

INITIATION OF BAPTIZED CANDIDATES: FURTHER STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING THE RITE

One of the challenges we face in the RCIA is how to recognize and celebrate the efficacy of the baptism of candidates seeking full communion in the Catholic Church. Often candidates are either lumped into the same category with the unbaptized, or their baptism is recognized and named only, without giving them an opportunity to look at the deeper meaning of their baptism, which often times may engender in the candidates a feeling of being 'less important' than catechumens.

As we take further steps in implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, we encourage you to give attention to how baptized candidates are initiated in your parish. As you may know, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati is co-sponsoring a North American Forum institute, "*Concerning the Baptized*" in November. We invite you to consider in a particular way, baptized candidates and their process of initiation.

WHAT DOES THE RITE SAY?

The Rite of Christian Initiation makes a clear distinction between catechumens (unbaptized) and candidates (baptized). It further distinguishes between candidates who are uncatechized and those who are already catechized. Uncatechized candidates' formation is similar to that of catechumens, however, their baptismal status is to be recognized and affirmed throughout the process.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Part II.4: Preparation of Uncatechized Adults for Confirmation and Eucharist, states:
(emphasis added)

- #400 Even though uncatechized adults have not yet heard the message of the mystery of Christ, their status differs from that of catechumens, since by baptism they have already become members of the Church and children of God. Hence *their conversion is based on the baptism they have already received, the effects of which they must develop.*
- #401 ...the preparation of these adults *requires a considerable time during which the faith infused in baptism must grow in them and take deep root.*
- #402 For the most part the plan of catechesis corresponds to the one laid down for catechumens...But...the process of catechesis...*should take into account that these adults have a special status because they are already baptized.*

Therefore, uncatechized candidates' formation:

- May look very similar to that of a catechumen
- May last as long as that of a catechumen
- Is conscious of their baptismal status and reflected in their formation particularly in the celebration of the rites

The formation of candidates who are already catechized is very different than that of catechumens and uncatechized candidates.

Part II.5: Reception of Baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church

- #473 This rite is so arranged that *no greater burden than necessary* is required for the establishment of communion and unity.
- #477 The baptized Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church...*Anything that would equate candidates for reception with those who are catechumens is to be absolutely avoided.*

Therefore, catechized candidates' formation:

- May or may not include the various rites (Cf. #478)
- Is often much shorter than the uncatechized candidate
- Is adapted to their pastoral needs:
 - Helping them become familiar with the parish community through participation in small faith communities.
 - They may not necessarily be involved in catechumenal sessions
 - Doctrinal formation must be discerned, for Christians of some mainstream churches may only need updating on particular Catholic doctrine (Cf. #31 *National Statutes*)
 - their reception can take place at any time, usually not at Easter (#32 & #33 *National Statutes*)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR PARISH: SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

We say we respect baptism, but what does that really mean, and what are the implications in the RCIA process? Often, respect for baptism is shown only by our not rebaptizing. However, it is possible to be creative in ways that show we value the baptism that has already occurred in the lives of our candidates. For example,

1. When you interview baptized candidates, take time to ask them about their religious upbringing, and the meaning of baptism in their life.
2. If a person is baptized and catechized, discern with individuals about what is needed to complete their initiation in the Catholic Church, and discern an appropriate time for their reception into the Catholic Church – rather than bringing them through the entire process with everyone else.
3. As leaders in the RCIA, it is important to understand and make choices out of a consistent theology of baptism. A consistent baptismal theology must inform your decisions why candidates are included or not in the various rites, and enable proper catechesis about the meaning of the rites for a baptized person.
4. In precatechumenate and catechumenate sessions it is appropriate, at times, to end with a separate prayer/and or ritual for the already baptized and for those preparing for baptism. In the catechumenate keep the minor exorcisms and anointing with the oil of catechumens for true catechumens (unbaptized), and use other prayers/blessings for the already baptized. e.g. from the Book of Blessings. If, however, a blessing is used from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* for both catechumens and candidates together, adapt the language in order to include the baptized.

5. At the last gathering before the Rite of Welcome, bring the baptized candidates around the baptismal font and pray with the candidates, asking God to renew, deepen, and open the meaning of their baptism to them. During the Rite of Welcome use one acclamation after those to be baptized are presented, and a different acclamation after the already baptized are presented.
6. Dismissal of candidates from the Sunday Eucharist is not mandatory. However, it may be of great benefit to them to be dismissed and to be further nourished by the Word of God, particularly if they are uncatechized. An invitation should be extended to candidates to participate in the dismissal.
7. Only those preparing for baptism should sign the Book of the Elect. In your parish you might have the already baptized bring forward a copy of their baptismal certificate when their name is called, to show they are baptized and are now living out their baptism in the midst of the Catholic community. Talk with them before the Rite of Sending for Recognition by the Bishop, and help them to understand that they do not sign the Book of the Elect because they are already members of the elect by virtue of their baptism.
8. Only have the elect participate in the Scrutinies. Explain to candidates that they participate in the scrutinies as members of the Christian community. Like the rest of the Catholic community, they are in the process of renewing their baptismal commitment.
9. Think creatively about other ways you might highlight the baptism of candidates throughout the initiation process at your parish. Possibly have separate catechetical sessions on various occasions for the baptized in order to highlight for them the significance of their baptism.
10. Discernment of children who are already baptized must be given similar consideration as the adult candidates.
11. Initiation is completed at the Eucharistic table. The Eucharist is the pinnacle of initiation. Clearly communicating this mind set with the candidates will help them to feel the significance of the completion of their own initiation into the Catholic Church.