The Reception of Baptized Christians: 
A Short Course in Vatican II 
Ecclesiology and Ecumenism

THE PRESENT SITUATION
An increasingly popular topic of conversation among catechists 
and liturgists is the preparation and reception of baptized Chris­
tians into full communion with the Catholic Church. Why has the 
spotlight recently been cast upon this process? Statistics alone 
grab one’s attention. The experience in many parishes in the 
United States which have an active Rite of Christian Initiation of 
Adults (RCIA) process is that the number of baptized candidates 
typically exceeds the number of catechumens. Certainly, the 
church rejoices at the sight of the people who arrive on its door­
step, eager to live more deeply the Christian life. However, the 
frequent inclusion of baptized Christians in the formational and 
ritual process originally intended for unbaptized individuals has 
generated concern and caused some commentators to look more 
closely at the implications of this phenomenon.

While the literature on the reception of baptized Christians is 
sparse, that which exists addresses a common concern, that is, by 
joining baptized candidates with catechumens in the same cate­
chetical and ritual events, the dignity of these Christians’ baptism 
is potentially compromised. One plausible explanation for this 
heightened sensitivity to the baptism of candidates for full com­
munion is the significant progress made in recent years at the 
ecumenical table, which has sensitized the Christian churches in­

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volved in the ecumenical dialogues to the dignity of baptisms celebrated in one another’s communities. Therefore, it is not surprising that as the number of baptized candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church rises and the ecumenical conversations continue to flourish, the need to be attentive to the manner in which baptized Christians are prepared and received into full communion has become more apparent. Clearly, when a Christian baptized in another church or ecclesial community expresses the desire to embrace a relationship with the Catholic Church, the event has implications beyond that individual and beyond the Catholic Church. The implications are far-reaching, for they concern the wholeness and integrity of the entire Christian church.

Critical to the effort to be ecumenically aware is for catechists and liturgists to be knowledgeable about the Rite of Reception itself, as well as the ecclesiological and ecumenical issues underlying the entire process of reception. Remarkably, when one considers the entire spectrum of what is involved in the reception of baptized candidates into full communion, several important ecclesiological issues come to the fore. Even more striking is that the ecclesiological issues which surface are also key items on the ecumenical agenda.

Given the convergence of topics, an examination of the ecclesiological and ecumenical themes which are woven into the Rite of Reception will prove valuable to parish catechists and liturgists. Indeed, the importance of being familiar with such issues cannot be overstated. Those entrusted with the responsibility of preparing baptized Christians to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church must be in a position to respond competently to difficult questions from the candidates and the local community. For example, one could reasonably expect questions such as, "What meaning does the Catholic Church assign to a candidate’s baptism?" "What does it mean to be in ‘full communion’ with the Catholic Church?" "What does it mean for a candidate to say, ‘I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God?’" "Why are

2 The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, study ed., International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press 1990) 491. The Rite will hereafter be cited as “RCIA [paragraph number].”

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candidates reconfirmed?” “Why are candidates sometimes dismissed from Mass after the homily?” “What role does partaking in the Eucharist have in the reception of baptized Christians?” Familiarity with certain ecclesiological and ecumenical topics will help provide satisfactory answers to these questions.

Our consideration of the ecclesiological and ecumenical implications of the reception of baptized Christians into full communion with the Catholic Church will begin with a brief look at the background of the present Rite of Reception. We will then examine the rite in detail, paying particular attention to the ecclesiological and ecumenical issues that are framed in the questions posed above. Pastoral issues will also be addressed, namely, the importance both of honoring a candidate’s baptism and celebrating fully his or her reception in the Catholic Church. Finally, we will entertain the idea of placing the Rite of Reception outside of the RCIA umbrella, in an effort to alleviate concerns about combined groups of candidates and catechumens.

THE CREATION OF THE 1968 RITE OF RECEPTION
A rite to accommodate the reception of validly baptized Christians was mandated by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which states: “[A] new rite is to be drawn up for converts who have already been validly baptized, [and] it should indicate that they are now admitted to communion with the church.”


Also important is that the constitution’s use of the word “convert” was later determined to be inappropriate when applied to baptized Christians seeking to enter into full Catholic communion, since “the term ‘convert’ properly refers to one who comes from unbelief to Christian belief.” Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion with the Catholic Church (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference 1976) 1.

