

**An Order (Rite) of Christian Initiation of Adults Handbook  
For Directors, Coordinators and Team Ministers**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Vatican II called for a renewal of evangelization, catechesis, and liturgical celebration. The Catholic Church then wrote new rites for the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA). To help OCIA ministers get started with group formation on the journey of faith resulting in conversion and transformation of lives, an OCIA Handbook was written that explains how best to catechize: to discuss the Scripture with a focus on life experiences and Christian responses; to incorporate the Church's doctrines and precepts; and, to involve more parishioners in the OCIA process to welcome new members and to reinvigorate the parish congregation's faith.

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# PART ONE: RATIONALE FOR WRITING AN OCIA HANDBOOK

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Story of Lucas and OCIA

Lucas (name changed) walked into the room as we were gathering for our Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)<sup>1</sup> discussion after Sunday Mass. He carried a tote full of workbooks and catechisms. The RCIA coordinator welcomed him and then asked him to put those books away for our “text” is the Bible/Lectionary. As Lucas became more comfortable speaking with us, he related that he had been married to his Catholic wife for over forty years and been attending Mass with her frequently as she prayed for his conversion to Catholicism; he was raised in the Jewish faith (which he did not practice). He also expounded upon his first two tries at RCIA, laughingly stating he had “flunked out.” Lucas told us both parishes had an eight-month course and taught him the catechism, and Church doctrines and practices; but at the end of each, he saw no reason to come into the Church. With our group gatherings discerning the call to transform our lives based on the Sunday readings, knowing that God loves all and forgives all in his infinite mercy, and becoming a part of the RCIA community of friends as children of God, Lucas formed a relationship with God and came into the Church with much faith, hope, and joy. Thus began my concerns about how those inquiring about the Catholic Church would be best formed in faith.

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1. I use RCIA here because currently this process is called Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in the United States. A new translation that changes some terms to better reflect the Latin and to clarify some points has been completed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and is awaiting approval from the Vatican. The new translation will be called the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA), the term I use in this thesis.

## OCIA Catechist Formation Experiences

I had been attending the OCIA trainings that the Archdiocese offered. I found them very informative and helpful for how to celebrate the various rites during the OCIA process. However, there would always be someone present who was a brand-new OCIA coordinator who did not know where to begin. Often at the OCIA coordinators and ministers' trainings, I had observed new coordinators present for whom the training was neither totally appropriate nor helpful. The Archdiocese had offered four levels of training. RCIA 101 and 102 discussed the historical process of initiation, the general flow of initiation, the rites celebrated in general terms, and informational subjects such as sponsors, divorced inquirers, etc. RCIA 103 focused on the liturgical rites and how to celebrate them. RCIA 104 discussed the interview process with the inquirers and the dismissal of the catechumens from Mass after the Liturgy of the Word to discuss the Sunday readings and homily. There were no direct discussions about how to facilitate the group gatherings. Some years only one class of the training-sequence classes was offered. A new OCIA coordinator in a parish would attend whichever minister training was offered that year. These volunteers had been given the task by their pastor to walk with those seeking to join the Catholic Church community along an OCIA journey but were at a loss for how to begin or how to facilitate group meetings. Further, OCIA ministers, new or seasoned, might fall back to offering a catechism class rather than encouraging a continuous faith journey toward the rich life of a Christian disciple for both those seeking conversion and the ministers themselves. All those present at the gatherings may then benefit because faith and conversion with transformation of lives is a life-long journey for all Christians inspired by delving into the Scriptures in a way that includes life experiences.



## A Simple OCIA Resource Is Absent; and Observations of OCIA Process Problems

Although there are many OCIA/RCIA resources, finding a path to take can be overwhelming. There are a few good resources for group gathering discussions based on the Sunday liturgical year. However, finding one that gives some general background information on how and why those discussions are appropriate for faith formation while providing guidelines for how to facilitate group discussions is difficult, as I had experienced as a new OCIA coordinator. Finding a good resource for catechetical topics and church teachings and Tradition linked to the Sunday readings was difficult as well. In addition, most OCIA resources do not discuss how a well-formed OCIA process may enhance the journey for those seeking to enter the Church while reinvigorating the parish by interactions between the OCIA participants and the congregation.

Like parents of children, OCIA catechists are often the first source of knowledge for those inquiring into the Catholic faith. I had heard that both new and seasoned OCIA ministers may fall back to teaching doctrines, usually using the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*<sup>2</sup> within their group gatherings in an eight-month class. Anecdotally, I had heard that one parish still used the *Baltimore Catechism*.<sup>3</sup> I had also heard a complaint that a pastor refused to celebrate the OCIA liturgical rites. Church congregations complain to pastors or the OCIA ministers that Mass is longer with the liturgical rites celebrated or that the Easter Vigil is too long with the initiation rites of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist. The congregation may have little to no knowledge of the meaning of these celebrations because after their Confirmation many Catholics stop any formal or even informal faith formation outside of

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2. Joseph Ratzinger, *Imprini Potest, Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, English Translation: United States Catholic Conference, Inc. (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994).

3. Third Council of Baltimore, *The Baltimore Catechism: The Doctrines of the Catholic Church – Lessons on God, His Commandments, Christ, Sin, Confession and Prayer – 1891 Edition* (Baltimore: Pantianos Classics, 1891) in the original text; or, a more modern version: Bennet Kelley, *St. Joseph Baltimore Catechism (No. 1): Official Revised Edition* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing, 1964); No. 2 published in 1969.

Sunday homilies. These observations demonstrate the lack of understanding of the role of all as disciples to spread the Good News by the way we live our lives, by speaking of our faith to others and inviting them to join us, and by faithfully passing down our Church teachings and beliefs.

As experienced, completed, and recommended by my former OCIA coordinator, I decided to pursue a Master of Theological Studies program through St. Norbert's College to be more prepared for the role of OCIA coordinator. Each class was an opportunity to question my beliefs and grow in faith, not just to learn "head" information. It was a surprise that the classes were opportunities for faith formation through reflection, discussion, and prayer. The classes exemplify what catechesis should be for all faith formation journeys: a growth in faith, rooted in hope and love, that challenges us to transform our lives and to reach out to others in service.

#### Historical Overview of Initiation into the Church

Working within the OCIA group, speaking to congregants after Mass, and having discussions within a faith group brought a realization that many Catholics do not know the historical changes in the way Christians were initiated into the Church. I for one did not, and would not have known, had I not been active in OCIA. The idea that the sequence of infants' Baptisms, children's First Eucharists, and adolescents' Confirmations is, and has always been, the norm is mistaken.

The Church, by the third century, practiced a three-year period of the catechumenate with intense catechesis during the period prior to Easter. This concentrated period evolved into our Lenten season. On Easter, new Church members were initiated by Baptism and anointings with

oil followed by the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> Theologians such as Justin Martyr (ca. 150 CE), Irenaeus of Lyons (born ca. 140 CE), and Tertullian (born ca. 160 CE) spoke of how to catechize and of the importance of righteous living; and, Origen (202-204 CE, head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria) emphasized application of the Gospels to the culture of the day.<sup>5</sup> The *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to Hippolytus (ca. 215 CE) spoke of examining those wishing to enter the Church and gave detailed instructions on the initiation catechesis process as well as how those being received into the Church were to be initiated.<sup>6</sup>

As time passed, the three aspects of initiation into the Church were separated into three distinct sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Whole families, servants, and communities were baptized after Constantine declared Christianity a legal religion in 313 CE. In the late fourth to early fifth century, and unaware of the historical changes, Augustine developed the theology of original sin noting innocent infants were being baptized<sup>7</sup> without the need for repentance and a declaration of faith. In the West, Confirmation (which was originally reserved for the bishops) was delayed in part because the bishops were unable to travel to all the smaller towns.<sup>8</sup> In the eleventh century with an emphasis on the divinity of Christ and the sacredness of

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4. See for example: Peter Kirby, *Didache*, trans. Roberts-Donaldson, *Early Christian Writings*, June 19, 2020, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html> (note that the *Didache* is also called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*); Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of R.C.I.A.* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994); Lawrence Mick, *RCIA: Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989); and James Dunning, *New Wine: New Wineskins* (Chicago: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1981).

5. Mick, 15-16.

6. Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, translated into English with Introduction and Notes by Burton Scott Easton, Gutenberg EBook #61614 (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, March 14, 2020), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/61614/61614-h/61614-h.htm#tch9>. Produced by Stephen Hutcheson and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>. This citation must include the following as per the reference: *This eBook is for the use of anyone in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.*

7. Mick, 23.

8. Mick, 20.

the Eucharist, baptized infants no longer received the Eucharistic bread, and by the thirteenth century the Eucharistic cup was withheld.<sup>9</sup> Thus the initiation into the Church came to be three separate sacraments celebrated at advancing ages of children. Knowing this historical background allows OCIA catechists to explain the historical context of the process for adults versus children coming into the Catholic Church to inquirers as well as their family members and sponsors who may not understand.

### Motivation for Writing an OCIA Handbook

The experiences, knowledge, and insights described above led me to pursue helping other OCIA coordinators and ministers to pass along the faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior by providing an OCIA Handbook,<sup>10</sup> substantiated by theological writings, to assist both beginning and seasoned OCIA coordinators, and to help stimulate whole parishes. An OCIA Handbook has been written, reviewed by several active Catholics, some of whom are/were OCIA ministers throughout the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, and revised, with future publication anticipated.

This thesis in totality is comprised of two parts: the explanation of the Handbook project, and the Handbook itself. The following chapters provide the rationale for what is included in the Handbook, illustrate how the material is helpful to OCIA coordinators, and include how the OCIA process done well may reinvigorate parishes. The OCIA Handbook that was reviewed and revised is included at the end of, and as a portion of, this thesis.

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9. Mick, 23.

10. Patricia Duda, *Order (Rite) of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA/RCIA) Handbook: For Facilitating Group Faith Formation, For Effecting Conversion and Transformation of Those Wishing to Enter the Catholic Church, and For Reinvigorating the Parish* (currently unpublished except in this thesis, 2023). The term “OCIA Handbook” or simply “Handbook” refers to this Handbook throughout this thesis.

I pray that all those who obtain the OCIA Handbook I have written will be blessed with the courage, strength, and wisdom to walk with inquirers to lead them to the joy of initiation into the Catholic Church just as our OCIA team did with Lucas on his faith journey. In implementing an OCIA process well, I am sure that all in the group will continue their own faith formation. More importantly, I pray that all, both the OCIA ministers and those coming into the Church, continue to be transformed in how they live their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ as they discern how Sacred Scripture impacts their personal life experiences and choices.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE OCIA JOURNEY

### Evangelization—Our Response as Disciples of Jesus Christ

In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus commands his disciples to evangelize, to go out to all the people (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 46:49), and to be the light to all nations (Acts 13:47) just as the prophet in Deutero-Isaiah told the people in exile (Isaiah 46:6). As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to spread the “Good News” of Christ’s life, passion, death, and resurrection—of his sacrifice for our salvation—that calls us to serve. The Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s (Vatican II) called for a renewal of evangelization, of education, and of liturgical celebration. Popes since Vatican II have exhorted the faithful to evangelize as a most important mission for all Christians. Many post-Vatican II theologians have expounded upon the need for catechetical formation to be elevated from memorizing beliefs to applying Scripture and Church Tradition in a transformative way. Incorporating life experiences into the discussions of Sacred Scripture allows the relationship with God to grow. This renewed relationship leads to a deep and meaningful conversion to discipleship that inspires the heart to work for justice for all.

This faith journey reflects that of the early Church's evangelization rather than perpetuating a terminal-learning sequence of catechism questions and answers.

## OCIA Process

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Study Edition*<sup>11</sup> (RCIA Rites Book) is a collection of the liturgical rite scripts and defines the periods within the process of initiation into the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. The RCIA Rites Book includes educational and instructional notes for OCIA ministers. The faith journey is a walk beginning with inquiry, through the catechumenate, and to election to bring seekers into the Church (being baptized, confirmed, and receiving Eucharist); or for validly baptized Christians, bringing them into full communion with the Church (being confirmed and receiving Eucharist). Although portions of the OCIA Handbook may be of general interest to all Christian evangelists, in particular the sections on leading the group gatherings, it is aimed at the process for those coming into the Catholic Church. The rites are for the Roman Catholic liturgies and are clearly explained in the RCIA Rites Book; therefore, the rites themselves are not included in the OCIA Handbook.

Because the OCIA Handbook is directed generally to new OCIA ministers, as well as to those more experienced, terms are defined along with comments. This is not an alphabetical list but rather is given in the order in which the OCIA process progresses. This was done intentionally with the goal that reading through the definitions will give the reader an overall view of the OCIA process as well as a list they may refer to when unsure about a term. OCIA coordinators/leaders are defined for the purposes of this paper as those ministers who are tasked

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11. International Commission of English in the Liturgy and Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Study Edition* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988); referred to as the RCIA Rites Book in this thesis. A revised publication, *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults: Study Edition* has been approved by the USCCB and is awaiting approval by the Vatican.

with organizational duties for the OCIA process and who often may be the main facilitators of the group discussions. A short synopsis of the steps in the OCIA process through the four periods was included in the Handbook as an overview so that reading the RCIA Rites Book would be more comprehensible for OCIA coordinators and ministers.

The OCIA faith journey is “as long as necessary” for catechumens to come to conversion as explicated in the RCIA Rites Book.<sup>12</sup> For many catechumens in various parishes this is about a one-year process of weekly meetings for all, along with Sunday discussions with catechumens dismissed from Mass after the Liturgy of the Word (the process may be longer for children). Some parishes treat the journey for adults more as an eight-month catechetical class with a list of topics as opposed to Scriptural discussions within the liturgical year as indicated in the RCIA Rites Book:

A suitable catechesis is...planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebration of the Word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.<sup>13</sup>

There is no set curriculum; however, as a person journeys in faith toward initiation into the Church, there are four periods defined. The four periods are Inquiry, Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy with a celebration of a rite to mark the passing into the next period. This faith journey with the ministers and catechumens walking together in reading and discussing Scripture, in discussing Catholic beliefs, and in understanding the Catholic Church’s teachings and Tradition continues as needed for conversion. Also, the growth in spirituality and faith should transform their lives to become true disciples of Christ in service and justice. This conversion and transformation can be realized through “Opening the Word,” a

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12. RCIA Rites Book, no. 75. For Candidates, see nos. 473, 478.

13. RCIA Rites Book, no. 75:1 and the following sections that support a liturgical-year catechesis.

term used to describe reflecting upon and discussing the Sunday readings and how they relate to life experiences. Other discussions on a particular topic such as of a Catholic dogma, Tradition, or belief; of a personal concern or current affair and how one's faith may shape one's response; or of a service project for the group are also appropriate. These concepts are included in the OCIA Handbook to guide discussion facilitators with the goal always to transform lives rather than give a terminal-educational experience.

### CHAPTER THREE: FACILITATING AND HOSTING OCIA GATHERINGS

In my experience as a member of an all-volunteer OCIA ministry team, the team members gave limited input during discussions whereas the coordinator acted as the key facilitator and speaker. Stepping in after the previous OCIA coordinator retired, and after an admonition from a deacon that not enough catechesis was being taught, a search for appropriate resources was undertaken. My goal was to continue to have group discussions around the Sunday liturgical readings. Catechesis would be tied to the Word proclaimed, not separated as a class with a list of topics to be learned apart from the Scriptures.

Two references were available from the Director of Religious Education at the parish: *Journey of Faith* and *The Living Word*.<sup>14</sup> *Journey of Faith* includes some background information on the Sunday readings, a couple of reflection questions, and short-phrased themes tied to another publication of theirs. *The Living Word* is more comprehensive, with a "Catechist's Preparation" section, a guide that includes scripts to read with some reflection questions, final

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14. Redemptorists, *Journey of Faith, The Word into Life: A Guide for Group Reflection on Sunday Scripture* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2007); Leisa Ansliger, et al., *The Living Word: Leading RCIA Dismissals, Year C* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2018), as examples.



thoughts, and short-phrased themes for “extended catechesis.” These are appropriate for new and seasoned OCIA ministers but lack detailed information on how to facilitate a group discussion. The two references had limited information about how to incorporate catechetical topics tied to the Sunday readings.

In searching for a simple, appropriate resource, it became clear that including catechetical topics and introducing how to lead a discussion were not emphasized in the literature. The emphasis was on “Opening the Word” and on leading those seeking God to a relationship with God that results in a transformation of lives—the ultimate goal. Resources that were suitable were often expensive, were published for each cycle or new every year, did not follow the liturgical year but were by topic, and/or called for other publications such as participants’ manuals.<sup>15</sup> This led to including basic information in the OCIA Handbook about how to facilitate a group discussion in a warm and inviting ambience; how a facilitator could easily prepare for “Opening the Word” for the Sunday readings with catechumens dismissed from Mass; and how to facilitate a discussion with the whole OCIA group while including catechetical topics.

