

## **NOTES ON ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS (RCIA 41-67 Dark Blue Book for England and Wales)**

**Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens** is the first rite of the RCIA process for those who are unbaptised. It takes place within the context of a Sunday Mass. Those wishing to enter into the second period of the RCIA (the **Catechumenate**) make a public commitment to accept the way of the cross. The worshipping community, the members of the parish family, publicly welcome the **unbaptised enquirers** and promise to support to them in their ongoing journey of faith.

At the beginning of this rite the Inquirers are referred to as Candidates. By the end of the Rite they are referred to as Catechumens. They retain this title up to the Rite of Election at the Cathedral.

**Those who are already baptised and seeking reception into full communion with the Catholic Church are not required to take part in the rite because of the status they already enjoy as members of the baptised.**

The Pastoral notes on the Rite tell us that this moment is of the 'utmost importance'.

The candidates are:

- Assembling publicly for the first time
- Making their intention known to the Church

The Church:

- carrying out its apostolic mission, admits those who intend to become members. (RCIA 41)

In deciding when to celebrate:

- Are the candidates ready?
- Is the parish ready?
- Might the readings of the day you have chosen be helpful?

Candidates' readiness

- the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root
- evidence of the first faith that was conceived during the period of evangelisation and precatechumenate
- evidence of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ
- evidence of the first stirrings of repentance
- a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer
- a sense of the Church
- and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community
- The candidate should also be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical rite of acceptance (RCIA 42)

In summary, therefore, it does not matter how long someone has been an enquirer, they cannot move on to become catechumens until they show evidence of:

- first faith
- an initial conversion
- an intention to change their lives
- a desire to enter into a relationship with God in Christ

The candidates now become Catechumens.

- *They are joined to the Church, part of the household of Christ, since the Church nourishes them with the word of God and sustains them by means of liturgical celebrations.*
- *They should be eager, then, to take part in celebrations of the word of God and to receive blessings and other sacramentals.*
- *When two catechumens marry or when a catechumen marries an unbaptised person, the appropriate rite is to be used.*
- *One who dies during the catechumenate receives a Christian burial.*

The Rite suggests that ‘the candidates, their sponsors and a group of the faithful gather outside the church (or inside at the entrance or elsewhere)’

The outline of the rite is then as follows: (RCIA 48ff) Note that in the last two questions in the Opening Dialogue: “The celebrant may use other words than those provided in asking the candidates about their intentions and may let them answer in their own words.”

#### RECEIVING THE CANDIDATES (RCIA 48-60)

- *Greeting*
- *Opening Dialogue*
- *Candidates’ first acceptance of the Gospel*
- *Affirmation by the sponsors and the assembly*
- *Signing of the candidates with the cross*
  - *Signing of the forehead*
  - *Signing of the other senses*
  - *Concluding prayer*
- *Invitation to the celebration of the word of God*

#### LITURGY OF THE WORD (RCIA 61-66)

- *Instruction*
- *Readings*
- *Homily*
- *Presentation of a Bible or cross (optional)*
- *Intercessions for the Catechumens*
- *Prayer over the Catechumens*
- *Dismissal of the Catechumens (this is the norm although the Rite does make reference to serious reasons for remaining – RCIA 67)*

#### LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

**With regard to Dismissal of the Catechumens the Rite says** ‘Ordinarily, however, when they are present in the assembly of the faithful they should be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the eucharist begins (unless their dismissal would present practical or pastoral problems). For they must await their baptism, which will join them to God’s priestly people and empower them to participate in Christ’s new worship.’ RCIA 75,3

This Rite is a major step in the RCIA process, for it allows the enquirers to publicly state their intention to continue their journey of conversion to Christ, a liturgy they have a right to experience. It allows also the community to recognise firstly, that there are people continually wishing to come to Christ, secondly, that they as baptised Catholics have a responsibility to support and be an example to those seeking Christ. It also gives the community the opportunity to reflect on their own baptism and journey in faith. As the catechumens move step by step, publicly, towards Easter, so the community will, hopefully, become more conscious of their own living of the Paschal Mystery.