the hymn *God's Spirit is in my heart* (Alan Dale, *Celebration Hymnal* 227, *Laudate* 864).

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pens and pencils, the prayer focus with a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Pentecost and the Gifts of the Spirit

Preparation: Your sacred space might include a red cloth with the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you play some quiet music while you pray:

“Father of light, from whom every good gift comes, send your Spirit into our lives with the power of a mighty wind, and by the flame of your wisdom open our minds, loosen our tongues to sing your praise in words beyond our power of speech. Without your Spirit, we cannot raise our voices in words of peace or announce the truth that Jesus is Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

(Opening Prayer of the Church for Pentecost Year A from the Missal *adapted*)

Music suggestion: You might sing *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us* (Daniel Iverson, *Celebration Hymnal* 666, *Laudate* 306).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to help the children learn how their mission and the mission of the church is to do the work of the Holy Spirit. Read the story of Pentecost from Acts 2:1-8, 11b about how the believers were gathered together in one room and, all of a sudden, they heard a sound like a strong wind that seemed to fill the whole house. The reading describes how they were filled with the Holy Spirit; it says that they saw what looked like tongues of fire coming and resting on each of them.

Explanation: The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. The *fruits* of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory (CCC 1830-1832). In this session, the children will learn about the Gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of these gifts. Two of the gifts help us to relate to God and five of them help us to relate to others. Pentecost was the beginning of the Church; and it is the beginning for the children too. They are now members of the Church family. The disciples found joy in knowing that Jesus had given them the Spirit to help and guide them. We, too, have been given the gifts of the Spirit to help us carry out the mission of the Church and to do the work of the Holy Spirit.

Application: The Gifts of the Spirit are given to us – not just for us to keep – but for us to use for the benefit of others. As baptised people, we are called to become more and more like Jesus and to share in his work. The children are challenged to identify how they are doing this in their lives. The activity is a crossword puzzle which tests them to see how much they have learned about the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit. The real test, of course, is to explore with them how they are using these gifts in their mission as new Christians.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment and then teach the children the *Come, Holy Spirit* prayer:

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray. O God, who instructed the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

You might finish with the hymn *Holy Spirit, Come Now* (Jesse Manibusan, *Never too young – by request*).

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pens and pencils, the prayer focus with a red cloth, a candle, a cross and bible (open to one of the Scripture passages used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Preparation: Your sacred space might include a purple cloth and a priest's purple stole with the candle, bible and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you play some quiet music while you pray:

“God, our Father, we are your children. You watch over us with loving care — even when we go away from you and do wrong. You do not forget us; you keep on loving us. This makes us happy and we thank you. Amen.”

Music suggestion: *Open my eyes* (Jesse Manibusan, *Never too young – by request*).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn about what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation – for when the children want to celebrate the sacrament in the future. Read the story of Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 about how God loves us like the Father in the story loved his son. The story is important because it helps us to understand what happens when we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation; and, in this session, the children will be taught how to celebrate the sacrament; they will be taught about the role the priest plays.

Explanation: The power of the sacrament of reconciliation consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship (CCC 1468). The story of the Prodigal Son explains this by taking us through the experience of the younger son. He remembers what his Father was like and he was willing to go back to say sorry. His motives might not have been right. He was hungry and he hoped he would be given food to eat at his Father's house. He didn't fully appreciate how he had hurt his Father, how he had hurt his family – but his Father was so happy that he came back that everything else was blotted out of his mind and he wanted to have a party to celebrate. We explain that it is like that for us too. God loves us like the Father in this family. No matter how far we wander, God is always waiting there to welcome us back. We begin by remembering God's love for us. We say we are sorry for times we have done wrong. We ask for forgiveness and, most importantly, we accept God's forgiveness. We celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation knowing God's love is always there for us; he never refuses to give us his love and his forgiveness. Show the children the purple stole the priest wears when he hears confessions and explain that he does this because purple is the colour of penitence and forgiveness.