## CHAPTER FOUR: A LIFE EXPERIENCES APPROACH FOR CONVERSION

Skimming resources uncovered a common theme: for conversion and transformation it is important to link Scripture to life experiences. Scripture is not simply a story with a moral about what happened long ago, nor is it simply a historical account of an event or of a teaching;

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15. Examples of suitable resources are: Bob Duggan, et al., *Foundations in Faith: Catechist Manual Catechumenate Year C* (Allen, TX: Resources for Christian Living, 1997); Mark Link, *The New Catholic Vision: Correlated with the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Cincinnati, OH: RCL Benziger, 1996); Barbara Morgan and William Keimig, ed., *On the Journey Series for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: RCIA Catechist’s Manual* (Clinton, MD: The Association for Catechumenal Ministry, 2007); and Joyce Stolberg, *God Calls You By Name: A Journey Through the Rite of Christian Initiation Catholic Sacramental Preparation Process, Catechist and Director’s Edition* (Colorado Springs, CO: Mother’s House Publishing, 2012).

Scripture has a message that can be applied today—that God wants a relationship with us, and that he sent his Son with the message that the kingdom of God is different than earthly kingdoms. Jesus showed us the unbounding love God has for each person. We form this relationship with God by living a life of faith, hope, and charity with our neighbors.

### Vatican II and Post-Vatican II Writings

The Second Vatican Council of 1963 called for the restoration of the catechumenate for adults; for a revision of the rites of initiation for adults; and for a new rite for those already validly baptized—therefore already members of the Christian Church—seeking full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, it called for Confirmation to be tied more closely to initiation.<sup>16</sup> This led to the liturgical rites being revised, first in Latin by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1972 and then translated into English as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Study Edition* published in 1988 and decreed to be the norm in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Knowledge of this call for renewal of initiation into the Church may help an OCIA minister be more effective when discussing why the Rites of Initiation are celebrated as they are today.

The Second Vatican Council also exhorted good catechesis in *Gravissimum Educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*).<sup>18</sup> The Sacred Congregation for the Clergy then published

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16. Paul VI, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, (Vatican: Holy See, December 4, 1963) no. 64, 66, 71, [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html); and Paul VI, *Decree Ad Gentes on the Mission Activity of the Church* (Vatican: Holy See, December 7, 1965), no. 64-71, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html).

17. RCIA Rites Book.

18. Paul VI, *Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican: Holy See, October 28, 1965), [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_gravissimum-educationis\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html).

*The General Catechetical Directory*<sup>19</sup> in 1971 that promotes a norm of adult catechesis that emphasizes human experience, Scripture, and liturgy as a “means for interpreting the meaning of life and the signs of the times.”<sup>20</sup> Many theologians such as Gerard Baumbach, Walter Brueggemann, James Fowler, Thomas Groome, Anne Marie Mongoven, Sharon Parks, and Sherry Weddell expounded upon adult faith formation as a life-long journey that leads to conversion and outreach in the Church’s mission to the world. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* in 1999 continuing to extol a “Catholic laity [that] will play a pivotal leadership role in fulfilling the Christian mission of evangelizing and transforming society. For adults to fulfill their roles in this new era of the Church their faith formation must be lifelong...”<sup>21</sup> This is only possible if the lives of the Catholics themselves are transformed.

Popes after Vatican II have expounded upon evangelization as one of the most important roles of the Church in the modern world: Pope Paul VI in his *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*;<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II in his *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*<sup>23</sup> in which he coined the term “new evangelization;” Pope Benedict XVI’s *Ubi cumque Et Semper* that

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19. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The General Catechetical Directory* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1971), Vatican.va.

20. Christina Spahn, Personal Communication, PowerPoint slides in *THEO 520 – History and Models of Catechesis* (Albuquerque: St. Norbert Master of Theological Studies Program, Fall, 2020).

21. USCCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999).

22. Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Vatican: Holy See, December 8, 1975), [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html).

23. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (Vatican: Holy See, December 30, 1988), [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html).

established a Pontifical Council for promoting evangelization;<sup>24</sup> and Pope Francis in his *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*.<sup>25</sup> This mission of evangelization—to spread the “Good News” of salvation—should be embraced by those coming into the Catholic Church. Therefore, it must be a natural outgrowth of catechesis during the OCIA faith-formation journey.

### OCIA Catechist Ministers’ Preparation

After Vatican II, theologians were calling for a renewal of the formation of catechists (see the section titled “The Call for a Renewal of Catechesis” below). Often parishioners are asked to be catechists without any sort of training or prayerful preparation for the roles. In the same time period as the RCIA Rites Book publication, writers such as James Dunning, Barbara Hixon, Brueggemann, Parks, and Groome wrote about adult formation in general and the RCIA process in particular, as it pertains to the transformation of ministers, not simply of those to whom they minister. They do not expound upon the Church’s dogmas, precepts, and teachings as much as the need for spirituality, for love, and for justice.

For OCIA ministers, more background knowledge of catechesis and how to relate it to the Sunday readings through “Opening the Word” that includes Biblical background information enriches OCIA group discussions. Resources such as those mentioned in Chapter Three (Redemptorists, Ansliger) are helpful, but not necessary, to begin facilitating OCIA group gatherings. The OCIA Handbook advocates learning more about the Sunday Scripture readings

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24. Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter in the Form of Motu Proprio: Ubicumque Et Semper...Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization* (Vatican: Holy See, September 21, 2010), [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apl\\_20100921\\_ubicumque-et-semper.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html).

25. Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (The Joy of the Gospel)*, (Vatican: Holy See, November 24, 2013), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

through Bible book introductions and footnotes, or in short commentaries such as those given in lector workbooks.<sup>26</sup> Preparing in this way gives OCIA ministers a sense of the genre of the reading; the historical period and events; by whom and to whom it was written; and the context of the reading within the Scripture. This helps to make the readings come alive; for although the readings' messages are relevant to today's times, they were written for the people of the writers' times.

Another aspect of importance to OCIA catechists is recruiting and maintaining a good team of people to work together effectively. I myself have struggled with this. When my parish OCIA leader retired, many of those whom she'd recruited also left. New younger team members I recruited came and went as life challenges and changes emerged. Ronald Lewinski speaks of the importance of the entire parish community welcoming and embracing the catechumens especially in small rural communities.<sup>27</sup> Diane Macalintal expounds upon the entire community being a part of the "curriculum" by involving catechumens in the many activities of a parish.<sup>28</sup> The inclusion of interactions between the parish community and those seeking to enter the Church may help to spark the charism of someone in the parish to join the OCIA team.

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26. For example, Catherine Cory, et al., *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word 2023* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2022).

27. Ronald Lewinski, *An Introduction to the RCIA: The Vision of Christian Initiation* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2017).

28. Diane Macalintal, *Your Parish Is the Curriculum: RCIA in the Midst of the Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018).

## CHAPTER FIVE: CATECHESIS—INCORPORATING IT INTO THE PROCESS

### Search for a Fitting Catechetical Resource

Purchasing several catechisms in the hope that one was written in a short, easy-to-read format that might easily be tied to the catechetical topic of the Sunday Lectionary was unsuccessful. The *Homiletic Directory*<sup>29</sup> expounds on preparing homilies; on how to interpret the Word in the liturgies; and on homily preparation for the liturgical year. The *Directory* then includes a list of the *CCC* sections that pertain to each Sunday throughout the three cycles of liturgical readings. This list may be a fitting reference but seemed less useful than first expected because it is typically broad, one-word topics and does not explicate the details that might be incorporated into a discussion. My parish pastor had recommended our catechumens and candidates be given *Catholicism for Dummies*,<sup>30</sup> a simple catechism in easy-to-understand language to be used as a reference book, not for study in our group meetings. A comparison of passages of the *Dummies* book with the *CCC* found them to agree in context, making it a useful reference written in the plain language of today. But again, this would be for reference only, not as a text for catechetical, lecture-style teachings.

Seeking ideas from other parishes around the country through a cursory search of online examples of OCIA guidelines or curriculums was not entirely successful. Most contained a list of topics; some gave good guidelines on how to facilitate the OCIA group; and, a couple others simply cut the *CCC* into four sections for the four periods of the initiation faith journey with no

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29. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20140629\\_direttorio-omiletico\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20140629_direttorio-omiletico_en.html). This document was inspired by Pope Francis' *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* on the church's missionary call to discipleship in today's modern world.

30. Kenneth Brighenti, et al., *Catholicism All-In-One for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015).

regard to differences in the periods of Inquiry, Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy. Those that did give good guidelines were not publications but simply files posted on the internet. Several of these references are listed in the Bibliography. Those by the Diocese of Covington (Klocke), St. Jude Parish (Nguyen), and the Archdiocese of New York (Ferrone) were well done. The Canadian Archdiocese of Regina Liturgy Commission gives only a long Q&A list of information; and, the Diocese of Sacramento (Soto) gave a shorter list, both taken mostly from the RCIA Rites Book. The Archdiocese for the Military Services United States of America, and St. Joan of Arc Parish (Roberts), follow a list of topics in the order as written in the *CCC* without any obvious regard for the OCIA participants' periods of the process. None, however, were both satisfactory and publicly available; many were simply Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) files posted. There are also online RCIA classes—far removed from conversion and transformation within a community of believers.

### The Call for a Renewal of Catechesis

The Catholic Church has written guidelines for the renewal of catechesis with an emphasis on faith, spirituality, prayer, and conversion as well as evangelization. There has been a series of writings from both the Vatican and the USCCB: the *General Catechetical Directory* of 1971 (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy), the *National Catechetical Directory* of 1979 (Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* of 1992 (Ratzinger), the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997 (Congregation for the Clergy), and the *National Directory for Catechesis* of 2005 (Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis). Although they are appropriate as references to those teaching catechists, they are not as useful to

a new catechist trying to teach others about the faith without any training to help them digest these publications.

Many modern theologians have also written on the topic of catechesis with varying emphases. Authors such as Baumbach, Brueggemann, Fowler, Parks, Groome, Mongoven, and Weddell have been writing on this topic since the late 1970s, promoting a change in how catechesis is taught. The goal is not so much a learning of facts about the Catholic Church as it is a change of heart that brings one to a relationship with God that manifests in how one lives. The fact that many books and articles on the topic of catechesis continue to be written fifty years after Vatican II is an indication of the importance of promoting practices, strategies, and methods in how to pass along the faith in an effective manner.

#### OCIA Catechesis

In the OCIA Handbook, the Church's teachings and Tradition are proposed to be incorporated into the group meetings to bring the participants into a fuller understanding of the Good News and the Roman Catholic Church. This includes such topics as why we do and say the things they see and hear; the beliefs that are dogmatic/doctrinal and Church teachings; the catechism teachings on various topics; the spirituality and expressions of prayer of the Church; the contemporary issues both inside and outside the Church; and, the response expected of us as disciples of Christ.

A pastoral approach to group meetings based mainly on Thomas Groome's "life to Faith to life" praxis<sup>31</sup> of "Opening the Word" organized around the Sunday liturgical readings was

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31. Thomas Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: Harper One, Harper Collins, 2011), Chapter 8.



found to be a simple yet effective method for catechesis of candidates and catechumens.

Groome's approach was a major contributing factor in the decision to write the OCIA Handbook and is explicated in a chapter of the Handbook. Although his method is flexible in how it is put into practice, the major thrust can be summarized as: (1) discuss some common life experiences on a topic put forth by the OCIA minister; (2) read the Scripture and discuss how that topic was presented, how those in the story reacted, or how those present would react if put into the story, etc.; and, (3) reflect on how those present could individually or as a group put the message into practice in a concrete way.<sup>32</sup> More specifically, participants are given a question about a life experience they have had in the past or a situation they may face in the future. Participants share their stories and discuss how the experience affected, or could affect them. The Sunday readings are discussed along with background information such as the literary genre; the time and place in history; and the messenger and audience. Participants discuss which character in the story they would resemble; how the story touched them; or, when they had a similar or analogous experience. The discussion is brought back to the present to discuss what response the reading invokes for life in the here and now. The response often should evoke a sense of the responsibility to love and serve God and others and what type of service they may be called to do either individually or as a group. How they should serve, either in their daily interactions with others or as a project, either individually or as a group, can be encouraged. This pedagogical method requires some level of conversion, of changing one's life practices<sup>33</sup> and can be as simple as forgiving a friend, smiling to a harried cashier, spending quality time with family members, or passing the faith down to children in the home through daily prayers of gratitude. Others may be

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32. Groom, Chap. 9.

33. Groom, 262-263.

called to serve in their parish as a Sunday lector or choir member, as a catechist, or in an outreach group, a few of many charisms.

Other theologians also bring the heart and soul into the faith-formation conversations. The method of including life experiences is supported by Mongoven’s symbolic catechesis: (1) reflecting on the events of their daily lives; (2) correlating that experience with a faith symbol of God’s presence; and (3) discovering “how God relates to us and how we relate to God, to one another, and to the universe in which we live.”<sup>34</sup> It is also similar to Carl Pfeifer and Janaan Manternach’s catechetical process that starts with a human experience, explores “Christ-like attitudes and actions” in Scripture and the faith community with prayer in a “liturgical symbol or ritual” and results in “a lived response.”<sup>35</sup> As Groom expounds, “Praxis...is reflective and informed action toward desired and practical outcomes,” and further, “Critical reflection looks inward to the depths of personal awareness and outward at the whole public world through social analysis.”<sup>36</sup> He goes on to say that this reflection and action entails a “way of love” and of “Jesus’ way of justice,” concluding, “Nothing less would be discipleship to the one who defined his life purpose as bringing good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed and effecting God’s year of jubilee (Luke 4:16-21).”<sup>37</sup>

The concepts described in this section and those below for reinvigorating Church parishes were emphasized in two recent offerings: the National Gathering on Christian Initiation Conference held in Chicago (July 13-14, 2022) and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical

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34. Anne Marie Mongoven, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis: How We Share the Fire in Our Hearts* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 3. See also a good summary of her praxis by Regis Duffy, “Faith Meets Life,” in *America, the Jesuit Review*, Sept. 16, 2000, no. 4, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/culture/faith-meets-life>.

35. Carl J. Pfeifer and Janaan Manternach, “The Processes of Catechesis” in *Empowering Catechetical Coordinators*, ed. Thomas Groome and Michael Corso (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1999), 64. Text also available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED430318.pdf>.

36. Groome, 275-276, 279.

37. Groome, 111-112.

Commissions' OCIA Webinar Series (August 31, 2022 - February 14, 2023).<sup>38</sup> Speakers at both of these meetings emphasized the need for conversion of those in OCIA and of revitalizing the OCIA process in parishes with themes today very much the same as those pushed in the past forty years.

By incorporating catechetical topics that are related to the Sunday readings, one's knowledge of the Catholic Church will be heightened so that ministers, candidates, and catechumens will be more cognizant of Catholic beliefs and Tradition. The *CCC*, or other Catholic catechisms which may be better for inquirers such as *Catholicism for Dummies* that puts the catechism into simple speech, defines much that the Roman Catholic Church professes, but they are not appropriate study texts for OCIA; they are reference books if questions arise. The *CCC* as related to the Sunday readings and as given in the *Homiletic Directory*, or, better, the *Catholic Update 100+ Set: Topics for RCIA*<sup>39</sup> as well as other catechetical writings can be employed.<sup>40</sup> The precepts of the Church can be worked into discussions or can be an additional segment of the gathering if needed. OCIA ministers must be vigilant about focusing on the importance of establishing a relationship with God and discussing life experiences as related to Scripture. The OCIA Handbook emphasizes that ministers must **not** turn the conversion-growth process into a lecture class that simply gives information that ends at the Rite of Initiation rather than begins a life-long journey of formation. The goal is the continuing transformational

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38. NGCI, Personal Communications at the "National Gathering on Christian Initiation: A Conference for Catechumenal Ministers and Pastoral Leaders – Evaluating and Revitalizing the RCIA in Your Parish" (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, July 13-14, 2022); FDLIC, Personal Communications on "Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) Webinar Series" (Washington, D.C.: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, August 31, 2022 – February 14, 2023).

39. Redemptorist Ministry, *Catholic Update 100+ Set: Topics for RCIA* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2019).

40. Cf. Joe Paprocki, *Called to be Catholic: Essentials of the Catholic Faith for Ages 12-15* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014); Alan Schreck, *The Essential Catholic Catechism: A Readable, Comprehensive Catechism* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000); Link, *New Catholic Vision*.

conversion of the candidates and catechumens as well as the OCIA ministers, sponsors, and others who attend, leading all to live as disciples reaching out in service to the sick, poor, and marginalized.

