

CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE  
of  
BALLARAT



Diocesan Liturgical Commission

# **PARISH HANDBOOK FOR THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**

**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT**

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# INTRODUCTION

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My dear people,

I am very pleased to introduce this new edition of our Parish Handbook for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides for a personalised process of introduction to the faith and life of the Catholic community. It is particularly appropriate that we have a handbook for the local parish community, providing step by step guidance for this process.

This updated version draws on the experience of welcoming people into our Catholic community in parishes throughout our diocese in the years since the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was first published in Australia in 1987.

I hope that all the parishes in our diocese will find this handbook helpful in the wonderful task of nurturing the faith of those who seek to follow Christ as members of our Catholic community.

God bless you all.

Yours in Christ,

+ Paul Bird CSsR  
Bishop of Ballarat  
November, 2019

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Diocesan Liturgical Commission acknowledges with gratitude the co-operation of the Archdiocese of Perth, the late Archbishop Foley and the Perth Catechumenate Office, for their permission to use their RCIA guidelines as a model and source for this handbook.

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# POLICY & DIRECTIVES

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## DIOCESAN POLICY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

1. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as decreed by the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law is to be implemented in all parishes according to Diocesan directives.
2. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (EJ Dwyer, (Australia) Pty Ltd 1987) approved by the Australian Episcopal Liturgical Commission (1987) is approved for use in the Diocese of Ballarat.
3. The Diocese of Ballarat provides on-going formation and support for the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults through the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and the Diocesan RCIA Co-ordinator.
4. Participation in the Rite normally takes place in the local parish.

## DIOCESAN DIRECTIVES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)

1. The implementation of the RCIA in a parish is to be preceded by a study of the Rite and its periods and stages by those responsible for the process.
2. The period of the Precatechumenate is **essential** and sufficient time should be allowed for this period.
3. It is helpful if the Parish Priest can meet with each inquirer during the Precatechumenate. This would be an opportunity for the inquirer to provide the personal information referred to in Appendix 1.
4. The distinction between unbaptised (catechumens) and baptised (candidates) must be recognised at all times, especially in the liturgical rites.
5. **The Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate** marks the beginning of the Catechumenate period.
6. The period of the Catechumenate should be of sufficient time to allow for the gradual deepening of the catechumen's/candidate's relationship with God and her/his growth in the Christian life.
7. The "Dismissal" is included in the Sunday Liturgy whenever catechumens/candidates are present.
8. The **Rite of Election** is celebrated by the Bishop at the beginning of Lent. This is preceded by the **Rite of Enrolment of Names** in each parish.
9. The period of Purification and Enlightenment is a spiritual preparation for Easter.
10. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is incorporated at stages appropriate for baptised candidates.
11. The on-going pastoral care and integration of neophytes during and after the period of Mystagogia is a vital responsibility of the parish.
12. The principles embodied in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults apply also to the on-going growth of the People of God in general and those who have a particular involvement in the RCIA.

# THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

## PROCESS OF THE RCIA

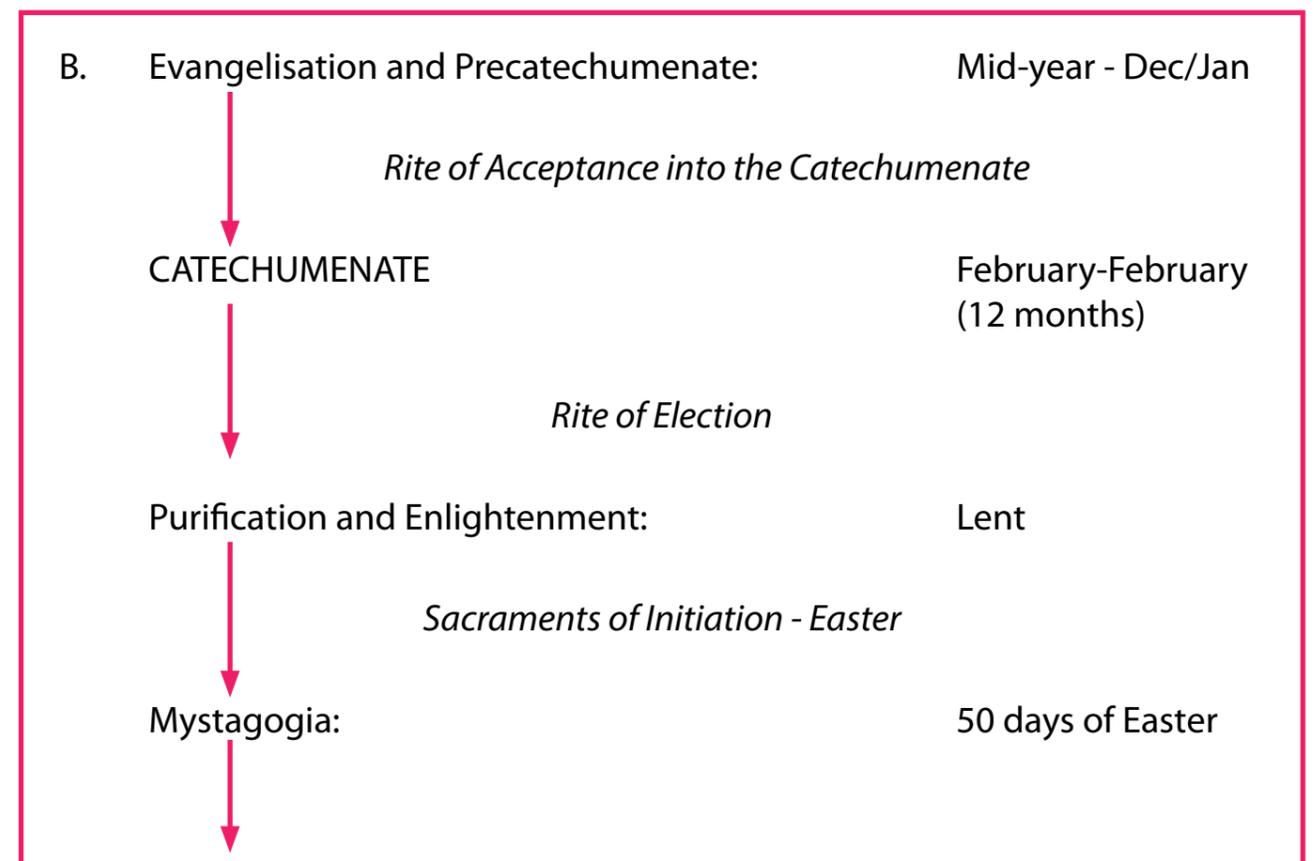
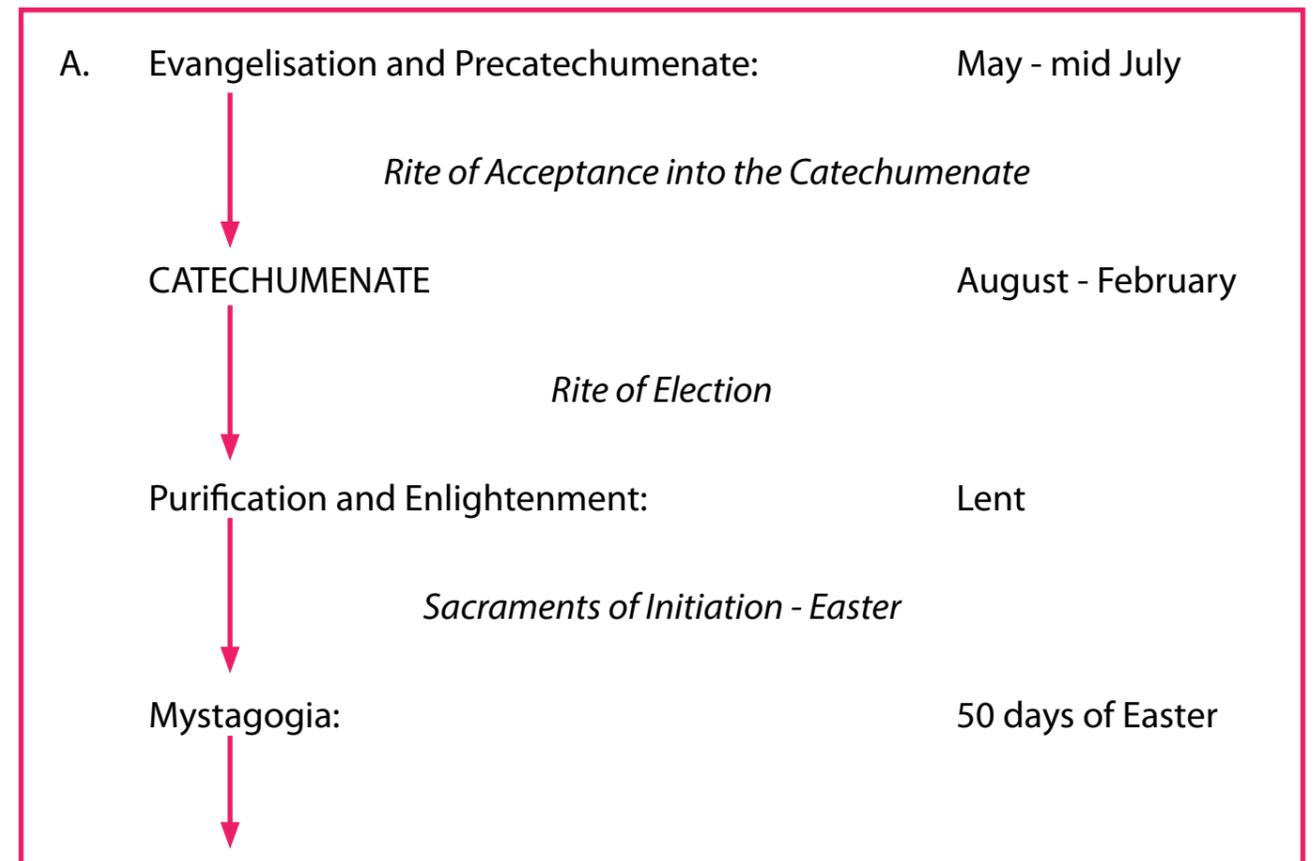
The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a process, through which people proceed towards faith in Jesus Christ as expressed by full membership in the Catholic Church. Before considering the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in its entirety, it is important to distinguish process from programme.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a **process** in that it focuses upon the person's growth in the Spirit, that is, **CONVERSION**. Conversion demands change and growth that is both personal and social and involves the whole person. The process therefore demands a flexibility to give the person time and room to grow and requires on-going evaluation throughout all stages of the process. The work of conversion proceeds at the pace of the Holy Spirit and the person, and respects the person's call to readiness for the next step on the journey. So the process relies more on discernment of and mutual reflection on the conversion that is taking place than it does on covering a given number of topics.