Application: The children need to know that the sacrament of reconciliation can be celebrated any time they feel they would like to celebrate it or they feel a need to celebrate it. They need to be told that most parishes have set times for Confessions on Saturdays and that many parishes have Services of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent; but that they can ask their priest to hear their confession – to celebrate the sacrament – any time. And, they should be told when the sacrament is celebrated in their parish. By teaching them about the examination of conscience, by giving them some practical examples of the kind of things they might experience (such as times they have been unkind or selfish, etc.) they will see the relevance for the sacrament in their lives. We introduce the Beatitudes in this session by way of explaining that they are at the heart of Jesus' teaching – and they provide another way to examine our conscience.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment and then teach the children an *act of contrition*:

“Forgive me, Father, for the times when I have not behaved like Jesus. Help me to accept your forgiveness. Help me to do better. I will try to do better because I love you. Thank you for forgiving me. Amen.”

You might finish with the hymn *God forgave my sin in Jesus' name* (Carol Owens, *Celebration Hymnal* 209; *Laudate* 849)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheets with pens and pencils, the prayer focus with a purple cloth, the priest's stole, a candle, a cross and bible (open to the Scripture passage used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Encountering Jesus in the Sacraments

Preparation: Your sacred space might include the oil of the sick and the oil of chrism (if possible), together with the candle, bible, a cloth and the cross. For your opening prayer, you might light the candle while you play some quiet music while you pray:

“Jesus, we know you are always here with us and we meet you in the sacraments.
Inspire us with your Spirit to be more and more aware of your love, your care for us and your presence as we encounter you in our lives as new Christians.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

You might sing *I will be with you* (Gerald Markland, *Celebration Hymnal* 289; *Laudate* 866).

Proclamation: The aim of this session is to learn about encounters with Jesus in the sacraments and we look in detail at the sacrament of the sick and in the sacraments of marriage and Holy Orders. We hear how the Church teaches us that, just as God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, Christ now encounters married people in the sacrament of Matrimony” (*Gaudium et Spes* 48 §2). This session also invites the children to review what they know about all seven sacraments and to see how we encounter Jesus in all of them.

Explanation: Our Christian religion is an encounter of God and us in Christ; through the sacraments, we are reminded that God is always with us because they are signs of God’s love in our lives (CCC 1120, 1210). There are moments when God’s love and presence touch our lives in a special way. The Church’s seven sacraments celebrate some of these moments. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick celebrates God’s gifts of hope, strength and healing, life and friendship with God the Father, with Jesus and with one another. The action used is anointing; the words used are prayers and the symbols used are oil and the sign of the cross. The priest lays his hands on the head of the sick person and anoints their forehead, saying: “Through this anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Then he anoints their hands, saying: “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up. Amen.” Marriage is a sacrament which celebrates the gift of love and life and friendship with God the Father, with Jesus and with one another too. A man and a woman profess their faith that God is with them and they ask God to bless them and to bless their relationship. The action used is the joining of hands; the words are the prayers and promises and the symbols are the giving and receiving of rings and the sign of the cross. Ordination (or Holy Orders) is a sacrament which celebrates the gift of priesthood and life and friendship with God the Father, with Jesus and with one another. A priest chooses to give his life for the service of others in the Church. This is his response to God’s call to live a life filled with love for God’s people. There are three Holy Orders: deacons, priests, bishops. The actions used here are the laying on of hands, anointing, clothing with vestments; the words are the prayers and promises and the symbols are oil and the sign of peace.

Application: It is important that these children have had an introduction to all seven sacraments during their time in the CICCA. Their catechesis as Catholics will continue through their religious education (at home or in the parish) and through the homilies on Sundays but, at this point, they need to have been introduced to these basic practices of our faith.

Celebration: You might begin with your prayer by pausing for a moment and then teach the children the *Gloria* or the *Sanctus* (the *Holy Holy*) – one of the prayers they will be saying at Mass. You might finish with the hymn *O the love of the Lord is my essence* (Estelle White, *Celebration Hymnal* 570, *Laudate* 967)

For this session, you will need: copies of the activity sheet with pens and pencils, the prayer focus with the oil of the sick and the oil of chrism (if possible), a candle, a cross and bible (open to the Scripture passage used in the session) and whatever music you have chosen.

Final notes:

Health and Safety – Every parish will have guidelines on health and safety which need to be known and followed. As leader, it is your responsibility to ensure that the place where you are meeting is safe.