As a nod especially to new OCIA coordinators who are searching for catechetical topics to include in discussions of the Sunday readings, a list of topics is included in the OCIA Handbook. A reference to a chart Rita Thiron developed of the three Liturgical years with cross references to the *CCC* is provided. She adds the important statement:

It is not the intention of this author to suggest that the *Catechism* serve as the sole source for catechesis nor that the *Catechism* be used as a textbook that replaces effective adult methodology. What these charts do reveal is that the Church's magisterial teaching and her rich Tradition are firmly rooted in the revealed Work of God and that "liturgy is the privileged place for catechizing the People of God" (*CCC* 1074 and National Directory for Catechesis, 33).<sup>41</sup>

The Handbook cautions against taking the list provided and "teaching" the catechetical topics in a "lecture class." The list is simply included to allow OCIA ministers to check which topic might meld with the Sunday liturgical readings. The theme of conversion and transformation is repeated throughout the OCIA Handbook in the hope that the message is received and embraced.

## CHAPTER SIX: REINVIGORATING THE PARISH—A LONG-TERM GOAL

Theologians such as Dunning, Mick, Thomas Morris, Jack Seymour and others mentioned above have suggested that the OCIA process is the responsibility of the entire Church;

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41. Rita Thiron , "The Lectionary for Mass and the Catechism of the Catholic Church," Hartford, CT: 2007 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions October 9-12, 2007. Posted on the web by Diocese of St. Petersburg without author's permission, but permission granted by author to reference this post: [https://www.dosp.org/wp-content/uploads/28\\_Lectionary-Catechism-Alignment-Tool-rev.-9.30.16.pdf](https://www.dosp.org/wp-content/uploads/28_Lectionary-Catechism-Alignment-Tool-rev.-9.30.16.pdf).

all are called to be disciples. Just as Jesus sent his disciples out to spread the Good News and to baptize, all today are called to evangelize, to love God and one another—including our enemies—and to serve with justice for all. Service may be thought of as the three “T’s:” giving of our “Time, Talents, and Treasure” to the Church, but it is much more. In today’s society, living a virtuous life could be thought of as the first step, but actively working to serve the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, especially in working to break down systemic barriers is just as important. Therefore, ideas for implementing wider interactions with parishioners outside of the immediate group of inquirers and OCIA ministers to refresh the faith and actions of all parishioners is a worthy endeavor.

Involving parishioners by inviting them to participate in OCIA can assist them in their continuing faith journey. Sponsors should be invited to OCIA gatherings since they should be walking with catechumens and candidates. Often, that is not possible for the chosen sponsor of a catechumen or candidate, so having another person from the community walk with them involves more of the parish. The entire parish family is involved by including in the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) a petition at Mass for those coming into the Church and by participating in the liturgical rites throughout the year.

Having the OCIA process catechumens and candidates participate in any activities the parish offers will help them to feel they are a part of the parish family as they learn more about what being a Catholic involves. If the OCIA group is presenting a video or speaker, or volunteering for a service project, the rest of the parish congregation can be invited to join them. By interacting with each other, those seeking to enter the Church and those of the parish faith community support one another in their life-long faith journeys. Seeing others coming into the Church and participating together in OCIA and parish activities—with the faith of all renewed—

may reinvigorate the parish with a desire for more faith formation and outreach activities. This renewal of faith may inspire parish members to passionate involvement in the mission of the Church to evangelize—to spread the Good News of the salvation of Christ—and to work together for the good of all people.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: OCIA HANDBOOK PREPARATION

Once knowledge of beneficial, effective catechesis was gleaned, the OCIA Handbook was drafted. The theme of conversion and transformation was incorporated throughout the Handbook. The OCIA Handbook is contained in this thesis and includes the sections described above: (1) an introduction with a look at the historical initiation process; (2) an overview of the OCIA process including annotated definitions; (3) a set of guidelines for group meetings emphasizing an inviting environment for discussions, a method for facilitator preparations, an explication of “Opening the Word,” and recommendations for OCIA minister formation; (4) a faith journey model that brings one’s life experiences into the faith discussions to prompt conversions of faith and transformations of how one lives life; (5) a method for including catechetical information within the Scriptural discussions of the liturgical year; and, (6) ideas for including interactions between those in the OCIA group and parishioners to stimulate the faith of all, and hence, the parish as a whole. The most important of these are the suggestions for group discussions to help lead catechumens into a life lived as a disciple of Christ while also giving them a foundation of Catholic beliefs. If the initiation process is done well, it contributes to the continuing conversion of all the faithful of the parish.

## Solicitation of Handbook Reviewers

Plans to send a completed draft of the OCIA Handbook and ask for criticisms and suggestions from those involved in the OCIA process in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe was undertaken. Because the Archdiocese includes a diverse population spread out across the state of New Mexico, including the largest New Mexico city, and rural, mission churches, the goal was to include a diverse set of reviewers from various geographical areas. The first attempt to recruit reviewers involved sending email requests for suggestions for reviewers to a few people I knew were involved in OCIA in the Albuquerque, NM area as well as the Archdiocesan Directors of Worship, of Religious Formation and Youth Ministry, of Native American Ministry, and of Hispanic Ministry; the Director of the National Black Catholic Congress, and a deacon in a Vietnamese parish that I had met in classes offered by the Archdiocese. The responses netted a couple of people willing to review the Handbook, but only in the large cities, and not a diverse group. I then sent a first email to contacts found on parish websites—RCIA coordinators or Adult Formation contacts, or the main parish contact—for about twenty-five parishes (there are almost one hundred in the Archdiocese) asking for a recommendation of a person to contact. This first email is shown at the end of this section. I received few responses; therefore, I called about fifteen parishes. Once I received a name with contact information, I sent a second, more detailed email shown at the end of this section.

Nine people, four from the northeast and one from the southwest areas of Albuquerque, which differ in their demographics, and four from smaller towns in the Archdiocese were willing to review the Handbook. At the end of this section, a map shows the Archdiocesan counties outlined with the general parish locations of the nine reviewers.

**First email sent to twenty parishes or in their “contact us” form:**

Hello,

I am in the Master of Theological Studies program at St. Norbert College (De Pere, WI) at the Norbertine Abbey in the south valley of Albuquerque. For my thesis, I have written a handbook draft to help those working to bring people into the Catholic Church through the Rite of Initiation of Adults (RCIA, to be called Order of Initiation of Adults OCIA).

The book is about 50 pages long with an additional 30 pages of appendices.

My professor suggested I have a diverse set of folks review the book; therefore, I am asking if you could recommend someone in your community to me. I am looking to get input from those active in OCIA (RCIA) in various parishes around the Archdiocese if possible, or if not, someone who'd be willing to help out. If you could recommend a couple names for me and send me their email and/or phone contact information I would greatly appreciate it.

If one is willing, I will send the information to them: the draft of the handbook, list of 6 questions, and several demographic questions. Of course, they could decline once they see the book and questions if they so choose. No names, parishes, cities, etc. will be published - just general anonymous information.

Thank you. Feel free to call or email me with questions or have your recommended people contact me for further information before they agree to receive the handbook.

Blessings,

Pat Duda

[pat.duda.52@gmail.com](mailto:pat.duda.52@gmail.com)

505-440-3735

**Second email sent to those who responded with a particular person to contact:**

Greetings \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a Master of Theological Studies student at the St. Norbert Abbey in Albuquerque through St. Norbert College (De Pere, WI) and have prepared a Handbook for RCIA ministers to assist those new to the ministry to help them get started as well as for seasoned ministers to renew their program.

At this time, I am humbly seeking reviewers to read the Handbook (it is 50 pages with about 30 pages of Appendices) and to answer six general questions as well as some questions for demographic information to assist me in revising the Handbook as necessary to ensure it will be beneficial to RCIA ministers.

Could you recommend someone in your parish who is active or has been active in the RCIA ministry to review this document for me? Question answers could be sent to me by email or by mail; or, I would be happy to meet with them—a nice chance to visit around the Archdiocese. I would like input by at least November 21 so that I am able to complete my thesis this semester. Please reply to this email or forward this to someone you think may be interested as soon as possible so that I am able to mail a copy of the Handbook to them if they are unable to access it online.

I thank you in advance for your assistance and ask God’s blessings upon you and your parish. Feel free to email or call me with questions.

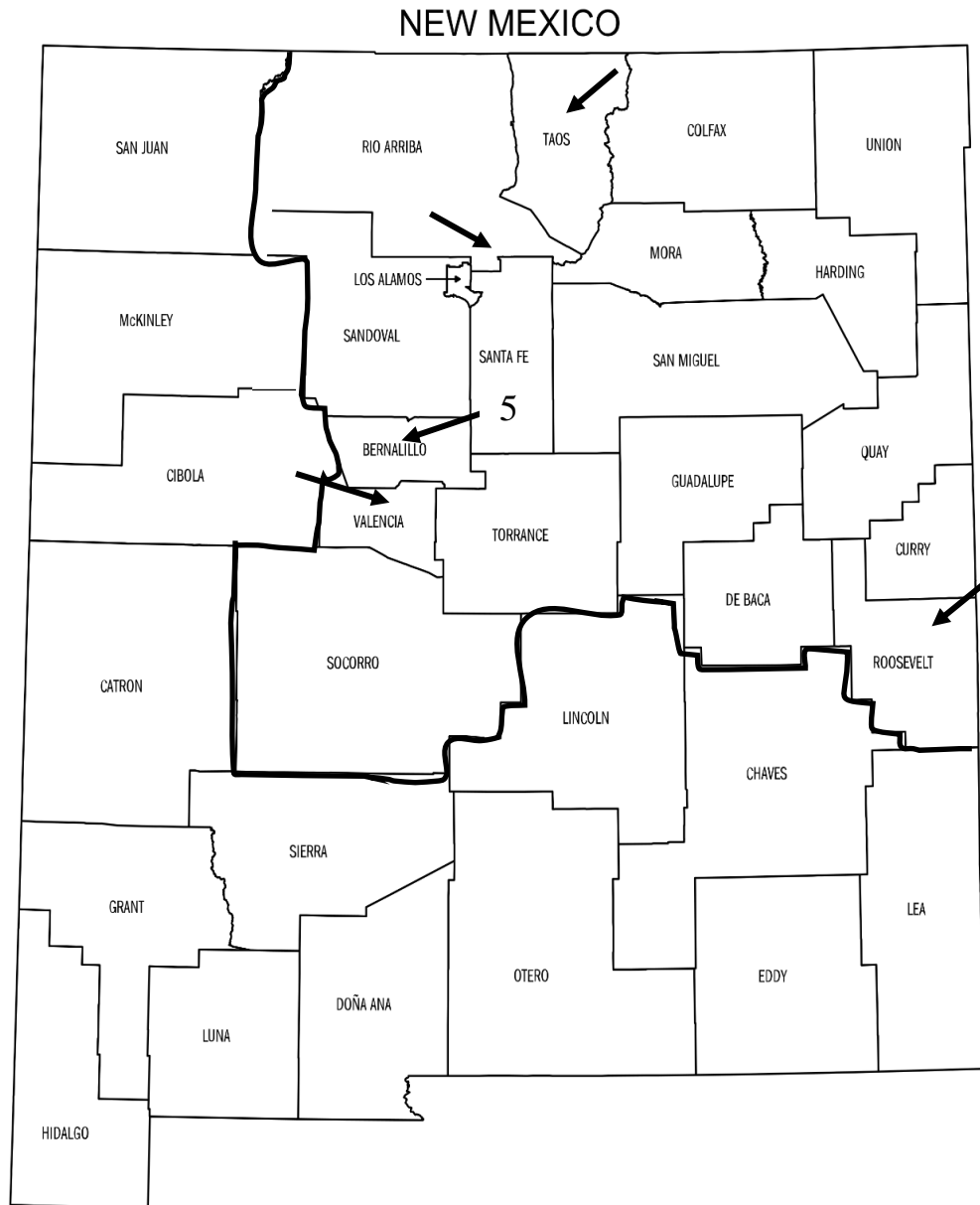
Sincerely,

Pat Duda

505-440-3735 [pat.duda.52@gmail.com](mailto:pat.duda.52@gmail.com)



Map of New Mexico Counties with Counties within the Archdiocese of Santa Fe outlined and general locations of the parishes of the nine reviewers.<sup>42</sup>



42. Map taken from Bill and Jodie Rosener, "Printable New Mexico Map with County Lines," SunCatcherStudio, SunCatcherStudio.com, 2023. <https://suncatcherstudio.com/uploads/patterns/usa-county-ma.s/states/colored-maps/png-large/new-mexico-county-map-fefefe.png>. Used with permission. Outline and arrows added.

## OCIA Reviewers' Input

The nine reviewers were sent a reviewer's form with five basic questions, an answer scale,<sup>43</sup> and a section for comments. A set of demographic questions for the reviewers was also requested as the Archdiocese is culturally diverse and the level of OCIA experience varies. The form as sent out is given at the end of this section with the addition of the question answer scale replies tabulated in parenthesis. All the answers to the five questions about (1) readability; (2) organization for clear understanding of the OCIA process and implementation; (3) giving confidence to a new OCIA leader; (4) being able to use the Handbook to get started leading a group; and, (5) areas lacking or missing, had positive answers.

Over 200 comments about the Handbook were collected—most through a Google Drive document sharing, although two were on paper copies scanned and sent back electronically. Most comments were proof-reading, clarification, language, and grammar suggestions (it was sent out without final proofreading to save time since the purpose was overall concept input, yet the reviewers proofread the Handbook as well). However, there were a few important comments that were addressed. A concern that new OCIA coordinators would feel overwhelmed with the aspect of reinvigorating the parish was addressed by making it clear this was an additional goal once the process was established, and was to be implemented in small steps as possible. One reviewer asked that a section be added on OCIA minister recruitment, formation, and retention; a section about this concern was added. Several comments about the emphasis that the OCIA process must not be a “catechetical class” but a “faith journey” pointed out that “Opening the Word” is also catechesis; and, therefore, asked why catechesis was being criticized. Remarks of

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43. Rensis Likert, “A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes,” *Archives of Psychology*, 22 140, 55 (1932).

this nature in the Handbook were changed to be more inclusive of catechesis in general with the emphasis that the OCIA process should not be only a lecture-style catechism class. Many of the proofreading clarifications of thoughts were incorporated into the OCIA Handbook, with many thanks to the reviewers. The revised document is included in this thesis and is expected to be published with changes to formatting and the addition of bulleted side bars/boxes or drawings as was planned and was also suggested by one reviewer.

The demographic section of the form was filled out only partially and only by four of the nine reviewers. Some demographic information was given by reviewers in email responses who did not fill it out on the form, or was knowledge gleaned in past interactions with them. The group is not as diverse as was desired. Four reviewers are male and five are female. At least two of the reviewers are of Hispanic/Latino origin, and one marked “white;” the rest are unknown although it is supposed that at least two others are also white. Six reviewers are over the age of sixty and the others of unknown age. Four reviewers have graduate degrees and at least two others have a four-year degree. In summation, the group was mostly educated, men and women over the age of sixty; and, probably, the majority would be classified as white. Although it was not on the form as was intended, the level of OCIA experience was collected through the reviewers’ comments. Three reviewers have less than two years of experience leading an OCIA group and noted this Handbook would have been a good resource to them. Four reviewers have many years of experience as an OCIA coordinator and two have no experience in the OCIA process. All reviewers thought the OCIA Handbook was a worthwhile endeavor, with a few mentioning it would be a very good resource, and two wishing it had been available to them when they began as OCIA coordinators.

OCIA (RCIA) Handbook Reviewers' Form (With Tabulated Answers)

Please answer each of the questions below and add your comments (more room at the end) so I can get a look at and compare the input from various people. At the end, I am open to and welcome any additional comments to improve upon this book so it will be a good and useful resource.