4Bugnini, 595.

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In less than one year, the Rite of Reception was drawn up and approved.\(^5\)

The Rite of Reception was included in an appendix to the RCIA, which was drafted during the same timeframe and published in 1972.\(^6\) The RCIA also provides for so-called combined rites to be used for occasions when rites for catechumens and for baptized but uncatechized adults are celebrated in combination, including the reception of baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church in combination with the celebration of Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil.\(^7\) What the study groups likely did not intend by these inclusions is a catechumenate comprised mainly of baptized candidates.\(^8\) This is, however, precisely the situation which has evolved, at least in the United States.

Further, it is important to keep in mind that other sacramental rites were undergoing revision at the same time the Rite of Reception and the RCIA were being drafted. Within a period of four years, the church embraced a restored catechumenate, a new rite for reception of baptized Christians, and revised rites of baptism, confirmation and penance.\(^9\)

Finally, we must not overlook the ecumenical climate in which the Rite of Reception was conceived. Although the ecumenical movement had originated in the early twentieth century among Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox, the Catholic Church only formally recognized the movement and endorsed participation in

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\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 591 and 595. The Rite of Reception does not appear as an appendix to the RCIA as published in the United States; rather, the provisions for the reception of baptized candidates are included in the RCIA in Part II, Section 5.

\(^7\) RCIA, Appendix I.

\(^8\) As Robert Duggan points out, the RCIA “was developed specifically to deal with the unbaptized.” Robert Duggan, “Ecumenical Sensitivity and the RCIA,” Christian Initiation Resources Reader, vol. II (New York: William H. Sadlier Inc., 1984) 42. He comments further that “[what] was not envisioned is a catechumenate populated with baptized Christians already familiar with the Christian message and who reflect significant levels of conversion in their lives.” Ibid., 42.

\(^9\) As previously indicated, the Rite of Reception was approved April, 1968. The publication dates for the other rites referenced are: 15 May 1969 for the Rite of Baptism, 22 August 1971 for the Rite of Confirmation, 6 January 1972 for the RCIA, and 16 June 1972 for the Rite of Penance.
Leading up to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church’s ecumenical activity increased, and the Church’s attitude towards other Christian churches was changing dramatically. The church’s new ecumenical spirit is reflected in three key documents produced in the wake of the Second Vatican Council — the 1964 Decree on Ecumenism, the 1965 Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, and the 1967 Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican Concerning Ecumenical Matters (“1967 Ecumenical Directory”). (The 1967 Directory was revised in 1993 and as such is no longer binding. The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism is in use at the present time and is hereafter cited as the “1993 Ecumenical Directory.”) The Rite of Reception, as well as the RCIA, followed closely on the heels of these documents and makes reference to them.

RECEPTION OF THE VALIDLY BAPTIZED:
ISSUES OF VATICAN II ECCLESIOLOGY AND ECUMENISM
It is striking that when one considers the process for receiving validly baptized Christians into full Catholic communion, important ecclesiological and ecumenical topics surface. The first of these, baptism, is fundamental to the Christian life; yet, baptism becomes enmeshed in layers of complexity when placed in an ecclesiological and ecumenical context. As we will see, the process of receiving candidates into full Catholic communion reflects a deep respect for baptisms celebrated in other Christian communities; however, the emphasis on the dignity of baptism also confronts us with difficult questions of what meaning the Catholic Church assigns to baptism when talking about Christian unity and the relationship of baptism to the reception of other sacraments, particularly those of Eucharist and penance. After addressing baptism, we will look at the ritual celebration of reception, including an evaluation of the issues raised by the celebration of confirmation as part of the rite.

11 Ibid., 14.

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Meaning of Baptism: Special Status of the Baptized: A Reflection of an Ecumenical Vision. The RCIA norms regarding the preparation and reception of baptized Christians contain numerous references to the special status afforded to these individuals by virtue of their baptism. A sampling of such references will highlight the ecumenical attitude promoted by Vatican II and incorporated into the process for receiving baptized Christians into full Catholic communion.

