



Diocesan Liturgical Commission

PARISH HANDBOOK FOR THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS WITH CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS WITH CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

This policy, in alignment with the Ballarat diocesan document “Parish Handbook for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults”, has been developed explicitly for children who are to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church. The spiritual journey of conversion for these young people is modelled on the four stages of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). “The provisions of the canons on adult baptism apply to all those who, having ceased to be infants, have reached the use of reason.” (Canon §852.1)

The process for children is an opportunity to introduce them to the life of Jesus and invite them to a lifetime of discipleship and prayer. It is a process of evangelisation and conversion which touches the family and community around them. They, with their families, should be involved in a process of formation which is appropriate to their age and needs. The process will encompass the four-fold approach to formation: catechetical, communal, liturgical and apostolic.

This document applies to children of the ages seven to sixteen who have not been baptised. “This form of the rite of Christian initiation is intended for children, not baptised as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age. They seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative.” (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Section on the Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age, paragraph 242)

The process for initiating children should follow the process outlined in the RCIA documents. It involves participation in the four periods of the RCIA:

- Time of Inquiry;
- Time of Catechumenate;
- Time of Enlightenment ;
- Time of Mystagogy;

and all that these times suggest for formation.

This is a process of spiritual formation. It is an opportunity for the children to spend time in exploring Scripture and catechesis about the Catholic Church. It is a time for those on the journey to be introduced into the parish community by way of attending parish liturgies and events. It is a time to nurture and grow in faith and conversion to God. Using Scripture, prayer and reflection, the children will make their commitment to full initiation into the Catholic Church.

The period of formation should be suitable to each young person's stage of development. It should be significant enough that there is a sense of belonging to the parish community, as each young person gains appropriate knowledge about the teachings of the Church. The journey should not be rushed in order to fit in with a pre-ordained schedule. Different people will need different lengths of time before being ready for full initiation into the Church. The young person must be able to comprehend what they are requesting and be able to express, in their own way, their desire for initiation.

Each period will be celebrated by a rite that assists the children to continue, in a more resolute way, their journey of faith:

- Rite of Acceptance as Catechumens;
- Rite of Election and Enrolment of Names;
- Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

PARENTAL AND COMMUNAL INVOLVEMENT

In paragraph 244 of the RCIA, we read:

“The children’s progress in the formation they receive depends on the help and example of their companions and on the influence of their parents/guardians. Both these factors should therefore be taken into account.

1. Since the children to be initiated often belong to a group of children of the same age who are already baptised and are preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist, their initiation progresses gradually and within the supportive setting of this group of companions.
2. It is to be hoped that the children will also receive as much help and example as possible from the parents/guardians, whose permission is required for the children to be initiated and to live the Christian life. The period of initiation will also provide a good opportunity for the family to have contact with priests and catechists.”

When a child has expressed interest in being initiated into the Catholic Church, it is important that the child and parents/guardians are interviewed. This is a time of discernment with the child and the family, as a way to determine what kind of formation is best suited to the child. It is an opportunity to determine the age of the child, baptismal status and the catechetical experiences of the child and family.

It is envisioned that the parents/guardians remain involved in the formative process. However, it may be that the child requesting initiation is from a family where parents/guardians may be non-practising or not of the Catholic Faith. This can often mean an opportunity for the parents/guardians to renew their own faith and grow in their relationship with Christ as they learn more about the

Catholic Church along with their child.

It may be that a small community can be formed as support for the young person and the family. The RCIA suggests that there be a peer group of those to be baptised who would participate in the process as companions in the catechetical sessions and during the celebrations of the rituals. "For the celebrations proper to this form of Christian Initiation, it is advantageous, as circumstances allow, to form a group of several children who are in this same situation, in order that by example they may help one another in their progress as catechumens." (RCIA par 245)

Another support to the young person, and to the family, is the parish sponsor. The sponsor not only assists in relation to catechesis but introduces the child and the family into the parish community. It could be that a parish family takes on the role as sponsor. In this case, intergenerational catechesis can provide formation for the entire family.

Others who can support the children and families on this faith journey are godparents, peers, members of the RCIA team, other members of the parish community and the parish priest.

LITURGICAL RITES AT VARIOUS STAGES OF THE PROCESS

"As with adults, their initiation is marked by several steps, the liturgical rites of acceptance into the order of catechumens, penitential rites or scrutinies, and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation; corresponding to the periods of adult initiation are the periods of the children's catechetical formation that lead up to and follow the steps of their initiation." (RCIA par 243)

The rites of Acceptance, Election and Initiation are to be public events occurring within a parish environment, as this expresses clearly that the children are being initiated into a parish community.

In regard to dismissal of catechumens during a parish liturgy, the children should be dismissed from the Eucharist after the homily, as are adult catechumens. The children should have a separate dismissal session suited to their age, but they should be dismissed at the same time as the adults.

When preparing rites that include children, it is important to use language that the children understand. At the same time, any adaptations made to rites should be consistent with the adult process and should retain the key formational and liturgical components of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

The Code of Canon Law provides that “unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, immediately after receiving baptism, an adult is to be confirmed, to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and to receive Holy Communion.” (Canon §866). As noted above, the provisions of the canons for the baptism of adults apply to the baptism of children of catechetical age (Canon §852.1). Accordingly, unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, immediately after receiving baptism, a child of catechetical age is to be confirmed, to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and to receive Holy Communion.

“In regard to the time for the celebration of the steps of initiation, it is preferable that, if possible, the final period of preparation, begun by the second step, the penitential rites, coincide with Lent and that the final step, celebration of the sacraments of initiation, take place at

the Easter Vigil. Nevertheless before the children are admitted to the sacraments at Easter, it should be established that they are ready for the sacraments. Celebration at this time must also be consistent with the program of catechetical instruction they are receiving, since the candidates should, if possible, come to the sacraments of initiation at the time that their baptised companions are to receive Confirmation or Eucharist.” (RCIA par 246)

“In order to bring out the paschal character of baptism, celebration of the sacraments of initiation should preferably take place at the Easter Vigil or on a Sunday, the day that the Church devotes to the remembrance of Christ’s resurrection. But the provisions of paragraph 246 should also guide the choice of time for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.” (RCIA par 280)

In these paragraphs, the Rite of Christian Initiation highlights the value of celebrating the sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at the Easter Vigil. However, the Rite also points to a link between the celebration of these three sacraments with unbaptised children and the celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist with their baptised companions. The link might be in coordinating elements of the instruction of all the children. In some cases, it might be appropriate to have a common celebration of the sacraments, in which the unbaptised children receive Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist while the baptised children receive Confirmation and Eucharist. The Rite of Christian Initiation provides a format for such a combined celebration.

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