<p>1. The handbook is readable for those who are not familiar with RCIA. Add short comments here to support your answer:</p>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree (2)
	<input type="radio"/> Agree (4)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>2. The organization of the material lends itself to a clear understanding of the RCIA faith journey, and how to implement it. Add short comments here to support your answer with:</p>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree (2)
	<input type="radio"/> Agree (3)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree (1)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>3. This handbook would give confidence to someone tasked with being an RCIA minister/coordinator who may not be familiar with RCIA. Add short comments here to support your answer:</p>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree (1)
	<input type="radio"/> Agree (4)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree (1)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree

<p>4. One would be able to use this handbook and the RCIA Rites Book to get started with a group inquiring about coming into the church. Add short comments here to support your answer:</p>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree (2)
	<input type="radio"/> Agree (3)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree (1)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>5. I do not see either an area that is lacking in some respect or one not included that should be when used in conjunction with the RCIA Rites Book. Add short comments here to support your answer with examples as you are able:</p>	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree (1)
	<input type="radio"/> Agree (2)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree (2)
	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree

<p>DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION – No names of people, parishes or towns will be given in my thesis. Only general demographical information will be mentioned. This is for my information only (not to be shared). I'll contact you if you'd like more information.</p> <p>You may decline to answer any you wish (<b>Answers Optional</b>)</p>		<input type="radio"/> I understand (3)	
<input type="radio"/> I would like more information.		<input type="radio"/> Female (3)	<input type="radio"/> Male (1)
Gender (if another, write it here):	<input type="radio"/> Under 40	<input type="radio"/> 40-60	<input type="radio"/> Over 60 (4)
Age	<input type="radio"/> High School	<input type="radio"/> Associate's Degree	
Highest Education Level	<input type="radio"/> Technical/Vocational	<input type="radio"/> Four-Year College (1)	
	<input type="radio"/> Certificate Program	<input type="radio"/> Graduate Degree (4)	
Which of the following best describes you?	<input type="radio"/> Black/African American	<input type="radio"/> White (1)	
	<input type="radio"/> Hispanic/Latino: (1) ___ Mexican American ___ Spanish Descent (1) ___ Other, Specify: _____	<input type="radio"/> Asian, Specify: _____	
	<input type="radio"/> Native American, Specify: _____	<input type="radio"/> Biracial, Specify: _____	
		<input type="radio"/> Other: _____	

Email this back to me at [pat.duda.52@gmail.com](mailto:pat.duda.52@gmail.com). Thank you and God bless you! Pat

Add additional comments or expand upon a particular question from above:

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

For those who volunteer to be an OCIA ministry coordinator or group facilitator, or for renewal of ministers in OCIA programs that are well established, an OCIA Handbook was determined to be a beneficial reference. The OCIA Handbook explains how to establish a welcoming ambience; gives a short history of catechesis; explicates how to look at Scripture more thoughtfully when preparing for each OCIA gathering; gives suggestions for OCIA minister recruitment, formation, and retention; outlines how to discuss the Scripture with a focus on life experiences and Christian responses to Scripture; and suggests how to incorporate the Church's doctrines and precepts. In addition, ideas about how to involve more parishioners in the OCIA process to help refresh the congregation's faith and stimulate their parish Church are included. This Handbook may be given free of charge to the parishes in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe after approval from the Archbishop once it is published. The hope is that OCIA ministers will be encouraged to embrace the goal of forming catechumens and candidates through discussions of life experiences and relating the experiences to Scripture. The hoped for outcome is transformational conversions such that all on their faith journey become disciples of service in God's Kingdom. In the words put forth by Groom for his "life to Faith to life" approach of faith formation:

So anyone aspiring to take this approach must commit to creating a community of conversation among participants; to actively engage them as agents of their own and one another's learning; to invite them to express and reflect critically on their lives in dialogue with each other; to lend them ready, persuasive, and meaningful (connecting with their lives) access to Christian Story and Vision; to encourage them to appropriate its teachings and spiritual wisdom as their own; and to invite them to make decisions for lived Christian faith.<sup>44</sup>

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44. Groom, *Faith?* 262-263.

These should be the goals of all OCIA faith-journey ministers and pastors, and the OCIA Handbook was written to help implement these goals. The entire Handbook follows the Bibliography directly below with the Handbook's Bibliography at the conclusion of this thesis.



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## PART 2: THE OCIA HANDBOOK

The OCIA Handbook as described in this thesis with publication envisioned is contained in the following pages.

ORDER (RITE) of CHRISTIAN  
INITIATION of ADULTS  
(OCIA/RCIA)  
HANDBOOK



For Facilitating Group Faith Formation,  
For Effecting Conversion and Transformation  
of Those Wishing to Enter the Catholic Church,  
and  
For Reinvigorating the Parish

Patricia M. Duda

At the end of all four Gospels Jesus commands his disciples to go out and spread the good news (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-23). It is therefore the role of every one of us to evangelize. As Pope Francis exhorts:

*The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel. (114) In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. (119) All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients...Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. (120)*

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*<sup>45</sup>

## ORDER (RITE) OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

(OCIA/RCIA)

HANDBOOK

For Facilitating Group Faith Formation Gatherings,

For Effecting Conversion and Transformation of Those Wishing to Enter the Catholic Church,

and

For Reinvigorating the Parish

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ORDER (RITE) of CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS  
OCIA/RCIA HANDBOOK

For Facilitating Group Faith Formation Gatherings,  
For Effecting Conversions and Transformation of Those Wishing to Enter the Catholic Church,  
and  
For Reinvigorating the Parish

Patricia M. Duda

Albuquerque, NM

Unpublished apart from within this thesis.

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Najla Bonahoom Sluder, my spiritual guide and RCIA ministry mentor. Without her dedication to RCIA, her invitation to me to join her as a minister, her ongoing love, compassion, and support of myself and all those in our St. John XXIII Catholic Community (Albuquerque) RCIA groups over the years, and her encouragement to follow in her footsteps in obtaining a Master of Theological Studies degree, this book would not be in existence. Thank you with all my heart, Najla.

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*Note: I have elected to capitalize all names of groups of people, e.g., Ministers, Catechumens, Candidates, Sponsors, and others so the groups are more easily identified in the text. -PD*

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Welcome

Welcome to the opportunity of bringing others into the Catholic faith. Although evangelization—spreading the good news of Christ’s saving graces and the impact on our lives—and discipleship are the mission of all the faithful, you have been called to take an active role in this special ministry. This Handbook has been developed to assist new and seasoned Ministers of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) (formerly the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [RCIA]<sup>46</sup>). For those beginning in OCIA Ministry, the basics on how to get started and how to facilitate faith-based group discussions will be useful. For seasoned Ministers, both the group discussions (especially if your gatherings resemble lectures) and how to extend the process within the faithful of the community will be beneficial. The focus is facilitating group discussions to give those seeking God a foundation in Catholic beliefs through the Scriptures, and a transformational conversion—a gift from God: “the work of God, the work of one who has sought him[/her] out, found him[/her], and grasped him[/her]...the experience of being grasped by ultimate concern, of God’s love flooding our hearts.”<sup>47</sup>

Several areas work together to bring the Catechumens and Candidates to a greater knowledge of God and his workings in their lives: liturgy, catechesis, spiritual development, discipleship or witness, and community are pillars upon which to build. Because conversion is

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46. The name change to OCIA has been approved and the new OCIA rites book has words translated to be closer to the Latin and for consistent use of terms. The new publication has been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and is awaiting Vatican approval. Many publications, online searches, etc. will continue to appear as RCIA. This handbook will use the term OCIA. Any numerical references are to the paragraph numbers in the current RCIA Rites Book and have not been changed in the OCIA book.

47. James Dunning, *New Wine: New Wineskins, Exploring the RCIA* (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1981), 87.

ongoing and life-long, a strong OCIA process may also support parish-wide renewal efforts for the continuing conversion of all the faithful of the parish.

As OCIA Ministers, you may find your own faith challenged, deepened, and/or renewed as you answer questions and participate in the group discussions. Although portions of this Handbook may be of general interest to Christians facilitating faith-based discussions, it is aimed at the process for those coming into the Roman Catholic Church. You should have a copy in your parish of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults – Study Edition*.<sup>48</sup> It is invaluable and necessary to read the introductions and become familiar with the rites that will be celebrated. I suggest you also obtain the tabs to find the topics more easily. Because the RCIA Rites Book is a comprehensive explanation of the rites, the details of the rites are not given in this Handbook; paragraph 75 of the RCIA Rites Book is filled with information. Understand that not all parish pastors, or you as a Team Leader or Minister, may be completely familiar with OCIA (or the RCIA Rites Book), so the OCIA Leader and pastor may want to have discussions about the importance of the OCIA process and rites.

Those seeking to come into the Catholic Church have been evangelized in some way, but it is the promptings of the Holy Spirit that leads Inquirers to you. We welcome all, embrace all, and support all on their faith journey. If Inquirers decide becoming a member of the Catholic faith is not for them, or at least not at the present time, that is not to be looked at as a failure on your part. Although you may question Inquirers to ascertain how your process may have impacted them, or what has prompted their decision, you should do so with charity and prayers for their continued search for meaning in their faith life. In addition, if someone comes just to be

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48. International Commission of English in the Liturgy and Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Study Edition* (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988). This will be referred to as the "RCIA Rites Book" as the new OCIA book has not yet been published. Any numerical references are to the paragraph numbers in the current Rites book and have not been changed in the OCIA book.

able to become a Godparent for a baptism or confirmation, gently let them know that the Holy Spirit prompted them to join your group and seek a relationship with God. Remember, faith, hope, and love are those virtues that should shine from all within any group setting.

This Handbook has been kept as simple as possible while still giving enough information for someone to begin to implement or to reinvigorate a parish OCIA process. Along with the RCIA Rites Book, the Handbook is all one needs to get started. The appendices are included only if you wish more information on a particular topic or if you wish to incorporate some of my suggestions without the need to research resources. In this way, those looking for a simple and straightforward template to follow have that in the Handbook proper. Those who are looking for explanations, examples, or samples may find them in the appendices.

## Definitions

The definitions of the terms in this Handbook are not given in alphabetical order, but in the order that makes sense for the faith journey. Reading through these annotated definitions will give you a sense of the process for those coming into full communion with the Catholic Church; therefore, I recommend you take the time to do so. As an overview, the process for the unbaptized begins with the period of the Precatechumenate, or Inquiry, and they are called Inquirers, who move through the periods of the Catechumenate as Catechumens, of Enlightenment and Purification as Elect, and of Mystagogy as Neophytes after their initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist) into the Church. Those who have been baptized



previously are considered members of the Church and are called Inquirers, and then Candidates until they become Newly Initiated after being confirmed and receiving First Eucharist.<sup>49</sup>

- **OCIA:** The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults is the process the Roman Catholic Church employs to bring Inquirers into full communion with the Church through Baptism (if not already validly baptized), Confirmation, and First Eucharist. This is a faith journey with accompanying liturgical rites. (Recall that presently the publication for the rites is the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.)
- **OCIA Ministers (Team):** Ministers are members of a Catholic parish ministry who are willing to meet with others seeking faith through the Catholic Church (YOU!). Often the group is called the OCIA Team. Sponsors may also be a part of this group.
- **OCIA Coordinators/Team Leaders/Directors:** These are defined for the purpose of this Handbook as those Ministers who are tasked with organizational duties for the OCIA process and often may be the main facilitators for the group discussions.
- **Faith Journey:** This is the road of conversion and to a transformation of how someone lives their life. It is a lifelong journey, and OCIA is a formal part of that journey for those seeking to come into full communion with the Catholic Church through the Sacraments of Initiation.
- **Sacraments of Initiation:** The three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist, initiate people into the Catholic Church. All adults, including children over seven years old (the age of reason), in the OCIA process should receive all three sacraments at one liturgical celebration.

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49. I have chosen to capitalize several terms as if proper names so they are more readily visible in the text such as Minister, Catechumen, Candidate, and others.

- **Inquirers:** Those who are questioning if they should seek faith in God through the Catholic Church are Inquirers. They start their journey in a Period of Inquiry. They are not obligated to attend Sunday liturgies but are welcome to do so especially if they have been doing so. A registration process is recommended to gather contact, religious, and marriage information. An example of a form that can be helpful is given in Appendix A.
- **Sponsors:** Sponsors walk with the Inquirers, Catechumens, and Candidates in their journey toward conversion. These may be an Inquirer’s personal Sponsor choice as well as someone from the parish (whom the OCIA Team helps to identify) who accompanies the Inquirers on their faith journey, especially if their chosen Sponsor is not a parish member or is not available (e.g., lives out of town). The Sponsors should have a relationship with the Inquirers, Catechumens, or Candidates that will continue over time in support of the person who has entered fully into the Church. They should be open to discussing their faith with the Catechumen or Candidate. They participate in the liturgical rites with the person they are sponsoring. They also have the responsibility to help determine if the person is ready to enter the Church. There are requirements for being a Sponsor. See Appendix A for an example of a Sponsor Form with requirements listed.
- **Godparents:** The Godparent for Baptism is the same person as the “Sponsor” for Confirmation for the OCIA process and is the person accompanying the Catechumen on their faith journey. The same requirements as for Sponsors apply (see Appendix A).
- **Period of Inquiry:** This is a period of time, that varies based on each person, during which Inquirers ask questions about the Catholic Church: what we believe, why we do what we do, what the process is to become Catholic, etc. They also grow in faith and understanding as they participate in parish activities. This period is also called the Period

of Evangelization and Precatechumenate. Whenever Inquirers are ready for the next step—see RCIA Rites Book no. 42—a Rite of Acceptance or Rite of Welcoming may take place during a Mass liturgy.

- **Rites/Orders:** All rites are formal liturgical celebrations (e.g. Order of Baptism of an Infant). Several rites are celebrated throughout the year as those seeking to join the Church grow in faith. These should be done within the community of faith, most often during a Sunday Mass. Rites for the OCIA process can be found in the RCIA Rites Book or forthcoming OCIA Book.
- **Rite of Acceptance and Rite of Welcoming:** Once Inquirers have come to know they wish to pursue becoming full members of the Catholic Church, they celebrate one of these rites. The Rite of Acceptance is for those never baptized (their names, the name of their Sponsors, and the presiding Minister, place, and date may be inscribed in the parish's Book of Catechumens—optional; some parishes do not keep a Book of Catechumens). The Rite of Welcoming is for those baptized in another faith or baptized Catholic but not catechized and is optional but recommended. They may sign a Book of Candidates if your local parish wishes to keep such a book. There is a combined rite if doing both during the same Mass. This rite may be celebrated more than once a year when Inquirers are deemed ready.
- **Catechumens:** Those never baptized but who have made a commitment to learn about the Catholic faith and have celebrated the Rite of Acceptance are now called Catechumens. At Sunday liturgies the Catechumens are dismissed after the homily to reflect on the Liturgy of the Word and to further discuss the Mass readings and homily

until they are initiated into the Church. (If they die before becoming full members of the Church, even un-baptized, they may receive a Catholic funeral and burial.<sup>50</sup>)

- **Candidates:** Those who are either baptized in the Catholic Church but with no formal catechesis or further sacraments (Eucharist, Confirmation) or baptized using a Trinitarian rite in another Christian denomination and have committed to learning more about the Catholic faith are called Candidates. They may have celebrated the Rite of Welcoming. Candidates are considered to be members of the Christian Church and participate in the Mass (they may go up in the communion procession with their arms crossed to receive a blessing) and other liturgical celebrations but cannot receive the sacraments. (If they die before becoming full members of the Church, they may receive a Catholic funeral and burial. See footnote under Catechumens.) Note: Catechumens are called both *Catechumens* and *Candidates* in the RCIA Rites Book and other publications; this Handbook will use these definitions for clarity to differentiate the two types of those coming into the Church.<sup>51</sup>
- **Period of the Catechumenate:** This is the period after the Inquirers have made their commitment to continue their faith journey through the Rite of Acceptance. Candidates also participate during this period after they have committed to continuing their journey. During this period, more in-depth discussions, based on the Sunday liturgical readings, incorporating faith and morals and other Church teachings, takes place. This period is as long as necessary for Catechumens to come to conversion—a minimum of one full year—and can last several years for Catechumens.<sup>52</sup> Candidates who have been active

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50. RCIA Rites Book, Appendix III, no. 9.

51. The terms *Catechumen* and *Candidate* will be applied consistently in the to be published OCIA book; Candidate will refer only to those baptized and seeking full communion in the Catholic Church.

52. RCIA Rites Book, no. 76.

disciples in another Christian denomination or have been attending Sunday liturgies for years (for example a spouse of an active Catholic) may enter into full communion with the Catholic Church as soon as they are deemed ready.

- **Dismissal after the Liturgy of the Word:** After hearing the Sunday readings and homily, the Catechumens are dismissed. Following a blessing, they exit in a procession led by an OCIA Minister/Lector/Parishioner holding the Lectionary high (see RCIA Rites Book no. 89). They gather to reflect on what they heard with a discussion of how the Scripture may relate to their life.
- **Blessings, Minor Exorcisms, and Anointings:** These are optional liturgical celebrations for both Candidates and Catechumens that may be conferred by a deacon, priest, or catechist appointed by the Bishop (See RCIA Rites Book Nos. 12 and 16) during the Period of the Catechumenate either during Mass after the homily, or during a group gathering.
- **Rite of Sending:** If deemed ready to be initiated into the Church, a liturgical rite may be celebrated in the parish to send the Catechumens and Candidates to the Bishop for the Rite of Election (Catechumens) and Call to Continuing Conversion (Candidates). The Catechumens sign a Book of the Elect either at their parish or in the presence of the Bishop. The Candidates may sign a book for them at the parish level if not done previously, but this is not necessary. They do not sign the Book of the Elect. It is necessary that parishioners see a clear distinction between Candidates who are already members of the Church and Catechumens.
- **Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion:** This rite is normally celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent (only after Catechumens and Candidates are discerned to be

ready and without impediments—such as a marriage irregularity—to enter into the Church) when the Catechumens and Candidates are formally welcomed and deemed ready to complete the Sacraments of Initiation as professed by their Sponsors and the whole community. The Bishop has the Catechumens sign the Book of the Elect or, the Book of the Elect of the parish may be brought to the Rite of Election for the Bishop to sign as directed. Candidates celebrate the rite of Call to Continuing Conversion often at the same ceremony.

