



Diocese of Westminster

AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

RCIA

Guide to RCIA



“The restoration of the catechumenate fostered by the Second Vatican Council was realised with the publication of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The catechumenate, “a training period in the whole Christian life” (AG 14), is a process structured in three phases or periods, aimed at leading the catechumen to the full encounter with the mystery of Christ in the life of the community, and is therefore considered a *typical setting* of initiation, catechesis, and mystagogy” (*Directory for Catechesis*, 63)

GUIDE TO THE RCIA

‘Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives.’

Lumen Fidei - Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis 2013 (4)

‘Rite of Christian Initiation – Introductory Material’ contains the guidance given in the Ritual Edition of the Rite, for the use of clergy and catechists, and accompanies this document. All the RCIA references contained here can be found in this document. It can also be downloaded at

<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RCIA.pdf>

Who is on this journey?

1. Unbaptised adults (who will become catechumens) asking for baptism, confirmation and communion
2. Adults baptised in another Christian tradition – or candidates - asking for reception into full communion in the Church
3. Uncatechised adults, baptised Catholics asking for Confirmation and Eucharist
4. Children who have reached catechetical age (7-14 yrs of age), who are asking for the sacraments of initiation – who will generally be prepared as a separate group

Generally in our parishes the first three groups are prepared together but it is important to recognise where candidates are on their journey of faith and provide an appropriate catechesis.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is essentially designed for unbaptised adults, and the Rites in Part 1 are to be celebrated with the unbaptised.

Part II of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is entitled “Rites for Particular Circumstances”. It includes materials for the adaptation of the rite to those already baptised who are to be catechised and complete their Christian initiation or are to become part of the full communion of the Catholic Church — and, circumstances in which the rite of reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church is integrated with the celebration at the Easter Vigil of the sacraments of initiation.

‘The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously. (RCIA 4)

The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God’s grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place. (RCIA 5)

This journey includes not only the periods for making inquiry and for maturing, but also the steps marking the catechumens' progress, as they pass, so to speak, through another doorway or ascend to the next level.

1. The first step: reaching the point of initial conversion and wishing to become Christians, they are accepted as catechumens by the Church.

2. The second step: having progressed in faith and nearly completed the catechumenate, they are accepted into a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation.

3. The third step: having completed their spiritual preparation, they receive the sacraments of Christian initiation.

These three steps are to be regarded as the major, more intense moments of initiation and are marked by **three liturgical rites:**

- the first by the **rite of acceptance** into the order of catechumens;
- the second by the **rite of election** or enrolment of names;
- and the third by the **celebration of the sacraments** of Christian initiation

The steps **lead** to periods of inquiry and growth; alternatively the periods may also be seen as **preparing** for the ensuing step.

1. **The first period** consists of inquiry on the part of the candidates and of evangelization and the pre-catechumenate on the part of the Church. It ends with the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens.

2. **The second period**, which begins with the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens and may last for several years, includes catechesis and the rites connected with catechesis. It comes to an end on the day of election.

3. **The third** and much shorter period, which follows the rite of election, ordinarily coincides with the Lenten preparation for the Easter celebration and the sacraments of initiation. It is a time of purification and enlightenment and includes the celebration of the rites belonging to this period.

4. **The final period** extends through the whole Easter season and is devoted to the postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy. It is a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community.

PERIOD OF EVANGELISATION AND PRECATECHUMENATE (a period of enquiry)

'During this period, priests and deacons, catechists and other laypersons are to give the candidates a suitable explanation of the Gospel (see no. 42). The candidates are to receive help and attention so that with a purified and clearer intention they may cooperate with God's grace. Opportunities should be provided for them to meet families and other groups of Christians.' RCIA 38

What the Rite says:

Although the rite of initiation begins with admission to the catechumenate, the preceding period or pre-catechumenate is of great importance and as a rule should not be omitted. It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all. Thus those who are not yet Christians, their hearts opened by the Holy Spirit, may believe and be freely converted to the Lord and commit

themselves sincerely to him. For he who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life fulfils all their spiritual expectations, indeed infinitely surpasses them. (RCIA 36)

