



CATECHUMENEON

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Quarterly

Challenges and Blessings

Happy New Year! We know the past year has been filled with many challenges, but we've also heard from several of you about the many blessings you've experienced as you shifted catechetical sessions and prayer online. Some of you have even shared that you've spent these past several months evaluating the initiation process in your parish, which has led to new insights and inspiration for the coming months, especially once the pandemics ends. I invite you to share your wisdom with us on the Forum on Catechumeneon.org.

Like our ancestors in faith, we continue to preach the Gospel in relevant ways and adapt to our circumstances. Why? Because individuals continue to be stirred by the Holy Spirit to seek the living God. These folks continue to knock at our church doors and inquire about Jesus and the Catholic Church. Therefore, as faith-filled communities, we seek creative ways to be the presence of Christ in our neighborhoods and especially to those who inquire and have become catechumens during this past year.

While initiation ministry may look different right now, let us continue our creative work and find the blessings in our midst. I believe there is still much to be learned from this pandemic-time. In this issue of *Catechumeneon Quarterly*, we explore the topic of baptized candidates, and Michael Ruzicki invites us to prepare for the upcoming *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Let this be a time of blessing and a time of (good) challenges that help us grow in faith and ministry.

In Christ,
Timothy Johnston
Editor and Liturgical
Training Consultant

*N., the Lord received you
into the Catholic Church. /
His loving kindness has led you here, /
so that in the unity of the Holy Spirit /
you may have full communion with us /
in the faith that you have professed
in the presence of his family. (RCIA, 492)*



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Rite of Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church, St. Thomas, Naperville, IL

Let's Stop Making "Converts" at Easter

Maxwell E. Johnson

(Editor's note: This article first appeared in the September 1999 issue of *Catechumeneate*.)

During last year's Easter Vigil at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Anywhere, several already baptized candidates who had been members of other Christian traditions were received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church and confirmed, after having participated in the Christian initiation process for at least a year of catechesis and a Lent of "purification and enlightenment." Among those received into full communion were former Lutherans and Episcopalians.

A few blocks from St. Mary's, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church (of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or ELCA), a similar celebration was taking place at the same time, where several now former Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, after participating in the Lutheran catechumenal process *Welcome to Christ*,¹ were making their "Affirmation of Baptism." And, at St. Alban's Episcopal Church, again just a few blocks away from both St. Mary's and Our Savior's and also again during the Easter Vigil celebration, several former Lutherans and Roman Catholics were being received into the Episcopal Church, USA, after having been formed by the Episcopal version of the catechumenate and "renewing" their baptismal vows (in preparation for a hand-laying rite by the bishop at another point during the Easter season).²

In all three of these churches on that night, the new Easter fire had been blessed; the Paschal candle had been lighted and carried in solemn procession into a darkened church with the "Light of Christ / Thanks be to God" sung three times; the powerful Exsultet had been intoned in the glow of both the Paschal candle and the lighted candles held by the assembly, the great watery stories of salvation from the Old Testament had been read; Romans 6 and the Easter Gospel had been sent forth from the assembly conscious that in the words of Saint Augustine, they were "an Easter people and alleluia was [their] song."

But in the process, in addition to those who might actually have been baptized during the celebration, some that night had become "Catholics," "Lutherans," "Episcopalians" through similar ritual processes called either "Confirmation" (Roman Catholic), "affirmation of Baptism" (Lutheran), or "reaffirmation of Baptism" (Episcopalian). What is wrong with this picture?

Within a variety of parish settings and different Christian traditions throughout the United States, the above scenario is played out every year, as the Easter Vigil increasingly has become "New Members Night" and/or "Ecclesial Musical Chairs Night," wherein already baptized members of Christ's *one* body pass from one particular way of ecclesial living into another. As such, Easter is rapidly becoming, I fear, the great festival of our Christian disunity. How ironic it is that at the very moment when our com-

mon and ecumenical Christian life and paschal identity should be celebrated, when the celebration of the paschal sacrament of our one Baptism into Christ and the Church is most highly appropriate, we frequently have chosen instead to use (abuse?) the Easter Vigil as the prime time for "making converts" to our particular ecclesial tradition (as though being received into full communion is the sacramental equivalent of Baptism).

Such use of the catechumenal process for "making converts," while obviously widespread, common, and even permitted, certainly represents a radical departure both from the so-called Golden Age of the catechumenate—known to us in the writings of those great mystagogues Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan³—as well as from the intent of those who sought to restore the catechumenate to the life of the Church today.

Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church

As readers of this journal are well aware, in addition to various adaptations of the ritual process leading to adult Baptism, Confirmation, and first Communion—i.e., "Rites for Particular Circumstances"⁴—the Roman Catholic RCIA also provides a rite of "Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church." This rite, which can take place either during or outside Mass, includes the conferral and reception of Confirmation and, at least within Mass (the preferred occasion), the reception of first Communion. In the rite itself, following the profession of the Nicene Creed in the context of the Eucharistic liturgy, those being received into full Roman Catholic communion are invited to state simply, "I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God";⁵ they are then confirmed and receive their first Communion.