Turning first to the guidelines for the preparation of baptized but uncatechized adults found in Part II, 4, baptism is emphasized
as that which distinguishes candidates from catechumens.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, the rite of reception outlined in Part II, 5 of the RCIA makes clear that “[anything] that would equate candidates for reception with those who are catechumens is to be absolutely avoided.”\textsuperscript{14} With regard to catechesis, the guidelines in Part II, 4 indicate that the process should take into account the special status these adults have because of their baptism.\textsuperscript{15} Finally, the optional liturgical celebrations offered in Part II, 4 stress the special status granted candidates because of their baptism. The Rite of Welcoming the Candidates, for example, is described as a celebration where the adults are “welcomed into the community and acknowledged themselves to be part of it because they have already been marked

\textsuperscript{13} RCIA 400.

\textsuperscript{14} RCIA 477. This same admonition is given in RCIA 506, which pertains to the rites for combined groups of catechumens and candidates: “In the catechesis of the community and in the celebration of these rites, care must be taken to maintain the distinction between the catechumens and the baptized candidates.” Likewise, NSC 30 states: “Those who have already been baptized in another Church or ecclesial community should not be treated as catechumens or so designated.”

\textsuperscript{15} RCIA 402. Cf. RCIA 478: “In all cases . . . discernment should be made regarding the length of catechetical formation required for each individual candidate for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.” Also see NSC 30, which provides that “the doctrinal and spiritual preparation for reception into full Catholic communion should be determined according to the individual case, that is, it should depend on the extent to which the baptized person has led a Christian life within a community of faith and been appropriately catechized to deepen his or her inner adherence to the Church.”

NSC 31 is also noteworthy in that it directs when uncatechized Christians may participate in the elements of catechumenal formation: “Those who have been baptized but have received relatively little Christian upbringing may participate in the elements of catechumenal formation so far as necessary and appropriate, but should not take part in rites intended for the unbaptized catechumens. They may, however, participate in celebrations of the word together with catechumens. In addition they may be included with uncatechized adult Catholics in such rites as may be appropriate among those included or mentioned in the ritual in Part II, 4.” The directive goes on to state that certain rites, i.e., presentation of the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the book of the Gospels “are not proper except for those who have received no Christian instruction and formation.” NSC 31 also cautions that baptized persons who have lived a Christian life and need “only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation within the Catholic community should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the catechumenate.”

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by the seal of baptism."\(^{16}\) When the Rite of Welcoming is celebrated, the candidates are to be seated "in a prominent place among the faithful [because] they are already numbered among the baptized,"\(^{17}\) and the celebrant is to remind the assembly of these candidates' baptism.\(^{18}\) The prayer texts for the Rite of Welcoming and the other optional rites also make frequent mention of the candidates' baptism.\(^{19}\)

The Catholic Church's ecumenical sensitivity to the baptism of candidates is also indicated in the rite's norm concerning conditional baptism. It has been a long-standing tradition not to rebaptize individuals baptized by ministers outside the communion of the Catholic Church; however, one can conclude from the careful wording in the 1967 Ecumenical Directory and the Rite of Reception that baptisms in other Christian communities were once viewed with some degree of suspicion. Indeed, it appears that indiscriminate conditional baptism of all who desired full communion with the Catholic Church was commonplace.\(^{20}\) The 1967 Ecumenical Directory addressed this practice head-on by indicating that indiscriminate conditional baptisms "cannot be approved."\(^{21}\) The Directory also provided that to baptize conditionally, there must be "prudent doubt of the fact, or of the validity, of a baptism," and that if after serious investigation, "reasonable doubt persists," the rite of conditional baptism is to be carried out privately.\(^{22}\) The Rite of Reception mirrors the statements made in the 1967 Ecumenical Directory in this regard.\(^{23}\)

An Ecclesiological Understanding of Baptism: It's All in the Rite. The emphasis on the baptism of candidates for the Rite of Reception further draws our attention to the importance of examining the various ecclesiological implications of baptism. As we examine the

\(^{16}\) RCIA 405.
\(^{17}\) RCIA 416.
\(^{18}\) RCIA 417.
\(^{19}\) See 419(A), 420, 422, 424, 430, 431, 440, 452(A), 454, 455, and 469.
\(^{20}\) Robert Duggan writes that the "Rite of Reception hopes to end once and for all the former practice of indiscriminate rebaptism and any tendency to treat separated Christians as if they were godless infidels." Duggan, 43.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., nos. 14 and 15. See also 1993 Ecumenical Directory, no. 99.
\(^{23}\) RCIA 480. See also NSC 37.