The new **Directory for Catechesis** published in June 2020 refers to this period as

'necessary in order to turn the initial interest in the Gospel into a deliberate choice. The Christian community, co-operating with the work of the Holy Spirit, welcomes the interest of those who are seeking the Lord and during the time necessary...carries out a first form of evangelisation and discernment through accompaniment and the presentation of the kerygma. This period...is important for the reception of the proclamation and for an initial response and conversion. In fact, it already brings with it the desire to get away from sin and to follow in the footsteps of Christ'
(*Directory for Catechesis 33c*)

'... kerygma, ... needs to be the centre of all evangelizing activity' and goes on to say, 'The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father's infinite mercy. On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you."' (Evangelii Gaudium 164)

The **kerygma** (from a Greek word meaning 'proclamation') is the first proclamation, the proclamation of the Good News, the Gospel, of Jesus' life death and resurrection.

This period is a time for

- Searching and asking questions about the Catholic faith
- Building relationships and developing trust
- The sharing of stories, the stories of the enquirers and stories of the team and the parish community,
- AND stories of our faith, from the scriptures, Old and New Testaments, stories of the community of believers over the centuries

The telling of such stories leads to a level raising questions of meaning, leading then to a recognition that it is here we come to encounter and know God

- Invitation into experiences of prayer of varied forms, leading to an awareness of prayer of petition and thanksgiving
- Introduction to the Christian community

The step which follows, when those enquirers desire to move on with their journey and desire to become catechumens, is the **RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS**. (RCIA 48)

The rite gives six criteria for enquirers who wish to become catechumens. (RCIA 42)

These criteria guide the content of the precatechumenate:

- Evidence of first faith
- Initial conversion
- Intention to change their lives
- First stirring of repentance
- A start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer
- Experience of the company and spirit of Christians

This step is the candidates' public declaration of their intention to continue their journey of faith towards full initiation in the Catholic Church. It is therefore important that the candidates are prepared for the liturgical rite through prayer and encouragement that they will be encouraged and supported during this public moment, as well as ensuring that they are ready for the questions they will be asked.

PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

'during the period of the catechumenate the dynamics of this way of life are explored, taught, shared and given by members of the Christian community to the new member, as in any apprenticeship. Not only does one learn about the Christian way of life but one becomes a Christian, a disciple.' RCIA – *Transforming the Church* Thomas H. Morris (P.116)

The **process of initiation** is described as *'an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life (General Directory for Catechesis 67). It is a lifelong journey, a continuous road of conversion, a gradual 'falling in love with God'.*

The Rite describes the Period of the Catechumenate thus:

'an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity.' RCIA 75

The Rite goes on to explain how we achieve this maturity in faith. Paragraph 75 is a most important section guiding catechesis during the catechumenate, and those guiding formation in faith need to be very familiar with it.

There are four elements described.

- **catechesis**
'planned to be gradual and complete...accommodated to the liturgical year, supported by celebrations of the word, leading to 'not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire.' (75.1)
- immersion in the **Christian way of life**, *'helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community'*. (75.2) By living with Christians we are helped to become Christian and knowledge of people in the community helps with life within the community after initiation, initiation into the Body of Christ.

This exposure to the Christian life will expose them, also, to the spiritual life with that community leading the catechumens to *'learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practise love of neighbour, even at the cost of self renunciation.'*

- the support of **liturgical rites**, *'which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing.'* (75.3) The ritual provides a variety of liturgical rites to accomplish this; celebrations of the word, blessings, exorcisms, anointings. These rites celebrate and support moments on the journey but are often ignored by parishes. To deprive the catechumens of these celebrations deprives them of those moments when catechesis is strengthened by God's blessing. Do look at the rites (RCIA 81-99) and consider their celebration.
- **apostolic witness**.
'Since the Church's life is apostolic, catechumens 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.' (75.4)

Consider how the catechumens may be formed to recognize that service in the name of Christ, serving the needs of the world, from the very beginning. It is not something that should wait until after initiation.