When compared with previous rites for the "reception of converts," this new rite of reception represents a most welcome change. Prior to 1962, for example, those "converting" from a variety of other religious traditions were required to make an abjuration either of "Hebrew superstition," the Islamic "sect of the infidel," or, in the case of the already baptized, the "heretical errors" of the particular "evil" Protestant "sect" they were leaving.⁶ Even as recently as 1964, the following "Profession of Faith" was sought:



Photo by Yvette Dostani © LIP

I, N.N., (xx) years of age, born outside the Catholic Church, have held and believed errors contrary to her teaching. Now, enlightened by divine grace, I kneel before you, Reverend Father N.N., having before my eyes and touching with my hands the holy Gospels; and with a firm faith I believe and profess each and all the articles that are contained in the Apostles' Creed, that is: I believe in God . . . , and life everlasting. Amen. I admit and embrace most firmly the apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions and all the other constitutions and prescriptions of the Church. I admit the sacred Scriptures according to the sense which has been held and is still held by Holy Mother Church, whose duty it is to judge the true sense and interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, and I shall never accept or interpret them except according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers. I profess that the sacraments of the New Law are, truly and precisely, seven in number, instituted for the salvation of mankind, though all are not necessary for each individual: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony.

I profess that all confer grace and that of these, baptism, confirmation, and holy orders cannot be repeated without sacrilege. I also accept and admit the ritual of the Catholic Church in the solemn administration of all the above mentioned sacraments. I accept and hold, in each and every part, all that has been defined and declared by the Sacred Council of Trent concerning original sin and justification. I profess that in the Mass is offered to God a true, real, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead; that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist is really, truly, and substantially the Body and Blood together with the Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that there takes place what the Church calls transubstantiation, that is, the change of all the substance of the bread into the Body and of all the substance of the wine into the Blood. I confess also that in receiving under either of these species one receives Jesus Christ, whole and entire. I firmly hold that purgatory exists and that the souls detained there can be helped by the prayers of the faithful. Likewise I hold that the saints, who reign with Jesus Christ, should be venerated and invoked, that they offer prayers to God for us, and that their relics are to be venerated. I profess firmly that the images of Jesus Christ and of the Mother of God, ever Virgin, as well as of all the saints, should be given due honor and veneration. I also affirm that Jesus Christ left to the Church the faculty to grant indulgences and that their use is most salutary to the Christian people. I recognize the holy, Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic church as the mother and teacher of all the Churches and I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Pontiff, successor of Saint Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and Vicar of Jesus Christ. Besides I accept, without hesitation, and profess all that has been handed down, defined, and declared by the sacred canons and by the general councils, especially by the Sacred Council of Trent and by the Vatican General Council, and in a special manner concerning the primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff. At the same time I condemn and reprove all that the Church has condemned and reprobated. This same Catholic faith, outside of which nobody can be saved, which I now freely profess and to which I truly adhere, the same I promise and swear to maintain and profess, with the help of God, entire, inviolate, and with firm constancy until the last breath of life; and I will strive, as far as possible, that this same faith shall be held, taught, and publicly professed by

all those who depend on me and by those of whom I shall have charge. So help me God and these holy Gospels.⁷

Combined Rites in the Catholic Church

Although the revised rite of reception, mandated by the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* at Vatican II, appears within the RCIA, it is nowhere indicated that it is to be seen as part of the catechumenal process leading to Easter initiation! Indeed, it is only within an appendix to the edition of the RCIA approved for the dioceses of the United States—although often imitated elsewhere around the world—that a series of rites called “additional (Combined) Rites” regularly places real catechumens (unbaptized adults), candidates for Confirmation and first Communion (uncatechized but baptized adults), and candidates for reception into full communion together into the same overall ritual process of catechumenal formation with the respective initiation rites then celebrated at the Easter Vigil.⁸ While the attempt to be so inclusive of people at differing stages in their spiritual journeys may be laudable, and while no one would question the need for tradition-specific catechesis and formation, these combined rites, especially with regard to the rite of reception into full communion, present particular problems that still need to be resolved, including those expressed in the scenario suggested above.

It should never be forgotten, but often is, I fear, that the origins of the restoration of the adult catechumenate are to be located within the various attempts of missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to prepare adult converts for the full rites of Christian initiation in the Roman Catholic Church.⁹ Similarly, with regard to the RCIA itself, the intent of this restored catechumenate is also for the conversion of the *unbaptized*. In other words, the adult catechumenate as envisioned by the RCIA is *prebaptismal* in nature and orientation and not designed with the reception or transfer of Christians from one ecclesial tradition to another in mind.

Nevertheless, in the Additional (Combined) rites of the RCIA, both real catechumens and other “candidates,” including those for reception into membership—and occasionally those seeking restoration to membership—are often joined together within the same catechumenal process. Hence, while adult catechumens receive Baptism, Confirmation, and first Communion at the Easter Vigil, other candidates are often received into communion with Confirmation and receive their first Communion at the same time.

To be fair, attempts are certainly made in all of these combined situations to make clear distinctions between catechumens and candidates so that the dignity of Baptism itself is not compromised. According to the RCIA, for example, candidates for full communion are not supposed to sign the book of the elect, are not supposed to be exorcised with the elect, and are not supposed to receive other rites designated for catechumens alone. But by placing various groups together in the same catechumenal process and celebrating both Christian initiation and reception/Confirmation together at the Easter Vigil, it is not always clear

that the distinctions between these groups is clear either to the liturgical assembly or to the elect and candidates themselves.

Such confusion, in fact, becomes even more problematic when the number of candidates is greater than the number of catechumens or elect in a given parish, a regular phenomenon in some places today. Indeed, this confusion extends even to those who have the responsibility of leading or directing the process. I have heard parish initiation directors actually describe the catechumenate *not* as the ritual process leading from an initial conversion to full Christian initiation through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist but as a “program people go through who want to become *Catholics*.” And I am well aware of situations where initiation directors—and even pastors (!)—simply do *not* know the rites themselves and not only treat candidates for full communion as catechumens but insist on using the terminology of “catechumen” to refer to them.