- Take care when lighting candles, it is better to light the candle for prayer and extinguish it when the prayer has ended. If you are going to invite the children to light candles, consider using long matches for additional safety.
- Check with the parents to find out if there are any significant health or special needs issues. Check with the parents whether there are any allergy issues and always ask parents for permission before you give the children anything to eat.
- Make sure the place you are meeting is safe, clean and well-maintained and that it has nothing in it that children could trip on. If you are using any electrical equipment, be careful of leads.
- Be familiar with fire escapes, fire precautions and related apparatus.
- Ensure there is a first aid kit and that it is checked frequently
- Ensure that there is an accident book and that all accidents/incidents are recorded.
- Check the toilets are usable, have paper and washing facilities.
- Ensure that at least one adult has a mobile phone with them in working order and in case of being out of range there is need to be aware of where the nearest telephone is for emergencies.

Safeguarding children – It is important for the welfare of the children in your care and for your own protection that you have a copy and are familiar with the parish/diocesan guidelines for safeguarding children. You should know who your parish representative for Safeguarding is. Everyone involved with the children will need a current CRB check. This is normally done through the diocese before the catechist or any helpers have contact with the children. The parish is likely to have guidelines. The following list may give you some ideas if the parish does not have guidelines (but your parish guidelines should, of course, take priority over this list).

1. Ensure that a minimum of two leaders/workers are always present. In groups of more than 20, there should be one additional helper for every 10 children.
2. With activities away from the normal meeting place, the ratio of adult/leader to child should be 1:7; and, with children under 8 years of age, the recommended ration is 1:6.
3. You should never let a child wander out of the meeting room unsupervised.
4. When children are being picked up at the end of the session, ensure you know who it is who will collect them. Never allow a child to depart with a stranger.
5. If you are taking photos of children, ensure you have permission from the parents (in writing if possible). If you are displaying photos of the children in the church, do not include the name of the child with the photograph and make sure you have the parents' permission to display the photograph.
6. Leaders need to avoid situations of potential danger or embarrassment. For example, do not find yourself alone in a room with a child. This means that leaders must not drive a child home in a car on their own.

7. Ensure that leaders know what to do in the case of suspected or alleged abuse.
8. Re: activities away from the normal meeting place:
 - a) Ensure there is adequate insurance cover;
 - b) A consent form signed by the parents or guardians is required. Make sure you are informed of any medical issues (i.e., if the child needs an inhaler)
 - c) Ensure that someone knows where the group is and who is in the group, if the group is working away from the normal meeting place. It is necessary that the group reports out and back.
9. Keep a register of up-to-date information: name of the child, address, phone number, special medications, the name, address and phone number of the child's doctor and a signed permission form from the parents or guardians for the leader to be in *loco parentis* in case of emergency.
10. Keep an attendance register for the sessions.
11. Ensure that where vehicles are used there is adequate insurance and permits, that seat belts and any other special equipment are properly maintained, for example, wheel chair access lifts.

You must

1. Treat all children with respect.
2. Provide an example of good conduct that you wish others to follow.
3. Be aware that even caring physical contact with a child may be misinterpreted.
4. Show understanding when dealing with sensitive issues.

Glossary of terms

These are common terms used in the RCIA and in the CICCA.

