

Catechumenal Ministry – RCIA
The Period of the Catechumenate in the Conversion Process

The process of conversion within the RCIA as with other catechetical settings takes place through four periods with three aspects pertaining to each period:

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| 1. Evangelization & Precatechumenate | } liturgical, catechetical, pastoral |
| 2. Catechumenate | } liturgical, catechetical, pastoral |
| 3. Purification & Enlightenment | } liturgical, catechetical, pastoral |
| 4. Mystagogy | } liturgical, catechetical, pastoral |

The Second Period, called the Catechumenate, is the longest and most catechetical of all the periods. It is characterized by handing on the *Deposit of Faith*, found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, together with a sense of mystery of the Church that comes with a deeper understanding through participation in Celebrations of the Word.

2nd Period – Catechumenate

Through the Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming, those seeking full initiation (inquirers) are now called **catechumens** (unbaptized) and **candidates** (baptized). This change in name signifies a change in relationship to Christ and His Church. Through this rite candidates and catechumens:

- Publicly declare their intent to be Catholic
- Receive graces needed for the continuation of their journey of faith.
- Enter a formal (although not complete) relationship with the Church, in anticipation of the Easter Vigil when they will fully enter the Church and receive the sacraments.

The Three Aspects of the Catechumenate:

Liturgical Aspect:

- “The Church...helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God’s blessing.” (RCIA n. 75.3)
- Following the Liturgy of the Word and the General Intercessions at Mass, Catechumens are dismissed for reflection on the readings and homily (also called *Breaking Open the Word*). Candidates are encouraged to also join the catechumens at this time. *Breaking Open the Word* is facilitated by a priest and/or RCIA catechist. (RCIA n. 75.3, 81-89)
- A good understanding of the Lord’s Day and a basic Catholic understanding of the Mass is explained during this period. (e.g. tabernacle, altar, elements of the Mass, and prayers and gestures during Mass – e.g. genuflecting.)

Catechetical Aspect:

- Catechesis during this period should extend for at least one year for catechumens (unbaptized).
- The content of catechesis in this period is the *Deposit of Faith*. This includes a gradual and complete coverage of all the doctrines of the Faith, accommodated to the liturgical seasons of the Church, and supported by weekly Celebrations of the Word.

This includes sessions which begin with a *Liturgy of the Word*; and *Breaking Open the Word* which takes place on Sundays after the Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming.

The *Deposit of Faith* should therefore include teachings on:

- the Church, Mary, the Last Things – the Creed
- the concept of sacraments, grace & the seven sacraments – the Sacraments
- sin, virtue, vice, theological virtues – the Moral Life
- deeper growth in prayer & increased prayer time – Christian Prayer

The *Deposit of Faith* adds more substance to the basics of the *Gospel* message received in the Period of the Precatechumenate. Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church is normative, especially at this point in the RCIA process.

- Hence, catechesis in this period needs to be, by necessity, comprehensive in both doctrine and moral life. (RCIA Ap. III, n.7)

Catholic teaching during the Period of the Catechumenate should:

- enlighten faith; direct the heart toward God; foster participation in the liturgy;
- inspire apostolic activity & nurture a life that is truly in accord with Christ.

(See RCIA n.78)

Pastoral Aspect:

- In the pastoral dimension of this second period of conversion, the guidance of godparents, sponsors, and the entire parish community is important as a witness to the Christian way of life. (RCIA 75.2) By their example, candidates and catechumens should be led to:
 - Turn more readily to God in Prayer
 - Bear witness to the Faith
 - Keep their hopes set on Christ
 - Begin to recognize and follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds
 - Practice love of neighbor
 - Stronger faith and conversion (RCIA n. 75.2)
- Because the Church is both a mother and a teacher to the catechumens and candidates, personal care must be taken to both know and cherish each individual that comes to the Church. With this in mind, personal pastoral care will include:
 - Freedom from selfishness & love of neighbor.
 - Growth in charity and constancy in prayer
 - Being living examples of the Gospel (RCIA, n. 543)
- Lastly, those coming to the fullness of truth must, “learn 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.” (RCIA n. 75.4)

As is evident from the above, the further one proceeds on the road to conversion, the more intense becomes the journey. It is for this reason precisely that the Rites are celebrated as gateways and sources of grace for the ‘pilgrims of faith.’ This period is in preparation for the Rite of Election.

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