Paul Turner has written clearly about this confusion:

We can only hope that the need for a rite of transferring membership will become minimized. Progress in the ecumenical movement should help us move toward a single eucharistic table for all Christian families. This would reduce the need for a separate rite of “Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church” and purify the purpose of confirmation. . . . Current pastoral practice sadly initiates such candidates in much the same way as catechumens. The two groups are catechized together and pass through either the same rituals or ponderous adaptations which struggle to challenge the non-baptized without offending non-Catholic Christians. Frequently, candidates are disappointed that they cannot be baptized like catechumens, that they should not sign the book of the elect like catechumens, that they are not called to scrutinies like catechumens, that they are not anointed with the oil of catechumens like catechumens. . . . By making candidates imitate the path of catechumens we have too often made it too difficult for Christians who share one baptism to share one eucharistic table. The ecumenical movement longs for the day when the rites which prepare baptized Christians for full communion will be ripped from our books, and the catechumenate now so freely adapted for the *baptized* may become again the proper province of the unbaptized.¹⁰

Norms for Reception into Communion

What is often neglected in Roman Catholic dioceses and parishes in this regard are the norms for the rite of “Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church” in the *National Statutes on the Catechumenate*, accepted by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States in 1986. According to these *National Statutes*, those received into full communion from other Christian traditions are *never* to be designated as “converts,” a term strictly reserved for those who convert “from unbelief to Christian belief.”¹¹ It is also clearly stated that:

It is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil lest there be any confusion of such baptized Christians with the candidates for baptism, possible misunderstanding of or even reflection upon the sacrament

of baptism celebrated in another church or ecclesial community, or any perceived triumphalism in the liturgical welcome into the Catholic eucharistic community.¹²

The widespread neglect of the *National Statutes*’ clearly articulated “preferential option” for the rite of reception taking place outside the context of the Easter Vigil has the potential of turning the restored catechumenate into little more than a new way to make “converts” out of already baptized Christians who seek to be received or transferred into another church.¹³ It is quite unfortunate that such a powerful and ecumenical statement about the theology of Baptism and the common identity and dignity of all the baptized has not been taken more seriously in the pastoral adaptations of the RCIA.

Combined Rites in Other Churches

What is equally unfortunate is that in other churches’ restoration of the adult catechumenate today, the same dynamic of combining rites and people has also been at work. Both Lutheran and Episcopal adaptations of the catechumenate, for example, have followed the unfortunate precedent set by the “additional (Combined) Rites” in the USA version of the RCIA. But the prize for turning the catechumenal process into a denominational or parochial event might certainly go to us Lutherans, where, according to the rites themselves, some form of *Luther’s* catechism *may* be presented on the first Sunday in Lent at the “Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism,”¹⁴ and a Lutheran worship book *is* presented to *baptismal* candidates on the fifth Sunday in Lent.¹⁵ The Lutheran process also assumes that those preparing for Affirmation of Baptism will be included among the “group of candidates.”¹⁶

Stop Making “Converts” at the Easter Vigil

What, then, shall we do? The solution to all this is really quite simple. Let’s stop making “converts” at the Easter Vigil so that the Easter Vigil *and* the Lenten catechumenate itself can function properly, in relationship to baptismal preparation and renewal in a way consistent with its origins and with the primary intent of its modern restoration. In so doing, let’s all take seriously the preferential option of the *National Statutes* so that any and all ecumenical confusion about Baptism is avoided. Quite simply, there is neither a historical precedent for the reception/Confirmation of baptized Christians from other traditions at Easter, nor any sound theological reason why such should take place. If anything, the theology of Baptism itself mitigates against such a practice, and it is baptismal theology—not convenience and not some vague notion of inclusivity—that must shape pastoral practice at this point.

So when should people be received into full communion or be received into another Christian tradition through affirmation or renewal of baptism? Please don’t misunderstand me. While I agree fully with Paul Turner that “the ecumenical movement longs for the day when the rites which prepare baptized Christians for full communion will be ripped from our books,” I also think



that the decisions of people who seek to embrace a new manner of living out their baptismal faith within a particular ecclesial manner of life should be celebrated fully. However, although tradition-specific catechesis will be necessary for all in this context and basic Christian catechesis a necessity for some, such “candidates” are not catechumens and have no place in the prebaptismal catechumenate of Lent.

So when should rites of reception take place? Certainly not on Holy Thursday, unless one considers such “converts” to be the equivalent of those in the “order of penitents,” who in the early medieval Roman tradition were reconciled on Holy Thursday. In short, let’s separate this process entirely from Lent, the Triduum, and the fifty days of Easter and find other moments in the life of the Christian community when such reception would be appropriate¹⁷ and it might be easier to avoid confusion or “possible misunderstanding of or even reflection upon the sacrament of Baptism celebrated in another Church or ecclesial community, or any perceived triumphalism in the liturgical welcome into the Catholic eucharistic community.” Whether Confirmation (or its equivalent should be part of such rites of reception is another question for another time.

Try now to picture yet another possible scenario: During this year’s Easter Vigil, St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, and St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, all located in Anywhere, celebrated most of the Easter Vigil together in one common place. Since St. Mary’s was the host parish for this event, Father McCarthy presided over the blessing of the new fire and lighting of the Paschal candle, and offered the concluding prayers after each of the vigil readings. An Episcopal deacon from St. Alban’s carried the Paschal Candle in procession and intoned the Exsultet. Lectors came from all three parishes, and a combined choir assisted with the appropriate Responsorial Psalms and other chants. Pastor Swanson from Our Savior’s gave the Easter Homily.

