

This is not a workshop where you sit and listen while someone talks. The emphasis will be on learning from one another's experiences under the guidance of a facilitator with experience in the subject.

RCIA=Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults The RCIA is an official liturgical text that includes notes on the formation process that should surround the liturgical rites. It has a section (Part II:1) that shows how the RCIA should be used with school age children.

Which children?

The RCIA is used when children who **have reached the "age of reason" (about 7 years) without having been baptized** are brought to the parish for catechesis for baptism. (If brought to the parish for catechesis prior to the age of reason, use the Rite of Baptism for Infants, even if they are now older.)

- A. Who are we? Which group are you in? Catechists working with or hoping to work with:
  - GROUP 1: school age children who have not been baptized
  - GROUP 2: (same as Group A but) regularly work with 3 or more unbaptized children per year
  - GROUP 3: school age children who were baptized earlier but are beyond the usual age for First Eucharist of Confirmation—no unbaptized children. (Technically not RCIA, but may have similar needs)
- B. Within your groups, 1, 2 or 3, if there are more than five participants please break into discussion groups of 3-5 each for our discussion time.
- C. Discussion format. You can try going around the circle for each bullet point but you don't have to do them in strict order. We would like a volunteer note taker in each group.
  - Introduce yourselves, parish and town, how long you have been a catechist, perhaps something else about your family or background.
  - Briefly describe the RCIA with children (or similar) program in your parish and your role in it.
  - What are some successes that you have had?
  - What are some challenges you have had to deal with?
  - What are some questions you would like answered?  
**If there is a question the members of the group cannot answer among themselves, the note taker can ask that in the larger group when the small group discussion time ends.**
  - Can you list some resources, books, videos, music, and others that you have found helpful?
- D. Sharing of questions in the large group.
- E. Depending on timing we might do another round in different groups.

#### SOME IDEAS AND POINTERS THAT YOU MAY FIND HELPFUL

1. There is **only one catechumenate**.
  - There may be different groups.
  - They may sometimes come together.
  - Both adults and children are fully initiated at the Easter Vigil in the year that they are judged to be ready. (National Statutes §18)
2. **Involve the families**: Someone in the program needs to **interview the family and maintain ongoing contact**. This is a time for pastoral care for the whole family.

3. For all, Christian Initiation is a journey of conversion.  
We design experiences that we hope will open the way for God to touch the hearts of the children and draw them into relationship, intimacy with Jesus.
  
4. Stages & major rituals are the same for children as for adults
  - Pre-evangelization or Inquiry
    - ↳ Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate
  - Catechumenate (multi-year)
    - ↳ Rite of Election
  - Period of Purification and Enlightenment
    - ↳ Full Initiation at the Easter Vigil
  - Mystagogy
  
5. Pre-evangelization
  - Older children (12+) similar to adult inquiry, since they need to make a personal decision to accept this.
  - Younger (9-11) more a matter of “getting acquainted” with Jesus and his followers. Their parents bring them. If they are reasonably open, move ahead.
  - Need to involve parents in their own conversion process.
  
6. Catechumenate
  - For children, more than one year of formation.
  - Emphasize the importance of the Rite of Acceptance: They are members of the Church from that point on. “Joined to the Church, the catechumens are now part of the household of Christ” RCIA §47
  - RCIA text assumes they will be initiated at the same time as their peers are confirmed (RCIA §256, *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) pp. 119-120)
  - Use blessings and minor rites to assure them that they are valued
  
7. Need to adapt each year to the pastoral needs of the ages and groupings presented  
If parents are also catechumens that is a different pastoral situation than just the children alone.
  
8. How to group them (if your main catechetical program is based on weekly classes—if your main catechetical program is family based, then you already have the intergenerational sessions available)
  - Many children:
    - Perhaps weekly catechesis as a group.
    - May need more than one track depending on the age mix.
    - Do intergenerational sessions with parents periodically.
    - Dismissal catechesis might be appropriate.
  
  - Few children:
    - Enrolled in the regular catechetical program for their age
    - Periodic supplemental catechesis in a small group
    - Monthly intergenerational sessions of the catechumenal families
    - Dismissal catechesis might be awkward if there are only one or two.



9. Remember the **six tasks of catechesis**

- Knowledge of the faith
- Liturgical formation
- Moral formation
- Formation for prayer
- Formation in community
- Formation for mission

All six should be active in the formation of catechumens



10. How do we integrate these children into the wider community?

- Service opportunities
- Companion families who are recruited to walk the journey with them
- Representatives of different ministries invite the families to join them at an event
- If they are a separate class they might meet for gathering prayers with other classes
- If in mainstream classes, have all the catechists pray for “the catechumens, children preparing for baptism” without naming them unless they want their classmates to know.