- **Candidate** – a baptised Christian of another denomination who wants to become a Catholic.
- **Catechumen** – an unbaptised person who wants to become a Catholic; they are called catechumens during the period of the catechumenate
- **Catechumenate** – the lengthy period for formation of the catechumens and candidates
- **Discernment** – the process of determining the person's readiness to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation⁴⁴
- **Doctrine** – in simple terms, is what the Church believes and teaches. It is the underpinning of faith. It is sometimes talked about as a 'body of teaching' because, like a body, it has many different parts linked together in a single purpose of enabling life. In the case of these materials, the life of faith.
- **Elect** – the name given to the catechumens at the Rite of Election; it is what they are called during the period of Purification and Enlightenment
- **Enquiry** – the stage when people are introduced to the ways of faith in the Catholic Church
- **Full communion** – the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation for candidates baptised in another Christian denomination
- **Godparent** – the person who guides and supports the catechumen's progress in the baptismal life – and, by example, shows the person how to live the gospel⁴⁵
- **Initiation** – the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
- **Mystagogia** – the final period of formation following the Sacraments of Initiation, which lasts from Easter to Pentecost, which focuses on how they will participate in the life and service of the community⁴⁶
- **Peer group** – the group of similar-aged children already baptised who are preparing for First Communion and Confirmation or who support the CICCA group⁴⁷
- **Purification & Enlightenment** – the time of prayerful preparation prior to the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation
- **Rite of Catechumens** – This is also known as the Rite of Acceptance; it is the first Liturgical Rite celebrated by the unbaptised children and it marks the end of the Enquiry Period and the beginning of the Catechumenate period
- **Rite of Election** – the second Liturgical Rite celebrated normally on the first Sunday of Lent when the Church judges the catechumens ready to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation and when the bishop sends them forth to prepare prayerfully for the Sacraments of Initiation
- **Sacraments of Initiation** – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
- **Scrutiny** – the Rite(s) which heal and strengthen the elect as they prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ RCIA 42-43, 119-120

⁴⁵ RCIA 11

⁴⁶ RCIA 234

⁴⁷ RCIA 245

⁴⁸ RCIA 128-133, 267-270

Frequently asked questions about CICCA

Question: We have a married couple in our RCIA programme who have three children who have never been baptised, aged 5, 8 and 10 years of age. The children are attending the parish R.E. programme and the older children are part of the CICCA group. Should the 5-year old be included with them or should we do something different with him? Does he need any preparation?

Answer: Many parish priests and catechists would take the view that a 5-year old should have some preparation for his baptism. They would also take the view – for the sake of the family unit – that it is important for the family to be catechised and initiated into the Church together. This will require special permission from the bishop and you should make contact with your diocesan Chancery Office.

Question: We have an 8-year old girl in our parish who was baptised, confirmed and received the eucharist for the first time as an infant in the Melkite Church. She continued to receive communion from the time she was about 4 or 5 years old while her family was attending the Melkite Church; but the family is now worshipping in our parish and the girl is attending our parish primary school. She has applied now to join our First Communion group with her peer group in the parish. What should we do?

Answer: The Eastern Catholic Church is in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. In some parishes, the child will be invited to join her peers as they prepare for their First Holy Communion. She may even be invited to wear the traditional communion dress – and to receive communion with the other children; but she should understand that this is not her First Holy Communion.

Question: What happens when these Eastern Catholic children are older and their peers are preparing to be confirmed? Indeed, what happens if a young person who was confirmed at 7 or 8 years of age in another diocese or in another country and he/she asks to join the Confirmation group?

Answer: The young person can be invited to join the group and can participate in the sessions by way of affirming their faith. You may find a book by James Wilde, *Confirmed as Children, Affirmed as Teens (Font & Table)* helpful. They can be invited pray for their peers who are preparing to be confirmed. When it comes to the celebration of the sacrament, the young person can be introduced to the bishop, who is likely to be pleased to greet them and bless them.

Question: We have a 10-year old boy in the parish who has been practicing as Catholics for five years and he and his mother are well-known to the parish priest. The boy was not baptised because his father withheld permission. The boy is now applying for a place at secondary school and he has persuaded his father to allow the baptism (1) because he sees himself as a Catholic and he longs to receive communion with everyone else when he comes to Mass and (2) because he wants to go to the Catholic school with his Catholic friends from the parish. He wants to be baptised as soon as possible. The Rite says that the boy should be baptised, confirmed and receive the Eucharist for the first time at the same time; but the Parish Priest has said that he will baptise him to help him with his application to the school and he will arrange for him to be prepared for his first communion afterwards. He then wants the boy to wait to prepare to be confirmed with his peers at 14 years of age. What do you say?

