

WHO BELONGS IN THE CATECHUMENATE (RCIA)

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* includes the norms and all the ritual celebrations of initiation for the following groups:

A. **Unbaptized Adult Converts (RCIA Part I):**

Unbaptized adults are normally led through the full Catechumenate described in Part I of the rite. The combined duration of the Catechumenate period and the period of purification and enlightenment is expected to be twelve months or more (NCCB Statutes no. 6). Although a shorter period of time may be pastorally acceptable for certain individuals, parishes should set a standard of twelve months or more, and take care not to create the expectation that a shorter period of preparation will usually be sufficient. In exceptional cases, an abbreviated Catechumenate (RCIA Part II, chapter 2) may be used with the bishop's permission (RCIA no. 331, NCCB Statutes no. 20). In danger of death, the sacraments can be celebrated at once (RCIA Part II, chapter 3; see also the Pastoral Care of the Sick, chapter 8).

B. **Unbaptized Children of Catechetical Age (RCIA Part II, chapter 1):**

Unbaptized children of catechetical age are normally accepted into a Catechumenate for children, catechized in a way that is appropriate for their age level, celebrate a penitential rite (scrutiny) or rites, and receive the three sacraments of initiation together at one time (RCIA Part II, chapter 1). In exceptional cases and in danger of death, the same options outlined above for adults apply also to children of catechetical age.

C. **Baptized but Uncatechized Adults (Catholic or Non-Catholic) Preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist (RCIA Part II, chapter 4):**

Baptized but uncatechized adults (Catholic or Non-Catholic) preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist are so similar to the unbaptized in their catechetical status that the rite permits them to participate in most of the full process of formation outlined in RCIA Part I (see RCIA Part II, chapter 4). They are called candidates, not catechumens (NCCB Statutes no. 2). They are never referred to as converts (NCCB Statutes no. 2). Clear distinctions between catechumens and candidates must always be kept in the celebration of the rites (NCCB Statutes no. 31). Such candidates would not usually receive the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil, but at another time. Typically, this will take place on another Sunday during the Easter season.

- Baptized but uncatechized children of catechetical age are also in some cases addressed by this portion of the rite (see no. 19C of these Guidelines).
- The sacrament of Penance is celebrated with baptized candidates at a time prior to and distinct from the celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist (NCCB Statutes no. 27).
- For information on the faculty of administering Confirmation to these candidates, see no. 16 of these Guidelines.

D. **Baptized but Catechized Christian (Non-Catholic) Candidates for Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church (RCIA Part II, chapter 5):**

Baptized but catechized Christian (Non-Catholic) candidates for Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church who are not described in item C above, are normally received into the Catholic Church at a Sunday Eucharist (NCCB Statutes no. 32), at which they make a profession of faith, are confirmed (with very few exceptions), and receive Communion.

Who Belongs in a Process Other Than the Catechumenate?

The Catechumenate is a process of initiation and conversion centered on the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Its steps and periods are designed for the welfare of catechumens and candidates proper, whose progress in faith it is meant to serve. Although its principles and structure may give inspiration to other processes and programs in the Church, the Catechumenate itself must maintain a clear identity, and should not be asked to take on tasks for which it was not intended.

The implementation of the Catechumenate comes at a time when the Church is increasingly aware of the pastoral and catechetical needs of many of its members. These needs are real and important, but should be addressed by other means.

- A. **Fully initiated Alienated Catholics** who are interested in exploring the possibility of a return to the Church and the practice of their faith **do not belong** in a Catechumenate. Their experiences of the Church, their questions, and their pastoral needs are different from those of catechumens and candidates, and require a different pastoral response on the part of the Church.
- B. **Fully initiated Adult Catholics Seeking Updating** or a deeper knowledge of their faith belong in a parish adult faith formation program or a faith renewal process, **not** the Catechumenate. Adult faith formation programs should be available through the local parish. If Catholics who want to deepen their faith are also interested in becoming involved in the Catechumenate through a particular ministry, such as hospitality or sponsorship that is another matter and should be decided based on the person's gifts and desire to serve.
- C. **Adult Catholics Seeking Confirmation Only** belong, not in the Catechumenate, but in a program of preparation for the reception of Confirmation. Although these adults may have received only a rudimentary catechesis during their Catholic upbringing, they are nonetheless different from the "Baptized but Uncatechized Adults" who have received no Christian formation, and typically have never participated in the Eucharist. Normally adults seeking Confirmation only should receive an appropriate catechesis and be confirmed by the bishop.

Because of the variety of ages at which the sacrament of Confirmation is administered in the Church at present, and because of the mobility of our society, an increasing number of young Catholics "fall through the cracks" of the sacramental system and reach adulthood without having been confirmed. Their lack of Confirmation frequently goes unnoticed until they prepare for marriage. When large numbers of unconfirmed Catholics seeking marriage are introduced into the Catechumenate, they alter the focus of the process and create time pressures that are not appropriate for a conversion journey. Therefore it is especially important that the needs of such candidates be considered separately.

The norms outlined above describe the general expectations of the Archdiocese. Individual cases may arise in which a pastoral decision to include in a Catechumenate someone who falls into one of these categories may be the best solution available at the time. Pastors and Catechumenate directors should use their judgment in such special cases, keeping in mind the general concerns outlined above.