11. How do we initiate them into ritual prayer?

- Attend liturgy of the word for children if age appropriate.
- Tours of the church and demonstrations of rituals, as we might do with regular sacrament preparation.
- Invite the families into parish ritual prayer: processions, May crowning, blessing of bread, ethnic feasts, etc.
- In class or family sessions create ritual prayer using the key liturgical symbols: sign of the cross, water, oil, candle, darkness and light, bread, blessings, especially the minor rites. (See “The Christian Initiation of Older Children,” by Sr. Sandi Demasi, pp. 20-59. You can order this for \$25 from the Worship Office of the Archdiocese of Newark.)

12. How do we initiate them into the mission of the Church in Christian Service?

- Invite catechumenal families to help with the soup kitchen, Christmas gift drive, food pantry, offering of letters, etc.
- Invite families to accompany parishioners in regular ministries, visiting the sick, decorating the church, caring for the grounds...

13. Spirituality and Conversion in Children

- They are nourished through story and imagination
  - Gospels are filled with stories and imagery
  - Symbols of the sacraments can be doorways to the imagination.
- Faith is built through relationships
  - They are not going to remember a word you say—They are just going to remember who you are!
- In conversation help them uncover & unpack the presence/experience of God in their lives.
  - We are in the business of creating memories based on experiences.
  - From these, faith arises.

Good reference on children’s spiritual thinking: Robert Coles *The Spiritual Life of Children*

#### 14. How do you discern conversion in a child?

- You talk with them about their thoughts and feelings, behavior towards others, how they experience God, church, Jesus, prayer and worship.
- We don't expect fully formed faith, but an openness
- How do you discern conversion in a child?
- See the questions in RCIA §283 for direction:  
Have these children...  
...shown themselves to be sincere in their desire for baptism, confirmation and the eucharist?  
...listened well to the word of God?  
...tried to live as his faithful followers?  
...taken part in this community's life of prayer and service?

### **SOME RESOURCES FOR RCIA WITH CHILDREN**

**RITUAL TEXT:** *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults: Study Edition*. Available from Liturgy Training Publications.

Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation of the University of Dayton .

<https://vlcff.udayton.edu/> has a good course on the RCIA. This would focus on adult initiation rather than the special situations that involve children.

[https://vlcff.udayton.edu/courses/course\\_details.php?course=165](https://vlcff.udayton.edu/courses/course_details.php?course=165)

[www.TeamRCIA.com](http://www.TeamRCIA.com) . A very helpful web site with many RCIA resources. While some are free others are available for purchase and can be quite expensive. Includes material and training for RCIA with children.

*Journey of Faith for Children*. Ligouri. <https://www.liquori.org/store/rcia-for-parishes/new-journey-of-faith-for-children.html> (Curriculum resource.)

*The Christian Initiation of Older Children: An Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Part II: Rites for Particular Circumstances: Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age*. Sr. Sandra DeMasi, SSJ. Available from the Archdiocese of Newark Worship Office. This resource draws out and amplifies the text of the Rite, suggests how children and adults may be integrated into celebrating the major rites of the catechumenate together, offers excellent examples of how the minor rites can be used to lead children to ritual prayer.

If you have a large group meeting weekly and not attending regular graded catechesis the *Pflaum Gospel Weeklies* provide a lectionary-oriented curriculum. This could also be a resource for groups that are in graded catechesis but meet less frequently as catechumens.

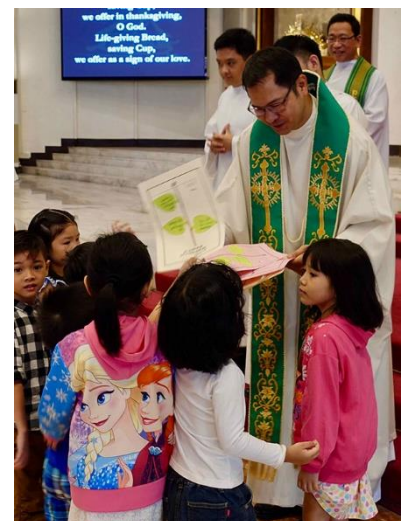
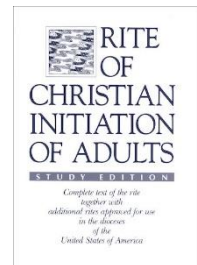
There is a wide variety of materials for intergenerational catechesis that can be adapted for family-based sessions.

Always start with Jesus, the stories of the Gospel. Try to find a substantial Bible for children at their reading level and read the New Testament stories. Skip some of the miracles and parables if they get repetitious.

Gr. 2-4 : *The Beginners Bible* (Zonderkidz)

Gr. 4-6: *The Read and Learn Bible* (American Bible Society & Scholastic)

Gr. 7-8: Selected stories from the Good News New Testament or the CEV translation. Other youth Bibles are also available. The Gospel of Luke might be a good choice to follow. It has a lot of famous stories unique to Luke, Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Rich Man and Lazarus, Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Zaccheus. If the healings and parables get too repetitious skip some of them.



