

Some Dos and Don'ts in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens



Many of you are probably beginning to plan for a celebration of the Rite of Acceptance. As you prepare your communities for this first public ritual of the RCIA, keep these best practices and things to avoid in mind.

Suggested best practices:

1. Schedule and celebrate the Rite of Acceptance several times throughout the year, even during the Easter season. (See RCIA 18.3)
2. Give each candidate for the Rite of Acceptance a sponsor who “has known and assisted the candidates” (RCIA 10). The sponsor should be a “gift” from the parish to the candidate. (Note: “Candidate” has two different definitions. In regards to the Rite of Acceptance, which is only for unbaptized persons, “candidate” refers to a person’s ritual role; that is, the candidate is the person who is the subject of a rite. In this context, it does not refer to a person’s baptismal status.)
3. If the candidate for the Rite of Acceptance wants to provide his or her own sponsor, allow, if reasonably appropriate, for that person to act as a co-sponsor along with the sponsor provided by the parish.
4. Rehearse the rite with the presiding priest or deacon, the sponsors, the acolytes, the music director/cantor, and any other assistants who will have roles to play during the rite (e.g., cross bearer, ushers). Do not rehearse it with those who will be catechumens, but help them prepare spiritually for the rite (see the next two suggestions).
5. Prepare the sponsors and their candidates for the dialogue at the beginning of the rite (RCIA 50). Help them to respond from their heart. Their responses should be spontaneous, but not unprepared.
6. If you want to give a personal cross as a gift to those who will become catechumens, instead of giving it to them during the rite, have their sponsors give them a cross at the time when the inquirer is discerned to be ready for the rite (see RCIA, 42). Use this giving of the cross before the rite as a way to help both the candidate and the sponsor spiritually prepare for the rite.
7. Instead of giving catechumens a personal Bible as a gift during the rite, have their sponsors give them a Bible at the time when the inquirer is discerned to be ready for the rite, or even earlier as part of the precatechumenate period.
8. Encourage the presider to sing the prayers of the rite.
9. Several weeks before the rite, prepare the assembly to celebrate it through catechesis and reflection questions. If the assembly has not yet met the inquirers who will become catechumens, informally introduce them to the assembly several weeks before the rite so that the assembly can pray for them as part of the spiritual preparation for the Rite of Acceptance.

10. Dismiss catechumens (adults and children). The dismissal is an important part of their formation.
11. Pay attention to RCIA 48 and RCIA 60. The rite begins outside or at the entrance of the church. A “group of the faithful” gather with them outside (RCIA 48). Before the Liturgy of the Word, the celebrant invites all to “enter the church” (RCIA 60).
12. Schedule the rite on a day when the readings are most connected to what is being communicated by the Rite of Acceptance itself, i.e., following Christ, hearing God’s word, picking up one’s cross, etc.
13. Make sure the homilist focuses the homily on what just happened in the rite, connects it to the readings, and addresses the catechumens.
14. Be sure the presider and the homilist (if it is a different person) knows the catechumens and some of their stories of faith so he can speak genuinely to them in the rite and make his homily relevant to them.
15. Keep an official record of the names of catechumens, their sponsors, the date they became catechumens, and the name of the presider at the rite. (See RCIA 46)

Practices to avoid:

1. Don’t make the candidates for the Rite of Acceptance knock on the doors of the church. This is NOT in the rite and is very inappropriate to the rite and to the meaning of the ritual.
2. Don’t schedule the rite on the First Sunday of Advent simply because it’s the beginning of the liturgical year. This parallels too much a “beginning of the school year” mentality. Also the First Sunday of Advent has a major focus of its own and often focuses on the “end times.”
3. Don’t schedule the Rite of Acceptance on Sundays when additional events are happening in the Mass (e.g., the diocesan appeal talk, blessing of students, parish festival), or when there’s a visiting priest presiding. Look at the parish’s calendar for any conflicts of events.
4. Don’t rehearse the rite with those who will become catechumens.
5. Don’t instruct the sponsors and candidates for the Rite of Acceptance to respond to the dialogue in the rite (RCIA 50) with rote answers.
6. Don’t make “air crosses” during the signing of the senses (RCIA 56).
7. Don’t give a personal cross as a gift to the catechumens *during the rite*. This is an optional part of the rite (RCIA 64), and giving an individual cross tends to diminish the fact that the catechumens had already “received” the cross when their senses were signed. Instead, do this before or after the rite.
8. Don’t give a personal Bible as a gift to the catechumens *during the rite*. This is an optional part of the rite (RCIA 64), and giving an individual Bible tends to diminish the fact that the catechumens had already “accepted” the Gospel when they stated they were ready to live the Gospel (RCIA 52) and when they heard the Scriptures for the first time as catechumens in the assembly of the faithful (RCIA 60-63). Instead, do this before or after the rite.
9. Don’t dismiss baptized candidates; the norm is for any baptized person to remain in the assembly for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, even if they are unable to participate in Communion, since their principle role is to pray the Creed, the Universal Prayers (Prayers of the Faithful), and to join in the Eucharistic Prayer.
10. Never dismiss sponsors with the catechumens.
11. Don’t let the homilist ignore the catechumens or what just happened in the rite.
12. Don’t give the script to the presider or the musician at the last minute. Work, plan, and rehearse it with them long before the day of the rite.