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ecclesiological issues, we will also discover the existence of certain ecumenical tensions. We can look to the RCIA directives for the preparation and reception of baptized candidates to assist with our effort in teasing out these issues and tensions.

An evaluation of the relevant RCIA norms brings into focus essentially three issues that are important for our purposes here: the meaning of "full communion" with the Catholic Church, the relationship between baptism and one's incorporation into the universal church of Christ and a particular ecclesial community, and the understanding of baptism as the means for sharing fully in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.

In the Rite of Reception, candidates ask to be received into the "full communion of the Catholic Church." The combined rite for the celebration at the Easter Vigil of the sacraments of initiation and the rite of reception expands upon this idea of "full communion," stating that by seeking reception into full Catholic communion, candidates "are entering fully into a community that is constituted by its communion both in faith and in the sacramental sharing of the paschal mystery." This same norm notes that "[the] celebration of their reception at the Easter Vigil provides the candidates with a privileged opportunity to recall and reaffirm their own baptism, 'the sacramental bond of unity [and] foundation of communion between all Christians'."

Thus, our first question comes into focus: What does "full communion" mean and how does this concept relate to baptism? To answer this question, we must define communion. Communion can be characterized simply as a network of relationships. This network is comprised of "[the] Christian's relationship to Christ, [which] is inseparable from that person's relationship to the corporate body, the church." A person is inserted into this network of relationships through baptism.

24 RCIA 563.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.

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To appreciate the meaning of full communion, we must consider that in Catholic thought, there are degrees of communion. In fact, in the Catholic mindset, baptism alone does not place one fully into the network of relationships. Hence, Christians baptized in other ecclesial communities are described as being in partial or imperfect communion with the Catholic Church. This notion of partial or imperfect communion is spelled out in Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism, which “characterizes the communion among Christians who participate in the one baptism as imperfect.”

The Decree further states: “[Baptism], of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus ordained toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it to be, and finally, toward a complete integration into eucharistic communion.” Based on this understanding of baptism, the Catholic Church sees full communion as coming about when a person baptized as a member of another Christian community makes a complete profession of faith in the Catholic Church. This profession of

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29 Ibid., 40. A potential ecumenical rub in the Decree on Ecumenism is worth noting. In a recent article, Susan Wood writes that the Decree on Ecumenism is “very self-referencing with regard to the Roman Catholic Church in that it speaks of how other ecclesial communities are in (imperfect) communion with Roman Catholicism rather than how they and Roman Catholicism are in communion with each other within the church of Christ. Lumen Gentium offers the possibility for a more nuanced perspective when it distinguishes between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church by saying that “the church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church.” Susan K. Wood, “Baptism and the Foundations of Communion,” in Michael Root, et al., eds., Baptism and the Unity of the Church (Grand Rapids Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1998) 44.

30 Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism, 22. Susan Wood points out that from an ecumenical perspective, a tension exists in the two forms of communion articulated in the Decree, that is, “a communion envisioned between churches as institutions and a christological communion that transcends but does not bypass the churches as institutions.” Wood, “Baptism and the Foundations of Communion,” 45–46. She writes that “[this] tension mirrors the distinction between visible and invisible elements of communion. The unity achieved in baptism is soteriological unity in Christ. What baptism is ordered toward but cannot contain within itself, belongs to the visible elements of unity: profession of faith, a system of salvation, and participation in eucharistic communion.” Ibid. (emphasis original).
faith, as set forth in the Rite of Reception, incorporates the person fully into the "system of salvation," which the Decree on Ecumenism implies is identical with the Catholic Church. This incorporation, in turn, enables the person who has made the requisite profession of faith to participate in eucharistic communion, which symbolizes the totality of the church and expresses the fullness of one's unity with the Catholic Church. We will return later to the significance of Eucharist to the rite of reception.