- **The Elect:** The Catechumens are called the Elect after being welcomed by the Bishop during the Rite of Election (Candidates continue to be called Candidates) and are awaiting the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.
- **Period of Enlightenment and Purification:** This period, following the Rite of Election, is observed during Lent. This is an intense period of reflection, repentance, penance, and further conversion as the Elect prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. Note that the Easter Vigil is the traditional time for Catechumens (now Elect) to be initiated into the Church. Although Candidates may come into complete communion at the Easter Vigil as well, if they are ready to enter the Church at any point in time, they may do so at a Sunday liturgy preferably during the Easter Season (the spouse of a Catholic who has been attending Mass for years, or one who was an active Christian in another denomination are examples of those not to be held back when appropriate and at the pastor's discretion).<sup>53</sup>

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53. RCIA Rites Book, no. 473, 478.

- **Penitential Rite (specific to OCIA):** Normally on the Second Sunday of Lent, a liturgical rite for the Candidates is celebrated which includes intercessory prayers that they may turn from sin to a virtuous life followed by a prayer over the Candidates.
- **Scrutinies:** These liturgical rites are normally celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent, when the Elect are prayed over with intercessions and prayers to turn from sin and toward God (called **Minor Exorcisms**) and then given blessings. (Not to be celebrated for Candidates although they are encouraged to attend with the parish congregation.)
- **Neophytes/Newly Initiated:** Those who have newly received the Sacraments of Initiation (those who have received all three Sacraments of Initiation are Neophytes; those previously baptized are Newly Initiated) are now full members of the Catholic Church and continue their faith journey. After the Period of Mystagogy, it is suggested that they continue meeting at least monthly until the anniversary of their initiation.
- **Period of Mystagogy:** During the period between Easter and Pentecost the Neophytes and Newly Initiated further develop their faith. Remember that the faith journey is life-long for all. Pentecost is not an end but another beginning for all in the congregation to grow in the fullness of the Catholic Church. It is expected that Neophytes and Newly Initiated will continue to meet, likely less frequently, after Pentecost.
- **Marriage Irregularity (possible postponement of Lenten rites):** Any marriage that has taken place prior to full communion in the Church must be examined. The paperwork and process may take anywhere from several months to several years; therefore, the OCIA Coordinator should be aware of this issue as early as possible (see the Registration Form in Appendix A, for example). This is an opportune time to explain the Church's view of

marriage. OCIA Ministers are cautioned not to get too involved or tell those with a marriage irregularity how long a determination and/or annulment may take. Begin by turning the matter over to the pastor or his designated person; then, support those going through the process as needed. Those with a marriage irregularity may or may not wish to share their personal stories. If an annulment process is not completed when Lent begins, even if they are otherwise deemed ready to come into the Church, they should not participate in the Rite of Sending and the Rite of Welcoming or Call to Continuing Conversion at that time. They remain Candidates or Catechumens, not Elect, and do not celebrate the Penitential Rite/Scrutinies as well. When they are ready, they then experience all of these celebrations during the Lenten season leading to their initiation into the Church at the Easter Vigil (or earlier for Candidates if appropriate—see definition of the Period of Catechumenate.)

- **USCCB:** The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has information on their website about OCIA/RCIA and much more including daily liturgical readings and reflections.<sup>54</sup>

### Historical Overview of Initiation into the Church

Catechesis has a long history in the Roman Catholic Church. During the first 150 years, “there were only Christians, sharing their lives, and sharing both the stories of Jesus and their own faith stories with other people...there was a community...[with] a mission to share Good News which created Church.”<sup>55</sup> The early Church practiced a three-year period of the

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54. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2023). [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

55. Dunning, 15.



Catechumenate with intense catechesis during the period prior to Easter (the “origins of Lent”).<sup>56</sup> At Easter, new Church members were initiated by an anointing with oil and Baptism, a second anointing with oil, and then joined in the celebration of the Eucharist. As time passed, these acts were separated for practical, not theological, reasons into three distinct sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. After The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, in the 1960s), the Church reintroduced the methodology of the early Christian Church including the Catechumenate<sup>57</sup> and the liturgical rites as revised and proclaimed in the RCIA Rites Book. Although the journey has no prescribed time period, the book notes it “should be long enough—several years if necessary—for the conversion and faith of the Catechumens to become strong;”<sup>58</sup> and, further, “By their formation in the entire Christian life and a sufficiently prolonged probation the catechumens are properly initiated into the mysteries of salvation and the practice of an evangelical way of life.”<sup>59</sup> The Vatican II document, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, also asked that a new rite be established for those already validly baptized, noting that they (Candidates) are already in communion with the Church;<sup>60</sup> these rites are also included in the RCIA Rites Book. These comments are a short explanation of why we are bringing new members into the Church in the way we do. For a more detailed description of the historical changes, see Lawrence Mick’s short book.<sup>61</sup> A short synopsis is given in Appendix B.

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56. Lawrence Mick, *RCIA: Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 18.

57. Paul VI, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, (Vatican: Holy See, December 4, 1963), no. 66.

58. RCIA Rites Book, no. 76.

59. RCIA Rites Book, 78.

60. Paul VI. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 69.

61. Mick.

## Chapter One Conclusion

We continue the long history of the Catholic Church's tradition of bringing others into its fold. We welcome Inquirers into our individual parish communities and into the Universal Church. We do so with love just as we would welcome a new family member, such as a newly married spouse or a new child. Just as with family, the new member learns who we are, what we are about, where our values lie, and when to celebrate traditional liturgical and sacramental rites.

If you have not done so, I recommend that you read the definitions because it gives you a good outline of what the OCIA process is, who the people involved are, and how the community is involved by celebrating rites within the Sunday liturgies. The following chapters include the basics of the process of OCIA, the welcoming way to host group meetings, the "life to Faith to life" method of Thomas Groome for Scriptural and catechetical reflection, the inclusion of catechesis, and the possibility of reinvigorating the whole parish just by doing OCIA well. Read on, do not be overwhelmed, and let the Holy Spirit guide you in all you do.

## CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF THE OCIA PROCESS

If you read the annotated definitions as suggested, you should have a general idea of the OCIA process since the definitions were given in the general order of events. The OCIA process is as long as necessary for Catechumens and Candidates to come to conversion and consists of four periods. The Periods of Inquiry and of the Catechumenate could take several years for some to commit to a transformed life as a disciple of Jesus in the Catholic Church or to go through a process to regularize a marriage irregularity. Once discerned to be ready, the Catechumens (now

Elect) and Candidates enter the Period of Enlightenment and Purification during Lent; and, after being Initiated into the Church, the Neophytes and Newly Initiated enter the Period of Mystagogy, formally until Pentecost, but truly life-long. For many parishes the process is about a one-year progression of weekly gatherings (the minimum time stipulated in the RCIA Rites Book). The process is NOT a lecture class, it is NOT simply a school year of catechism studies; it is a faith journey. It is strongly recommended that parishes have a year-round process so that Inquirers may be welcomed and begin their faith journey when they are ready to do so. There is nothing more off-putting than to be told they must wait until the next year or the next “class” begins, when they have found the courage to step forward and ask about coming into the Church. If a parish has large enough groups and sufficient OCIA Ministers, the Inquirers should be in a group separate from the Catechumens and Candidates. Children and teens benefit from a more age-appropriate setting and experience as well.

### Importance of Liturgical Rites

The liturgical rites are an important component of the faith journey of the Inquirers, Catechumens and Candidates. The rites mark the steps in the process and contribute to a sense of moving forward in faith development. The rites are also important to the whole community in helping the congregation to renew their own faith as they witness those celebrating their own faith-journey transitions.

It is imperative that you have access to the RCIA Rites Book. The USCCB has written this book as a Study Edition which means the book has incorporated the directions and explanations prior to each section of the book, the scripts for the liturgical rites. I highly suggest you read paragraph 75 in the RCIA Rites Book often to refresh your memory of the basics of the

OCIA process. The book is divided into the four periods and also into sections for the Catechumens and the Candidates. It also contains combined rites if both Catechumens and Candidates are celebrating a rite at the same Mass. The RCIA Rites Book is your most important resource for how to celebrate the rites throughout the process. The explanatory materials at the beginning of each section are important for understanding how each rite is to be celebrated. The RCIA Rites Book also makes it very clear that Catechumens and Candidates are to be treated separately and differently and in a manner that makes it clear to the congregation that this is so. If you have both Catechumens and Candidates celebrating rites at the same Mass, the book has combined rites that are celebrated in a manner that makes the two categories distinct for all concerned.

The RCIA Rites Book also includes a section for OCIA adapted for children who were not baptized as infants and are of catechetical age. Note that there is no Children's OCIA, or "OCIC (RCIC)." Children past the age of reason, seven years of age, follow the same faith journey process of OCIA with full initiation, celebrating all three sacraments together as the norm. Children should be in separate OCIA gatherings, or with their peers who are baptized and will be celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation, so the discussions are appropriate for their age level; however, the same OCIA process, with all the accompanying rites as for adults, is followed. They celebrate their Rites of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, First Eucharist) at the Easter Vigil with the adults. There are various resources for age-appropriate catechesis within an OCIA process.

If the child is thinking of the Sacraments as a "graduation" with no further catechesis necessary, or parents are pressing for their child to come fully into the Church, or just want them baptized, then the child may not be ready to be initiated into the Church and may remain a

Catechumen for a longer period. During the faith journey a transformational conversion at the child's or adolescent's level of understanding should take place.

To coordinate the celebration of the rites, all one must do is prepare a script using the choices given in the RCIA Rites Book. If you and/or your pastor are unfamiliar with OCIA and the OCIA rites, or even because it has been a year since the rites were last celebrated, you may go over the RCIA Rites Book together. You may also include your worship director, pastoral assistant, music director, and others as appropriate to your parish to become more knowledgeable about how the rites are celebrated.

### The Period of Inquiry

The Period of Inquiry may be called the Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate. It is the time during which Inquirers tell their stories, ask questions, and assess if this faith journey is one upon which they wish to embark. It should be as long as necessary for Inquirers to begin the conversion process. "Opening the Word" proclaimed at the Sunday Mass is the focus. Questions and general information about the Church and its Tradition, including our gestures and words at Mass, and what we believe as Catholics are also topics of discussion. Some information about the Bible as a "book of books" as well as common prayers, devotions, and sacramentals may also be discussed. According to the norms, Inquirers should be in a separate group apart from the Catechumens and Candidates. If your parish has large groups, you may consider having a separate group welcoming Inquirers all year long; they join the Candidates and Catechumens when ready. For small groups and when there are not sufficient OCIA Ministers, Inquirers may meet with the Catechumens and Candidates, joining at any time of the year, as their questions

may still aid in formation of those who are Catechumens or Candidates and the OCIA Ministers as well. Inquirers then continue the journey as Candidates or Catechumens when ready.

### The Period of the Catechumenate

The Period of the Catechumenate begins with the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance for the unbaptized and the optional Rite of Welcoming for the baptized but un-catechized in the Catholic faith. Again, there is a combined rite if you have Candidates and Catechumens celebrating these rites at the same Mass. Catechumens are accepted into the OCIA process but are dismissed from Mass after the homily; Candidates stay for Mass as they are considered already a part of the Christian community. After the dismissal from Mass, the Catechumens “Open the Word” discussing how the readings and homily have touched them. The gathering of the Catechumens and OCIA Minister(s) can be as short as the remainder of the time for the Mass. They may continue to meet with the Candidates and Team members joining the group after Mass for more in-depth discussions of the Sunday readings and various topics or they may all gather at another time during the week for more catechesis. For a small parish, Inquirers may be invited to these gatherings as well if separate group meetings are problematic.

The longer or separate gatherings are still not lecture classes or simply studying a catechism book, but are a time to grow in relationship with our Lord while also incorporating catechetical topics. These sessions will include more about the Christian Church, but the focus continues to be on Scripture and tradition from a Catholic perspective by “Opening the Word” with the previous Sunday’s readings and on deepening their understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Catechumens and Candidates should be undergoing a transformative conversion such that they are living their lives in the faith. OCIA Ministers should be attuned to

how the Catechumens and Candidates are discussing their faith and their daily activities (see the section below on discernment). Reading Scripture should be encouraged; for example, reading one Chapter from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and one from the New Testament in their Bible each day; or through daily Mass readings.<sup>62</sup> Catechumens and Candidates can be encouraged to pray through Lectio Divina.<sup>63</sup> During this period, they should also be participating in activities of the parish as they are able. Their Sponsor should be encouraged to invite the Catechumen or Candidate to join in parish activities as the Sponsor walks with them, or all the OCIA participants could join in an activity. The Catechumens and Candidates should begin to feel that they are part of the community, that the parish is their home in faith.

#### Discernment of Readiness for Rites and the Sacraments of Initiation

A task of OCIA Ministers, Sponsors, and the parish (although the parishioners rely on the testimony of those who know the Inquirers, Candidates and Catechumens more personally) is to discern whether or not there is a conversion of heart and a transformation in the way the Catechumens and Candidates live their lives. These tasks of discernment of the beginnings of conversion should take place prior to the Rite of Acceptance or Welcoming to assess if the Inquirers are ready to move forward. At that point, all that is required is a desire to know God and Jesus' saving grace more fully. This may manifest through active participation, attendance, and commitment to the process.

As Inquirers move forward to Catechumens or Candidates, discussions about the faith, reflections on the Word, activities in which they are participating, and how they respond to

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62. USCCB, "Daily Readings," 2023, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org), is one example.

63. USCCB, "How do we pray with Sacred Scripture?" 2023. [www.usccb.org/catholic-prayers](http://www.usccb.org/catholic-prayers).

others in their daily activities, should shed light on conversions and transformations. For larger groups, individual interviews to discuss any issues or concerns and to assess how the Catechumen or Candidate feels they are growing in faith, spirituality, and discipleship can be done over time to help with this task. Self-discernment should be an ongoing activity of all Christians as they ask themselves whether God is the center of their life and how they have responded to Jesus' call through the workings of the Holy Spirit. In addition, discernment of charisms—gifts—and how to put them into practice in God's kingdom on earth will help to focus the discipleship of each person as they live in the grace of the Spirit.

The Period of the Catechumenate is then as long as necessary for a conversion of heart and a resulting transformation of how one lives as a disciple of Christ. The discernment of readiness to be initiated into the Church is most important since the rites celebrated during Lent do not take place for those not yet ready to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation. This could be by personal choice, by the OCIA Ministers and Sponsors discerning that the Catechumen or Candidate has not transformed their life and formed a relationship with God, or because a marriage irregularity has not been resolved. In those cases, the Rite of Sending and the Rite of Election or Call to Continuing conversion, as well as the Lenten rites (all discussed in the next section) should not be celebrated. Those unable, or not ready, continue as Catechumens or Candidates. Celebrating all the Lenten rites prior to celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation prepares Catechumens and Candidates more fully for Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

At the Rite of Election, the Bishop, the shepherd of the local Church, recognizes and affirms the readiness of the Catechumens and Candidates to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. Because of the many parishes in a diocese, the Bishop cannot baptize, confirm, and celebrate the Eucharist with all of the Catechumens and Candidates in the



diocese; therefore, he may grant pastors the faculty to confirm thus the initiates are able to complete their initiation into the Church at the parish Easter Vigil celebration.

### The Period of Purification and Enlightenment during Lent

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment is celebrated during Lent and begins with the Rite of Sending at the parish level followed by the Rite of the Election or Call to Continuing Conversion with the Bishop, normally on the first Sunday of Lent. The Lenten period is one of deep reflection. Lent is a time when all are encouraged to pray, to repent, to do penance/fast, and to give alms just as all Christians do as they prepare for Easter. Candidates should make their first confession during this period if they have not done so; and, they celebrate an OCIA specific Penitential Rite on the Second Sunday of Lent. The Elect celebrate three scrutinies (minor exorcisms and blessings), one each on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent expressed with the Cycle A reading. The Elect are also presented with the Creed and Lord's Prayer (either at the first and third scrutinies respectively, or, as recommended, during that week at a daily Mass if possible, or alternatively, at your OCIA gathering). The Creed and Lord's Prayer could also be presented during the Period of the Catechumenate as mentioned in the OCIA Rites Book. If desired, the Candidates may be given a copy of each during a group gathering, but not as part of the liturgical celebration of the Elect.<sup>64</sup> The congregation should be made aware that the two groups, Catechumens and Candidates, have been treated differently.