At the time appointed for Baptism and its renewal, an ecumenical “Litany of the Saints” was sung,¹⁸ and the water was blessed by Father Smith from St. Alban’s, who also led in the renunciation of Satan and the triple profession of faith. By turns, the “elect” from each parish (including infants) were baptized (including Confirmation and/or the appropriate postbaptismal rites) by the respective ministers from those parishes in the presence of this common liturgical assembly. Following a common renewal of baptismal vows, a sprinkling rite, and an exchange of peace, all three parish groups (unfortunately) moved to two separate locations in the building for, unfortunately, two separate celebrations of the eucharist.¹⁹

Yet following those celebrations, all three assembled together again for a common Concluding Rite, the singing of a final hymn (“Jesus Christ is Ris’n Today!” was chosen) and an Easter party in St. Mary’s parish hall in honor of all those newly baptized that night in the *same* font. It is to such common and ecumenical origins in the baptismal waters that the forty days of Lent, the Paschal Triduum and the fifty days of Easter call us each year. Can we not commit ourselves anew to ridding ourselves of any and everything that keeps us from this realization?

Notes

1. *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997). See also the accompanying volumes: *Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Catechetical Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997) and *Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Introduction to the Catechumenate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997).
2. See *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 284ff. See also Office of Evangelism Ministries, The Episcopal Church, *The Catechumenal Process: Adult Initiation & Formation for Christian Life and Ministry* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990).
3. E. Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994).
4. *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville: Pueblo, 1990), 170–286.
5. *Ibid.*, para. 491, p. 280.
6. Cf. *Rituale Parvum* (Turin: Desclee, 1949), 35–36.
7. *The 1964 English Ritual: Collectio Rituum* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1964), 193–195. For “the uneducated and for those who do not have the religious development to understand the longer formula,” the following “Alternative Form” was also provided: “I, N.N., touching with my hands God’s holy Gospels, enlightened by divine grace, profess the faith which the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church teaches. I believe that Church to be the one true Church which Jesus Christ founded on earth, to which I submit with all my heart. I believe in God . . . , and life everlasting. Amen. I profess that seven sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ for the salvation of mankind, namely, baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony.”
8. See *Ibid.*, 287–356.
9. Cf. D. Gelpi, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians*, vol. 1: *Adult Conversion and Initiation* (Collegeville 1993), 188–189.
10. P. Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon’s Court* (Mahwah/New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 129. Turner, of course, is being too nice. Too often, in fact, candidates for full communion do sign the book of the elect, are scrutinized, etc.
11. *The Rites*, vol. 1, para. 2, p. 341.
12. *Ibid.*, para. 33, p. 347. While the following paragraph makes a concession “for pastoral reasons,” it asserts, nevertheless, that “a clear distinction should be maintained during the celebration between candidates for sacramental initiation and candidates for reception into full communion, and ecumenical sensitivities should be carefully respected.”
13. This seems to be particularly the case in university and college campus ministry settings, where candidates for full communion almost always outnumber catechumens. For that matter, in such settings when actual catechumens who become elected to Baptism are present, other problems appear. The entire catechumenal process, for example, rather than the expected one year of the catechumenate and one year of postbaptismal mystagogy, is often streamlined or reduced to a single academic year with enrollment into the catechumenate in Advent, Election on the first Sunday in Lent, the Rites of Initiation either at the Easter Vigil or (assuming that students are on Easter break during the vigil) the Second Sunday of Easter, with mystagogy concluding sometime near spring commencement.
14. *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 24.
15. *Ibid.*, 32.
16. See *ibid.*, 26 and 34.
17. The only detailed study of the Roman Catholic rite of reception into full communion I am aware of is the very helpful book edited by Ronald A. Oakham, *One at the Table: The Reception of Baptized Christians* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publication, 1995). This volume should be looked at carefully by all who struggle with this question.
18. For an example of such an ecumenical litany, see *Welcome to Christ: Lutheran Rites for the Catechumenate*, 70–71.
19. I say only two separate celebrations because the Episcopalians and ELCA Lutherans have been participating in an “Interim Eucharistic Sharing” agreement on the way toward full communion.



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Naming Our Expectations

Michael Ruzicki

A few years ago, I took the first flight out of Chicago on Thanksgiving morning to visit my family for the holiday weekend. Kind enough to get an early start to the day, my siblings picked me up from the airport and we drove to my mother's house. We had time to gripe about the early hour, catch each other up on our lives, and decide which topics were on and off the table of discussion. Soon after arriving and sharing our hellos, we put in the turkey, made a pot of coffee, and prepared for the day. It was great. For hours we chopped ingredients, shared recipes, and told stories. Yes, the same stories that families tell over and over, year after year. There was laughter, crying, yelling, and all the emotions that go with a family get-together.

As it was getting close to dinnertime, my niece called to tell us she would be a few minutes late. After she hung up, some family members expressed their disappointment. "Shouldn't she know how important today is?" "It's a day to spend with the family." "It's not just about sitting down to eat meal." While agreeing with all of them, I questioned them: "And how would she know that? Did we invite her and the kids to spend the whole day? Is there anything in her experience that may have taught her that Thanksgiving is more than just a meal?" In my view, we cannot blame someone for their actions (or inactions) when expectations have never been communicated.



Photo © John Zich

I believe this to be the case in many of our parish communities when it comes to the role of the faithful in the initiation process of catechumens and candidates. Across the country, including in my own parish, I have heard parish leaders lament the fact that the baptized are not actively involved in the catechumenal journey. Agreed. The RCIA states that "the people of God . . . should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized" (9). But did anyone tell them this? We can't just *tell* our congregations this, that's not enough. We need to build up the Church actively and intentionally by first building up the baptized members of our communities.