Related to the consideration of full communion is our second question, that is, does baptism make one a member of the universal church of Christ or a particular confessional community? The RCIA alludes to the connection between baptism and church membership: "By baptism [the baptized but uncatechized adults] have already become members of the church and children of God." The question which arises is, what is the "church" to which this norm refers? From the Catholic perspective, persons are at once baptized into both the universal church of Christ and a particular, local church. So, baptism is "entry into the concrete life and care of [a particular] community," while it is also initiation into the church universal. Communion, however, is always realized in a local church. Susan Wood writes that most concretely, "we are baptized into a worshiping assembly," and for Catholics, this

31 RCIA 400.
32 Wood, "Baptism as a Mark of the Church," 40-41.
33 Institute for Ecumenical Research, "Baptism and the Unity of the Church: A Study Paper," in Michael Root, et al., eds., Baptism and the Unity of the Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1998) 15. Here, the potentially ambiguous language in a prayer text found in the RCIA's optional rite of sending the candidates for recognition by the bishop is of interest: "My dear friends, these candidates, already one with us by their baptism in Christ, have asked to complete their initiation (or: to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church." RCIA 440 (emphasis added). This same language is found in RCIA 541. A few questions surface from the wording of RCIA 440 and 541. One, precisely who is the "us" referred to in these texts? If the baptized but uncatechized adults were baptized in the Catholic Church, is "Church" and "us" intended to mean both the universal church of Christ and the particular church of Roman Catholicism? If, on the other hand, the candidates are persons baptized in other ecclesial communities, does "Church" and "us" refer only to the universal church of Christ?

34 Ibid.

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translates into a “particular church defined as an altar community around its bishops.”

The role of the bishop in this regard is clearly indicated in the optional Rite of Sending in Part II, 4 of the RCIA: “Because [the bishop] is the sign of unity within the particular church, it is fitting for the bishop to recognize these candidates.” Moreover, the bishop’s role is highlighted in the Rite of Reception, wherein it is specifically stated that “[it] is the office of the bishop to receive baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church.” While the Rite permits this responsibility to be delegated to a priest, “the point should not be lost: the Rite brings the candidate into the whole of the Catholic Church, with all its hierarchy and all its people, for hierarchy and laity together make up the communion of the church.”

The last of the three issues defined above regarding baptism is the Catholic understanding of the relationship between baptism and the church’s worship and sacramental life. The relationship between baptism and the church’s worship life is of interest here because of the recent debate in RCIA catechetical circles about whether baptized candidates ought to be dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass. The RCIA provides for the dismissal of catechumens; however, no such provision is made for the dismissal of baptized candidates. Yet, it frequently happens that in parishes where there are combined groups, the candidates are dismissed along with the catechumens. This practice has caused some concern. Thomas Morris, for example, writes that

35 Ibid. An ecumenical tension seems inherent in the understanding that Christians are baptized into a particular church. Susan Wood notes that “we are baptized into unity and disunity simultaneously — unity because of our unity of one baptism in Christ, disunity because we are baptized into a particular community that is not in communion with other communities. The altar communities into which we are baptized are not in union with one another. It does mean, however, that eucharistic communion includes a visible communion of union with a bishop and also the union of local churches with each other through the communio of the bishops.” Ibid. See also the 1993 Ecumenical Directory, 13–14.
36 RCIA 435.
37 RCIA 481.
38 Ferrone, 18.
39 See RCIA, Appendix I.

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baptized Christians, regardless of whether baptized Catholic or in other Christian communities, "have a right to participate in the priestly prayer of the Eucharist by virtue of their baptism." He goes on to argue that this "right to pray the eucharistic prayer with the community (a priestly role)" requires that dismissal can be done only with a candidate's permission.

Canonist John Huels agrees. He comments that "[although] they may not yet, as a rule, receive holy communion, the candidates' presence at the entire eucharistic celebration is a clear way of signifying that they already are members of the faithful, though they are not yet in full communion." He adds that the candidates' presence at the liturgy of the Eucharist affirms the dignity of their baptism and is "a clear sign to them, to the catechumens, and to the entire community that baptism does indeed make a difference." Huels recognizes, however, that the candidates are not obliged to remain at Mass because the precept regarding Mass attendance binds only Catholics.

The line of reasoning by Morris and Huels makes sense in light of the Vatican II principle that by baptism, one is "consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood" and "appointed [to] Christian religious worship." However, from a liturgical perspective, the position that a person baptized in another ecclesial community has the right to pray the eucharistic prayer becomes shaky when we admit that the right to pray this prayer seems to have no bearing on the right to partake at the eucharistic table. Arguably, this results in the isolation of the eucharistic elements from the entire liturgical action (in this case, the eucharistic prayer). It also shines the spotlight on a remaining ecumenical tension, that is, the

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40 Thomas H. Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church, A Resource for Pastoral Implementation* (New York: Paulist Press 1997) 148. Morris further suggests that parish leaders ought to consult the Ecumenical Directory's guidelines regarding the participation of baptized candidates in community worship. Ibid. These guidelines are found in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory, 102-42.

