

# THE VISION OF INITIATION

## CONTAINED IN THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

### SECTION A: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The paschal mystery of Christ is at the heart of the initiation journey. The sacraments of initiation draw us into the mystery, through death to new life, incorporating us into Christ as members of his body, bringing us to his full stature, and enabling us for mission (***Christian Initiation: General Introduction 1, 2, RCIA 8***).
2. The call of God seeks to move individuals to seek initiation. Individuals respond to that call for many reasons and at apparently random times. Neither God nor the individual follows an arbitrary schedule, especially not the school year (***RCIA 1, 18.1, 36, 37, 44 and 76***).
3. Initiation is the primary mission of the Church. Initiation ministry is as integral to Christian identity as is participation in the Sunday eucharist (***Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum concilium, 2***).
4. Every parishioner has a role to play in bringing others to life centred at the table of the Lord. Parishes have a responsibility to form members for their role in initiation: as witnesses to the faith in their world, as catechists, sponsors, ministers of breaking open the word, role models, and as witnesses and active, conscious participants in the rites themselves. Rather than “warning” parishioners of the impending celebration of a rite, parishes must work to invite, enable and encourage the assembly’s full, conscious and active participants in each rite (***RCIA 9***).
5. The sequence of sacraments of initiation is: baptism, confirmation, eucharist. (***Canon 842.2, Christian Initiation: General Introduction 2, RCIA 198, 281.***)
6. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is primarily for the unbaptized. The pattern outlined in Part I must be fully understood by those who use Part II, Chapters 1- 4 and Appendix 3, which by definition consist of approved adaptations for particular circumstances (***RCIA pg. vi-vii***). Part II, Chapter 5 is not an adaptation and is addressed in Section D below.
7. The progress of individuals through the periods and rites is gradual and is guided by ongoing discernment by the individual under the guidance of initiation ministers. Factors in discernment include among other things: growth in faith; a deepening relationship with God in Christ; self-examination and repentance; a desire for participation in the liturgical life of the parish and in the parish community; and a desire to live an apostolic life (***RCIA 1, 36, 37, 38, 42, 43, 106, and 107***).
8. The individual’s spiritual journey before asking for the initiation sacraments must be explored at the outset of the process and respected during the catechumenate or period of formation. It is possible that for some individuals much of the preparatory formation work might already have taken place (***RCIA 43***).

9. The Church's ministry is to individuals. Although some needs can be met in group activities, no single program will meet the needs of all (**RCIA 76**).
10. The Sunday eucharist is the primary source and starting point of all formation for Christian life. Except where specified in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, sacraments and other rites are celebrated during the regular Sunday parish liturgy.
11. The entire parish community shares in the work of initiation:
  - showing hospitality, care and concern in their interactions with the candidates and in their prayers for them;
  - setting an example of full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy;
  - setting an example of life in the community of believers;
  - witnessing to faith in the Triune God in their daily lives;
  - and setting an example of apostolic care and work for and in the world.

**(RCIA 9)**

At the same time the public celebration of the rites has its own impact on the community, calling it and strengthening it to be a sign of God's love and will for all humanity.

## **SECTION B: THE UNBAPTIZED**

1. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* establishes the pattern and norms for unbaptized people who have reached the age of reason — understood as having reached or passed the seventh year of life — who are seeking initiation (baptism, confirmation, eucharist). Since the goal of the initiation process is life at the eucharistic table, full initiation (baptism, confirmation, eucharist) is normative for anyone who has reached the age of reason (**RCIA 1, 242**).
2. All the rites outlined in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* are integral to the initiation process. None are to be omitted except in particular circumstances as outlined in Part II Chapters 2 and 3.
3. The “Period of the Evangelization and Precatechumenate” and the “Period of the Catechumenate” can begin at any time throughout the year and are of no fixed length. Their duration depends on God's grace and the spiritual journey of the individual (**RCIA 5, 76**).
4. In light of the broad scope of a balanced formation for Christian life (see Part 3 below), the sponsor who accompanies a catechumen should come from the initiating parish. Catechumens are free to choose an additional person to walk with them on the journey, especially if this person will eventually become the godparent, but this person should not replace the parish sponsor (**RCIA 10, 75.2, 108**).
5. The ministry of the sponsor begins with the “Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.” The ministry of the godparent begins with the “Rite of Election or

Enrolment of Names.” The sponsor and godparent may be, but are not necessarily, the same person (**RCIA 10, 80**).