A **programme** revolves around external demands and timelines. It dictates when a person is ready to move to the next step. It tends to place emphasis on knowledge and move in a fixed structure for the imparting of this knowledge or particular experience. It also presumes that the Holy Spirit is working within its timeline.

It is important therefore not to emphasise particular dates and timelines for any part of the RCIA process. This would give the impression that the RCIA is an automatic pre-determined programme and prevent the flexibility called for by discernment of readiness and growth of those involved.

The Liturgical Year however, is integral to the RCIA process. This will influence the timeline followed by the parish for catechumens/candidates. Two possible approaches which take both the readiness of the catechumens/candidates and the Liturgical Year into account could be:



## GLOSSARY

<b>CANDIDATE</b>	A baptised person preparing for reception into full communion with the Church.
<b>CATECHESIS</b>	The instruction and spiritual formation of catechumens/candidates seeking full communion with the Church.
<b>CATECHIST</b>	One who leads in and contributes to the instruction and spiritual formation of catechumens/candidates.
<b>CATECHUMEN</b>	An unbaptised person formally admitted to the process of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation.
<b>CATECHUMENATE</b>	The second period of the initiation process.
<b>DISMISSAL</b>	The rite of sending the catechumens/candidates from the Sunday Assembly after the homily for a time of reflection on the Word.
<b>ELECT</b>	Catechumens who are chosen at the beginning of Lent to prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter.
<b>ENLIGHTENMENT</b>	The third period of the initiation process immediately prior to the Sacraments of initiation, ordinarily during Lent.
<b>EPHPHETHA</b>	The Rite in which the celebrant touches the ears and the mouth of the elect and prays that they may be open to hear and proclaim the Word of God in faith.
<b>EVANGELISATION</b>	The activity of the Church whereby a first proclamation of the Gospel is made to persons inquiring about the faith. Evangelisation can also refer to the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel in the life of the believer and the community.
<b>EXORCISM</b>	Prayers that the elect and candidates be delivered from the powers of evil and falsehood and be strengthened to live for the kingdom of God.
<b>GODPARENT</b>	The person selected by the elect, with the consent of the priest, to accompany her/him during the rites of initiation.

<b>INITIATION</b>	The entire process through which a person enters the Church culminating in the Sacraments of Initiation.
<b>INQUIRER</b>	One who seeks to learn about the faith of the Church.
<b>INQUIRY</b>	The first period of the initiation process, also called the Precatechumenate.
<b>LECTIONARY</b>	Book containing the scriptures which are read in the liturgy. The Sunday scripture readings are arranged in a three-year cycle.
<b>MYSTAGOGIA</b>	The fourth period of the initiation process, the time of post-baptised catechesis.
<b>NEOPHYTE</b>	Title given to the newly initiated during Eastertide.
<b>PRECATECHUMENATE</b>	The first period of the initiation process, also called the Inquiry.
<b>PURIFICATION</b>	See Enlightenment.
<b>RECEPTION INTO FULL COMMUNION</b>	The process by which a baptised Christian becomes a full member of the Catholic Church.
<b>RITE OF ELECTION</b>	Liturgy, celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent (or close to that day) at which the bishop ratifies the recommendations of the parish communities and solemnly chooses men and women for the Easter sacraments.
<b>SCRUTINIES</b>	Rites celebrated with the elect and candidates on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent.
<b>SPONSOR</b>	A member of the parish community who accompanies the catechumen/candidate through the periods of the initiation process.
<b>TRIDUUM</b>	The “three days” that begin the evening of Holy Thursday and conclude on Easter Sunday evening. The Triduum is a single celebration of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. The Initiation Sacraments take place at the height of the Triduum, the Easter Vigil.

## MINISTRIES OF THE RCIA

*...the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised... Hence, the entire community must help the candidates and catechumens throughout the process of initiation.*

*(Introduction to the RCIA #9)*

### PARISH COMMUNITY

The task of the parish community is:

- to **WITNESS** to faith in Jesus Christ;
- to **CELEBRATE** this faith through liturgy;
- to **WELCOME** and offer hospitality;
- to **ENABLE** the gifts of members of the parish community to be exercised for the building up of the Church.

### PARISH RCIA TEAM

The Parish RCIA Team represents and acts on behalf of the parish community. The task of the RCIA Team is:

- to implement and oversee the process of the Rite;
- to provide an atmosphere of hospitality and welcome for those interested in the Catholic faith;
- to develop a personal understanding and knowledge of the RCIA, its process and liturgies;
- to promote and enable parish participation in the ministries of the RCIA;
- to prepare and support those in specific ministries called for by the RCIA;
- to assist in the discernment of readiness of catechumens/candidates for each stage of the process;
- to provide a co-ordinator/contact person as a meeting convener and as a contact for diocesan matters and other parish groups.

### CATECHIST

Catechists are appointed by and represent the parish community to assist catechumens/candidates in the conversion process. Their task is:

- to lead catechumens/candidates in reflection upon the Scriptures of the Sundays of the Catechumenate period;
- to assist in faith instruction;
- to contribute to the discernment of readiness of catechumens/candidates;
- to be willing to reflect on and share their own faith experience.