This section of the Introductory Material also addresses the question of 'How long?' It is a period of indeterminate length.

'The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough — several years if necessary — for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong. By their formation in the entire Christian life and a sufficiently prolonged probation the catechumens are properly initiated into the mysteries of salvation and the practice of an evangelical way of life. By means of sacred rites celebrated at successive times they are led into the life of faith, worship, and charity belonging to the people of God.' 76

There is no need to rush. Some parishes run a year-round catechumenate, allowing catechumens and candidates to experience the whole liturgical year, others run a 'rolling' catechumenate, over a period of two years. Discernment that continues throughout the period of the catechumenate will guide decisions about readiness to move on in the process of initiation. Certainly where parishes have baptised candidates preparing for full reception into the Church, some will be ready before others and this needs to be taken into account.

RCIA 78 draws together the **content of catechesis**. It should be:

'of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ.'

RCIA 79 emphasises the importance of the **Minor Rites** during this period, stating that '*celebrations of the word of God are foremost*'. (See RCIA 81-89, where a model of a celebration of the word of God is given). The rites are celebrated 'to mark the passage of catechumens from one level of catechesis to another.'

During this period, too, consideration should be given to the choosing of godparents and sponsors for catechumens and candidates.

RCIA 83 states:

'From the very beginning of the period of the catechumenate the catechumens should be taught to keep holy the Lord's Day.'

Parishes will want to consider how best, alongside catechesis, to lead candidates to a recognition of the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist to our lives. This is part of what is meant in RCIA 75.2 by '*immersion in the Christian way of life*'. In many parishes a catechist or sponsor arranges to accompany them to Mass. It is much easier to be with a member of the community who can help the catechumens to feel comfortable in what may be an unfamiliar experience.

The step which follows the Period of the Catechumenate is the **RITE OF ELECTION OR ENROLMENT OF NAMES**

RCIA 105 describes it as:

the liturgical rite called both election and the enrolment of names, which closes the period of the catechumenate proper, that is, the lengthy period of formation of the catechumens' minds and hearts...(it) also marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, during which the elect will be encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity.

At the Rite of Election, celebrated in the Cathedral by the Cardinal on the first weekend of Lent, *on the basis of the testimony of godparents and catechists and of the catechumens' reaffirmation of their intention, the Church judges their state of readiness and decides on their advancement toward the sacraments of initiation. Thus the Church makes its 'election,' that is, the choice and admission of those catechumens who have the dispositions that make them fit to take part, at the next major celebration, in the sacraments of initiation. (RCIA 106)*

Before the Rite of Election, RCIA teams will need to discern the readiness of catechumens to become the Elect. The Rite gives clear guidance on this discernment:

RCIA 107 tells us that the catechumens are expected to:

- have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and
- to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching
- as well as a spirit of faith and charity.

With deliberate will and an enlightened faith they must:

- have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church,
- resolve they will express publicly in the actual celebration of the rite.”

The importance of this discernment is articulated very strongly in the Rite.

RCIA 109

'Within the rite of election the bishop celebrant, (for us the Cardinal), declares in the presence of the community the Church's approval of the candidates. Therefore to exclude any semblance of mere formality from the rite, there should be a deliberation prior to its celebration to decide on the catechumens' suitability.. This deliberation is carried out by the priests, deacons, and

- *catechists involved in the formation of the catechumens, and*
- *by the godparents and*
- *representatives of the local community.*
- *If circumstances suggest, the group of catechumens may also take part.'*

It is important that the godparents are involved in this discernment as at the Rite of Election the Cardinal will address them, asking for their witness, saying:

'God's holy Church wishes to know whether these candidates are sufficiently prepared to be enrolled among the elect for the coming celebration of Easter. And so I speak first of all to you their godparents.

- *Have they faithfully listened to God's word proclaimed by the Church?*
- *Have they responded to that word and begun to walk in God's presence?*
- *Have they shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined with them in prayer? (RCIA 118)*

And the catechumens will be asked to state publicly their intent: RCIA 119

[The Bishop says to the catechumens:] *"Since you have already heard the call of Christ, you must now express your response to that call clearly and in the presence of the whole Church. Therefore,*

- *do you wish to enter fully into the life of the Church?*
- *through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the eucharist?"*

The catechumens are declared to be members of the Elect, to be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil.