Answer: I can see why the priest would want to adapt the preparation for these sacraments for him. Since the child himself has expressed such a strong desire to be baptised and to attend a Catholic school and since the priest knows the boy and his mother well, I can see why the priest would want to baptise him as soon as possible now that he has his father's permission. In some parishes, a child of this age will be prepared for his baptism and then join

the other Catholic children in the parish who are being prepared for their first reconciliation and first communion. As for Confirmation, for pastoral reasons, children of this age often wait until they are 14 years of age (if that is when Confirmation is normally celebrated) before they are prepared so that they get to know their peer group in the parish. However, the baptism should not have to be rushed through to help with the child's application to the Catholic school. Canon Law tells us that, as soon as the boy is a member of the catechumenate, he should be treated in the same way as baptised members insofar as his application is concerned.⁴⁹

Question: There is a child in our local Catholic primary school, who likes to come to pray at school and wants to come to Mass on Sundays. Her mother tells us that she was aware this might happen when she chose this school; she has no objection with the child becoming a Catholic and is willing to support the child and is willing to allow her to go to a Catholic secondary school – but she has no intention of becoming a Catholic. Can the child be baptised?

Answer: What this child is experiencing may be the first glimmerings of faith and the child should be taken seriously. The child has a right to be nurtured in the faith she is requesting. As long as the parent is willing to support the child now and as they get older, the child should be encouraged and welcomed. After all, we have to remember that this is God's work and it is prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Question: We have had children who were baptised in the CofE (or other Christian denominations) and then they begin to worship in the Catholic Church who appear in our first communion programmes. The child identifies him/herself as a Catholic because they have not known anything different. Do you let them join the sacramental preparation programme?

Answer: These children are usually prepared for their first reconciliation and first communion with the other Catholic children in the parish and, by receiving the sacraments, the Parish Priest takes the position that they have been received into the Church. Their reception should be recorded in the register of reception. A simple certificate can be given to them including the wording "N, born on [date], was baptised into Jesus's new life on [date] in the Parish Community of [name of parish] Church of England (or whatever) [wherever] and was received into the Catholic Church *and* received the Holy Eucharist for the first time on [date] in the Parish community of [whatever, wherever]." The certificate should be signed by the Parish Priest.

Question: What about older children *under* catechetical age? We have a child of 4 years of age whose parents are now good practicing Catholics. They left the Church for a while and were practicing at the local Church of England and, during that time, the child was baptised. The child has only ever known the Catholic Church. Can you tell me how you would deal with that child to *make them Catholic*? The parents are now applying for a place at the local primary school; and, because they do not have a baptismal certificate saying the child is Catholic, she is not being offered a place.

Answer: This situation is becoming more common because of the increase in marriages between Catholics and other Christians; it does not only occur when the parent or parents have lapsed. There is nothing in the Rite for children under catechetical age. A Canon lawyer advises that they are part of the church by practice – if not by technicality. There is no Rite for them; the only requirement is that it should be recorded in the register of reception. The child should not be singled out because of an accident of parental decision. You should record the child's reception in the register of reception and give the parents a letter from the Parish Priest confirming that the parent or parents are practicing Catholics and the child's reception has been recorded in the register of reception. This should be sufficient for the school to accept the child as *being Catholic*.

⁴⁹ Canon 206 §2

CICCA Resources

The essential resource:

- *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, ICEL, 1985

Church documents (including links to where you can find these documents on line)

- *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, ICEL, 1985; www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RCIA.pdf
- *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum, DV)* November 18, 1965; www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html
- *Catechesis in our Time (Catechesi Tradendae, CD)* Apostolic Exhortation 16 October 1979; www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0120/
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*; http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM
- *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* Issued by the Congregation for the Clergy in 1997; www.intratext.com/x/eng0159.htm

Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (CICCA)