It should be clear to the Elect and Candidates that they are in a different period of the OCIA process. This period is not a time for continuing or cramming in catechesis. The focus of

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64. If you search the internet for "Lord's Prayer conversation with God" you will find a useful activity to make the Lord's Prayer meaningful for listeners.

the Lenten gatherings is prayerful reflection. For example, each week a different type of prayerful reflection can be introduced such as the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, Lectio Divina, contemplative/centering prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic Adoration, or any others offered by your parish or diocese. Various examinations of conscience such as St. Ignatius of Loyola's evening examination of conscience, or reflecting on the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Corporal Acts of Mercy, or the Beatitudes would all be appropriate.

### Final Preparation for the Rites of Initiation

Historically, Easter is the time for Catechumens to be initiated into the Church. The Rites of Initiation today are celebrated, if at all possible, at the Easter Vigil. Candidates may come into full communion with the Church either at the Easter Vigil or at another Sunday Mass, in particular, during the Easter Season, especially if the groups are large. There is a combined rite if both groups are coming into the Church at the Vigil. I suggest you read through the Easter Vigil script along with the presider, deacon, choir director, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, and acolytes/altar servers so all will go smoothly and prayerfully especially since many more may be present in the congregation than normally attend Sunday Mass.

The RCIA Rites Book suggests the Elect should try to set aside Holy Saturday as a final day of prayer and reflection as they prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation. The Candidates do so as well if they are coming into full communion at the Vigil. The RCIA Rites Book lists some of the rites that may be celebrated:

- The presentation of the Lord's Prayer (if not done previously)
- The recitation of the Creed (if the presentation of the Creed was celebrated previously)

- The Ephphetha Rite (opening the eyes and ears)
- The celebration of the choice of a baptismal name.<sup>65</sup> (The choice itself should be done earlier and given to the music ministry to be added to the Litany of Saints for the Easter Vigil.)

Having one rite, such as the Ephphetha Rite, on Holy Saturday morning may increase the anticipation of the Catechumens and Candidates as they see the hustle and bustle of getting the church ready for the Easter Vigil. They should also try to make Holy Saturday a day of prayer and reflection at home as much as possible.

A half-day to day-long retreat is recommended during Lent. One or more of the optional rites listed above, or minor exorcisms and blessings could be celebrated during the retreat. Any day in Lent, the Saturday of Palm Sunday weekend, or Holy Saturday morning are all possible dates.

A retreat may take many forms. A “Scrutinies Retreat” based on the readings of Lectionary Cycle A (especially if Cycle B or C readings are read on Lenten Sundays at the rites’ Masses as per the pastor) is a possibility. You may wish to enlist the help of a priest, deacon, or of a lay person you can trust to take the retreatants on a faith-filled day of reflection and prayer. Sponsors, spouses (if appropriate due to their involvement in the journey) and the OCIA Ministers can all participate and benefit from this experience. An example of one I have prepared and facilitated is given in Appendix C. Miriam Malone has a book of retreat resources especially for Catechumens and Candidates.<sup>66</sup> There are many other resources that can be used such as DVDs, reflective publications or pamphlets, podcasts/YouTube videos of Bishop Robert Barron, Father Richard Rohr, Fr. Mike Schmitz, or others. In addition, if your parish or diocese has

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65. RCIA Rites Book, no. 185-186.

66. Miriam Malone, *Enter the Rose* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 2005).

subscribed to FORMED.org there are many good programs there. Keeping with the Lenten themes of repentance, penance, and forgiveness along with prayer and discipleship while contemplating the awesomeness of God's loving compassion and mercy are all appropriate themes.

### The Period of Mystagogy

Increased faith formation continues from Easter to Pentecost during the Period of Mystagogy, but is also life-long. The Neophytes and Newly Initiated now celebrate Mass fully with the faith community and deepen their understanding of the paschal mystery and their own faith. This period lends itself to more details on the liturgical celebrations of the Church. The Mass can be studied, especially since the Neophytes have not ordinarily been attending beyond the Liturgy of the Word. Discussing the other sacraments, the Tradition of the Church, or continuing to answer questions the Neophytes and Newly Initiated may have, is encouraged along with a continuation of "Opening the Word."

Although the following should have been discussed during the Period of the Catechumenate, the Neophytes and Newly Initiated may also be presented with more information on participating in the various ministries at Mass and service initiatives of the parish. They may also choose to join a service group outside the parish. Depending on their life circumstances, they may simply witness by living a Christian life, especially in raising children or being charitable employees or employers. Some may wish to continue to learn more after Pentecost and should be welcomed to continue to meet as Neophytes and Newly Initiated up until the anniversary of their initiation. For a small parish, meeting with the Inquirers, Catechumens, and Candidates enriches the discussions of all as Neophytes and Newly Initiated join the OCIA Team even if infrequently or temporarily.

## Chapter Two Conclusion

Each OCIA period has its own focus, and this should be clear to those journeying through the OCIA process as they move from Inquirers to Catechumens or Candidates, and to Elect and Neophytes or Newly Initiated. This faith journey with the Ministers and those seeking a relationship with God walking together in reading and discussing scripture, in discussing Catholic beliefs, and in learning about the Catholic Church’s teachings and Tradition continues as needed for conversion. The growth in spirituality and faith transforms their lives toward service and justice—“*to sort out what belongs to whom and to return it to them*”<sup>67</sup>—to become true disciples of Christ. This conversion and transformation can be realized through “Opening the Word” and reflecting on how Scripture relates to the lives of the group participants. Engaging in a discussion of a Catholic Tradition or belief, of personal and current affairs and how one’s faith may shape one’s response, of watching and discussing a video, or reading and discussing an article may be included throughout the process. The website TeamRCIA.com is an excellent resource for OCIA Ministers about the OCIA process.

As OCIA Ministers you may be surprised at how much you learn about your own faith and spirituality, about how to live your lives as a disciple of Christ, and about your ongoing faith conversion. Be welcoming of all, be kind and considerate to all, and be willing to share your own faith’s ups and downs. Those who may have a permanent impediment (in which case they should be in a dialogue with the pastor) that prevents them from coming into full communion with the Church through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist can still grow in faith, hope, and charity and so should be welcomed. Do not pressure participants if they are slow in coming to

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67. Walter Brueggemann, “Voices of the Night—Against Justice,” in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An Agenda for Ministers*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas H. Groome (New York: Paulist Press), 5. Brueggemann references the Book of Micah as an example: Micah 2:1-2; 3:1-2; 3:8-9; 4:1-4; 6:8.

conversion. This faith journey is unique to each of us and takes place in our own way, time, and space; therefore, respect for each other is essential.

## CHAPTER THREE: FACILITATING AND HOSTING OCIA

### The Welcoming Ambiance

The environment sets the stage for your group gatherings. It should be warm and inviting so participants will feel free to speak candidly. It should not be implied that gatherings are a lecture class, so, preferably, gatherings should not be in a classroom setting with desks or even around a large table; if need be, pull desks into a circle or move chairs from the table if there is room to do so. Seating should be arranged in a circle so all are equally comfortable in seeing and speaking. It should feel more like being invited into one's home where stories are shared. The atmosphere can be enhanced by having a small table covered with the liturgical-season color and a Bible or the Lectionary. A candle can be lit if permitted. Anytime a new person joins the group, it is suggested all reintroduce themselves with their name, whether they are an OCIA Minister, Catechumen or Candidate, Sponsor, or spouse, etc., and why they have joined this group.

Refreshments when casual conversation can be enjoyed are also a plus. Refreshments can be provided by the Ministry Team members, by parishioners, or by all in the group signing up to take a turn. Providing snacks is an opportunity for parishioners outside the group (hospitality ministry) to prepare and clean up and/or provide refreshments and meet those in your group. Each new person can be asked if they have any food restrictions (peanut allergy, gluten-free, etc.); water, or hot water for tea or hot chocolate, can make those not drinking coffee feel included.

The facilitator or OCIA Ministers and Leader should be observant of various personality types and try to achieve an atmosphere in which all feel comfortable speaking. Keep in mind some people are extroverts and others introverts. Some people start talking right away without much thought, whereas others need time to think and focus their thoughts before engaging in conversation. Detail-oriented folks may not see the big picture while others may focus more widely. Some people tend to develop step-by-step plans, while others are more spontaneous in their words and actions. People who are aware of the sensitivities of others may be more mindful when speaking, whereas others might say something without realizing their words could be hurtful.

Although you do not have to analyze each person, you should be aware of these differences so one person does not dominate the conversation or another go off on tangents. Therefore, be patient and allow for quiet time if you ask a question and no one answers—one does not need to fill the void. You may ask for a moment of silence before taking responses. In addition, members of the group may always take a pass without judgment—no one should be pressured or alienated. However, if needed, an OCIA Minister could speak to someone privately if they are not contributing to the discussions because Catechumens and Candidates should be showing evidence of a growing faith through their words and deeds. When trying to come to a decision, for instance what parish outreach activity the group may want to support, you may have to balance the thoughts of those who wish to analyze and weigh the options against those who wish to move forward quickly after realizing the needs of a certain group. This practice may be true for yourself and the members of the Ministry Team as well as for those coming into the Church in your gatherings.

An important aspect is that all feel unpressured, and safe to discuss their hopes, dreams, and concerns or past failings; therefore, confidentiality must be respected. Voicing the “rule” that all said in the room stays in the room is essential and should be repeated each time a new person joins the group.

The Group Gatherings: Facilitated by the OCIA Leader and OCIA Ministers

*Facilitators’ Preparations*

Being an OCIA Minister is a year-round commitment; therefore, rotating who is present or who facilitates may be desirable. In preparing for the group meetings, it is not necessary to attempt to know everything that might come up in the discussion; however, some scriptural background information as discussed below will help you to be prepared to answer basic questions. Realize that you do not have to have all the answers. If you do not have an answer, tell your questioner that you will get an answer for them, or simply note that we are all searching for answers but there are mysteries beyond our capacity to understand.

Preparations begin with the readings for the Sunday Mass (discussions are of the Sunday readings on or after the Sunday they are proclaimed). Read them all and reflect on how the message might impact your own life in faith. For background knowledge, take some time to read the Scripture passages before and after the reading to get a better sense of the biblical context. I highly recommend you also read a lector workbook<sup>68</sup> and/or the introduction and footnotes in your Bible. Doing so may give you context and background such as: the time and place of the

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68. Catherine Cory, et al., *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word 2023* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2022), for example. This workbook gives background information on each of the readings. Your parish may already have these available for lectors. Although it is published every year, even an older copy for the appropriate cycle of Sunday readings is advantageous.



readings, what is going on historically, and from whom and to whom the passage was written. Often, when “Opening the Word,” giving a short summary of this information may help the group come to a better understanding of the passage. Although the above is a good starting point, if one wishes other resources there are books specifically for OCIA such as *The Word into Life*, *The Living Word*, and the *Foundations in Faith*<sup>69</sup> series. In addition, there are homilies online that the facilitator may listen to ahead of time. If you are feeling lost, you may contact me as a resource as well.<sup>70</sup> Just be careful not to utilize resources in a way that turns gatherings into a “class”—a “head” study of topics without implications for living as a Christian disciple. Simply use other resources for ideas about how to approach the readings or begin the discussion. More on this in Chapter 4.

Gatherings should begin (after introductions and announcements) and end with a prayer. The gathering prayer can refocus the group after greeting each other, partaking of refreshments, or making announcements. At the end of the session, a concluding prayer can be prayed. These prayers can be prepared prior and read, or be spontaneous. The concluding prayer, if spontaneous, can incorporate ideas from the discussion. The OCIA Minister should be prepared to do both but may ask if another wishes to pray spontaneously. Never embarrass someone who does not wish to do this by asking them to say the prayer without their consent. I have prepared examples of prayers, found in Appendix D, but there are many resources for prayers.

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69. Redemptorists, *Journey of Faith, The Word into Life: A Guide for Group Reflection on Sunday Scripture* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2007); Leisa Ansliger, et al., *The Living Word: Leading RCIA Dismissals* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2018); and RCL Benziger, *Foundations in Faith Catechist Manual* (Dubuque, Iowa: RCL Benziger, various years) for examples. Note that *The Word into Life* includes three leader workbooks with background on the readings and a couple questions for reflection and discussion. It also has some sample gathering and dismissal prayers and lists by number catechetical topics that are in separate Faith Catechetical Handouts. *The Living Word* includes Scriptural background notes and a formal catechist’s guide with a “script” one can follow and extended catechesis phrased themes. RCL Benziger has many appropriate resources.

70. My email address is pat.duda.52@gmail.com.

Preparing to meet with those on their faith journey through the OCIA process may seem daunting at times. Remembering you are also on a faith journey and are prepared to share your stories—how your faith is a part of your life—will put you more at ease. The preparations suggestions above will assist in discussions with both the Catechumens dismissed from Mass and at whole group gatherings.

*Catechumens Dismissed: "Opening the Word"*

After the homily at Sunday Mass, the Catechumens are dismissed for a reflection on the readings and homily—they do not stay for the Liturgy of the Eucharist for they are not yet in the order of the faithful. The presider sends them forth with a prayer (see the RCIA Rites Book for dismissal examples at the end of several of the rites<sup>71</sup>), and the OCIA Minister or other designated person (such as a Team member or volunteer Lector) leads the Catechumens out of the nave holding the Lectionary high. The choir and assembly may sing an appropriate short verse. If one is available, a second Lectionary can be at the Ambo to be processed out. (If you process with the single parish Lectionary, remember to return it prior to the next Mass.)

The time after dismissal is **not** a time for formal, topical, catechetical lectures and may be as short as until Mass has been dismissed. Examples of questions on which to reflect, include the following:

- What was one word or phrase in a reading that touched you? How did it touch you?
- What in the homily struck you? How did it do so?
- Which character would you identify with in the Gospel story? Why?
- How do you think you would have reacted had you heard the passage as Jesus spoke it?

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<sup>71</sup> RCIA Rites Book, no. 116; with the same words of dismissal for other rites as well.

Remember silent time should be given to think about possible responses. Also, the Minister may start if the Catechumen(s) are not very vocal. The Minister may offer a prayer to close the gathering. At this point, the group gathering may continue with others joining after Mass or the group meeting may be scheduled on a different day or time.

#### *Group Gathering of Catechumens, Candidates and OCIA Ministers*

The weekly group gatherings are prayerful reflections during which all are engaged in their faith journey as they continue to discern how to live as disciples of Christ. The Sunday liturgy readings are discussed beginning again with a discussion of the readings and homily as above for the dismissed Catechumens. There is no problem with repeating the same questions because the Catechumens will hear the responses and faith stories of the others including the stories of the OCIA Ministers. It is important to keep in mind that a gathering is not a teacher/pupil setting, but a sharing by the faithful discerning how to grow in faith and action. The discussion then moves to a more in-depth reflection on life experiences, faith responses to the readings, and returning to examine how they each might transform their life in actions that reveal their faith. This is discussed further in Chapter 4. Some catechesis could follow with a topic that is tied into the theme for the Sunday. See Chapter 5 for more information on suitable catechesis.

#### Recruiting, Forming, and Retaining Team Members

It is often difficult to gather and maintain a group of volunteers committed to any purpose in any organization. At the end of the Gospels, Jesus sends his disciples out to spread the Good News and to baptize others—this, and service for justice with love as Christ loved, is the mission of the Church. Therefore, evangelization by every member of the parish, by how they live their lives as shining lights of Christ, should be encouraged by the pastoral staff. Ministry is a calling

to serve, but it often needs an invitation; therefore, your pastor could preach homilies on that subject as it pertains to a Sunday reading when you are actively recruiting, and especially on Catechetical Sunday when all catechists are recognized.<sup>72</sup>

Personal invitations normally are more effective for recruiting members; therefore, announcements at Mass, in the parish bulletin, or on the parish website—although useful to refer to for more information—may not on their own capture the spiritual imagination of others. Invitations to the parish congregation to join the OCIA group gathering occasionally for a special presentation, speaker, or video not only introduces the Catechumens and Candidates to parishioners, and vice versa, it may also spark a desire in a parishioner to contribute to the group as a future speaker or to join the group. It is important to discern what someone is offering: a one-time presentation on a topic, a faith-story sharing, or a desire to become more involved.

