

RCIA Team Training

The purpose and mission of the RCIA team?

Indispensable to a foundational RCIA process is the presence of a team that assists the priest in the coordination of each session. As has been noted in previous on-line RCIA articles, the team is comprised of a cross-section of the parish, called to serve primarily as the first Catholic community of those seeking to enter the Church. As a result, the specific purpose of the team is to be as it were ‘the Church in miniature,’ to those who have been called by Christ to a life of conversion and fullness of truth. In this capacity the team becomes an instrument of conversion called by the grace of Christ to lead others to a fullness of faith, and insertion into the very mysteries of Christ, communion with Him in the sacraments.

Who is part of the RCIA team?

The team should include – a priest/catechist, RCIA coordinator/catechist, and 10-12 other parishioners. Session duties would include hospitality – (refreshment/snack schedule); greeters – (nametags); librarian (book/tape check out); set-up/clean-up crew; distributors (collators) for handouts; assistants for retreats. Certain team members well formed in the Faith may also be called upon to be small group facilitators. These small group leaders need to understand the small group’s purpose and dynamics. Briefly, the small group’s purpose is to:

1. Discuss questions in a less threatening setting, formulate the questions they might have but don’t know and/or are afraid to ask, and discuss the need for daily prayer.
2. Lead them to ask the underlying question, “How should my life change as a result of this teaching?” This encourages the inquirers to integrate the teaching into their life..
3. Help the inquirers to commit to daily prayer, (including place & amount of time)

Most importantly however, the RCIA team is asked to make a commitment to pray for all those who seek to enter the Church, that God may grant them the graces necessary for conversion to Christ and His Church. Conversion, which by definition requires a change of life, can be a great struggle for those seeking to become Catholic. Sometimes it is even accompanied at a great price. As a result, the spiritual support and prayer of the team for all who come to the RCIA is indispensable. God’s grace and prayer strengthens the sojourner down the road of conversion.

What training should the RCIA team receive?

As suggested in previous articles (See www.dioceseoflacrosse.com), the RCIA team should plan to arrive a half hour earlier than the session begins. This is an opportunity for prayer, session preparation, and a 10-15 minute training. Training gives an opportunity for the coordinator to form and inform the group in both carrying out the RCIA process in the mind of the Church, and in tailoring the process to the needs of those seeking to be Catholic.

Common Topics for training include:

- a) Confidentiality – During each session, but increasingly as the process of conversion continues, many personal and delicate matters may be revealed. It is extremely important that the matters which are discussed during the RCIA session remain there. Every care must be taken to ensure that the team understands the level of confidentiality that is being entrusted to them. It is also essential to note that during the period of the Precatechumenate, the inquirer has yet to develop a

formal relationship with the Church. As a result, the team should not reveal the names of those in the process. This formal relationship with the Church happens when those seeking to enter the Church first publicly state their intention at the Rite of Acceptance/Rite of Welcoming.

- b) Understanding the RCIA process – It is imperative that the RCIA team fully understand their role, and the nature of the catechumenate (RCIA process). Hence, training may serve to further acquaint the team with the four periods, and the three aspects within each period (liturgical, catechetical, pastoral).
1. liturgical- preparation for upcoming rites
 2. catechetical – the teaching approach of this period
 3. pastoral – leading inquirers/candidates to a firm conviction of the Truth
- c) Small Groups- A major facet to each session, besides the teaching and refreshment times, is the small group period. Here application questions that pertain to the teaching are examined in small groups of 3-4 people. Usually it is in this smaller dynamic that the ‘seeds of conversion’ begin to surface, and the need for support from the ‘the Church in miniature,’ (i.e. the RCIA group) becomes increasingly important. In fact as the RCIA process continues the RCIA group takes on the character of a family, and the small groups encourage not only an integration of the teaching by the inquirer, but also a spiritual bonding with those on the RCIA team. The trials and difficulties that oftentimes surface in the smaller support group assists in introducing and/or cultivating a greater understanding of the Church (in both the small group and the RCIA group as a whole). In this setting pastoral guidance can take place, but sensitive issues should be conveyed to the priest to be dealt with on an individual basis.
- Furthermore, small groups are also instrumental in helping those seeking the truth, to identify and formulate questions which can then be answered by the priest or chief catechist. This assistance to help identify questions and to receive answers continues throughout the conversion process. It is however during the first period of the RCIA – the precatechumenate, that the Gospel is being explained, which requires frequent opportunities for question-answer periods.
- d) Philosophy/theology of Other Religions – This brief teaching on the philosophies/theologies of various faith backgrounds should also be discussed. Here the team learns what other faiths teach, so as to help the inquirers formulate their questions and be able to pray for the specific needs of those seeking the truth of Christ.
- e) Practical Considerations – Organization is always a common topic for discussion in any team – the RCIA team is no different. The details that pertain to the smooth running of a session should be discussed and coordinated well. This may for example, range from the organization of binders, to room layout, to planning good retreats prior to each rite. Good organization always leads to good coordination.

For any further questions contact:

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