

## Catechetical Office – Archdiocese of New York

### Who Ministers in the RCIA?

#### 1. The Community

The community is the primary minister of the catechumenate. RCIA no. 9 describes this ministry in detail. Consistent effort should be made to enable the parish community to be aware of and undertake their responsibility for the new life that God is giving the Church through its converts.

Efforts to enable parishioners to explore their faith in parish groups (such as RENEW or other programs, as well as materials related to the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Plan on Adult Faith Formation, "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us"), and to evangelize (such as materials relating to the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Plan "Go and Make Disciples") can promote awareness of the crucial role of the faithful in giving witness and nurturing conversion.

With or without special programs, the people of the parish should pray for the catechumens and candidates, socialize with them, and give them good example of the Christian life. The ongoing ministry of preaching and catechesis in the parish should build up the sense of the faithful that it is important and necessary for the community to care for catechumens and candidates in the process of initiation.

#### 2. The Catechumenate (RCIA) Director or Coordinator

It is expected that in addition to the pastor there is one person who is responsible for overseeing the work of the catechumenate in the parish. This person may be called the Catechumenate Director, or the Catechumenate Coordinator. A person in this position should have experience working in the catechumenate, as well as appropriate educational preparation for this ministry.

The director or coordinator is responsible for working with the pastor and the catechumenate team to see that the ministries of the catechumenate are carried out, and that the norms and directives of the rite are observed. The director or coordinator also insures that the archdiocesan norms and directives are carried out. The director or coordinator arranges for the team's training and ongoing development, and serves as contact person for the Archdiocese.

#### 3. Catechists

The catechist in the catechumenate must have a thorough knowledge of and love for the teachings of the Church, as well as the practical skills necessary to work effectively with adults and/or children. Catechists who work with adults should understand the principles of adult learning, and those who work with children should apply pedagogical skills that are appropriate to the age group of the children. Because the catechumenate is intimately bound up with the liturgical life of the Church, and draws substantially on the scriptures proclaimed in the Sunday assembly, catechists in the catechumenate need to be solidly grounded in good principles of liturgy and scriptural interpretation, as well as theology, morality, spirituality, and so on.

The catechumenate catechist has a special responsibility to show forth the Church's respect for non-Christian religions, and to exemplify and foster an ecumenical spirit within the catechumenate group.

At the same time, the catechist should affirm and clearly explain the distinctive witness of Catholicism, and the unique gift of Christ, so that indifferentism or relativism--which are the enemies of true ecumenism and interfaith dialogue--may be avoided. A commitment to ongoing formation is essential for the catechumenate catechist. Special presentations, workshops and institutes sponsored by the Archdiocese and by surrounding dioceses can help the catechist to grow in this ministry. For information about what offerings are available, contact the Director of the Catechumenate at the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office.

#### 4. Sponsors and Godparents

##### A. For Adults

Any fully initiated and practicing adult Catholic who is willing to assist in the process of initiation and is able to set a good example of the life of faith may be a sponsor for an adult catechumen. The sponsor's role is described in RCIA no. 10. The

godparent of an adult catechumen should also assist in the initiation process and set a good example. The godparent's role is described in RCIA no. 11. The godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic in good standing. The same person usually fills the roles of sponsor and godparent, although two different people may fill them.

- We highly recommend that new sponsors and godparents be sought for each new catechumen and candidate, so that more people of the parish will take part in this important ministry.
- Having a spouse or fiancé serve as a sponsor, though permissible, is not generally recommended. It is better to recruit a member of the parish who will enlarge the circle of support for the catechumen or candidate, rather than to rely on a spouse or fiancé who by nature of their relationship already has a central but different role in the person's life.

The sponsor of a candidate accompanies the candidate through the entire process of initiation, and assists in all the liturgical rites with the candidate. (No "new" or additional godparents are permitted, since the candidates are already baptized.)

#### B. For Children of Catechetical Age

Parents normally present their children at the Rite of Acceptance. If they are unable to do so, a sponsor may take their place (RCIA no. 260). The godparents of unbaptized children in the catechumenate whose role is analogous to that of the godparents for adults (RCIA no. 11) must not be their parents. These godparents should be involved during the catechumenate process, and will accompany the child at the Rite of Election and at the Sacraments of Initiation. Parents normally present their baptized children at the Rite of Welcome, as they do at the Rite of Acceptance. If they are unable to do so, a sponsor may take their place. The sacramental sponsors of children who are baptized candidates in the catechumenate may not be their parents. These sponsors should take part in the entire catechumenate process and the appropriate liturgical rites.

#### Formation of Sponsors and Godparents

The catechumenate director or coordinator is responsible to see to it that sponsors and godparents receive adequate formation for these important ministries. When working with children of catechetical age, formation of parents is also important. To qualify for these the ministries of sponsor and godparent, adults should be willing to assist in the process of the child's initiation, be present at the rites, and be able to provide a good example and witness to the faith. They must be fully initiated adult Catholics in good standing.

## **RCIA Team Development – What to do?**

From year to year the catechumenate team will need to incorporate new members and provide ongoing education for those who continue to minister in the catechumenate process. Some of the orientation of new team members and ongoing education of experienced team members can be accomplished at the parish under the guidance of the catechumenate director and the pastor. Participation in workshops, seminars, and courses offered by the (Arch)diocese and by international organizations such as *The North American Forum on the Catechumenate* will also provide valuable help to team members. The parish should encourage its team members to grow in their ministry and support their participation in outside events and workshops that will enrich their understanding of the RCIA.

Regular evaluation should be part of the work of the catechumenate team. All team members, including the director, should evaluate the process, their own work, and the functioning of the team. Evaluations are for the purpose of affirming those aspects of the ministry that have worked well, and discovering what improvements can be made in the future.

The catechumenate team may also become involved with assessing the needs of the parish in the area of Christian initiation, religious education, and liturgy. Because of their work with the Christian initiation of adults, their observations will be valuable to the pastor and the parish council in planning parish initiatives such as small communities, family catechesis, evangelization, and outreach to the alienated.

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#### Core Team:

- Director / Coordinator of the Catechumenate (RCIA)
- A member of the Parish Staff (if the Director/ Coordinator is not a Parish Staff member)
- Catechist Coordinator
- Sponsor / Godparent Coordinator
- Liturgy Coordinator
- Hospitality Coordinator
- Communications Coordinator