In the next few years, we will receive a new translation the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* (OCIA). This must be a time for us to recalibrate our efforts. Many parishes have adopted the mindset of having an "RCIA team" that acts on behalf of the faithful. Now don't get me wrong, the work that is being done by RCIA teams is necessary and good. However, this current approach to initiation ministry is far from the vision of the Church. We need parishioners who see themselves as "initiation ministers," responsible for formation of catechumens and candidates. Can a parish team coordinate and animate this work? Absolutely!

I recommend that we take a step back. As diocesan leaders and pastors, as initiation ministry coordinators and catechists, we would benefit from taking a step back from the mindset of *this is how we've always done it*. We should gift ourselves with a retreat away from our ministerial work. This retreat should include prayer, Scripture, learning, and discussion. As leaders in a community, we should take the time to reflect on the ministry that we are doing—is it truly in line with the vision of the rite? Simply put, "are the right people doing the right things at the right times?"

Now is the time, before the OCIA is promulgated, to start devising a plan for our parishes. Now is the time to set expectations for our parishioners and equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and awareness to perform the duties of the baptized. Now is the time to begin renewing and reinvigorating the initiation process in our parishes.

Growing up nominally Catholic, I was under the impression that “pray, pay, and obey” were my “Catholic responsibilities.” The first time I learned otherwise (namely, my responsibilities as baptismal priest, prophet, and king) was in graduate school. That is unacceptable. Like my niece at Thanksgiving dinner, no one ever laid out the expectations before me. Now we have an opportunity to reclaim the vision of the rite, articulate the expectations before the baptized faithful, and prepare them for their responsibilities.

Initiation ministry can benefit from creating a strategic plan. Along with parish leaders, like the parish council, the initiation team might ask these questions: What is our end goal? What are our hopes and dreams? And how do we lay the foundation to achieve all of this?

Friends, we owe this to our family—the Church.



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*Almighty ever-living God,
who gather what is scattered
and keep together what you have gathered,
look kindly on the flock of your Son,
that those whom one Baptism has consecrated
may be joined together by integrity of faith
and united in the bond of charity.*
(The Roman Missal, “For the Unity of Christians,” A)

St. Joseph the Worker, West Jordan, UT.

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Celebrating the Call to Continuing Conversion

Timothy A. Johnston

What is the Call to Continuing Conversion, and do the parish's candidates need to attend the celebration at the cathedral?

—Fr. Pete

The Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion (RCIA, 446–458) is an adaptation for use in the United States. It is an optional ceremony that was designed to be a parish-based celebration when there are no catechumens. Most parishes, it seems, send their candidates, along with the catechumens, to the cathedral for the combined Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion. In either case, it is not required for a candidate who is preparing to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church or completing initiation through confirmation and/or Eucharist to participate in this optional rite.

The rite as outlined in part II 4.c was intended to be celebrated at the start of the Lenten season. It presumes that reception will take place at the end of the Lenten season. This approach, however, does not respect what paragraph 473 says about “no greater burden than necessary is required for the establishment of communion and unity” or what the *National Statutes* say in paragraph 33: “It is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil.” We must remember that the vision within the rite stresses the dignity of the baptized and that candidates may be received into the Church whenever they are prepared. I think this Lenten focus is too narrow but was the pastoral wisdom at the time these optional rites were developed.

Even though the rite was intended for use at the beginning of Lent, I do believe the rite can provide a powerful witness to the parish family even outside of the Lenten season. If, for example, your parish celebrates reception at four different intervals during the year, then maybe it celebrates this Call to Continuing Conversion four to six weeks prior to the celebration of the reception of candidates for full communion or the celebration of the completion of initiation for baptized Catholics. This could mark, like Lent does for the elect, those final days of intense spiritual preparation for baptized candidates. It really was designed to be a parish celebration! It can bring to light the overall catechetical and formation process for these candidates and give the community of faith a more active and visible role in the candidates' formation.

When preparing the rite, take full opportunity to adapt the text when possible (i.e., in these or similar words). This pastoral adaptation allows more flexibility and richness so the rite can be effective in the time and season in which it is celebrated. Two final things to note. First, this rite is celebrated by the pastor (RCIA, 448). Second, paragraph 457 indicates that this rite may be celebrated outside of Mass. This may be a helpful option in some circumstances, especially since many candidates are still not able to share fully at the Eucharistic table. This option also may allow for more flexibility on celebrating the rite, choosing readings, and inviting the parish community to gather for prayer.

In any case, I strongly encourage you to talk with the initiation team, the liturgy committee, and other pastoral leaders to discern the best approach for your community. Also, take time to evaluate the celebrations along the way and tweak them as needed. This could be a great entryway to do some parish formation on baptism and rouse the hearts of the faithful.



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Searching for best practices? Email training@ltp.org if you have a question you would like one of the Catechumeneon team members to answer.