### SPONSOR

Sponsors are drawn from the parish community and represent it with the catechumens/candidates. Their task is:

- to accompany catechumens/candidates on their journey of faith;
- to take on the role of friend, guide and contact with the parish community;
- to accompany the catechumens/candidates in the liturgies of the RCIA;
- to assist in the discernment of readiness of the catechumens/candidates;
- to share their own faith experience;
- to take the role of godparent if required.

### PRIEST

The role of the Priest in the RCIA process is:

- to animate, enable, contribute to the Parish RCIA Team;
- to provide LITURGICAL leadership in the celebration of the liturgical rites of the RCIA and the Sunday liturgies;
- to contribute to and ensure the SPIRITUAL development of those involved in the RCIA;
- to show PASTORAL concern for the life situations of the catechumens/candidates;
- to provide CATECHETICAL formation through the Sunday homily and provision of appropriate input of Church teaching and tradition;

- to initiate and ensure the discernment of readiness of the catechumens/candidates.

### **BISHOP**

The Bishop is the leader of the liturgical life of the Church, the focal point of the unity of the Christian community. It is the Bishop who ensures the availability of the process of the RCIA for those seeking Christian initiation.

He has the responsibility for those seeking Baptism and this is celebrated through the Rite of Election in the Cathedral Church of the Diocese, where the Bishop calls catechumens and candidates to the Easter sacraments.

# **PERIOD OF PRECATECHUMENATE**

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## **THE PERIOD OF EVANGELISATION AND PRECATECHUMENATE**

*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has  
been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.*

*(1 Cor 3:11 NRSV)*

Period One of the RCIA is called the THE PERIOD OF EVANGELISATION AND PRECATECHUMENATE. It is a time when inquirers are welcomed by the Catholic community. It is a time of EVANGELISATION, and may lead to entry into the Catechumenate.

At this first stage, evangelisation is the proclamation of the Word of God leading to initial conversion to Jesus Christ.

The Precatechumenate is concerned with the most basic part of the Christian life, that is, establishing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Precatechumenate or Inquiry endeavours:

- to help inquirers establish (re-establish, deepen) a personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- to help inquirers yield to the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives so that they experience the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in and through them (RCIA #36-38);
- to help inquirers to become aware that our response, as Christians, is lived and expressed through our relationship with others and all of creation, working for the Reign of God within the community of the faithful;
- to help inquirers to begin to use or make further use of prayer and Scripture as effective means of growth in their relationship with Jesus Christ;
- to help inquirers to move towards the Catechumenate and so be joined more fully to Christ and the Church (RCIA #47).

The Precatechumenate is an essential part of the entire process and as such must be neither omitted nor hurried. An adequate time frame, of at least six months, ought to be allowed for this period.

### **PRAYER**

The importance and power of prayer cannot be over-emphasised. Inquirers should be encouraged to cultivate an intimate personal relationship with the Lord through a daily quiet time. Team members, also, must know the Lord whom they proclaim. The sharing of prayer among team members and inquirers is important. In shared prayer experiences we draw others into our communion with Jesus Christ, and help them to experience the presence of the Lord Jesus in our midst and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### **BACKGROUND OF INQUIRERS**

The background of the inquirers needs to be respected. It is very important to know who the inquirers are, "whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptised people who do not practise, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name" (EN 21).

During the Precatechumenate it is important to discover what sacraments, if any, the inquirers have received, and also if there is any impediment to full membership in the Church. See Appendix 1. Towards the end of this period, thought should be given to the preparation of sponsors for those inquirers who will proceed to the Catechumenate.

## **THE COMMUNITY OF THE FAITHFUL**

*The initiation of the catechumens is a gradual process and takes place within the community of the faithful.*

*(RCIA #4)*

The community of the faithful is the Church, specifically the local Church or parish, represented by those involved in RCIA ministries.

### **HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality is a key component of the role of the community of the faithful, who should cultivate the qualities of welcoming, sensitivity, affirmation and listening. The time spent together in the Precatechumenate allows for the growth of the Precatechumenate group. It is a time to listen, to show care and concern, to envelop the inquirers in a genuine atmosphere of accepting love. Inquirers must feel at home, accepted, to the point of being able to share their real needs - physical, psychological, cultural, spiritual - and their life stories (Para 9.1).

## **DISCERNMENT OF INITIAL CONVERSION**

*The prerequisite for acceptance into the Order of Catechumens is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teachings have taken root in the candidates.*

*(RCIA #42)*

An important part of the process of initial evangelisation is that there is an ongoing **discernment of conversion**.

DISCERNMENT is a prayerful process involving dialogue between the inquirer, the priest and the community of faith. Questions which point towards the initial conversion necessary for acceptance into the Catechumenate may be devised and offered to the inquirer to assist her/his reflection (see RCIA #42). Remember, however, this is not an examination. *Discernment resources available from diocesan website.*

In a prayerful context those responsible should share their insights concerning the readiness of the inquirer to proceed to the Catechumenate. This discernment occurs within an atmosphere of respect and humility.

Inquirers who are not ready to respond to the invitation should be encouraged to continue in the RCIA process. It should be carefully explained to unbaptised inquirers that they may be enrolled as catechumens only when they have made the initial commitment to follow the Lord within the Catholic community.

### **SPONSORS**

Another important outcome of this discernment is the linking of each inquirer with the most suitable sponsor available. The sponsor is drawn from and appointed by the parish community to be a companion and guide to the one seeking membership in the Catholic Church (RCIA #10). *See Appendix 2.*

### **rites**

When the decision to continue has been made, the unbaptised inquirer proceeds to the RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS, the step by which they move into the next period.