41 Ibid., 149.


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 10-11.

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participation of *all* the baptized, regardless of confessional affiliation, in the eucharistic meal.

A related point is the link between baptism and participation in the sacramental life of the church. The Decree on Ecumenism speaks of baptism as establishing a "sacramental bond of unity among all who through it are reborn." The RCIA echoes this understanding when it describes a candidate's baptism as "the sacramental bond of unity [and] foundation of communion between all Christians." Baptism as pointing to "complete entrance into eucharistic communion" is reiterated in RCIA 563, which further states that "the baptismal themes of the Easter Vigil can serve to emphasize why the high point of the candidates' reception is their sharing in the Eucharist with the Catholic community for the first time."

The emphasis on Eucharist as the full sign of communion with the church makes it preferable for the rite of reception to take place within the Mass. If for a serious reason the rite is celebrated outside Mass, the rite suggests that "the Mass in which for the first time the newly received will take part with the Catholic community should be celebrated as soon as possible, in order to make clear the connection between the reception and eucharistic communion."

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46 Decree on Ecumenism, 22.
47 RCIA 563.
48 RCIA 563. The National Statutes differ on the value of celebrating the reception of candidates into full communion at the Easter Vigil. NSC 33 provides that "[i]t is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil lest there be any confusion of such baptized Christians with the candidates for baptism, possible misunderstanding of or even reflection upon the sacrament of baptism celebrated in another church or ecclesial community, or any perceived triumphalism in the liturgical welcome into the Catholic eucharistic community."

49 RCIA 475(1). RCIA 475(2) addresses an ecumenical concern: "Any appearance of triumphalism should be carefully avoided and the manner of celebrating this Mass should be decided beforehand and with a view to the particular circumstances. Both the ecumenical implications and the bond between the candidate and the parish community should be considered. Often it will be preferable to celebrate the Mass with only a few relatives and friends. If for a serious reason Mass cannot be celebrated, the reception should at least take place within a liturgy of the word, whenever this is possible. The person to be received into full communion should be consulted about the form of reception."

50 RCIA 476.

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Thus, as one commentator notes, the “whole thrust of reception of baptized Christians is toward a consummation in eucharistic communion.”

One additional point needs to be made regarding the relationship between baptism and the participation in the sacramental life of the church. The RCIA indicates that “[i]f the profession of faith and reception take place within Mass, the candidate, according to his or her own conscience, should make a confession of sins beforehand.” In support of urging candidates to celebrate the rite of penance, Huels comments that it is necessary, according to church doctrine and law, for candidates to confess all “serious sins in number and in kind that they recall having committed during their life after they were baptized.” Of course, we can explain to candidates that an essential aspect of the sacrament of penance is reconciliation with Christ. At the same time, the rite of penance has an important communal dimension in that it ritualizes reconciliation with the penitent’s ecclesial community. Accordingly, the rite is not generally practiced by baptized Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Hence, it is reasonable to ask why a candidate should be reconciled with a particular, local church with which he or she is not in full communion.

The Celebration of Reception. A number of issues of ecclesiological and ecumenical interest are embodied within the ritual designed

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51 Ferrone, 18.
52 RCIA 482. Also see NSC 36.
53 Huels, 19.
54 Familiarity with the guidelines given in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory concerning access to the sacrament of penance for Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities is essential here. The Directory provides that “in general the Catholic Church permits access to its Eucharistic communion and to the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick, only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life.” 1993 Ecumenical Directory, 129. However, “in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities.” Ibid. The conditions under which these three sacraments may be administered to a baptized person are “that the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed.” Ibid., 131.

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for reception into full Catholic communion. First, the overarching ecumenical sensitivity of the rite is apparent in the opening paragraph of RCIA, Part II, 5, which characterizes the rite of reception as being “so arranged that no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity.” The rite states further that “[any] appearance of triumphalism should be carefully avoided.” Also, as previously noted, the celebration of reception into full Catholic communion may be celebrated within or outside the Mass, a decision to made with the candidate and with an eye towards the ecumenical implications of celebrating the rite within Mass. Finally, it is worth noting two suggested intercessory prayers for the celebration, one of which prays for Christian unity and the other of which prays for the particular ecclesial community into which the candidate was baptized.