Everyone should be valued; therefore, all OCIA Ministers should be allowed input and their suggestions seriously considered. To tell someone that their idea will not work, that it has been tried before, or that the current way of doing things is the way it has always been done, is not valuing their ideas. Those statements may turn people away or diminish their enthusiasm. Each Team Member should have a task or role to play. This could be as simple as rotating tasks such as who prepares for the Sunday Catechumen dismissal, the gathering discussions, the catechetical topic, or the snacks. Depending on the Team Members and their charisms, each person could be assigned one of those tasks for the year rather than rotate tasks. If your Team is large enough, each member may serve once per month, therefore preventing burnout to help retain members for several years. Recruiting new members each year may keep the Team refreshed with new dynamics along with new ideas. With new members continually added, you

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<sup>72</sup> USCCB, *About Catechetical Sunday*, 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/catechetical-sunday-about>

may also avoid a Team that disintegrates if the OCIA Team Coordinator/Director/Leader leaves and the OCIA Ministers, with allegiance to that person, also leave.

Team Formation may have several components. Foremost, as Ministers, we are not “answer people” but humble representatives of Christ.<sup>73</sup> Second, we do not look at our ministry as a teacher/student model. Groome states well that:

*If we remember the God with whom we walk together, then educating for such walking must be rendered through a service that is a “power with” people, a ministry that empowers all of us to embody and live God’s word in humble walking. Our authority is no more than the right to serve, (see Mk 10:45) and our service must be by God’s grace, one of empowerment... We must die to the image of “teacher” into which we have typically been socialized and, without falling into false humility or abandoning our responsibilities, come to see ourselves as fellow or sister pilgrims to the people with whom we walk. We are indeed guides to them in Christ’s name, but it is our journey too.<sup>74</sup>*

Groome goes on to say that we must share our faith “Story...the whole faith Tradition (Scriptures, beliefs, rituals, sacraments, prayer forms, value systems, structures, expected life styles, etc.)”<sup>75</sup> To share those components well, Ministers should be well-formed in their faith. Some Ministers may have a good background in faith formation and others may have had little since their confirmation—both groups have much to offer. Formation on your OCIA Team may take various forms depending on the backgrounds of your Ministers.

A component of OCIA Team group formation is learning how to be an effective facilitator through training—as simple as discussing this book or watching a video series, or as involved as bringing in a facilitator trainer or taking a training course. OCIA Ministers should be familiar with the RCIA Rites Book, so a once per year overview would be appropriate. Your

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73. Thomas H. Groome, “Walking Humbly With Our God” in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An Agenda for Ministers*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas H. Groome (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 57.

74. Groome, “Walk Humbly,” 58.

75. Groome, “Walk Humbly,” 61.

diocesan office may offer OCIA training sessions and likely has a catechetical training program—often targeted toward parish school and faith formation catechists—that would be a good source for OCIA Ministers to further their own faith formation to enrich their walk with the Catechumens and Candidates. Connecting with another parish in a mentoring/support relationship may be advantageous. Team planning meetings help Ministers to become a cohesive group. A celebration of the OCIA Ministers at a Sunday liturgy shows that they are valued.

To become familiar with the catechetical topics the OCIA Team will be discussing, the Team may meet on a regular basis with a different member preparing each topic. The Team Ministers could also attend parish adult faith formation offerings such as a Bible study, a book study, or a video series; or invite other parish catechists or the entire parish to an OCIA offering.<sup>76</sup> This would have an added benefit of interacting with others to spread the word about the OCIA process through casual conversations. Growing spiritually together may be encompassed by attending a daily Mass and going for coffee afterwards to discuss the readings; reading and discussing one chapter of the Bible each week; praying the rosary; attending Stations of the Cross; or, simply encouraging reading a particular book.

All the activities above also help retain members as they become friends in Christ as a small community of believers and evangelizers. Each OCIA Minister may feel valued by giving them more responsibilities, the freedom to speak freely and be heard, the acknowledgement of being seen as a valued contributing member, and by respecting and valuing their own faith

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76. Books I'd recommend are: Barbara Hixon, *Formation for the Catechumenate Team: RCIA Spirituality! With reflection questions by Gail Gensler* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publication, Inc., 1997); Jack Seymour, ed. *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987) that looks at several Christian denominational approaches; Gerard Baumbach, *The Way of Catechesis: Exploring our History, Renewing Our Ministry* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2017); and Anne Marie Mongoven, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis: How We Share the Fire in Our Hearts* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000). See other examples under the "Annotated Bibliography of Resources for OCIA Catechists" after Appendix F.

stories, validates each Minister's openness to continue to walk their faith journey along with all those in the group: Ministers, Catechumens, Candidates, and others.

### Chapter Three Conclusion

I encourage you to pray and reflect on the realization that as a baptized Catholic you are anointed priest, prophet, and king, equipping you to host OCIA gatherings. Considering that all Christians are called to evangelize, think about your ministry in your parish's OCIA process and what you have to offer to others. Just as in any group setting you welcome new members and "show them the ropes," you are doing the same in welcoming those seeking faith and teaching them about your Catholic faith. Being prepared will take the anxiety away as you begin with prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, and do some reading about the Sunday Scriptures. Remember that this is not a teacher/pupil relationship, but a discussion of each person's faith journey. You share your ups and downs, your questions and concerns, and then together discern how to live in faith, hope, and charity. Your dialogs will be guided by this sharing as you facilitate to bring the discussion back to the Scriptures or topic as needed. The same principles apply to the dynamics of the Ministry Team. The next chapter has a more detailed look at how to facilitate the Scripture reflections.

## CHAPTER FOUR: "LIFE TO FAITH TO LIFE" APPROACH FOR CONVERSION

Several goals when bringing people into the Church are: to help them form a relationship with God; to become active disciples of Christ; to grow in faith, hope, and charity; and to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy with the faith community. We come together as the People

of God at Mass—the source and summit of our faith—to give thanks and praise, to be nourished at the Eucharistic Table, and to be supported by others as we are sent out into the world to live our faith working for the justice and salvation of all people. Below are some statements that support a life/faith approach for our faith journey and examples of how to implement it in the group meetings.

### Vatican II Statements

In the Vatican II Document on Christian Education, the following statement sums up what the goal of educating Christians should be:

*Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit a new creature so that they should be called and should be children of God, they have a right to a Christian education. A Christian education does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person...but has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced to the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth (cf. John 4:23) especially in liturgical action, and be conformed in their personal lives according to the new [person] created in justice and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:22-24); also that they develop into perfect [personhood], to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13) and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body; moreover, that aware of their calling, they learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. Peter 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of [persons] redeemed by Christ contribute to the good of the whole society.<sup>77</sup>*

This summary is important in that the purpose is not only to grow in faith and worship, which we might call internal graces, but it is also to bear witness to the world. Bearing witness includes not only living our own lives rightly as a witness to our faith but reaching out as disciples in spreading the Good News as well as working toward the good of the whole society.

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77. Paul VI. *Vatican II: Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)*, (Vatican: Holy See, October 28, 1965). [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_gravissimum-educationis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html). Bracketed language was changed to be more inclusive.



Vatican II, in the same document, also comments on the responsibility of parents as the first and foremost educators of their children in faith. But it goes on to say the Church (and we, the people, are the Church), must also be educators:

*Finally, in a special way, the duty of educating belongs to the Church, not merely because she must be recognized as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all [people], of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting [people] to be able to come to the fullness of this life. The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.<sup>78</sup>*

Note again the final goal of promoting the good of all humans, of society, and of the world.

Therefore, as OCIA Ministers gather with OCIA process participants, the goal is not that those seeking to come into the Church learn the doctrines and Tradition of the Church by reading and hearing lectures. Rather, along with sharing our beliefs about the triune God and the Tradition of the Church, we must guide the Catechumens and Candidates toward a faith conversion that moves them to step out into the world with joy and hope to be shared while striving to make our world a more just society for all. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss this further.

### Faith and Life Bound Together

Several respected leaders in OCIA ministry have promoted bringing people's faith lives and their experiential lives together so the people's faith may be manifested in how they live their lives. Studying a catechism may bring the facts about our Catholic beliefs into focus, but the study involves just the "head." The person's heart and soul must be engaged as well so they

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78. Paul VI. Bracketed language was changed to be more inclusive.

may begin to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. Doing so leads to people living their faith as the early disciples did in coming together as community, taking care of each other, and reaching out to those outside their community. In addition, helping to build up the kingdom of God means striving toward a just society in which every person is respected with the dignity deserving of being made in the image of God.

My preferred method for most OCIA gatherings is based on Groome's three-fold process: "life to Faith to life."<sup>79</sup> Although his method is flexible in how it is put into practice, the major thrust can be summarized as follows:

- Discuss some common life experiences on a topic put forth by the OCIA Minister.
- Read the Scripture and discuss how the topic is reflected in Christ's teachings, how those in the story reacted, or how those present will react if put into the story, etc.
- Reflect on how those present can individually or as a group put the message into practice in a concrete way for the common good of society and the world.<sup>80</sup>

A scripture reflection entwined with life experiences requires some level of conversion, of changing one's life practices.<sup>81</sup> As Groome explains, "Critical reflection looks inward to the depths of personal awareness and outward at the whole public world through social analysis."<sup>82</sup> He goes on to say this reflection and action entails a "way of love" and of "'Jesus' way of justice," concluding, "Nothing less would be discipleship to the one who defined his life purpose as bringing good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed and effecting God's year of jubilee (Luke 4:16-21)."<sup>83</sup>

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79. Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: Harper One, Harper Collins, 2011). Chap. 8.

80. Groome, *Faith?* Chap. 9.

81. Groome, *Faith?* 262-263.

82. Groome, *Faith?* 275-276, 279.

83. Groome, *Faith?* 111-112.

A detailed example of a gathering with Groom's technique is given in Appendix E which includes the background information gleaned when a facilitator prepares for the meeting.

However, a gathering can be as simple as asking a few questions about the readings or even just the Gospel. For example, if the Gospel is the story of the prodigal son/forgiving father:

- The facilitator may ask everyone to think of a time they know they hurt another person and whether they had asked for forgiveness. They can share their stories (allowing some to pass if they wish).
- Turning to the Gospel, those in the group may be asked if they felt humbled as the prodigal son did and if they were rewarded in being forgiven. Discussion points can be: if forgiveness is not received, it still sets one free; to forgive or not is the other person's prerogative; and to forgive another is also freeing. Holding a grudge only hurts oneself.
- A short discussion about repentance and salvation by the mercy and compassion of God can follow (a catechetical topic).
- Finally, each may be asked to contemplate if there is someone whom they should ask to forgive them or someone they should reach out to forgive, and how to incorporate more compassion into their lives. They may share this if they wish.

Once again, silent periods to think about their responses and respecting their answers or their right to pass on a question is important. Do note however, one cannot simply pass on all discussion points since that does not show any effort to participate or show growth in their faith. The facilitator should gently help to draw out participant's responses by asking them questions. Since the OCIA Ministry team members are expected to discern if Catechumens and Candidates are ready to be received into the Church, the Team must see and hear the faith growth of the participants.

Other types of questions that can be incorporated into discussions depending on the topic of the readings are:

- With which character in the story do you identify and why?
- What did you feel good about or what disturbed you when you heard the reading(s) and/or the homily?
- What do you think is the main point or lesson of the reading(s)?
- What does it tell you about God/Jesus?
- What response would be called for by us as Christians?
- How will it be easy or hard to incorporate the lesson of the story into your life?
- Where can you see God already at work in your life or the lives of others?
- What can you do today, this week, this month to be a better disciple of Christ?
- Is there something we can do as a group for this season in the Liturgical calendar?

#### Chapter Four Conclusion

In conclusion, Vatican II documents, papal encyclicals, and many authors have put forth renewed catechetical models for today's modern people that stress incorporating life experiences into the faith journey rather than learning a series of catechetical explanations given without life applications. To simply study a catechism without discerning how one should respond in faith to the struggles, labors, and pleasures of their life may not result in disciples of Christ who are ready to go forth and help spread the Good News as Christ told his disciples at the end of all four Gospels.<sup>84</sup> Christina Spahn, in her Theology Course, offered a bulleted summary of the elements of effective faith formation for adults. Her main points are:

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84. See Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49, and John 21:15-17.

- *It is about conversion and change—becoming more deeply committed as a disciple of Jesus*
- *Meets each person where he/she is*
- *Is relevant and responsive to perceived needs*
- *Is “owned” by all in the process*
- *Is relational—involving interaction between persons*
- *Is holistic—involving head, heart, spirit, one’s whole self*
- *Respects those involved—their culture and ethnic identity, their experiences, and the wisdom they’ve gained*
- *Relates faith to life—actively involving the person in the process*
- *Utilizes various learning styles and formats*
- *Requires a relaxed and pleasant environment, a “safe” place where one may question and explore*
- *Results in service, ministry, using one’s gifts in the Church and/or for the world*
- *Is a lifelong process*<sup>85</sup>

It could be renewing for our entire Church if all Catholic parishioners embrace these same concepts and invite others to join us in the fold of the Catholic Church. Chapter 6 will explore how doing OCIA well may lead to a more faith-filled and active parish; but next, catechetical topics are considered.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CATECHESIS—INCORPORATING IT INTO THE PROCESS

### Catechesis Flows from Scripture

First, remember that catechesis should flow naturally from the Sunday liturgical readings as the group reflects on the Word along with prompts from the facilitator. As questions are encouraged and arise, explanations may be given about our beliefs, our Church Tradition, and why we do what we do. However, if the discussions never delve deeper, then our Inquirers may not see the point of continuing the journey; and our Catechumens and Candidates may not feel

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85. Christina Spahn, Personal Communication, PowerPoint slides in *THEO 520 – History and Models of Catechesis* (Albuquerque: St. Norbert Master of Theological Studies Program, Fall, 2020).

they really understand the basics of our faith, or what makes Catholicism any different from other Christian denominations.

It may seem to an onlooker that the group gatherings involve discussions without depth. They may not see the connections between Scripture and Church teachings, and how one is embracing the Christian way of life. They may not understand that the main purpose is to convert—to enable a conversion in heart, soul, mind, and body. With that conversion, one’s way of living is transformed so that rather than conforming to our cultural ideas of success—power, wealth, beauty, self-indulgence, and more—one looks outward in love, compassion, and mercy in working for the good of all human beings. The Early Church taught the Creed and The Lord’s Prayer. Those seeking to become Christian in the fourth century were taught the Nicene Creed and how to live their lives as Christians within the community during a three-year period of catechesis. The Catholic Church today has a long history of beliefs and Tradition.

For the reasons above, I have added this Chapter on catechesis. Keep in mind the faith journey is life-long. We should not expect our Catechumens and Candidates to be schooled in everything they “should” know. In fact, if you asked your parishioners in the pews to answer questions about their faith, many of them may be unable to do so. It is unfortunate that many Catholics have an adolescent understanding of their faith due to not continuing to grow in faith past their Confirmation. In fact, many do not continue faith formation after their First Eucharist. Your Catechumens and Candidates, on the other hand, will be enriched in the faith as you bring in topics related to the Scripture readings. In addition, if you have a vibrant parish with many activities, then participating in those activities may be included in catechesis as they become a part of the parish community. How to include parish activities in catechesis is discussed further in Chapter 6.

## Am I Covering Everything?

My guess is the “curriculum” is the area you may want to know, to make sure you are “covering” the catechism of our Church. Sadly, I have seen online some parish programs that do just that, cover the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*<sup>86</sup> with no delineation or differences in the four periods of their OCIA process.<sup>87</sup> That is “head” informational learning but does not engage the heart and soul leading to conversion and transformation.

The RCIA Rites Book paragraph 75 states that Catechumens are “given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life,” a goal that comes from Vatican II. Paragraph 75 goes on to state four ways this is achieved:

- A suitable catechesis that is “gradual and complete...accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the Word” that leads to “an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation” should be provided.
- With the witness of all in the parish community, the Catechumens and Candidates “learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation.”
- “The Church, like a mother, helps the Catechumens on their journey by means of suitable rites, which purify the Catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God’s

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86. Joseph Ratzinger, *Imprini Potest, Catechism of the Catholic Church*, English Translation: United States Catholic Conference, Inc. (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994).

87. See, for example, John Trigilio, *Catechism of the Catholic Church Outline for RCIA*, (Irondale, AL: Eternal Word Television Network, Inc., 2023). <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/catechism-of-the-catholic-church-outline-for-rcia-1289>; or, My Catholic Life! RCIA Program, (Online: My Catholic Life! 2023). <https://mycatholic.life/rcia/>. These are examples of what is not recommended to follow.

blessing...[and] at Mass they may also take part in the Liturgy of the Word, thus preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist.”

- “Catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.”

