

OFFICE FOR WORSHIP

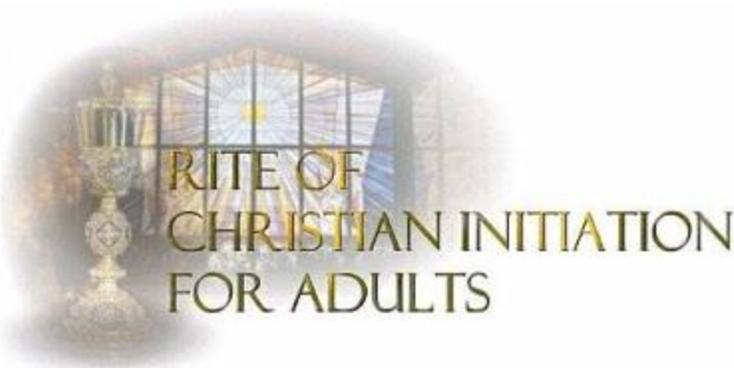
December 2017

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

Advent begins this weekend and thus a new liturgical year in the Church. For many parishes, Advent also marks the beginning of the catechumenate of the RCIA. This issue of the Office for Worship monthly newsletter brings you some helpful information regarding the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

A Process, Not a Program

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the process established by the universal Church for individuals to become Catholic and receive the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The goal of this process is to bring people into a relationship with Christ. It is initiation into “the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world.” If we begin with this goal in mind, the RCIA is not a program with a predetermined beginning and ending, but a sacramental formation process that prepares both individuals and communities for a particular way of life. Centered on fostering a deep relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church, this spiritual journey takes place through distinct stages over a period of time that is suitable to bring about a thorough catechesis, significant experience of the parish community, and commitment to the liturgical and moral life of the Catholic faith.



The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is a restoration of the ancient catechumenate, which arose within the first three centuries following the time of the apostles. It was a three-year period of rigorous examination for the purpose of determining whether the profession and the way of life of the candidate was compatible with the Christian moral law. The early Christians were not satisfied merely with knowledge of the faith. Instead, they sought primarily to form a true Christian. For this reason, the length of the catechumenate was of utmost importance as it provided ample opportunity for formation in the Christian way of life.

Because the early church experienced periods of persecution, it was critical that catechesis be comprehensive. Those becoming Christian literally risked their lives for their faith. Yet, the



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early Christians demanded little in the way of memory learning. Catechesis instead was closely bound with the liturgy. An active participation in the liturgy was on the whole the most desirable way in which the individual Christian and the Christian community were able to acquire necessary religious knowledge. Easter became the time for Baptism with the prior season of Lent a time to prepare. Regular participation in the Mass of the Catechumens provided instruction on the scripture while celebration with the community provided a witness to the Christian life.

Over the centuries, the catechumenate slowly began to disappear until the Second Vatican Council prescribed the restoration and use of this powerful method of initiation for the universal Church. Today the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is one of the ways the missionary faith of the Church is manifested. It is a continuing journey of personal conversion through immersion in Holy Scripture, authentic preaching, sound catechesis, liturgical participation, spiritual enrichment, and personal prayer. As integral elements of Christian initiation, the liturgical rites are meant to be celebrated in the midst of the parish assembly and according to the norms set forth in the Rite.

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens / Rite of Welcome

The Code of Canon Law requires that before an adult can be baptized, one must be admitted to the catechumenate, be led through the stages of initiation, be sufficiently instructed and tested in the Christian life, and be urged to have sorrow for personal sins. It also states that the individual be initiated "into the mystery of salvation and introduced into the life of the faith, the liturgy, the charity of the people of God, and the apostolate." In other words, once the individual is accepted into the order of catechumens and begins their spiritual journey, they enter into a type of Christian apprenticeship through personal prayer and the liturgy, through the witness of their lives as an apostolate, and through the charity of the community.

This period begins with the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and/or the Rite of Welcome. The Rite of Acceptance is of utmost importance, and is for the unbaptized. As the title suggests, it includes the First Acceptance of the Gospel and the signing with the cross. It also includes the dismissal of the catechumens.