6. The “Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens” is celebrated by the parish at several points during the year, whenever individuals are ready. The rite is not confined to certain liturgical feasts or seasons (**corollary to RCIA 18, 76**).
7. Once they have celebrated the “Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens” the catechumens are kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the eucharist whenever they are present.
8. The weekly Sunday dismissal for breaking open the word of God is vitally important, never optional. Parishes should make it known that visiting catechumens, whenever they are present, are welcome to join the parish group (**RCIA 75.3**).
9. Catechumens, including children who are of catechetical age, celebrate the “Rite of Election” and all of the rites of the “Period of Purification and Enlightenment.” It is appropriate for all elect, both children and adults, to celebrate the rites together. Language may be adapted according to the age and culture of the elect.
10. The “Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names” is celebrated only with the unbaptized.
11. The “Period of Purification and Enlightenment” and the “Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy” are defined by the liturgical year, specifically Lent and the Easter Season respectively (**RCIA 125 and 237**).

## **SECTION C:**

### **THE PERIODS - APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

1. In the initiation journey, evangelization has the character of storytelling. The life experience of the inquirer is brought into dialogue with the gospel to illuminate the presence and action of God (**RCIA 36**).
2. At the same time this precatechumenate period is a time for inquirers to raise awareness of and seek answers to questions about the Catholic faith and the Church as well as questions of how the Catholic faith relates to deep life issues.
3. Formation in the period of the catechumenate has the character of an apprenticeship in the whole of Christian life. It necessarily includes hands-on experiences, training, and practice leading to the development and integration of the attitudes, habits and life-style of a faithful disciple (**Decree *Ad Gentes*, On the Mission Activity of the Church 14, RCIA 75, 76**).
4. A balanced catechesis has a four-fold character:
  - a. gradual integration of the habits and way of life of Christian faith lived within the community of disciples;
  - b. preparation for, participation in, and reflection on liturgical rites and celebrations especially the parish Sunday liturgy;

- c. sharing in the apostolic work of the parish and/or diocese in accordance with personal gifts;
  - d. teachings leading not only to an acquaintance with the Church's doctrines and precepts, but beyond these to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation **(RCIA 75, 76, 78)**.
5. Doctrinal teaching is most effective when it arises from and leads back to lived experiences in liturgy, parish life and daily personal life **(RCIA 78)**.
  6. Suitable catechesis aims deeper than the acquisition of faith and a knowledge of the teachings and doctrines of the church. It encompasses all that it means to be and live as a disciple of Christ. Doctrines and teachings are presented in order to deepen the relationship with the person of Jesus and the longing to enter into his paschal mystery, i.e. the mystery of salvation. The most fitting context for this is offered Sunday after Sunday in the liturgical year, when the local Church gathers to celebrate word and sacrament **(RCIA 75, 76, 78)**.
  7. Catechesis is suspended during the "Period of Purification and Enlightenment," in favour of spiritual reflection and self-examination as the elect prepare for and reflect on the Sunday gospels and the experience of the Scutinies. None of the elect need be denied full participation in this period and its rites due to age. **(RCIA 125, 126)**.
  8. The process of catechumenal formation is shaped by the flow of the liturgical year. The phrase "accommodated to the liturgical year," from RCIA 75.1, does not mean "made to fit – or squeezed – into a single liturgical year." Rather, it means that formation is shaped by the flow of the year and the unfolding of the paschal mystery which it explores. In most cases the experience of at least one full liturgical year is foundational to formation for initiation **(RCIA 75, 76)**.
  9. Mystagogy or postbaptismal catechesis aims to deepen the grasp of the paschal mystery and integrate more and more it into the heart and daily life of the disciple **(RCIA 234, 306)**.
  10. A balanced mystagogy or postbaptismal catechesis has a three-fold character:
    - a. full, conscious and active participation in the Sunday liturgy
    - b. meditation and reflection on the gospels of the Year A Easter season, as well as on the experience of the rites and the whole Sunday liturgy;
    - c. work with others in Christian outreach **(RCIA 234–236, 306)**.
  11. All postbaptismal catechesis is inspired by the baptismal catechumenate. By definition, postbaptismal catechesis permeates the whole of Christian life and is, in fact, lifelong **(RCIA 234, 236, 306)**.