- *Celebrating Catholic Rites and Rituals in Religion Class*, Kathy Chateau and Paula Miller, Twenty-third Publications, CT, 2001
- *Children's Catechumenate*, (Catechist Manual & 3 level (primary, intermediate and upper level) workbooks), Thomas Long & Emily Filippi, Brown-Roa, Dubuque, Iowa, 1996
- *Children's Catechumenate: A Catechists Guide*, Philip McBrien, Resource Publications, California, 1997
- *Children & Christian Initiation - a practical guide*, Kathy Coffey, North American Forum on the Catechumenate, Living the Good News, Inc., Colorado, 1998
- *Children and Christian Initiation: Parent/Sponsor Book*, Kathy Coffey, Living the Good News Inc, 2001
- *Children & Christian Initiation - practical guides to the Pre-catechumenate, the Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment and Mystagogy*, Kathy Coffey, North American Forum on the Catechumenate, Living the Good News, Inc., Colorado, 1998
- *A Child's Journey – The Christian Initiation of Children*, Rita Burns Senseman, St. Anthony Messenger Press, Ohio, 1997
- *Christian Initiation of Older Children*. Sandra Figgess, St Paul's, London, 1995
- *Guided Meditations for Child Catechumens*, Sydney Ann Merritt, Resource Publications, Inc., California, 2001
- *Exploring the Mass*, by Bishop Vincent Nichols, CTS Publications, London, 1999
- *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children: Catechesis and Liturgy*, Edited by Kathy Brown & Frank C. Sokol, Font and Table Series, Liturgy Training Pubs, Chicago, 1989
- *The Christian Initiation of Children – Hope for the Future*, Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly, Paulist Press, London, 1991
- *Welcome to the Mass*, Pauline Books & Media, London, 2009
- *When Your Child Becomes Catholic: What Parents and Sponsors Need to Know* by Rita Burns Senseman, Constance M. Wolfer (Illustrator), Saint Anthony Messenger Press & Franciscan Communications, Cincinnati, OH, 2000
- *I call you friends – Book 3, a Religious Education Programme for family and parish use*, National Project, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, McCrimmons, Essex, to be published 2010. (Book 3 is for children of catechetical age who are seeking Christian Initiation.)

Resources for the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA)

- *Breaking Open the Word of God, Resources for Using the Lectionary for Catechesis in the RCIA Years A, B & C*, Ed. by Karen Hinman Powell & Joseph Sinwell, Paulist Press, New York, 1988.
- *Faith Alive*, Ed. by Rowanne Pasco & John Redford, New Catechism Edition, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1994.
- *Focus on Faith — A Resource for the Journey into the Catholic Church*, Deborah Jones, Kevin Mayhew Ltd., Suffolk, 1996.
- *Foundations in Faith — A Catechist's Manual, Year A and Participant's Books, Year A, B & C*, Resources for Christian Living, Allen, Texas, 1998 (marketed in UK by the Redemptorists)
- *God for Grown-ups — Discovering Christ Today in the Catholic Church*, A Redemptorist Publication, Hampshire, 1995
- *How to form a Catechumenate Team*, Karen M. Hinman, LTP, Chicago, 1986
- *Making RCIA Work*, Christine Dodd, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1993
- *RCIA Participant's Book and RCIA Catechist's Manual*, Association for Catechumenal Ministry (ACM), Maryland, 2005.
- *A Sacramental People, Vol One: Initiation*, Michael Drumm and Tom Gunning, Columbia Press, Dublin, 1999

Scripture & Children's Liturgy Programmes (to help in sharing the word with children)

- *God's Story told by the People of God – books 1, 2 & 3*, National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education Publication, Rejoice Publications, Chelmsford, 2002.
- *Jerusalem Bible*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1968
- *Good News Bible*, Collins, London, New edition, 2009
- *Welcome the Word, Celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with Children – Volumes 1 & 2*, Joan Brown, SND, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1995 & 1997.
- *Sunday Weekly Leader Guide for Sundays, Feast Days & Solemnities Years A, B & C*, Christianne Brusselmans, Sr. Paule Freeburg, Rev. Edward Matthews & Christopher Walker, Treehaus Communications, Inc., Ohio Fifth Edition, 1999 (available through Viewpoint in the UK)
- *Complete Children's Liturgy Book*, Katie Thompson, Kevin Mayhew Ltd, Suffolk, 2004.
- *Welcome! — Celebrations for young children for the Church's year*, Jenny Pate, McCrimmons, Essex, 2003
- *Gather the Children – Celebrate the Word with Ideas, Activities, Prayers & Projects, Years A, B and C*, Mary Catherine Berglund, Pastoral Press, Washington, 1989
- *Preaching & Teaching the Gospels to Children – Years A, B and C*, Sean McEntee, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Ct, 1991