Baptised inquirers need to discern whether it is within the Catholic tradition that they wish to continue their Christian journey and be accepted as candidates for full communion. If this is so, they are received as candidates for full communion in the Catholic Church.

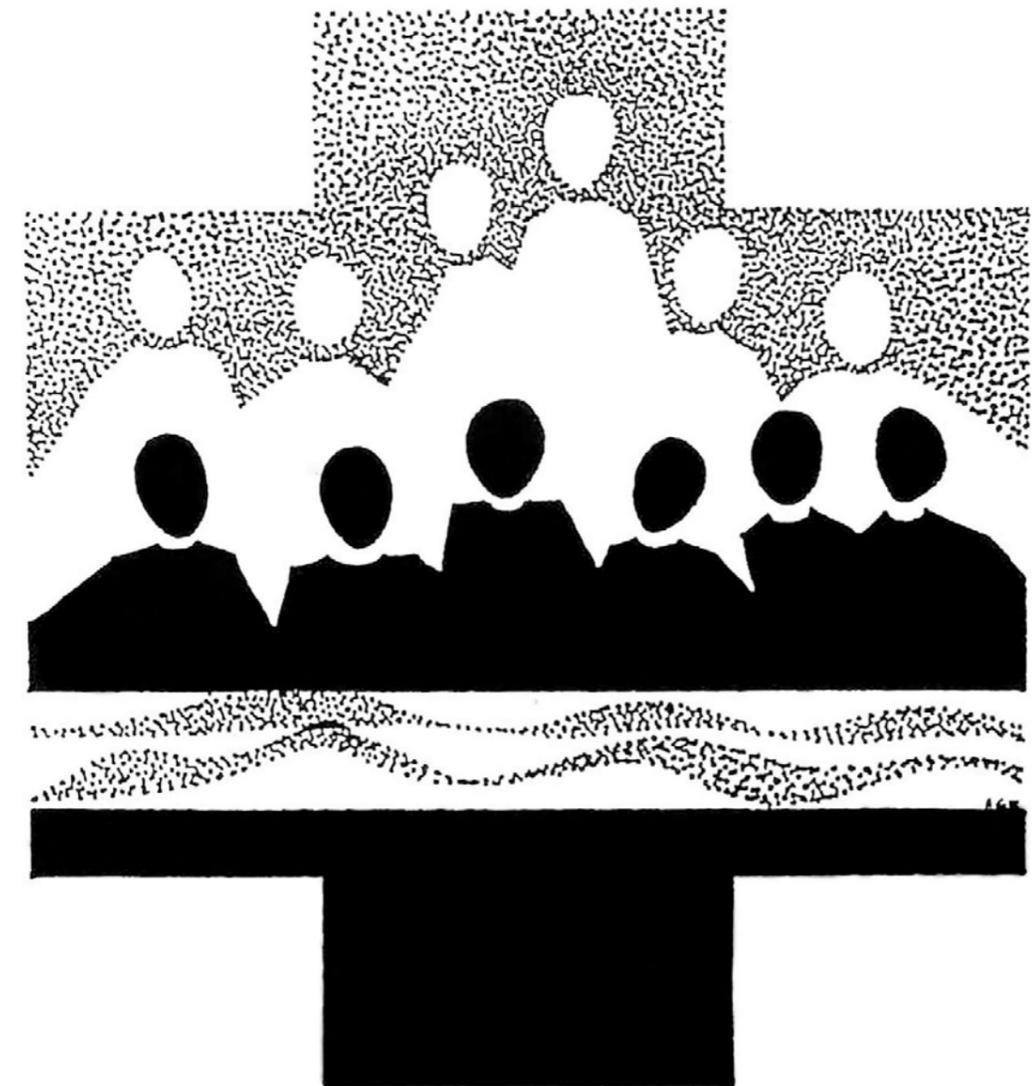
## **PRECATECHUMENATE MEETINGS**

In the telling of their personal stories and the hearing of the story of Jesus, the inquirers should be encouraged to raise ultimate questions about those stories, so that they might come to discern God's presence in their own lives and in the world.

The Precatechumenate (Inquiry) meetings should employ a variety of approaches.

These meetings are built on a basis of prayer, life-sharing, scripture, parish stories and Church tradition. It is important that principles of good adult education are remembered, and a wide variety of approaches and styles employed. These could include such strategies as group work, photo language and other processes which will help the inquirers to discover their questions.

Assistance with the planning of inquiry meetings may be available from parishes who have already implemented the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and from the Diocesan RCIA Co-ordinator.



# PERIOD OF CATECHUMENATE

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*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.*  
(Genesis 12:1 NRSV)

The Catechumenate is the second period in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Whilst the period of the Precatechumenate deals with the awakening of faith, the period of the Catechumenate is concerned with the nurturing and growth of faith.

*"It is an extended period during which the catechumens (and candidates) are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life."*  
(RCIA #75)

The Catechumenate is a period of formation which encompasses the development of a Catholic mentality of community and the sharing of Christian life. This development will be animated by the Christian message as presented through the Lectionary and the Liturgical Year and will include the presentation of essential Catholic teachings and truths regarding doctrine and morals. The period of the Catechumenate commences with the liturgical celebration of the **Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens** (pastorally known as the Rite of Welcome) and concludes with the **Rite of Election**.