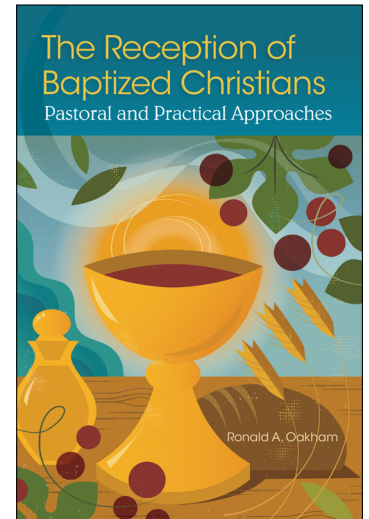
For Your Ministry

The Reception of Baptized Christians: Pastoral and Practical Approaches

Ronald A. Oakham, O. CARM

Receiving baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church is not initiation. As validly baptized Christians, they have already been initiated into Jesus Christ. When we welcome them, we are welcoming brothers and sisters in Christ, whether they are fully catechized practicing members of their faith communities or those who have received little or no Christian formation. It is a situation that calls for ecumenical sensitivity and pastoral wisdom on the part of those who will accompany these candidates as they prepare for reception.

In this book, Ron Oakham grounds his proposal for the reception of baptized Christians in the Church's *Decree on Ecumenism* and the text of the *Rite of Reception into the Full Communion of Catholic Church*. Using the practices of experienced parish ministers around the country, he describes a path for the preparation of both catechized and uncatechized candidates grounded in their baptism. Finally, he discusses the celebration of the Rite of Reception and mystagogical reflection.



Sample pages →

What people are saying . . .

This wonderful pastoral resource should be on the bookshelf of every cleric and any member of a parish initiation or reception team. Fr. Ron reminds us all of the important distinctions between catechumens, baptized and uncatechized Catholics, and baptized Christians seeking the full communion of the Catholic Church. Most importantly, he challenges us, through personal stories from initiation teams around the country, to foster a greater respect for the baptism of fellow Christians while focusing on the Eucharist as the pinnacle sacramental celebration.

—Christopher J. Ferraro,
Director of Music, Our Lady of Perpetual Help
Church, Lindenhurst, NY

This book provides real-life examples of people seeking to become Catholic, how to discern their needs, to best fit the rites to their situation and to help them come to full communion “with no greater burden than necessary” (RCIA, 473). It is a valuable resource for every RCIA director.

—Catherine Crino,
Director of Religious Education, St. Emily Parish,
Mount Prospect, IL

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Chapter 3

The Formation of Catechized Christians

The baptized Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic church. The candidate should learn to deepen an inner adherence to the church, where he or she will find the fullness of his or her baptism. (#477 US; 391 Can.)

In the early church, the sacrament of penance was regarded as a “second baptism.” St. Ambrose remarked that the church “possesses both water and tears: the water of baptism, the tears of penance.” In the case of the baptized who have completed a period of formation and are ready to complete their initiation, the sacrament of penance may occupy a place similar to the sacrament of baptism for the elect. (#528 Can. only)

Anyone working with parish initiation ministry has heard objections to the length of the catechumenate process. Some of the complaints are embedded, no doubt, in our society’s “immediate gratification” syndrome. We prefer instant responses, fast service, quick resolutions, and immediate attention in all facets of life. Thus, when people encounter a process that will take time, frustration ensues not only among those seeking initiation but also among Church ministers. However, to shape an important formation experience around these expectations of immediacy would be a disservice to both the individuals and our community.



Many of these objections are reasonable, however. Some of those who come seeking reception into the Church may have a background of catechetical formation that deserves a pastoral response different from the full catechumenate process. For example, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults does not envision that a Catholic's spouse who has been participating in the life of the parish for the past twenty-three years by attending church every Sunday, being involved in preparations for their children's celebration of the sacraments, contributing to the communal and apostolic dimensions of the parish's life, and generally participating in the Church's life, should be required to take part in an extended process of formation. The order of initiation also does not anticipate, however, that this person's reception would be celebrated in a way that is individual and quasi-private. In fact, the order expects that appropriate attention will be given to the elements of the initiation process outlined in part I of the ritual text, "Christian Initiation of Adults."

Much of the resistance to implementing the order of Christian initiation of adults comes from an authentic concern for the baptized, catechized Christian who comes seeking reception into the Church. As well meaning as this may be, in my experience, most parishes find that catechized Christians are the exception among baptized persons who come to us. More often than not, they are uncatechized. In addition, my observation is that people who have this concern tend not to implement the full vision of the rite with the unbaptized either. In my case study, I listened for stories of parishes that were implementing the vision more completely while being sensitive to the baptismal status of candidates.

Pastoral Responses

Kathy shared stories about several baptized candidates. Marty, along with his wife, Melanie, joined in the ongoing catechumenate sessions for a brief period but at the same time was meeting with his sponsor. Steve, a former minister, was given some materials to read regarding reconciliation and then met with the pastor, the catechumenate director, and his sponsor for discussion and sharing concerning this sacrament. David, along with his wife, was guided through his preparation by a married couple who worked in Marriage Encounter. Together, as a way of discovering how God was present in David's life, they explored the Church's understanding of matrimony and how this understanding is



Chapter 5

Preparing for Celebrating a New Union with the Catechized Christian

N., of your own free will you have asked to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. You have made your decision after careful thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I now invite you to come forward with your sponsor and in the presence of this community to profess the Catholic faith. In this faith you will be one with us for the first time at the eucharistic table of the Lord Jesus, the sign of the Church's unity. (#490 US; 403 Can.)

For both the uncatechized and the catechized Christian, formation is intended to prepare them for the Rite of Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church. The context within which it is celebrated may vary according to the situations of the persons with whom it is celebrated. With a catechized Christian, the rite is ordinarily celebrated on a solemnity or a Sunday; with the uncatechized Christian it may be celebrated on a solemnity or a Sunday or, for pastoral reasons, at the Easter Vigil, being sure to avoid “anything that would equate them with catechumens” (#565 US; 421 Can.). The order also allows, for good pastoral reasons, the completion of the initiation of uncatechized Catholics at the Easter Vigil with the celebration of Confirmation¹ and Eucharist (#409 US; 385 Can.). The Rite of Reception is not celebrated with a baptized Catholic; such a person is already within the full



communion of the Catholic Church. In all instances, the order presumes there is a period of spiritual preparation.