The Spiritual life and development of the child

- *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler, Crossroad, New York, 1991
- *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Robert Coles, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1990
- *The Children's God*, David Heller, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986
- *The Religious Potential of the Child*, Sofia Cavalletti, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1992
- "Adolescent Thinking and Understanding" Gary Sapp, *Handbook of Youth Ministry*, ed. Donald Ratcliff and James Davies, Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Al., 1991.
- *Our Faith Story*, S.J., *Our Faith Story—its telling and its sharing*, Patrick Purnell, SJ, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Living + Sharing our Faith, 1995

Other books or programmes

- *Church's Story – the Church's Story Lived by the People of God, Books 1, 2 & 3*,

National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education Publication, Rejoice Publications, Chelmsford, 2002.

- *Tell me the Story of Jesus*, V. Gilbert Beers, Candle Books, Abingdon, 2004
- *Walk with Me – a Religious Education Programme for family and parish use*, Anne White, Co-ordinator for the National Project, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, McCrimmons, Great Wakering, Essex, 1996.
- *I call you friends – Books 1&2, a Religious Education Programme for family and parish use*, National Project, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, McCrimmons, Essex, to be published 2010.
- *I meet Jesus*, Jean Vanier, Paulist Press, Mahweh, NJ, 1987
- *I walk with Jesus*, Jean Vanier, Paulist Press, Mahweh, NJ, 1985
- *Confirmed as Children, Affirmed as Teens (Font & Table)*, James Wilde, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1991
- *Welcome to the Mass: Pauline Books and Media resource: A3 photo book for display; CD-Rom and teaching notes.*
- *Praying with children*, Jenny Pate, McCrimmons, Great Wakering, Essex. 1995
- *The Lord be with you: introducing the Mass to children*, Jenny Pate, McCrimmons, Great Wakering, Essex, 1997

Music Resources

- Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word, Years A, B and C, Christopher Walker, OCP Publications, Portland, Or., 1990
- Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*, OCP Publications, Portland, Or., 2000; *You have called us by our name; we belong to you*, OCP Publications, 1995 – included on the CD
- *Never too Young: by request, Spirit & Song for Young People*, which offers more than 280 songs for use in prayer and liturgy for children, OCP Publications, Portland, Or.
- Monica Brown, *Praise & Blessings and God Delights in You*, Emmaus Productions, Thornleigh, NSW, 1999, 2001
- Paul Inwood, *Children at Heart*, OCP Publications, Portland, Or., 1998
- Christopher Walker and Sister Paula Freeberg, *Stories and Songs of Jesus and More Stories and Songs of Jesus;* OCP Publications, Portland, Or. 1994, 1999
- *Celebration Hymnal for Everyone*, McCrimmons, Great Wakering, Essex, 1994
- *Laudate Hymn Book*, Decani Music, Suffolk
- Marty Haugen, *Gather us in and All are welcome*, GIA Publications, Inc, Chicago IL 1994

Websites

- Refer to the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales website for helpful materials including the Guidelines for the Liturgy of the Word with Children. This is where you will find the Guidelines for the Catechesis of Children of Catechetical Age when they are published.
- Diocesan websites often offer materials and resources for children.
- *Mission Together or Missio* usually produce a Lent and Advent calendar.
- CAFOD produces a number of resources which would be useful.

😊 Special needs resources

- *A child's book of signed prayers*: Cath Smith available from Catholic Deaf Association. Simple prayers using British Sign Language, see website
- *Connecting With RE*: Liz O'Brien (RE and faith development for children with autism and/or severe and complex learning disabilities). Church House Publishing, London, 2007

Abbreviations used in these materials

CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CICCA	Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age
CT	Catechesi Tradendae
DV	Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)
GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium

Useful links

RCIA, General Introduction: <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RCIA.pdf>
Christian Initiation General Introduction: <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/CIGI.pdf>
Catechism of the Catholic Church: <http://www.vatican.va>
General Directory for Catechesis: <http://www.vatican.va>
Vatican II documents: <http://www.vatican.va>
Scripture: The Good News Bible: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/gnt>
The New Jerusalem Bible: <http://www.catholic.org/bible/>