## SPECIAL SITUATIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN

Catechetical suggestions to supplement directives from the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark in "Children of Catechetical Age—Concerning Children" <https://www.rcan.org/offices-and-ministries/divine-worship/rcia/children-catechetical-age> . Portions in bold are quoted directly from that source. Note that "child" as used below means anyone under 18 years of age.

**(1) AN UNBAPTIZED CHILD who has reached catechetical age (viz. about the age of 7) and wishes to become a member of the Roman Catholic Church, should follow the complete process of initiation as outlined in the RCIA, Part II, #1.**

- The process is formulated under the guidelines of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and policies formulated by the parish. The process should take several years. No need to rush it.\* (See National Directory for Catechesis [NDC] §36:A, p. 119.)
- Family involvement is essential, through work at home where possible and parent participation in some or all sessions with their children.
- Planning will depend on whether there are just one or two catechumens or a large group.
- A large group might have regular catechesis with parent participation.
- A very small group might meet less frequently while the child-catechumens would attend the regular graded catechetical sessions to complete a "thorough and systematic catechetical instruction." (NDC §36:A, p. 120)
- Attention should be paid to both catechesis springing from the Lectionary and to a suitable and complete curriculum.
- A judgment needs to be made "that they are ready for the sacraments." (RCIA, §256)
- In the year in which the child-catechumen is judged to be ready he or she "should receive the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens." (RCIA, Appendix III, National Statutes, §18.) (See RCIA §252-259, RCIA Appendix III, National Statutes, §18-19, NDC §36:A, pp. 119-120.)  
Resource: Journey of Faith for Children, Ligouri

[\*Those accepted into the catechumenate "are already joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] §1249). In the unlikely event that a catechumen should suffer sudden death before Baptism, "their explicit desire to receive it ... assures them the salvation they were not able to receive through the sacrament." (CCC §1259)

The RCIA envisions that children of catechetical age preparing for full initiation "should, if possible, come to the sacraments of initiation at the time that their baptized companions are to receive confirmation or eucharist." (RCIA §256, also quoted in NDC §36:A, p. 120)]

**(2) A CHRISTIAN CHILD BAPTIZED IN A NON-CATHOLIC CHURCH who has reached catechetical age should follow a process that leads to the celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist according to the norms of the "Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church." See Part II, #5 of the RCIA.**

- The process is formulated under the guidelines of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)
- Preparation might be similar to the above, depending on whether the child had prior catechesis.

**(3) A CHRISTIAN CHILD BAPTIZED IN AN EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH who has reached catechetical age who wishes to enter into the fullness of Catholic communion, no liturgical rite is required, but simply a profession of Catholic faith. N.B. Members of these Churches are incorporated into the corresponding Catholic Rite (e.g. Greek Orthodox become Greek Catholic) unless permission to transfer to the Latin Rite has been procured from the Vatican prior to their making a Profession of Faith.**

- In this situation it is best to consult the canon lawyers and liturgists for the niceties of rites, records and permissions. (Call the Catechetical Office for assistance on whom to call.)
- In many cases children baptized as Eastern Orthodox would have received Eucharist and Confirmation ("chrismation") at Baptism. They are not to be confirmed again if already confirmed, but should be encouraged to participate in the regular graded catechetical program with their peers. If it seems appropriate and they are so motivated, they may be given a role in the Confirmation ceremony of their peers (for example, usher, server, reader).



**(4) A CHILD BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH who has reached catechetical age and has not received the sacrament of Eucharist with his/her peer group follows a process that will lead to the celebration of the Eucharist at a time designated by the parish, preferably a Sunday of the Easter season.**

- Children baptized as infants in the Catholic Church who have missed the catechesis for Eucharist at the time common for their peer group would need suitable and complete catechesis in place of what they have missed.
- The program is formulated by the parish guided by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Administrative Manual and Curriculum Guidelines.
- In most parishes this is a two year process.

**(5) A CHILD BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH who has reached catechetical age and has not received the sacrament of Confirmation with his/her peer group follows a process that will lead to the celebration of the sacrament at the time that Confirmation is administered in the parish by the bishop.**

- Children baptized as infants in the Catholic Church who have missed the catechesis (both remote and immediate) for Confirmation at the time common for their peer group would need suitable catechesis in place of what they have missed.
- The program is formulated by the parish guided by the Archdiocesan Catechetical Administrative Manual and Curriculum Guidelines.
- Depending on the extent of prior catechesis and the age and maturity of the candidate this may be a multi-year process.

Below is a helpful resource for those leading the RCIA with unbaptized children. It is available for order from the Worship Office of the Archdiocese of Newark for \$25.

*THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF OLDER CHILDREN* by Sr. Sandra DeMasi, SSJ

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