## ELEMENTS OF THE CATECHUMENATE PERIOD

During the period of the Catechumenate, catechumens/candidates are formed through:

CATECHESIS	(RCIA #75.1)
COMMUNITY	(RCIA #75.2)
LITURGY	(RCIA #75.3)
WITNESS	(RCIA #75.4)

## CATECHESIS

To allow the catechesis to be effective and touch the lives of the catechumens/candidates, the catechetical activity must:

- follow a basic, flexible plan revolving around the Liturgical Year and be inclusive of the essentials of Catholic teaching;
- enable and support the catechumens/candidates in their movement toward an understanding of the Catholic way of life;
- be supported by prayer and reflection;
- be fully complemented by the ministries of priests (RCIA #13), catechists (RCIA #16) and other members of the faithful (RCIA #9).

The primary catechetical activity of the Catechumenate period is the Sunday reflection of the Word which takes place after the Liturgy of the Word of the Sunday Mass and involves the DISMISSAL. At the conclusion of the homily, the catechumens/candidates formally leave the assembly in order to further reflect upon the Word (RCIA #75.3). The time of reflection on the Word is led by a catechist. (For a further background statement on the appropriateness of the Dismissal and for the procedures of the time of the Dismissal, see the resources available from the diocesan website).

This reflection based on the Lectionary and the Liturgical Year will provide the framework for further catechetical activity which will enable the catechumens/candidates to develop an understanding and knowledge of basic doctrine of the Catholic Church. At frequent intervals during the Catechumenate they should gather with their sponsors, members of the parish community and those responsible for the time of the Catechumenate to consider issues relevant to their formation.

## COMMUNITY

It is within the local Catholic community that the formation of the catechumens/candidates takes place and the entire Catholic community must be incorporated into the RCIA process in order to provide support through prayer, interest and example. From the community specific ministries emerge, those of SPONSORS, GODPARENTS and CATECHISTS, and those who facilitate the process of the RCIA. The SPONSOR is drawn from the parish community to be a companion and guide to the one seeking membership of the Catholic Church. *See Appendix 2.* Likewise, the CATECHIST is called from the parish community to assist the catechumens/candidates in an understanding of the Word and the teachings of the Church. The process of the Catechumenate stage of the RCIA in the parish will be facilitated by a PLANNING GROUP from within the parish together with the parish clergy. This may be a specific group established for the Catechumenate period only.

## LITURGY

The catechumens/candidates are strengthened and supported on their journey by suitable liturgical rites (RCIA #75.3). Their growth in faith and their formation within the Catholic community are marked by appropriate liturgical rites. The RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE CATECHUMENATE marks the commencement of the period of the Catechumenate and should take place within the Sunday celebration of the Mass. The DISMISSAL ritual draws them into the Sunday worship of the community and enables them to be formed by the Word as it is proclaimed throughout the Liturgical Year of the Church. In this way the community prepares the catechumens/candidates for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. After appropriate discernment the catechumens/candidates are presented by the parish to the Bishop at the Rite of Election. *Resource available from the diocesan website.* The RITE OF ELECTION marks the conclusion of the formative time of the Catechumenate and the commencement of formal preparation for admission into the Church. This is preceded by the Rite of Naming. *Resources available from the diocesan website.* Other liturgical celebrations are recommended by the Rite to take place during the Catechumenate period. Liturgical ministries of the RCIA require the presence of Bishop, priest, sponsors, catechists, parish communities, according to the particular celebration as outlined in the Rite.

## WITNESS

The time of the Catechumenate should be so planned that the catechumens/candidates are able to be incorporated into the active witness of the Church. By working actively with others to spread the Gospel and continue the work of the Church, the catechumens/candidates experience the reality of Catholic life.

## LENGTH OF TIME OF THE PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

The length of time for the Catechumenate period needs to be considered:

- within the context of the whole RCIA process;
- in accord with the Liturgical Year of the Church;
- in relationship to the faith understanding and development of each catechumen/candidate;
- with regard for the pastoral situation of the parish community.

This means that the procedures and processes will be variable although built around the principles outlined in the Rite and amplified in this document. The ideal approach is an on-going process at work within the parish community.

*(RCIA #76)*

# PERIOD OF PURIFICATION & ENLIGHTENMENT

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*This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction.*

*(RCIA #126)*

The third period is called Purification and Enlightenment. It is a time of spiritual preparation normally taking place during Lent.

Lent is the time when the Christian community prepares for the solemn celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a time of deep prayer and conversion of life leading to renewal of baptismal commitment to Christ and the Church at Easter.

During this period elect/candidates are drawn into this community experience of prayer and conversion in preparation for the reception of the sacraments at Easter. Hence the emphasis, during this period, is on **prayer and reflection** and **liturgical rites**. Formal teaching is not given during this period.

## LITURGICAL RITES

The celebration of liturgical rites during this period leads the elect/candidates to a deeper knowledge of the place of Christ in their lives and the need for conversion. These rites are:

- the Scrutinies (RCIA #128 - 133);
- the Presentations (RCIA #134 - 136);
- the Rites of Preparation (RCIA #172 - 179).

## THE SCRUTINIES

The Scrutinies are celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. The Rite relates to the readings given in the Lectionary for the Sundays of Lent, Year A.

The Scrutinies are not examinations of the faith and religious practice of the elect/candidates, but are rites intended to assist the elect/candidates and community in self-searching and repentance.