PERIOD OF PURIFICATION & ENLIGHTENMENT

'This is the time immediately preceding the elects' initiation, usually the Lenten season preceding the celebration of this initiation at the Easter Vigil; it is a time of reflection, intensely centred on conversion, marked by celebration of the scrutinies and presentations and of the preparation rites on Holy Saturday.' RCIA 125ff

The significance of this period generally taking place during Lent cannot be ignored. The Universal Norms for the Liturgical Year states; *'Lent is ordered to preparing for the celebration of Easter, since the Lenten liturgy prepares for celebration of the Paschal Mystery both catechumens, by the various stages of Christian Initiation, and the faithful, who recall their own Baptism and do penance.'* (27)

This states clearly that the journey of Lent is one shared by the community and the Elect. The guidance from RCIA 125 clearly articulates that *'the liturgy and the liturgical catechesis of Lent...as well as the theme of repentance, renew the entire community along with those being prepared to celebrate the Paschal Mystery'* and that for both the Elect and the community *'the Lenten season is a time for spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery'*.

RCIA 126 uses these phrases:

- More intense spiritual preparation
- Interior reflection
- Intended to purify the minds and hearts as they search their own consciences and do penance
- Enlighten the minds and hearts with a deeper knowledge of Christ our Saviour
- Celebrationof the scrutinies and the presentations

So, the **focus of catechesis** during this period has changed from the period of the catechumenate. The period of purification and enlightenment presumes that the catechesis of the earlier period, that of scripture, doctrine, liturgy, community and service have led the Elect to a readiness to make the commitment of baptism.

'The elect and candidates, firm in their resolve to embrace the gospel, experience a time set apart for deepened reflection on this gospel way of life, seeking the prayers of the community during these final days of preparation....This, then, is a time of prayer and reflection. This is not the time to cover materials that they may have forgotten during the catechumenate period. Rather, it is a time of focusing on God's gifting presence, and how that presence uncovers and reveals attitudes and lifestyles that are contrary to relationship with God – namely, sin – as well as raising up those attitudes and gifts that deepen the relationship with

It is best seen, perhaps, as a time of retreat, offering opportunities for both short and extended periods of reflection, in addition to the usual times of gathering, if possible an afternoon, or even a day, of reflection.

The Scrutinies

RCIA 128-133, 137-143, 151-156, 158-164

The major liturgies of this period are the scrutinies which certainly need this kind of reflection. The **Scrutinies**, which are celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, are intended “to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect” and “then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good” (RCIA 141). They include prayers of exorcism and call for deep repentance.

It is important to recognise – and to, perhaps, emphasise to the Elect, that the word ‘scrutiny’ refers to the **self-searching** of the Elect (not the scrutiny of the Elect by others).

‘The period of catechesis following the scrutinies is primarily a time of support and care for the elect (and candidates), helping them to see God’s love operative in the midst of the painful naming of sin. The focus is on God’s love, not on our sin. This is not a time to be preoccupied with wretchedness (in fact there is no wretchedness). Rather, it is a time to be preoccupied with the freedom of being a child of God, and anything that keeps us from living that vocation to its fullness.’

What, then will be the catechesis for this period? The RCIA intends that the readings for the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent of Year A are used for the scrutinies. The gospels of these Sundays tell of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5-42), the man born blind (John 9:1-41) and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45), together raising the images of water, light and life.

The catechesis will offer the Elect the opportunity to reflect in readiness first for the scrutinies, and later for the celebration of the sacraments at the Easter Vigil. To reflect on their lives at this time, three questions might be asked of them, focussing on the three images, each with a strength and

weakness side to it:

- What have you most drunk of in Christ? What do you continue to thirst for?
- What have you seen that you never saw before? What do you remain blind to?
- What is most life-giving on your new intimacy with Christ? What is still dead and needs resurrection?