After the rite of Acceptance, the names of the Catechumens should be inscribed in the Register of Catechumens as having been through the Rite of

Contact the Worship Office

Have a liturgical question?
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Visit us on the web at
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Important Dates

Sunday, December 3, 2017
First Sunday of Advent

Friday, December 8, 2017
Solemnity of the Immaculate
Conception, *Holy Day of
Obligation*

Tuesday, December 12, 2017
Feast of Our Lady of
Guadalupe

Friday, December 22, 2017
7:00 p.m.
St. Ambrose Cathedral
Ordination to the Diaconate,
Mr. Ryan Andrew

Sunday, December 24, 2017
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Monday, December 25, 2017
Christmas

*****Christmas Eve Mass
cannot begin prior to 4:00
p.m.*****

Acceptance. The Rite of Acceptance is considered a Baptism of desire and thus the catechumen is a member of the household of Christ. As a member of the household, if they should marry before receiving the sacraments of initiation, they are entitled to a Catholic marriage following the appropriate ritual, including the dispensation from disparity of cult. Additionally, if the catechumen should die before they are fully initiated, they may receive a Christian burial.

Baptized, uncatechized candidates ideally move from the inquiry, pre-catechumenate stage to the catechumenate via the optional Rite of Welcome. A combined rite is available when there are both catechumens and candidates ready at the same time.

Several weeks before a parish celebrates the Rite of Acceptance (for catechumens) and/or the Rite of Welcome (for baptized candidates), there should be a brief interview with each inquirer. The certificate of Baptism should be obtained before the Rite of Welcome is celebrated. The purpose of this interview is to discern whether the inquirer is ready to proceed to the next step of the process. Criteria for this interview can be found in the ritual.

The Rite of Acceptance and/or Welcome should be celebrated in the context of Sunday Mass so that the parish can have the opportunity to offer their support and prayers to the catechumens and candidates. Not all inquirers need to be included at the same time. The Rite is celebrated as individuals are ready, and it may be celebrated more than once a year. Children who have reached the age of reason should be included with the Rite appropriately adapted for them.

Many parishes celebrate the Rite of Acceptance/Rite of Welcome on the First Sunday of Advent. While this is not “wrong” or “forbidden,” parishes may want to consider why this date was chosen for this Rite. It’s a busy day in the Church Year—there’s the blessing and lighting of the Advent wreath, the Gloria goes away, and the first couple of weeks of readings are not necessarily the most “welcoming” readings in all of scripture with the apocalyptic theme. Also, what “unspoken” messages does celebrating the Rite on this Sunday suggest? That RCIA begins in Advent and ends at Easter—a “school year” mentality? What if your parish has an inquirer that shows up in January? Does that person wait until the following Advent to begin the process? Does Advent until Easter give catechumens and candidates enough time to fully embrace the faith and be formed in the way of the Gospel and the community?

This raises a lot of questions and opens up discussion about when is the “right” time to celebrate the Rite. Any questions can be directed to Kim Mandelkow (kmandelkow@dmdiocese.org), Director of the Office for Worship, or John Gaffney (jgaffney@dmdiocese.org), Director of the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis at the diocesan offices.

December 24—Fourth Sunday of Advent AND Christmas Eve

What time is Mass?

This year, the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve fall on the same day. The last time this happened was 2006 so it may be difficult to think back to what happened nine years ago. This will be a particularly demanding day for our priests and lay ministers because it means “double duty.” But it also presents a question for many faithful as well—what time is Mass? What Mass “counts” for Sunday and what Mass “counts” for Christmas?

The obligation to participate in Sunday Mass remains as it is the “Lord’s Day,” the first holy day of all. It is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the day which marks the fourth “week” of the liturgical season. While the obligation to participate in a Mass of Sunday is normally satisfied at any time during the 24-hours of the day itself, 4:00 p.m. on December 24th marks the beginning of “evening” and thus, the beginning of the liturgical celebrations of Christmas with First Vespers of Christmas. **Any Mass beginning at or after 4:00 p.m. on December 24th is a Mass for Christmas.**

It is important to understand as well that **any Mass beginning before 4:00 p.m. on December 24th is a Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and thus does not fulfill the obligation of the holy day.**

What then are people’s options for Mass participation?

- 1) Go to a Saturday evening Mass (Sunday obligation) and a Sunday evening Mass (Christmas obligation).
- 2) Go to a Saturday evening Mass (Sunday obligation) and a Monday Mass (Christmas obligation).
- 3) Go to a Sunday Mass (Sunday obligation) and a Sunday evening Mass (Christmas obligation).
- 4) Go to a Sunday Mass (Sunday obligation) and a Monday Mass (Christmas obligation).

Remember, Christmas is officially December 25th. If you’ve always attended Mass on Christmas Eve and never on Christmas Day, you may want to consider making it part of your tradition this year!