## THE PRESENTATIONS

These are two separate rites in which the elect/candidates are presented with the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The traditional time for these Rites is shortly before final initiation. The Presentation of the Creed takes place during the third week of Lent, after the First Scrutiny (RCIA #144).

The Presentation of the Lord's Prayer takes place during the fifth week of Lent, after the Third Scrutiny (RCIA #168).

The Rite does, however, leave the option of celebrating the Presentations earlier during the Catechumenate period, eg. where this period is extended to twelve months or longer. When the faith of the catechumens/candidates is sufficiently mature, they can very credibly receive publicly and officially the profession of faith that the Church hands on to them.

## CREED

This is sometimes more formally known as the Presentation of the Profession of Faith. The point could be made in the homily that in the Creed we have a great treasure in that it is a summary of the truth about God and the relationship between God and the people of God. At the same time, those receiving the Creed could be reminded that in being entrusted with the Creed, they are being entrusted with the responsibility to ponder its truth, to live it and to pass it on to others.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

The homily gives an opportunity to show how this prayer sums up all prayer. Its first focus is that we give due worship, acknowledgment, reverence and acclamation for the presence of God in our lives. Jesus teaches us through the Lord's Prayer what prayer is all about - the worship of God, the coming of the kingdom, our daily needs, forgiveness, protection from evil.

Where the Lord's Prayer is to be presented to baptised candidates from other Christian traditions, there needs to be pastoral sensitivity to the place the Lord's Prayer may already have in the life of the candidate. Rather than a presentation of the prayer it may be more appropriate to have a re-affirmation of the prayer in the life of the candidate. This is one of those times when *Diocesan Directive no. 4* should be applied.

The Presentations give the elect the experience of publicly receiving the tradition of faith and prayer of the Church. The presence of the faithful at the presentations gives them the sense that they are becoming part of a supportive community. The faithful themselves also benefit from participating in these Rites.

### **rites of preparation**

Some or all of the following rites may be celebrated on Holy Saturday as part of the immediate preparation for the sacraments:

- recitation of the Creed;
- Ephphetha Rite;
- choosing of a Baptismal name;
- anointing with the Oil of Catechumens.

### **prayer and reflection**

Prayer and reflection is the formative activity of the period of Purification and Enlightenment. Elect/candidates should be provided with opportunities for both individual and group experiences and times of prayer and reflection. The weekly Dismissal will provide the focus for the week through reflective time spent with the Scriptures of the Sunday. *Resource available from the diocesan website.*

This can be reinforced through the time of Lent with Word services, a Retreat day, spiritual direction and an introduction to the Sacrament of Penance. Holy Saturday is a specific time of prayer and preparation when the elect/candidates are advised to spend their time in prayer and reflection and observe a fast, as far as they can.

The community should also be drawn into these activities of prayer and reflection in support of the elect/candidates.

### **SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**

As this period coincides with Lent - time of deep prayer and conversion of life - it is an appropriate time to prepare elect/candidates for the Sacrament of Penance. Experience has shown the value of personal Reconciliation for baptised candidates. This opportunity should be made available to the candidates during this period.



# PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGIA

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*This is the time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing works of charity.*  
(RCIA #234)

The final period of the initiation process is the Mystagoga, or period of post-baptismal catechesis. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults formally associates this period with the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost, but it must be an on-going process (see *Diocesan Directive 11*). It is essentially a time when neophytes deepen their grasp of the paschal mystery and make it part of their lives and are given a fuller and more effective understanding of the “mysteries” (RCIA #234-235). During the Mystagoga the neophytes, having experienced the sacramental mysteries, enter into a deeper reflection upon them.

The Rite emphasizes that this can be achieved collectively in the following ways:

- by sharing in the celebration of the Eucharist;
- by using the lectionary of paschal time as a basis for the post-baptismal catechesis;
- by meditating on the Gospel;
- by doing works of charity.

Thus having experienced the sacramental life of the Church and deepened their understanding of it, they develop a new understanding of the faith, the Church and the world (RCIA #235).

Not only is this a time of growth for the neophytes but also for the community of the faithful. It is a time when the community should provide thoughtful and careful help for the neophytes and grow with them in deepening their own grasp of the paschal mysteries. *Resource available from the diocesan website.* It is a time to reflect on:

- How participation in the sacramental life of the Church has contributed to their relationship with God;

- what they might offer to the life of the community;
- how they feel the Lord in calling them to live their faith in today’s world.

The neophytes should experience a real welcome into the community and enter more closely into its life. In return, the faithful should experience a renewal in their lives by observing the witness given by neophytes.

*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.*

*(Mark 16:15 NRSV)*



# RESOURCES

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The following documents are available from the members section of the diocesan website to assist with RCIA in your parish [www.ballarat.catholic.org.au](http://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au).

- **Confidential Information for the Parish Priest.**
- **The Sponsor & Godparents in the RCIA Process.**
- **Discernment:**
  - Discernment of Readiness: Before Enrolment in the Catechumenate.
  - Discernment of Readiness: Before the Rite of Election.
  - Discernment: During the time of Mystagogia.
- **Dismissals:**
  - The Dismissal.
  - Catechetical Method for Sunday Sessions Following Dismissal.
  - Structure of Sunday Sessions following Dismissal: Purification and Enlightenment.
- **Rites**
  - Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate.
  - Suggested Rite for Sunday Dismissal of Catechumens and Baptised Candidates.
  - First Scrutiny.
  - Second Scrutiny.
  - Third Scrutiny.
  - Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Enrolment of Names and Election.
  - Notes on the Rite of Enrolment of Names: The Parish Rite prior to the Rite of Election.
  - A Text for the Rite of Enrolment of Names.
  - Concluding Rite for Thanksgiving Eucharist during Period of Mystagogia.

