

Making Connections with the Parish

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What is the role of the parish in the Rite of Christian Initiation and in particular with the Rite adapted for Children of Catechetical Age?

Paragraph 4 of the ritual text states that the whole RCIA process takes place within the community of the faithful. Paragraph 9 clearly states that the local Church is to support and show by their concern that they accept their responsibility for the initiation of adults and thereby also children of catechetical age. It further states that the faithful have the 'obligation' for evangelization and that they are to assist the candidates and catechumens throughout the whole process from the Precatechumenate (Inquiry) through Mystagogy. RCIA paragraph 75 states that the Church, like a mother, cares for those seeking Christ, and that the entire community provides an example of living the faith, inviting the catechumens into the Christian way of life.

These paragraphs are meant to indicate the important role that the community of the faithful – the local Church – has throughout the whole RCIA process. Many parishioners might assume that it is only the team that is involved in the process. This begs the question, “How can we get the entire parish community involved?”

Begin by reminding the RCIA team that a part of their role is to represent the community to the catechumens and candidates, and to also actively look for ways to foster and strengthen the connection between the catechumens and candidates and the community in return. The following are suggestions to help in doing so.

1. Encourage the community's involvement in the various rites that mark the journey of the catechumens

and candidates. For example, in celebrating the rites choose music that is both appropriate and a part of the parish repertoire.

2. Announce ahead of time the rite that will be celebrated, what it celebrates, and the importance of the community's presence at the celebration. Invite the community to be present and to also congratulate the catechumens and candidates following the liturgy. If you have multiple Masses on a weekend, rotate the celebration of the various rites to different Masses so that they are not limited to one particular Mass. In this way, more members of the community will have visual contact (and perhaps recognition) of who the catechumens and candidates are.

3. Have the names of the catechumens and candidates on cards. Beginning with the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance or Welcome, invite each household to take one or more cards and to pray for the catechumen or candidate whose name is on each card. Then, when the Rite of Election and/or Initiation or Reception into Full Communion happens, the household can give the catechumen or candidate a congratulatory card.

4. If the parish has members who are homebound and/or in nursing homes, these members could also be invited to choose a card with the name of a catechumen or candidate for whom they can pray. During Mystagogy, the newly received catechumens, candidates, and their families could then go to meet and visit their prayer companions in their respective homes. Such a visit could also be anticipated prior to their initiation and/or reception into full communion.

5. Invite the children in the RCIA process, their

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family members, and their sponsors/sponsor families to choose a Sunday Mass and at which they can periodically serve as the greeters – holding the door, handing out music books or worship aids, and welcoming people as they enter the church.

6. If possible, connect the children to the outreach activities that are held in conjunction with the religious education, school, and/or parish programs. These would include seasonal service projects such as: school supply collection; food pantry collection; Christmas gift collection and delivery of food; Lenten Rice Bowl collection; Easter basket preparation and delivery; and meal preparation for the local homeless shelter. From such joint ventures, the children would meet their peers and learn by example how the parish lives the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

7. If the parish has a social justice ministry, encourage the children and their families to become active in that ministry. This would help them learn Catholic Social Teaching principles and what it means to put one's faith into action.

to the faith by the love the followers of Jesus had for each other and for the widow and orphan. Look for ways to celebrate the parish's commitment to live the Gospel here and now and the catechumens and candidates will be well apprenticed into a Catholic way of life.

Since the initiation process is the responsibility of all the baptized of every age, make a list of all the activities that go on in the parish and/or neighborhood. Explore with the catechumens and candidates which ones they would like to experience. With the help of the sponsor or sponsor family, facilitate the experience for them. It is important to also take time after each experience to reflect on the experience, and to name the ways in which they observe and experience Catholics living out the Gospel.

The RCIA process helps the person – adult or child – to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and also to become incorporated into a communal way of living the Gospel. In the early Church, people were attracted