Next, we need to consider the meaning of the candidate’s profession of faith and the act of reception. A profession of faith is the only act formally required for reception. Significantly, the rite specifically states that “[one] who is born and baptized outside the visible communion of the Catholic Church is not required to make an abjuration of heresy.” Thus, the abjuration of heresy, which from the Middle Ages until the 1960s had become the overshadowing element in the ritual for receiving baptized Christians into full communion, is simply eliminated.

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55 RCIA 473, citing Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis redintegratio, no. 18.
56 RCIA 475(2).
57 Ibid.
58 RCIA 496.
59 Bugnini, 596. Bugnini notes that the Secretariat for Christian Unity had elected not to ask for any more than the profession of faith. Ibid., n. 31.
60 RCIA 479. The provision replaces the 1959 Instruction of the Holy Office, which required an abjuration of error and absolution from excommunication. See 1976 USCC publication of Rite of Reception, 2. For a full text of the abjuration of heresy found in the Rituale Parvum, used as recently as 1964, see Maxwell E. Johnson, “Let’s Stop Making ‘Converts’ at Easter,” Catechumenate 21 (September 1999) 12.
The actual profession of faith prescribed in the rite has two parts. First, assuming the reception is within Mass, the candidate joins the community in reciting the Nicene Creed.\textsuperscript{62} Second, the candidate is asked to add the following profession of faith: “I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.”\textsuperscript{63} Assuming the candidate has been told beforehand what he or she will be asked to say, a practice which is certainly desirable, the question that can be expected is, “What does the statement mean?” Thankfully, in contrast to the former abjuration of heresy, the added profession of faith in the 1968 rite is brief; however, it could also be criticized for being vague. Does the statement mean the candidate believes and professes all Catholic Church dogma or doctrine, or all teachings, regardless of classification? Based on the phrase “revealed by God,” one can conclude that the candidate professes his or her belief in Church dogma, since dogma is defined as any propositional statement that is divinely revealed.\textsuperscript{64}

The profession of faith is followed by the act of reception. As the celebrant speaks the words of reception provided in the rite, he is to lay his right hand on the head of the candidate.\textsuperscript{65} However, if confirmation is to be conferred immediately, the imposition of the hand is omitted.\textsuperscript{66} As we shall see, confirmation is required for all Christians baptized in other ecclesial communities. Only Eastern Christians are not reconfirmed, because the Catholic Church regards chrismation in the Eastern churches as equivalent to confirmation.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{62}RCIA 491. Bugnini notes that where permission is given, the Apostles’ Creed may be used instead of the Nicene Creed. Bugnini, 596, n. 32. Also, if the reception of the candidate takes place at the Easter Vigil, the profession of faith is made by joining the community in the renewal of the baptismal promises. RCIA 563.

\textsuperscript{63}RCIA 491.

\textsuperscript{64}Richard R. Gaillardetz, Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press 1997) 93.

\textsuperscript{65}RCIA 492.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67}Paul Turner, Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon’s Court (New York: Paulist Press 1993) 63, citing the code of Oriental law, canon 897. Regarding the reception of Eastern Christians, the rite states that “no liturgical rite is required, but simply a profession of Catholic faith, even if such persons are permitted, in virtue of

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We turn now to an evaluation of the inclusion of confirmation in the rite of reception. Of all the topics which emerge from the rite of reception, the sacrament of confirmation has probably received the most criticism. No doubt that at the root of this criticism is the Catholic Church's refusal to recognize confirmation celebrated in other Christian communities, except for chrismation in the Eastern churches. Thus, the church's practice that those confirmed in other ecclesial communities are reconfirmed requires that we understand the basis for this teaching.

There are essentially two bases for the church's position on confirmation. One, unlike the Catholic Church, the Protestant-Anglican churches do not consider confirmation to be a sacrament. Two, the Catholic Church does not recognize apostolic succession in those churches, nor therefore the ordination of their clergy. As Paul Turner explains, "[since] the administration of confirmation is reserved in the Catholic Church to bishops and priests, Catholics do not recognize the validity of confirmation in another church."