Spiritual Preparation Prior to Reception

How long is the period of spiritual preparation? What happens during this final period? For the catechized Christian, there is no prescribed length of time for this period. A period of three to six weeks might be sufficient, depending on the individuals involved and what has preceded it. If a period of pastoral formation has been a part of the process, a shorter period would probably suffice. If the candidates are entering directly into this preparation period, a longer time frame may be needed. In either situation, the time set aside for this preparation must be enough to allow the dynamics of the period to unfold.

What happens during this time should be inspired by the vision set forth in the full catechumenal process. With this inspiration, this final period of preparation would be developed with a penitential character. It would be appropriate to use the baptismal promises as the basis for the reflections and penitential services. Examples of such can be found in appendix II of the *Rite of Penance*. Penitential services are designed as preparation for a celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance is a recommended part of the final preparation for celebrating reception (#482, US; #395 Can.). This recommendation builds upon the Church's recognition that the sacramental way we renew our Baptism is in the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. This period of preparation is an excellent opportunity to plan a weekend away or an extended period on a Saturday or Sunday for a retreat. At Sunday Masses, blessings can be prayed over these candidates, either at the time of dismissal or at the end of Mass if they are not dismissed. The prayers for strength in the Canadian text provide a good sample of such a blessing (#491 Can.).

The Dismissal

In chapter 3, it was mentioned that developing a dismissal specifically for the baptized candidate during their final period of preparation may be appropriate. This would be an adaptation not found in the US edition of the RCIA, although, as already noted, the Canadian edition permits



Chapter 7

Unfolding the Mysteries

These adults will complete their Christian formation and become fully integrated into the community by going through the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy (#410 US; #386 Can.).

The Period of Mystagogy, during which the mysteries—an early Church term for the sacraments—are unfolded, has proven to be one of the more elusive areas of implementation in the catechumenate. Knowing this, I expected to find that mystagogy is even less successfully implemented with the reception of baptized Christians. My expectations were met. Of all the directors I interviewed, only the three mentioned in this chapter indicated anything was happening.

Pastoral Responses

Chuck's team met with the newly received for about four weeks after reception. During these sessions, they explored the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. They didn't meet again after this.

Jerry's team also met for four weeks after the celebration of reception. They also used this time to unfold the experience of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. Following these weeks, they continued to gather monthly. At the end of the following Easter season, the group that had been meeting monthly welcomed the neophytes into the ongoing, monthly group after the neophytes had finished their own weekly mystagogical meetings.

Marydith's team didn't gather with the newly received the week immediately after the celebration, but began a series of weekly meetings



high regard and expressed an understanding of it as a sacred time in the life of the Church.

Reflections on the Pastoral Responses

At the conclusion of chapter 4, I suggested that we think mystagogically when we consider the formation of the baptized Christian. If the catechumenate team approaches the pastoral formation of catechumens and candidates in this way, they will be setting a firm foundation for a fruitful period of mystagogy.¹ But what does thinking mystagogically mean?

Two resources have helped me to understand what is meant by thinking mystagogically: the mystagogical homilies of Cyril of Jerusalem (a Father of the Church during the first half of the fourth century)² and the principles of adult learning developed by Leon McKensie and Malcolm Knowles.³ Cyril's homilies demonstrate the dynamic of taking one's experience of the initiation rites and bringing it into dialogue with stories from the Scriptures in order to interpret—theologize about—what has happened. McKensie's and Knowles' principles of adult learning present adults as active and involved learners who do not need all the answers given to them but who can, with appropriate and sufficient information, draw the necessary conclusions themselves.

Blending these two elements together can create a mystagogical approach appropriate for contemporary adult catechesis. If catechists focus on working with the candidates to relate their own life stories to the stories in Sacred Scripture and the Church's tradition in order to draw out Catholic theology, rather than focus on presenting disembodied theological treatises, then candidates will be formed in mystagogical thinking. As a result, when they experience something new, such as the sacraments, they will naturally want to explore the new meanings the experience presents. From their experiences during formation, they will know that there is always some new understanding to be had rather than believe that they have learned all there is to know.

This is what Marydith reported had happened within her group. The catechumenate team had been working very hard to reform their catechetical style from a child-centered approach (pedagogy) to an adult-centered approach (andragogy). They had noticed that the more they relied on adult learning principles as a guide for developing their catechetical sessions, the more success they had with the Period of Mystagogy.



Training and Events Calendar

For the most updated calendar of events,
visit <https://catechumeneon.org/events>.

Living the Sunday Word

Reflection on the Sunday Readings

Join us on Thursday evenings for an enriching and enlivening encounter with God's Word. By sharing their prayerful reflections, our team of pastoral ministers will accompany this intentional community in its meditation on and prayer with the Sunday readings. Each participant will have the opportunity to share his or her reflection on the Sunday readings. This gathering promises to awaken participants to hearing God's Word afresh each Sunday.

\$25 for the Season of Lent (6 sessions)

\$30 for the Season of Easter (7 sessions)

\$50 for Lent and Easter

www.ltp.org/products/details/VWSW20P2

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take place from 1:00 PM–2:00 PM ET.**

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visit <https://catechumeneon.org/events>.

