



Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, N.J.

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Over the last five years more than 160,000 adults annually have entered the Catholic Church in the United States. This amazing number—which does not include children coming into the church through infant baptism—coincides with the reinstatement of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The development has surprised church leaders, who never predicted such an increase in an age that can be described as amorphously religious, one in which people speak generally of God but eschew identification with a particular church.

The effect of the adult catechumenate, often referred to by the initials R.C.I.A., suggests that the church has found a potent vehicle for evangelization. Indeed, since the rite's reinstatement, the Catholic Church in the United States each year has drawn more new members than any other religious group in the nation. In the past 30 years, for example, there has been an increase of about 24 percent in the number of Catholics in the United States. In addition, the

catechumenate, which has taken root in the United States particularly, seems to have led to greater growth of the Catholic Church in the United States than in almost any other country.

Increase in numbers is significant, of course, but another benefit of the catechumenate appears to be its power to reinvigorate parishes. The R.C.I.A. involves teams of parishioners who guide people on their journey into the church. As any teacher knows, there is no better way to learn and become enthusiastic about something—including the faith—than to teach about it. Even parishioners who don't teach in the programs are involved too. They welcome strangers, show support, pray for the catechumens and candidates and become moved themselves as they witness men and women formally opt to share in their faith life.

Now, after looking at the results of a study that is about to be released called *Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States*, the U.S. bishops must enter a new phase: strengthening the catechumenate.

This phase must be marked by action to deal with concerns found during the three-year study, which was undertaken by five U.S. bishops'

committees: the Committee on Evangelization, which spearheaded the effort, and the Committees on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, Education, Liturgy and Pastoral Practices. The involvement of so many committees suggests that efforts to implement the adult catechumenate span several critical areas of diocesan and parish life and that concerns are far-reaching.

Given the huge success of the adult catechumenate, the study's major finding is that the overall implementation as intended by the rite must continue to be a major priority in dioceses and parishes. No surprise there. But it is not enough to rejoice in the number of people entering the church. Issues of the faith are not a numbers game.

Right now, according to the study, the R.C.I.A. is in a good news/bad news position. Tens of thousands of people are responding. That is good. But the study also shows that we are not doing enough to nourish their faith. That is not so good. The study highlights four challenges:

1. To provide ongoing formation for leadership and those involved in the catechumenate process;
2. To show a greater distinction between those preparing for baptism and those seeking full communion with the church;

AMAZING GROWTH

Challenges of Christian Initiation of Adults



process can be achieved by convening catechists to share their diverse experience in this area.

Ongoing formation is vital for pastors in their unique leadership roles as chief catechists in their parishes, but it also must be extended to all clergy and pastoral staff members. Diocesan formation programs may urge pastors not using the rite to start doing so. Such programs also can make implementation of the R.C.I.A. seem do-able to those who are intimidated by something new. It is the hope of the U.S. bishops that all parishes implement the rite.

The emphasis upon ongoing formation reinforces the teaching that faith formation is a lifelong process. It does not end at the Easter Vigil for those received into the church, any more than it does for catechists once they earn a degree. Respondents to questionnaires for the study stated clearly that new members in the church want more opportunities to develop their own faith formation. It is clear from the study that they feel an emptiness if they discover that there is nothing for them after their reception into the church. These same people overwhelmingly said that the greatest strength they experienced during the catechumenate was a feeling of being connected to a community. Mystagogy, the period of formation immediately following formal reception or return to the church, on the other hand, is reportedly the weakest aspect of the process. One fears that without a continuation of the initiation process after the Easter Vigil, the enthusiasm of new members will quickly wane, and their growth in the faith will be stunted.

FULL COMMUNION

Showing a greater distinction between those preparing for baptism and those seeking admission to the full communion of the Catholic Church is integral to the R.C.I.A. Survey responses and most of the bishops' committees expressed this concern. The dignity of baptism, no matter in what denomination one is baptized, is of great importance for all involved in this formation process. This distinction affects all aspects of pastoral life: catechetical, liturgical and communal formation. It is frequently mentioned that catechumens and candidates are often joined together because of a lack of resources—primarily of time and people. This lack of resources, however, provides opportunities to invite others into this essential ministry in the communities.

It is insulting to treat people who are familiar with the Scriptures from their experience in another faith group as if they had never opened a Bible until they began to study about Catholicism. It is equally offensive to treat people baptized in another faith community as if they had never been baptized at all. Yet when we do not distinguish between catechumens (who never have been baptized) and candidates from other Christian churches, we risk insulting people by cavalierly dismissing their earlier religious formation. Putting both groups together is comparable to putting students who can read and those who cannot in the same reading group. Both are ill served.