The scrutinies are celebrated with the Elect (the un-baptised) only. Candidates (those baptised) would celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (The American edition of RCIA offers a Penitential Rite for candidates in preparation for the sacrament of reconciliation – RCIA 459)

The Presentations

‘The Creed, as it recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race, 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.’
(RCIA 134)

RCIA 134ff

Since the earliest years of the Church the Tradition of the Church was best expressed in the **Creed** and the **Lord’s Prayer**, the foundations of our faith and our life of prayer. From the beginning these were presented orally to those preparing for baptism and the RCIA presentation is an oral one.

The presentations take place after the celebration of the scrutinies (unless they have been anticipated for pastoral reasons during the period of the catechumenate –RCIA 79,103-104). The Church entrusts to the Elect, who have completed their catechumenal formation, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts which express the heart of the Church's faith and prayer. They are presented in order to 'enlighten' the Elect.

The first presentation to the Elect is the **Presentation of the Creed**

- during the week following the first scrutiny.
- they are to commit the Creed to memory
- they will recite it publicly prior to professing their faith in accordance with that Creed on the day of their baptism. RCIA135 (see Preparation Rites for Holy Saturday RCIA 172ff|)

The second presentation to the Elect is the **Presentation of the Lord's Prayer**

- during the week following the third scrutiny (*but, if necessary, this presentation may be deferred for inclusion in the preparation rites of Holy Saturday; see no. 172*).
- From antiquity the Lord's Prayer has been the prayer proper to those who in baptism have received the spirit of adoption.
- When the Elect have been baptised and take part in their first celebration of the Eucharist, they will join the rest of the faithful in saying the Lord's Prayer. RCIA 136

Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday RCIA 172ff

These rites offer a final preparation for the Elect prior to the Rites of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

Holy Saturday is to be a day set aside for prayer and reflection before the rituals of initiation and so these preparatory rites serve as focus for the coming events of the Vigil. It is a time for the Elect to continue their spiritual preparation for their baptism.

The Rite states,

- The Elect are to be advised that on Holy Saturday they should refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast.
- When it is possible to bring the Elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer, some or all of the following rites may be celebrated as an immediate preparation for the sacraments .(RCIA 172)

The Elect may gather with their sponsors, their priest, their catechists, and others who have journeyed with them, to celebrate whichever of the rites is felt suitable. This often happens before a rehearsal of their part in the Easter Vigil.

It can be a very special moment in their journey, the relationships developed during the journey will have become very important and this is the final waiting time before the joy of their initiation into the Christian community. There is a model for this celebration at RCIA 174ff

Recitation of the Creed

The rite of the recitation of the Creed

- prepares the Elect for the profession of faith they will make immediately before they are baptised
- instructs them in their duty to proclaim the message of the Gospel. RCIA 180

The Ephphetha Rite takes its name from the word spoken by Jesus in his encounter with the deaf and mute man. To him Jesus says, “be opened!”

- and for the Elect we pray that their ears be opened to hear God’s word and that their mouths be opened to proclaim God’s praise.
- Its symbolism impresses on the Elect their need of grace in order that they may hear the word of God and profess it for their salvation. RCIA 184

Choosing a baptismal name

- recognises and reveals the life transforming power of initiation, wherein one leaves behind the “old man” (or “old woman”) and takes on the life of Christ.
- It is a powerful reminder of the seriousness and surrender involved in authentically living out the Gospel.
- The Rite of Choosing a Baptismal Name may be celebrated on Holy Saturday, unless it was included in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.
- The Elect may choose a new name, which is either a traditional Christian name or a name of regional usage that is not incompatible with Christian beliefs.
- Where it seems better suited to the circumstances and the Elect are not too numerous, the naming may consist simply in an explanation of the given name of each of the elect (RCIA 187)

The **anointing with the oil of catechumens** that ordinarily forms part of the liturgy of baptism may be anticipated on Holy Saturday to save time in the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