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## APPENDIX 1

### CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FOR THE PARISH PRIEST

Name:.....

Address: .....

Phone:.....

Date of birth:.....

Are you baptised (christened)? .....

If yes, into what church (religion) were you baptised? .....

Date and place of baptism:.....

Are you married? .....

Date and place of marriage: .....

Is your spouse baptised (christened)? .....

Date and place of baptism of spouse: .....

Have you been divorced? .....

Has your spouse ever been divorced? .....

*If either party to the marriage has been married previously and that marriage ended in divorce, further consultation to determine the canonical status of the current marriage should be made through the parish priest with the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal.*

## APPENDIX 2

# THE SPONSOR & GODPARENTS IN THE RCIA PROCESS

### ROLE OF THE SPONSOR

A Sponsor is called to be a:

- FRIEND and companion who accompanies the catechumen/candidate throughout the process of initiation and beyond;
- SOURCE OF INFORMATION about Catholic practices and the “nitty-gritty” of daily Christian living;
- GUIDE to parish organisations and to meeting other members of the Catholic Christian community;
- PARTICIPANT in the liturgical ceremonies of the Rite, including the Sacraments of Initiation unless a godparent is chosen for the Sacraments (*see below regarding Godparents*);
- CONTACT for priest, RCIA team, catechist, on the progress of the catechumen/candidate in the Catechumenate process and in discerning the readiness of the catechumen/candidate for the different steps of initiation.

### SELECTION OF SPONSOR

The choice of a sponsor is a joint decision of the catechumen/candidate and the parish RCIA team. It should be made after the qualities needed are clear. Since the role of a sponsor is a ministry and is crucial to the Church’s mission of sharing our faith, the team has a responsibility to make sure that whoever is chosen as sponsor will properly fulfil this ministry. The sponsor should be an open and flexible person, sensitive to the needs and feelings of others and able to listen effectively to another’s views and concerns.

The sponsor must demonstrate her/his own faith commitment and be able to speak openly of her/his own relationship to the Lord.

Obviously no person is going to meet all of these criteria fully. Experience suggests that willingness, depth of faith and parish involvement are more important than a prior relationship or age pairing. In each case the ability of the person to fulfil the total ministry of sponsor requires careful discernment.

### TRAINING FOR SPONSORS

A training session or programme for sponsors clearly meets a real need in many cases. Sponsors should be clearly informed of responsibilities and expectations before accepting this ministry. Priests and parish RCIA teams should be available to the sponsors for consultation and guidance.

### GODPARENTS

The Rite makes provision for a godparent distinct from the initial sponsor (cf. RCIA #10, 11). Because the godparent is required to testify to the faith of the catechumen/candidate, the person chosen must be qualified to carry out the proper liturgical functions.

Those chosen must have the capability and intention of carrying out the responsibility of godparent and be mature enough to do so. They are expected to fill the total ministry of sponsor from the time of the Rite of Election and should be chosen according to the criteria given in the Rite and in Canon Law (RCIA #11 and Canon §874).

## APPENDIX 3

### THE DISMISSAL

The Dismissal, celebrated during the Catechumenate and time of Purification and Enlightenment, can be a powerful and dynamic experience for both the catechumens/candidates and the parish community.

The form of worship and the experience of the presence of Christ proper to the catechumens/candidates is found in the celebration of the Word. Thus it is proper that the catechumens/candidates celebrate the Sunday Liturgy of the Word with the parish community after which they are dismissed, to reflect upon the Word and make it their own.

The Dismissal places catechesis in the midst of the wider community on the Sunday. It also takes place in the midst of prayer and worship. It becomes the best catechetical time, a prayerful time of hearing and responding to the living Word.

Seen in this light, the Dismissal is not an exclusion from the community, but an invitation to focus on Christ's presence made known in his Word.

The Dismissal emphasises the hunger catechumens/candidates have for the Eucharist, which will become a climax of the invitation to full membership on Easter Vigil night. It can be seen as a preparation for, and an anticipation of, the reception of Christ in the Eucharist, so, when that moment comes, its significance will be more appreciated.

The Dismissal is also a powerful public witness to the rest of the community. It challenges them concerning the depth of their journey in faith; they are helped to recognise the very special nature of their Eucharistic celebration; and it is a constant reminder of the connection between faith, conversion and the Eucharist. A healthy tension is thus set-up between the catechumens/candidates and the community.

The Dismissal also keeps before the community that they are participating in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and they become aware of the catechumens/candidates. Thus those present at the Liturgy can make themselves known to the catechumens/candidates and welcome them. It may also be an invitation to the parish community to become actively involved within some ministry of the Rite.

The parish community should be adequately prepared and informed for the implementation of the Dismissal.

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RCIA Team Book

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Team RCIA website

[www://teamrcia.com](http://www://teamrcia.com)

Christian Initiation Australia Network website

[www.cianetwork.net](http://www.cianetwork.net)

Information regarding resources for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is available from the Diocesan Resource Centre.

### CONTACT

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PARISH HANDBOOK FOR THE RITE  
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