Those working in Christian initiation also must acknowledge that many

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3. To address irregular marriages early in the process;

4. To provide for greater adaptation of the rite in the local churches.

ONGOING FORMATION

Ongoing formation of participants is of utmost importance. Otherwise we act like gardeners who plant seeds and then neglect to water them. Yet it is not just catechumens and candidates who need formation. So also do pastors, catechists and all the team members, who must be sensitive to the pastoral needs and issues of the adult groups and individuals they serve. The process needs common guidelines, but it is not a cookie-cutter operation. Each community of faith is unique, as is each catechumen and candidate. Some deepened understanding of the faith can come through basic ongoing formation programs. More understanding of the initiation

candidates bring to the Catholic Church rich traditions and experiences from other churches. In addition, many who start on the process already have been attending Mass—some for as long as 10 years or more—and began to learn about the church and grow in faith long before they even thought about participating in a structured initiation process.

IRREGULAR MARRIAGES

A major obstacle for beginning the R.C.I.A. process or being initiated into the church for some people is an irregular marriage. It is apparent from the study that some in irregular marriages participate only to find out late in the process that there is an obstacle to being admitted to full participation in the life in the church at this particular time. This is a most neuralgic issue. It is painful, at best, to start people down the path only to tell them later that they cannot be fully initiated into the church because of its teaching on marriage. This raises the importance of early personal interviews with people before they enter the process. In many instances, people are open to the possibility of regularizing their marriages. When this is addressed early in the process, people sometimes can receive the sacraments at the next Easter Vigil. Unfortunately this report also tells us that too many people choose not to regularize their marriages, because it often means revisiting painful separations and divorces. The church needs to do more pastorally to encourage and enable couples to pursue the annulment process.

FLEXIBILITY

Adaptation is of great importance for all involved in adult initiation. The rite and its

General Instruction speak clearly to us today and challenge us to adapt when pastoral needs arise and call upon all involved to be open to adaptation. It is clear that the way of implementing the rite in one community may be different from the way it is done in another. The great diversity found in the United States is a blessing, but it also presents one of the greatest challenges for pastoral ministry. This is a challenge that must be addressed by the local churches. For a start, we need print, audio and visual materials in several languages. We need materials for people with little or no formal education. We need to adapt the process to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults offers great hope as we move into the 21st century. The church has repeatedly stressed that evangelization is a high priority. With this rite we have a means to evangelize that is proving to be successful in the United States. Implementing and improving it must be a top priority for dioceses and parishes.

Bishop Wilton Gregory of the Diocese of Belleville, Ill., is vice-president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and holds a doctorate in liturgy from Rome's Pontifical Liturgical Institute.

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A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE CATECHUMENATE

Since 1988 our parishes have been implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the Archdiocese. These thirteen years have seen this ministry grow year after year. It has become the greatest means of evangelization for our Church and it is a means by which thousands of people have joined our church community.

In August of 1999, I wrote to you announcing the beginning of the practice in the Archdiocese of Newark of separating the celebration of the Rite of Election for our catechumens, and the Call to Continuing Conversion for our candidates. We had regional meetings with the people in your parish responsible for initiation and explained the rationale for the change. We asked that parishes begin a process of separating the rites they celebrate in the parish. Furthermore, **adult baptized Catholics** seeking confirmation were confirmed outside the Easter Vigil.

This year we will continue to implement the separation of the combined rites. Confirmation of **adult baptized Catholics** is to be celebrated apart from the Easter Vigil. The Archbishop will grant the faculty to the Regional Bishops to delegate pastors to confirm **adult baptized Catholics** in the parish on one of the Sundays of Easter or on Pentecost Sunday. Delegation will be given upon request for pastors to confirm those who have participated in a process of formation modeled on the catechumenate. Pastors are asked to request delegation from their Regional Bishop. The letter must state that the candidate has participated in a formation process modeled on the catechumenate.

Rev. Michael Sheehan
Director of the Catechumenate



Suggested Questions for a Background Interview with Candidates for the R.C.I.A.

The proposed questions are designed to aid pastoral ministers working with persons interested in becoming part of the RCIA.

The questions will help pastoral ministers obtain information involved with the candidate's marital status, family situation, and standing in the community. Such an interview will bring to light issues, which may need to be resolved, before a person can be initiated into the Church, particularly, issues regarding marriage.

(This questionnaire is not intended to be handed out to inquirers. Interviewer should obtain this information in the course of conversation with inquirer, and then see that it is recorded here. It should be completed before the Rite of Welcome/Acceptance.)

1. Name _____ Telephone _____

2. Address _____

3. Date of Birth _____ Place _____

4. Father's Name _____ Religion _____

5. Mother's Name _____ Religion _____
(maiden name)

6. Were you baptized? _____ If yes:

What Denomination _____

Name of Church _____

Address of Church _____

Date of Baptism _____ Officiant _____

7. Have you ever been confirmed? _____ Received communion? _____
Denomination _____ Denomination _____
Church _____ Church _____
Date _____ Date _____

8. Have you ever been accepted as a catechumen or a candidate in the Catholic Church? _____
If yes, when? _____
Where _____

9. Are you married at the present time? _____
Date of marriage _____ Place of marriage _____
Officiant _____
(name) (title)

Prior to this marriage, have you ever been married to another person either in church, civilly or by common law? _____. If yes, consult No. 1 below.