- The presiding celebrant is a priest or a deacon.
- When this anointing is anticipated, care is to be taken that the elect who are to be baptised understand its significance.
- It symbolises their need for God’s help and strength so that, undeterred by the bonds of the past and overcoming the opposition of the devil, they will forthrightly take the step of professing their faith and will hold fast to it unflinching throughout their lives.
- The oil used for this rite is to be the oil blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass, but for pastoral reasons a priest celebrant may bless oil for the rite immediately before the anointing. (RCIA 190-192)

THIRD STEP – CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

RCIA 198ff

There is no need to consider the celebration of the liturgy here but it may be helpful to note:

*‘The **usual time** for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation is the Easter Vigil... (RCIA 199) When the celebration takes place **outside the usual time** (see nos. 26-27), care should be taken to ensure that it has a markedly paschal character (see Christian Initiation, General Introduction, no. 6). Thus the texts for one of the ritual Masses ‘Christian Initiation: Baptism’ given in the Roman Missal are used, and the readings are chosen from those given in the Lectionary for Mass, ‘Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation apart from the Easter Vigil.’ (RCIA 200)*

THE PERIOD OF POSTBAPTISMAL CATECHESIS OR MYSTAGOGY

RCIA 234ff

'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.' RCIA (Outline)

The word 'mystagogy' is from a Greek word meaning 'the interpretation of mystery' or 'the teaching of mystery'.

To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents and their parish priests should give them thoughtful and friendly help. (RCIA 234)

They should experience 'a fuller and more effective understanding of the mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned and, above all, through their experience of the sacraments they have received. (RCIA 235)

Just as their new participation in the sacraments enlightens the neophytes' understanding of the scriptures, so, too, it increases their contact with the rest of the faithful and has an impact on the experience of the community. As a result, interaction between the neophyte and the faithful is made easier and more beneficial. (RCIA 236)

From the earliest years of the Church and in the Church today it has been a time of ongoing formation and maturation in the faith for those who had been baptised and received into the community during the Triduum (the Neophytes). Neophyte, again from the Greek meaning 'newly planted' is the name given to the newly baptised.

The goal of this period of postbaptismal catechesis was to engage the newly baptised in a more profound experience of the Paschal Mystery both on an intellectual level as well as on the level of lived personal experience. Both the *personal* experience of the newly baptised and the *community* experience of the faithful were of crucial importance during this stage of the catechumenal journey.

In the Easter season the neophytes reflect on the meaning of the rites, the signs and symbols of the Easter Vigil as the visible means through which they were initiated into a new life of grace and into the Christian community of believers.

They gather each week to deepen their grasp of the great Paschal Mystery into which they have just been incorporated. These new Christians have received the Body of Christ and have indeed become part of the Body of Christ through their Baptism. The Church uses this time to help the newly baptised (and newly received) to live out their lives as part of the Body of Christ.

Mystagogy, too, is about mission. The new Christians, now part of Christ's body, must now go forth with us to continue the mission of Jesus Christ.

So, the period of mystagogy is a time for:

- living a sacramental life
- living out the gospel way of life
- becoming more involved in the parish

Events for the newly baptised

- Masses of the Easter season – special places in the congregation should be reserved for the neophytes and their godparents. (RCIA 238)
- Some sort of celebration to close the period of postbaptismal catechesis during the Easter season near to Pentecost. (RCIA 239)
- On the anniversary of their Baptism neophytes should be brought together – to give thanks to God, to share spiritual experiences and to renew their commitment. (RCIA 240)
- The Bishop should meet and celebrate the Eucharist with the newly baptised at least once in the year. (RCIA 241)

The Mass for New Catholics, celebrated by the Cardinal, takes place at the Cathedral during the Easter season.

Care for New Catholics (Drawn from *'Six Steps to Effective Mystagogy – Miriam Malone, SNJM – <https://web.archive.org/web/20160406131049/http://www.rpinet.com/ml/2703mys.html>*)

- The community needs to maintain support for the neophytes. Having been part of small faith communities during the initiation process there is a need to have regular contact with a small community which will continue to provide support.
- Withdrawal/Removal of support of godparents and catechists, who believe that their job is done, causes problems. It may be that now they need the support even more.
- It is important to offer specific avenues by which new Catholics can be nurtured in faith and involved in parish life.