It is critical here that we not lose sight of the purpose of celebrating confirmation with baptized candidates. Confirmation is not the ritual or mechanism that brings a candidate into full communion with the Catholic Church. The profession of faith and act of

recourse to the Apostolic See to transfer to the Latin rite." RCIA 474. Attention needs to be given to two points in this provision. One, an Eastern non-Catholic Christian does not become a member of the Roman Catholic Church; rather, he or she becomes a member of the corresponding Eastern Catholic Church. If the person received wishes to become Roman Catholic, a request must be made to the Apostolic See for a transfer of rite. Morris, 233.

Two, although the rite indicates that "no liturgical rite is required," there is little guidance within the rite itself as to what is meant by "liturgical rite." The language of RCIA 474 clearly requires that there be a profession of Catholic faith. Logically, such profession ought to be followed by the act of reception, wherein the presiding priest verbally receives the candidate into full communion with the Catholic Church; however, this is not stated explicitly in the rite. Arguably, the profession of faith and act of reception is a liturgical rite; yet, since the rite provides that no liturgical rite is required and since Eastern Christians are not reconfirmed, one can only conclude that the rite intends for "liturgical rite" in this instance to mean confirmation.

68 Turner, 61.
69 Ibid., 61–62.
70 Ibid., 62. Turner adds that the non-recognition of orders is a "painful point in the ecumenical dialogue." Ibid.

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reception is the ritual act which marks the reception of the candidate into full communion and which gives the person now in full communion access to the Catholic Church’s sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. Because in most instances confirmation follows the act of reception immediately, the sacrament is susceptible to being misunderstood as that which is necessary to achieve full communion. In fact, in the Catholic Church, confirmation and Eucharist celebrate the fullness of Christian initiation. The challenge both catechetically and ritually is to make clear the intimate relationship of confirmation and Eucharist to baptism.

PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS
We end with two important pastoral considerations regarding the reception of baptized Christians into full Catholic communion. First, we must take care to find a balance between the ecumenical sensitivity needed in receiving candidates and the celebration of what is a significant time in people’s faith journey. Nick Wagner writes that this time “must be expressed in ritual [and that our] challenge is to develop rituals based on the principles found in the [RCIA] that respect the fact that these candidates are members of the Body of Christ.”  

The recognition that we need to celebrate fully a candidate’s decision to seek full Catholic communion leads to the second pastoral issue. The RCIA has undergone its second generation revision. We have now the wisdom of nearly three decades of experience with the rite. We also know that at least in the United States, the rite is frequently used as the primary means for receiving baptized Christians. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to consider making the Rite of Reception a rite wholly independent of the RCIA. In other words, combined rites would be eliminated. The rituals for the two groups — catechumens and candidates — would always be celebrated separately.

For example, rather than looking to a combined rite for the Easter Vigil to initiate catechumens and receive candidates, candidates would always be received at some other time, preferably a Sunday Eucharist. In particular, candidates could be received during one of the Sundays of Easter, which would serve to highlight the

71 Wagner, 25.

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significance of the candidates' baptism and help in sustaining the joyfulness of the fifty-day Easter season. Of course, candidates who are ready for reception could also be received at Sunday liturgies outside the Easter season. We must be mindful, however, of the frequency with which candidates are received. If the Rite of Reception is celebrated too often, we risk losing the rite’s meaning and the assembly’s interest.

On a final note, requiring the separation of rituals for catechumens and candidates does not mean that all aspects of formation be experienced separately. To avoid the potential drain on parish resources, there could still be overlap with catechetical instruction. However, if the liturgical rites are always celebrated independently of one another, we might alleviate the concerns expressed about combined groups of catechumens and candidates.

Steve Nolan

Representing Realities:
Theorizing Reality in Liturgy and Film

Celie, an uneducated black girl, sexually abused as a child, had her babies taken from her and was married off to a man who beat her. Subject of Steven Spielberg’s Oscar nominated adaptation of Alice Walker’s Pulitzer prize winner, *The Color Purple,* the misery of her life was slowly transformed by a woman’s love. Shug Avery, a wild girl night-club singer who dared to think her own thoughts and live her own life, gradually conscientised Celie empowering her to resist her abusive husband and begin to believe in herself. Along the way, the image which represented Celie’s God was transformed, and we glimpse the direction of her former image. “He big

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