Has your spouse ever been married (prior to your marriage) to another person either in church, civilly or by common law? _____. If yes, consult no. 2 below.

No. 1. PREVIOUS MARRIAGE OF INQUIRER

How many times were you married? _____
To whom? _____
What denomination? _____
When? _____ Where? _____
Officiant _____

If former spouse is deceased,
give date of death _____ Do you have a death certificate? _____

If former marriage was dissolved or declared null by the Church, give Diocese and
Protocol # _____

Date of decree _____

No. 2. PREVIOUS MARRIAGE OF PRESENT SPOUSE

How many times was he or she married? _____

To whom? _____

Denomination of Church of Marriage _____

When? _____

Where? _____

Officiant _____

If former spouse is deceased,
give date of death _____ Do you have a death certificate? _____

If former marriage was dissolved or declared null by the Church, give Diocese and
Protocol # _____

Date of decree _____

Other Discussion Questions

How have your family members and friends reacted to your decision to become a member of the Catholic Church?

Does anyone object or have concerns about your decision?

Is there anything in your past that could become public knowledge and discredit our parish and the Church community?

Is there any other personal information that the Church should be aware of?

Do you realize that becoming a member of the Church is an ongoing process, which generally takes more than a year?

Are there any concerns or issues that you would like to raise?

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

Popular devotions of the faithful should be nourished with good pastoral care. Part of this care is to see that the devotions “harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy...and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy, by its very nature far surpasses any of them.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13)

Asomewhat recent development in Catholic life is the devotion to Divine Mercy according to the inspiration of St. Faustina. Popular in Poland, this devotion has been finding acceptance also in our area. A key aspect of this devotion is the observance of the Second Sunday of Easter as ‘Divine Mercy Sunday.’ This

observance is preceded by a devotional novena beginning on Good Friday. (Note that at the time of St. Faustina’s experiences of the Lord’s apparitions, the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ had fallen into virtual disuse. It would be for Pope Pius XII in the 1950’s to attempt to restore the celebration of the Triduum to the whole Church as “the culmination of the entire liturgical year.”)

A few clarifications need to be made. The Divine Mercy devotion itself has been judged acceptable for Catholic people. As with any other example of popular piety it can be promoted among the faithful for individual spiritual

enrichment and may find a home in the devotional life of a parish community.

The challenge comes with the effort to make the Divine Mercy devotion part of the formal liturgical life of the Church. In the liturgical calendar, the week following Easter Sunday is treated like Easter Day itself. (All the days have the rank of “solemnity.”) Pope John Paul II has graciously determined that in the Roman Missal, after the title Second Sunday of Easter, there shall henceforth be added the appellation *or Divine Mercy Sunday*.

What does this mean for local practice? None of the texts or readings for the Second

Sunday of Easter nor its place in the liturgical calendar is changed by the decree; it merely establishes that the name of the day in the liturgical calendar will be *Second Sunday of Easter or Sunday of Divine Mercy*.

Parish leaders should be supportive of those who find spiritual enrichment in the Divine Mercy. However (and especially in view of the nature and dignity of the Triduum and Easter Octave in the Church’s general calendar), we should avoid the appearance of granting to this devotion the same status as the actual liturgy of the Church.

The Staff of the Worship Office

Proclamation of Divine Mercy Sunday

By virtue of a Decree issued on May 5, 2000 by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the discipline of the Sacraments, the Holy See proclaimed the Second Sunday of Easter also as Divine Mercy Sunday.

Decree

Merciful and gracious is the Lord (Ps 111:4), who, out of great love with which He loved us (Eph 2:4) and [out of] unspeakable goodness, gave us his Only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, so that through his Death and Resurrection of this Son He might open the way to eternal life for the human race, and that the adopted children who receive his mercy within his temple might lift up his praise to the ends of the earth.

In our times, the Christian faithful in many parts of the world wish to praise that divine mercy in divine worship, particularly in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, in which God’s loving kindness especially shines forth.

Acceding to these wishes, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II has graciously determined that in the Roman Missal, after the title Second Sunday of Easter, there shall henceforth be added the appellation *or Divine Mercy Sunday*, and has prescribed that the texts assigned for that day in the same Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours of the Roman Rite are always to be used for the liturgical celebration of this Sunday.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments now publishes these decisions of the Supreme Pontiff so that they may take effect.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Cardinal Jorge A. Medina Estévez
Prefect
+Francesco Pio Tamburrino
Archbishop Secretary

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