Practical Suggestions

- Successful Mystagogy begins with the first interview with an inquirer.
- Include the concept of Mystagogy as an integral part of the process from the very beginning (for all involved and in planning), avoiding any hint of Easter being the end or the goal.
- Include the formal period of Mystagogy in any written calendar of events for the entire process so that it is always seen in the context of the whole process.
- Develop competency at breaking open the Word during the Catechumenate.
- "Expect" Neophytes to gather the week after initiation to share stories and pictures of their Easter Vigil celebration and to share the Scriptures for the Sundays of Easter in light of their sacramental experiences.
- Avoid the temptation to use the six weeks of Easter as a time for information and recruitment for parish service.
- Plan for monthly gatherings following the Pentecost celebration
- Plan with them from the beginning to celebrate their first anniversary at the next Pentecost.
- Encourage the Neophytes to take ownership of their gatherings
- Lead them into deeper prayer and into greater participation in the parish community.
- Offer a special invitation to Neophytes to participate in various sacramental experiences throughout the year, and then to reflect on them together.
- Hold a special gathering each year for all Neophytes from the previous years.

Some thoughts for the neophytes

- Share your experience of sacramental initiation at the Easter Vigil.
- How did the signs and symbols and the scripture readings of the Easter Vigil deepen your understanding of the new life of faith you received in the sacraments of initiation?
- How will you continue your spiritual journey through participation in the sacraments, study of scripture and prayer, and service in the Christian community?
- How are you called to be a witness to your Easter faith in the resurrection of Christ?



A PRAYER FOR CATECHISTS

God of all truth,
Our minds are muddled,
Our bodies strive in vain,
When we try to speak of your mysteries.

Be for us the God of infinite clarity!

Help us to say what we mean,

And mean what we say.

Bring light to our lives

That they may tell of your Light.

Inspire us to leave the shelters and the shields we
have built for ourselves.



By the power of the Holy Spirit make us open to you

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT AND FORMATION OF RCIA CATECHISTS



RCIA NETWORK OF ENGLAND & WALES: <https://rcia.org.uk/>

‘The RCIA Network is made up of people who have leadership roles in the RCIA process in Dioceses and parishes, and exists to support them in their work and to promote an authentic understanding of the Church’s teaching about the Rite.’ Its website is currently under reconstruction but many of its resources are accessible.

TEAMRCIA: <https://teamrcia.com/>

TEAMRCIA ‘provides accessible and effective RCIA resources that help parish teams initiate and form disciples for Christ’s mission.’ It offers online training, articles supporting the RCIA process, free subscription to a weekly newsletter. TEAMRCIA have given us permission to give access to one of their downloadable resources here – a free ebook - so you can have an idea of what they offer: ‘RCIA’s Six Keys to Making Lifelong Disciples’ - <https://teamrcia.com/sixkeysbook>

CATECHUMENEON: <https://catechumeneon.org/>

LTP (Liturgy Training Publications) Catechumeneon website is a ‘collection of training and print resources focused on Christian initiation and designed to assist parishes with understanding and implementing the vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The naming of this initiative is inspired by an ancient Greek word used to describe the meeting place for catechumens; it is a place for prayer, study, and formation. Rooted in the vision of the rite, *Catechumeneon* resources and training opportunities provide catechists and other initiation ministers the formation and tools they need to journey with catechumens as they approach the waters of rebirth.’

Catechumeon offers a series of excellent free virtual events, at times accessible to UK users. Recordings of previous events and dates of future events can be found at:

https://ltp.adobeconnect.com/_a1081707727/recordings-2020-vcci-vdci/

THE ASSOCIATION FOR CATECHUMENAL MINISTRY (ACM): <https://acmrcia.org/>

ACM ‘seeks to foster the full implementation of the Order of Christian Initiation by providing a communications, resources, and education network for diocesan and parish personnel involved in the work of the catechumenate. The Association’s resources and work reflect its focus on the complementarity and indispensability of the various components (liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral) of a comprehensive Christian initiation process.’