## **SECTION D: BAPTIZED CATHOLICS AND OTHER VALIDLY BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS**

1. From the outset, the status of baptized candidates must be made clear to all concerned and their membership in the body of Christ affirmed as a present reality. Catholic candidates should never be spoken of as “preparing to be received.” In a mixed group (unbaptized and baptized, Catholic and not) the common goal is life at the table; the starting points and paths are different **(RCIA 456, 466)**.
2. The rites of Part I of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* are never to be celebrated with baptized individuals **(RCIA 457)**.
3. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* Part II Chapter 4 together with Appendix 3 outlines a pattern for the completion of initiation (the celebration of confirmation and/or eucharist) of baptized Catholics who have reached the age of reason — understood as having reached or passed the seventh year of life — and who have little or no catechetical formation **(RCIA 242 and 376)**.
4. Baptized Catholics completing their initiation are already in full communion with the Catholic Church and do not celebrate the “Rite of Reception” **(RCIA 465, 466)**.
5. The rites outlined in Appendix 3 (Other Rites for Use in Canada) are never celebrated in combination with those of Part I **(RCIA 466, 497)**.
6. The *Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church* originated earlier than and separately from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The provisions in this rite apply to all individuals validly baptized in a separated ecclesial community. It is included in the Canadian edition of the ritual book for pastoral convenience. The pastoral notes which precede the liturgical rite must be taken seriously by those working with candidates for reception.
7. The *Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church* may be celebrated at any suitable time throughout the year as soon as the candidate is ready. For catechized candidates, there is no reason to delay reception for the Easter Vigil or the Easter season **(RCIA 242 and 376)**.
8. Baptized Catholics who have little or no catechetical formation will require a process of formation similar in shape to that mentioned in Part 3 above, depending on needs of individual candidates. The rites and periods of Appendix 3 may be part of this formation process if these are judged to be pastorally appropriate. These people are referred to as candidates **(RCIA 456, 459, 461)**.
9. Individuals baptized in a separated ecclesial community who have little or no catechetical formation will require a process of formation similar in shape to that of baptized Catholics, as long as “no greater burden than necessary” is imposed. The rites and periods of Appendix 3 may be part of this formation process. These people are referred to as candidates. **(RCIA 387, 391, 456, 459, 461)**.

10. The “Rite of Welcoming Candidates for Confirmation and Eucharist” is celebrated by the parish as needed during the year whenever required by individuals. It is not confined to certain liturgical feasts or seasons **(RCIA 461)**.
11. The “Period of Christian Formation” can begin at any time and is of no fixed length. Its content and duration depends of God’s grace and the spiritual journey of the individual. Christian formation based on the pattern of RCIA 75 is required to the extent that it is found lacking in individual candidates **(RCIA 461)**.
12. The weekly breaking open the word of God is vitally important for uncatechized individuals. If they cannot join the catechumens when they are dismissed from the Sunday liturgy, another opportunity for this reflection should be provided **(RCIA 485)**.
13. The “Call to Lenten Renewal,” when deemed appropriate for the candidate, takes place near the beginning of Lent, but not on Ash Wednesday and never in combination with the “Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names” **(RCIA 496)**.
14. It is appropriate to offer preparation for and an opportunity for celebration of the sacrament of penance before the celebration of the initiation sacraments **(RCIA 528)**.
15. Baptized Catholics complete their initiation with the celebration of confirmation and eucharist at the Easter Vigil **(RCIA 458)**.
16. When scheduling the celebration of reception, pastoral judgement will be required in judging between paragraphs 387, 458 and 461.
17. Postbaptismal, mystagogical catechesis may also be offered to candidates immediately following the celebration of the sacraments.