

The job of the RCIA coordinator or director



The RCIA makes no mention of an RCIA director or even a team. However, RCIA 13 and 14 talk about the priest and his responsibilities, and RCIA 15 mentions how permanent deacons assist in whatever way is needed. In most parishes, the pastor would typically delegate many of these responsibilities to others on staff or to coordinators and volunteers in the RCIA. So these responsibilities could also be shared with an RCIA director, deacon, or other coordinators:

- Instruct catechumens and candidates in the Christian faith by apprenticing them in the living Word of God, community life, prayer, and works of mercy (see RCIA 75)
- Call the entire parish to be models and examples of living the Christian way of life
- Care for the rites of the catechumenate by working with the parish liturgist and music director; if there is no liturgist or music director, then work closely with presiders and liturgical ministers to be fully prepared for the rites
- Provide pastoral care to catechumens and candidates through not only spiritual guidance but also through genuine attention to their personal needs and calling the entire parish to do the same, especially by selecting good sponsors for each catechumen and candidate
- Assist the catechumens in discerning and choosing good godparents, and approving their choice of godparents

In most parishes, the role of the RCIA team leader goes far beyond this list. The team leader may be an organizer, coordinator, counselor, supporter, dishwasher, room arranger, and spiritual guide. However, the first and foremost ministry of the team leader is enablement of the community! All other qualities, responsibilities, and characteristics flow from this core ministry. The word enablement is related to the word ministry. It suggests not only a function, but a way of being.

The team leader is to enable the parish community to take the central role in the formation of the catechumens.

The ministry of enablement in the catechumenate, and in the whole life of the parish, is crucial for the ongoing renewal and life of the parish. It is also, despite our best intentions, quite difficult to practice, because enabling others means letting go of my agenda, my control. Enabling means sharing my gifts and talents and helping others to name and share theirs. Letting go means that the work may not be carried out as “I would like it.” It is realizing that my way is not the only way! Letting go means working your way out of a job that you may have worked long and hard to have!

Five keys to involving the assembly in the work of Christian initiation

Equip the saints for ministry

We are all aware of Paul’s description of particular gifts— “some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12, NRSV).

The RCIA leader enables the body of Christ for the work of initiating adults into the community.

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This last phrase is key to the ministry of enablement: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” The key word for the catechumenate coordinator/pastor is equip, which means “to build up.” The RCIA team leader builds up the body, the community of the faithful, which is the primary minister in the RCIA. The function, then, of the catechumenate leader is to enable or to equip men and women in the body of Christ for the work of initiating adults into the community. This ministry of enablement is the process by which we make it possible for others to find both the strength and authority to fulfill the purpose of their Christian lives. As parish coordinators/pastors we enable the ministry of sponsors, catechumenate team, catechists, godparents, assembly, and ultimately of the catechumen/neophyte. We strengthen and affirm the gifts of these men and women so that they in turn can use them “with authority” in building up Christ’s body in the world. The ministry of the coordinator/pastor makes it possible for others to minister.

The coordinator/pastor stands with them, walks with them, helps them to be about their mission as church. How do we organize this? It is one thing to talk about the catechumenate coordinator/pastor as an enabler. It is quite another thing to create an organized process so that it takes place. In the next session, we’ll look at the five models for organizing RCIA leadership, and we’ll talk about the most effective model for your parish.