

The Catechumenal Ministry

The aim of the Catechumenal Ministry, commonly called the RCIA process, is not to simply bring those seeking the truth to a knowledge of Christ. Rather, it is to bring those seeking Christ into an intimate union with Him. This ‘insertion’ into the life of Christ takes place through:

- Christian Community – (the Church Universal, and the parish in particular)
- Sacred Scripture – (the Word of God, “food for the soul..and font of spiritual life” CCC 131)
- Systematic Catechesis – (orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation of God CT 22)
- Liturgy – (every liturgical action is an encounter between Christ and the Church CCC 1097)

For whom specifically is the Catechumenal process directed toward?

- The Unbaptized Person - (i.e. non-Christian)
- The Baptized, Uncatechized Person - (i.e. Protestant; or Catholic who has not received further catechesis nor the sacraments of Confirmation & Eucharist – RCIA n. 400)
- The Baptized, Catechized Person who is Not Catholic – (i.e. Orthodox)

In addition, the Catechumenal Ministry as a whole is characterized by four periods with three aspects within each period:

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| 1. <u>Evangelization & Precatechumenate</u> | } <i>Liturgical, Catechetical, Pastoral</i> |
| 2. <u>Catechumenate</u> | } <i>Liturgical, Catechetical, Pastoral</i> |
| 3. <u>Purification & Enlightenment</u> | } <i>Liturgical, Catechetical, Pastoral</i> |
| 4. <u>Mystagogy</u> | } <i>Liturgical, Catechetical, Pastoral</i> |

1st Period – Evangelization & Precatechumenate

Liturgical Aspect:

During this period there are no liturgical rites because those inquiring into the Faith have not yet entered into a relationship with the Church. Inquirers enter into a formal relationship with the Church through the Rite of Acceptance and the Rite of Welcoming.

However “...pastors should help those taking part [in the *Precatechumenate*] with prayers suited to them (n. 40 RCIA text). Suggestions for this period:

- Explain and use the Sign of the Cross
- Introduce the proclamation of Scripture
- Pray the Psalms and other Scriptural prayers
- Offer a booklet of Basic Catholic Prayers and explain them
- Sing the hymns of the Church that help put words to the journey
- Explain the liturgical year, Sunday and feast days
- Begin simple, reflective, meditative prayer
- Explain and use grace before and after meals

Catechetical Aspect:

During the Precatechumenate, priests, deacons and laymen are to give the candidates a suitable explanation of the Gospel (n.38 RCIA text)

The Gospel is God's revelation of Himself and His love to mankind, together with His plan of salvation to the world. Hence the elements of the Gospel in the precatechumenate should be:

- Revelation: Who is God (Communion of Divine Persons) and what does He want
- Scripture: God's revelation of Himself and His Plan of salvation - communion with Him
- Our Sin Problem: The loss of God's life within us – separation from God
- Jesus: Salvation from sin through Jesus - re-union of God and humanity
- Salvation: Through the Paschal Mystery, our sins are forgiven and communion with God is possible
- The Church: Through the Church we receive the seven sacraments – God's Divine Life within us giving supernatural power to be faithful
- The Christian life: believing, hoping, trusting, loving

As a result, through the answering of questions, giving testimonies, and delivering of the Gospel, the seeds of conversion are planted – faith and initial conversion lead the person away from sin and toward the mystery of God's love. (n.37)

Pastoral Aspect:

At this point in the process, inquirers should receive assistance and support to purify their intentions, and clarify their desire to respond to God's grace (see RCIA, 38). Consequently the following signs will accompany conversion during the *Precatechumenate*:

- Evidence of initial faith manifested in repentance
- Interest in prayer life/further growth in prayer life
- Desire to study and learn what God has revealed
- An increasing sense of the Church (RCIA 42)

This is the time to connect inquirers to parishioners who could become friends. Sponsors should be chosen with care as well as providing them with training to be companions on the journey. Prayer intercession for the individual inquirers should begin.

It is also essential to teach to the upcoming rites. The rites are gateways and sources of grace to strengthen and draw the inquirers to the next period in the conversion process. The first set of liturgical rites to be celebrated after the period of the *Precatechumenate* are the Rite of Acceptance for the unbaptized and the Rite of Welcoming for the baptized.

* “*The prerequisite for making this first [liturgical] step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates.*” (n. 42)

For additional information on Catechumenal Ministry, contact Peter Savva, the New Assistant Director of Catechesis and Evangelization for Catechumenal Ministry at 608-791-2657, or e-mail him at psavva@dioceseoflacrosse.com or Ann Lankford, alankford@dioceseoflacrosse.com.