February 25, 2021

Exploring the Directory for Catechesis
for Initiation Ministers

March 11, 2021

Annulments and Pastoral Care

March 25, 2021

Best Practices for Beginning
a Year-Round Initiation Process

Virtual Workshops™

Diocesan and Parish Events

Contact us at training@LTP.org if you
would like to host an online workshop
for the members of your diocese or parish.

In-Person Training

Diocesan Events

In-person events have been postponed
until further notice. Contact Michael Ruzicki
at training@LTP.org if you are interested
in hosting a workshop institute after the
pandemic.

In-Person Training Opportunities

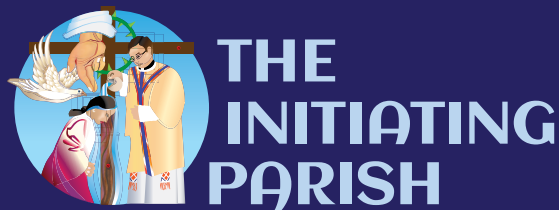
With *Catechumeneon*, LTP offers assistance to parishes and dioceses as they seek to train and form ministers around Christian initiation. We invite you to consider hosting one of our training events to help your catechumenal ministers and parish leaders deepen their understanding and vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

These pages provide an overview of the in-person and virtual training that you can host in your parish, diocese, or region.

For more information, contact us at training@ltp.org or call 773-579-4900, ext. 3536.

Formation Days

Invite LTP and our team of presenters into your diocese for an annual convocation focusing on Christian initiation. The RCIA presents a vision of parish that welcomes, accepts, forms, and challenges disciples to deepen their faith. This is not only achieved through catechesis and the liturgy but also with the whole community engaging in apostolic works of ministry.



Handing On What We Have Received

This Ministry Enrichment Gathering® will work with active initiation ministers and other parish leaders to explore the importance of the parish community in the initial and continuing formation of Christians, inspire all of its members by the spirit of baptismal catechumenate (RCIA, 75), and celebrate its liturgical rites with joy.

Envisioned to take place on a Saturday (9AM–3PM), a parish or diocese can host this gathering and invite others to deepen their appreciation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

For more information, visit www.MinistryEnrichmentGathering.org

1-Day Workshops

Whether you are interested in a basic overview or a detailed explanation of specific topics, work with us to sponsor a one-day RCIA workshop. Workshops can be presented in English and/or Spanish.

Topics include:

- The Principles of Initiation Ministry
- An Overview of the RCIA: The Steps and Periods
- RCIA and Baptized Candidates
- The Vision of the RCIA Adapted for Children
- Implementing and Sustaining the Year-Round Catechumenate
- Diocesan Workshop for Deacons
- Diocesan Workshop for Priests
- Other intermediate and advanced topics available upon request

2-Day Institutes

The two-day institutes are intensive training events with five presentations each day. These institutes are foundational in nature and are designed for those who have limited experience or training in the RCIA. Experienced ministers are always welcome to join, share their knowledge and experience, and serve as mentors to others in ministry.

Topics include:

- The Principles of Initiation Ministry
- An Overview of the RCIA
- Collaborate with LTP to create customized institute topics

3-Day Retreats

The RCIA is a spiritual journey for both the catechumens and the parish community. It is an extended time of prayer and formation during which the unbaptized candidates are apprenticed in faith to the baptized faithful. Conducted in a retreat-like manner, this training event will offer participants an experiential understanding of the RCIA as they walk through its periods and rites. Together they will participate in catechesis, ritual celebration, and apostolic witness adapted from the vision of the RCIA.

Virtual Training Opportunities



Virtual Workshops™

Virtual Workshops™ offer engaging and professional training and formation for liturgical ministers, catechists, and parish staffs. Participants gather virtually for 90 minutes of training, dialogue, and reflection. All Virtual Workshops™ utilize several multimedia components at once, including live video, short films, presentation slides, chat boxes, handouts/downloads, discussion boards, and polls.

LTP offers the opportunity for your parish, diocese, or region to contract a closed session of any of our Virtual Workshops™.

Participation models include:

- Individual participation from home computer or mobile device
- Group participation with several people gathered from a parish meeting room or select satellite sites around the diocese
- Hybrid model that blends both of these options

Topics include:

- An Introduction to the RCIA: Exploring the Process and the Vision
- Developing Your Parish's Initiation Ministry Team
- The Vision of the RCIA Adapted for Children
- Preparing the Liturgies of the RCIA
- Involving the Parish Community in the RCIA
- Effective Catechesis in the RCIA: Forming Disciples through Adult Learning Methods

For more information on any of these offerings, visit www.Catechumeneon.org

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Virtual Formation Retreats

These virtual gatherings will provide spiritual and practical formation while helping participants deepen their understanding of their ministry. Envisioned to be held on a Saturday morning, a diocese or clusters of parishes may bring participants together in various host sites. For those who are unable to attend in person because of distance or other circumstances, they can attend virtually from their home computer or mobile device.

Retreats for:

- Sponsors and Godparents
- Parish Leaders

Virtual Workshops™ for Clergy

In collaboration with the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC), LTP has developed a series of Virtual Workshops™ specifically designed for the ongoing formation of priests.

Choose from a list of workshops or create one that works for your diocese. You determine the date and time, and LTP will provide the technical assistance and promotional material needed to make your virtual training experience a success.

Virtual Workshops™ for Priests include:

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- The Priest as Shepherd of Christian Initiation
- Revitalizing Your Parish's Initiation Ministry Team
- Preparing and Presiding: The Rites of Christian Initiation
- Pastoral Counseling and Discernment in the RCIA
- Marriage, Annulments, and Other Canonical Issues in the RCIA Process