You can see the emphasis is not on catechetical studies of a catechism, but is focused on the Word, on spiritual growth, and on witnessing their new-found faith. A summary in the RCIA Rites Book paragraph 78 states: “the instruction that the Catechumens receive...should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teachings in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ.” There is no list of the “entirety” of Catholic teachings—of the dogmas, doctrines, teachings, Tradition, and catechisms—which would take more than the lifetime of one person to study. Again, the emphasis is not on all our Catholic teachings, but on the faith, spirituality, liturgy, and discipleship of the Catechumens. This is why the method of Groome that was described in Chapter 4 is so much more appropriate in coming to conversion and transformation.

Mystagogy lasts a lifetime. Just as I and others, as “cradle Catholics,” have learned about our faith over many years following our Confirmation and continue to do so, likewise the learning of a Neophyte or Newly Initiated continues throughout their lifetime. Diana Macalintal, in her great little book *Your Parish is the Curriculum*, expounds the six areas of catechesis for a group OCIA meeting:

- “Encounter” of Christ in liturgy
- “Recollect” and discuss how you encountered Christ in the liturgy
- “Reflect” on that encounter (how it felt, how it touched you)



- “Catechesis” to explore other scripture, writings, or practices that strengthen the teaching of the reading
- “Connect” to what is happening in the world and how you are challenged to change your life
- “Convert” by committing to do something in the coming week as a disciple of Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Those are the topics of the curriculum for catechesis. The topics again reflect the faith journey method of Groome by reflecting on the Scripture and applying it to everyday living.

### Major Catechetical Topics

Macalintal does not give a list of topics, dogmas, teachings, and Tradition one should discuss in the group OCIA meetings. She believes the “curriculum,” besides the group meetings as discussed above, is to become immersed in the activities of the parish. This is discussed at length in Chapter 6 below.

However, because of the reasons mentioned in the Introduction of this Chapter, it does not hurt to include a list of topics generally discussed during the faith journey. In this way, if the OCIA Ministers feel they are missing important topics, they can use these lists to keep track of what they have discussed as the group meetings progress. In addition, some may wish to include a thirty-minute catechetical topic at the end of their group discussion toward the end of the Catechumenate period as the group approaches the Lenten Season. An online search of catechetical topics for OCIA has everything from lists of “everything confirmed Catholics should know” to a few major topics.

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88. Diana Macalintal, *Your Parish is the Curriculum: RCIA in the Midst of the Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 103-104. Macalintal along with Nick Wagner co-founded [www.TeamRCIA.com](http://www.TeamRCIA.com) an abundant free resource with more trainings and items available if you become a member.

Motivated by Pope Francis’s comment that the Church is a field hospital for the wounded to help heal their wounds, Nick Wagner wrote a small book *Field Hospital Catechesis: The Core Content for RCIA Formation*. He says it is an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist, not knowing all the Scriptures, that brings salvation just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus found Christ in the breaking of the bread<sup>89</sup> and then understood the Scripture prophecies. He notes that we, as OCIA Ministers, must have faith and proclaim (evangelize) that Jesus saves.<sup>90</sup> His topics and subtopics are:

1. *The beginning: Know who God is*
  - A. *The most important lesson seekers must learn*
  - B. *God became one of us*
  - C. *What Jesus did and why it matters*
2. *The climax: Jesus makes a difference*
  - A. *The Jesus Sacrifice*
  - B. *The resurrection*
  - C. *The Jesus offer [of a new life]*
3. *The end: Walking the talk*
  - A. *Everybody matters*
  - B. *The secret to discipleship*
  - C. *Announce the Good News*<sup>91</sup>

Once again, as for many authoritative authors including popes beginning after Vatican II, the message we are proclaiming is not a list of dogmas, Church rules, and Church practices, but is the saving power of God that transforms us. Of course, those items mentioned can be discussed as they come up over the course of the faith journey, but they are not the focus. Rita Thiron developed a wonderful chart of the three Liturgical years with this statement in the introduction: “Each Gospel pericope [extract from the text] is summarized then cross-referenced to relevant paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.” She adds the important statement:

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89. Nick Wagner, *Field Hospital Catechesis: The Core Content of RCIA Formation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 13-14. Nick Wagner is cofounder of [www.TeamRCIA.com](http://www.TeamRCIA.com) with Diane Macalintal.

90. Wagner, Chapter 4.

91. Wagner, Chapter 5. This is an outline of the plan. Subsequent chapters expound on each topic listed.

*It is not the intention of this author to suggest that the Catechism serve as the sole source for catechesis nor that the Catechism be used as a textbook that replaces effective adult methodology. What these charts do reveal is that the Church's magisterial teaching and her rich Tradition are firmly rooted in the revealed Word of God and that "liturgy is the privileged place for catechizing the People of God" (CCC 1074 and National Directory for Catechesis, 33).<sup>92</sup>*

Jesus spoke often of the Kingdom of God. Our purpose is to live and work within that kingdom and help all others to do so as well. This is the way of our Lord who ate with sinners; who reached out to the poor and marginalized; who cured the lame, the blind, and the afflicted; and who forgave sins. Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer: to praise God; to see that God's kingdom is lived on earth as it is in heaven; to be nourished by his body and blood given for the salvation of all; to forgive others seventy times seven times if needed just as God always forgives us for our sins; and to ask the Spirit to guide us away from temptations and evil. That, along with the Creed delineating our canonical beliefs is what faith formation is all about. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth, not back to our same old habits and way of living, but to live in Christ, to proclaim to others his saving grace and to live a life transformed.

If you still feel you need more, Appendix F has a list of topics normally discussed in catechesis as I have culled them from several resources. Know that the list is not all inclusive nor all compulsory. It is simply a list to help you think about our Catholic faith as you prepare the Candidates and Catechumens to be initiated into the Catholic Church. You may check the list occasionally to keep track of topics you have discussed; but, please do not take the list and build your process around it. You and those coming into the Church will be not be growing on your faith journeys toward conversion and transformation if you do.

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92. Rita Thiron , "The Lectionary for Mass and the Catechism of the Catholic Church," Hartford, CT: 2007 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions October 9-12, 2007. Posted on the web by Diocese of St. Petersburg without author's permission, but permission granted by author to reference this post: [https://www.dosp.org/wp-content/uploads/28\\_Lectionary-Catechism-Alignment-Tool-rev.-9.30.16.pdf](https://www.dosp.org/wp-content/uploads/28_Lectionary-Catechism-Alignment-Tool-rev.-9.30.16.pdf).

## Chapter Five Conclusion

Although I have included this Chapter on what the topics of the core curriculum should be, I am sure you have come to realize it was not what you were expecting. Of course, catechesis includes prayer, reading Scripture, discussing Church doctrines, Church teachings, moral living, and fighting for justice for all, especially the poor, sick, and marginalized. True conversion and a resultant transformation in one's way of life does not come from a list of topics in the Church's catechism to be learned by memorization, or factual lectures. Conversion, including the continuing conversion of the OCIA Ministers, the Sponsors, and of all Catholics, comes from the realization that God loved us so much that he sent his son, Jesus Christ who died (to sin) and rose to new life that all of us might also obtain new life in him. The Holy Spirit through whom we have received saving grace strengthens us in our mission to be disciples of Christ. It is up to each of us to use our grace for the glory of God and the common good of all people.

## CHAPTER SIX: REINVIGORATING YOUR PARISH—A LONG-TERM GOAL

### A Good OCIA Process Leads to Reinvigorating a Parish

The goal of strengthening your parish is more for those who already have an established OCIA process in their parish, or have a dedicated Team to help with OCIA. If you are just beginning to figure out how to lead and facilitate OCIA group meetings or if you belong to a small parish, you may focus on the gatherings so as not to become overwhelmed. However, a well-functioning OCIA process itself should lead to refreshing parishioners' faith in at least some essential ways. The reverse is also true. A vibrant faith community with celebratory participation at Mass, faith formation groups, active ministries, or caring outreach, to name a

few, will bring people searching for meaning in their lives into your community. Tapping into the activities of the parish can actually make your responsibilities less burdensome. I will give you several ideas I have learned through readings and a recent conference.<sup>93</sup> Note also that if your Catechumens and Candidates do not feel a part of the community, they may feel isolated at Mass and lose an important connection to their faith. Therefore, making connections is important just as it is in other areas of their and our lives.

### Sponsors

Although some seeking to come into the Church may have a relative or friend willing to be a Godparent/Sponsor, a member of the parish could also act as a Sponsor. Sponsors have discussions with the Catechumens or Candidates answering questions as they are able but, more importantly, telling their faith story. Sponsors can speak of times they recognized the workings of the Holy Spirit in their life, or about their prayer life or service work, or how they live their lives as disciples in their homes and places of work. Involving parish members in this way may help to renew the faith of the Sponsors themselves.

These Sponsors are not necessarily a set group of people, but can be chosen based on mutual interests. For instance, a Catechumen or Candidate interested in outreach can be paired with someone who helps stock the food pantry or serves in a soup kitchen. If a Candidate is attracted to ecumenical issues, a Sponsor in an ecumenical group would be appropriate. If a Catechumen is interested in outreach to the sick, they can be paired with a Eucharistic Minister who takes communion to the homebound or to a nursing home. A Candidate who loves to sing

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93. Liturgical Training Publications, *The National Gathering on Christian Initiation: A Conference for Catechumenal Ministers and Pastoral Leaders* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2022).

can join the choir with a choir member Sponsor. Spiritual growth is supported by joining a rosary, devotional, centering prayer, or adoration group along with a Sponsor.

The Sponsor should be an active member of the parish, and the Catechumen or Candidate could accompany their Sponsor to other parish activities such as a Bible, book, or video study and discussion; a parish fiesta, neighborhood cleanup, or soup supper; and a wedding, funeral or First Communion celebration. (The signs and symbols of a wedding or funeral can be broken open at an OCIA meeting after the whole OCIA group attends one.) If a family member marries, the spouse gets to know the family, their values, and their ritual celebrations by sharing meals with them and joining in their activities and celebrations. It should be no different for those entering the Catholic Church—they get to know us, celebrate with us, do service with us, and learn more about our faith along with us.

### OCIA Activities

Parishioners are given an opportunity to reflect on their own faith life as they celebrate the OCIA liturgical rites at Sunday Masses. By having parishioners experience the dedication of those coming into the Church, parishioners have the opportunity to think about why others may wish to join the Church and therefore contemplate why they themselves remain Catholics. These rites are faith-journey reflections on the meaning and significance of conversion and transformation for all who are present. Celebrating these rites at various Sunday Masses will allow more parishioners to experience what is happening throughout the year. Including more of the optional blessings, anointings, and minor exorcisms will also broaden the outreach. Announcements in the bulletin, at Mass, or included in the homily to explain the purpose of the OCIA rites coming up can help the assembly to participate more fully. A presider simply asking

the congregation to raise their hands in blessing when appropriate may give them a sense of discipleship.

A second way to include the community is by inviting them to participate in the OCIA process in some way. For instance, parishioners can be invited to “adopt,” a Candidate or Catechumen to include in their daily prayers. Parishioners can also be invited to write letters of encouragement to their chosen person. This may give them cause to think about why they are Catholic. In addition, if a formal Sponsor does not attend the same Mass as the Catechumen or Candidate, asking for a volunteer who can sit with the Catechumen or Candidate at Mass, or accompany them to donuts and coffee after Mass, is advantageous to the community faith growth of both. These parish Sponsors can also step in as the proxy Sponsor at the liturgical rites if the formally-named Sponsor is unable to attend.

Another example, mentioned earlier, is to have parishioners sign up to bring the snacks for a particular meeting or even set up/clean up the refreshment area. If your group breaks for refreshments, it is an opportunity for casual conversation both among the group and with those providing the refreshments. Since evangelization—to spread the Good News by living a life in communion with Christ—is the responsibility of all the faithful as disciples, then praying for the Catechumens and Candidates as appropriate for the Liturgical Season and the Period of the OCIA process during the Prayers of the Faithful is encouraged.

If the parish is lacking in activities, the OCIA group can sponsor an event and invite the whole parish to join. An activity can be as simple as hosting coffee and snacks with conversation after Masses or sponsoring an outreach activity such as a collection of canned food to donate to a local food pantry or a Christmas tree with tags for gifts to collect for families in need. If the OCIA group plans to invite a speaker, or watch a video presentation, the whole parish

occasionally can be invited to attend. Catechetical offerings such as those mentioned in the “Recruiting, Forming, and Retaining Team Members” section of Chapter 3 or offering a historical look at the initiation process (see Appendix B) for an adult formation event can be opened to the parishioners. Any of these activities help the parish to grow in faith or spirituality, to practice discipleship with outreach, and to stimulate the parish in some small way while building the faith, spirituality, and charity of the Catechumens and Candidates within the community. These activities also help to grow the bond between the Catechumens/Candidates and the parishioners, leading to a sense of belonging that strengthens the community.

#### Parish Activities

Looking at the process of reinvigorating the parish from the opposite perspective, if your parish is a living community of faith growth and service outreach, these are areas that can be influenced by including the OCIA Catechumens and Candidates. If your parish has a vibrant adult faith formation program, your Catechumens and Candidates can also attend some of those meetings as a way to come to a deeper understanding of the faith while also being integrated into the parish community. Having the OCIA participants join in other parish functions such as prayer services, service projects, social issues discussions, marriage enrichment activities, parish socials, or just chatting during coffee and donuts after Mass may open up conversations about why the Catechumens and Candidates have decided to become Catholic on the one hand and why parishioners are Catholics on the other. These discussions should be encouraged. Another suggestion is for the Catechumens and Candidates to interview the teens in the Confirmation formation classes. The Catechumens and Candidates could participate in a parents’ meeting for First Communicants to experience parish catechesis. They could attend a meeting or activity on



the diocesan level. Again, joining in parish activities gives the Catechumens and Candidates a sense of belonging to the community, allows them to make new friends within the community, and lets them see what it means to live as a Catholic.

For an established OCIA process that aims to enliven the parish, the OCIA Ministry Team can suggest a plan to the parish based on “Opening the Word.” For example, all meetings for any activity at church (money counters, staff meetings, Bible study, choir practice, finance council, etc.) could start with the Gospel reading for the day. Reading or listening to a short reflection follows.<sup>94</sup> Then, a short period of time is allotted for comments on what touched each in the group. Without having discussions, this process takes about 10 minutes. It is well worth everyone’s time to always put God and prayer first with the goal of renewing the faith, spirituality, and discipleship of parishioners. God is the center of our lives.

There is another idea for parish-wide catechesis that I have seen on-line as well as in a friend’s Master of Theological Studies Thesis. She called hers “Words of Wisdom—Three-Minute Catechesis.”<sup>95</sup> The thrust is to give parishioners (and thereby the Candidates and Catechumens) a series of very short catechetical “lessons” on a particular topic. These can be read five minutes before the Sunday Masses allowing two minutes prior to Mass beginning for silent reflection. Several are available online although some may be copyrighted. An alternative is to engage the parish to write their own four- to eight-week series if a knowledgeable and trusted person is willing with the pastor’s approval.

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94. These can be found online on the USCCB site (<https://bible.usccb.org/readings/calendar>) that includes a reflection as both a podcast and a video. Other online YouTube videos are also available. In print form daily Scripture reading magazines such as *Give Us This Day*, *The Magnificat*, or *The Word Among Us* include reflections on the readings.

95. Jennifer Murphy-Dye, “Creatively Educating the Laity on the Second Vatican Council” Master of Theological Studies Thesis (De Pere, WI: St. Norbert’s College, 2013) is one example; search “Three Minute Catechesis” for others.

## Chapter Six Conclusion

As you can see, a well-executed OCIA process with Sunday liturgical celebrations as prescribed in the RCIA Rites Book alone may ignite a renewal of faith for parishioners. Inviting parishioners and the OCIA group to engage with each other in various activities is a benefit to both groups. Even in small or rural communities, interactions between the OCIA process participants and the faith community can be as simple as sharing coffee monthly after Mass. Further catechetical offerings also help both groups to grow in faith. The goal of parish-wide faith formation is the same as for the OCIA Candidates and Catechumens: to affect a continuing conversion toward God and a transformation of lives. In addition, involving your Catechumens and Candidates in parish activities as a group or individually with parish Sponsors gives the Catechumens and Candidates the opportunity to become active members of the community. As your OCIA process evolves, it may be that your group gatherings meet only three times per month while designating other parish activities to attend on alternating weeks. Dismissal of the Catechumens and “Opening the Word” would continue weekly.

I reiterate that this chapter can be challenging, especially for new OCIA Coordinators and Teams. Trying to implement one or two of these activities is a good goal for making connections and contributing to the parish. The pastor has a large part to play in any parish renewal process. An OCIA Team that supports the pastor, along with the pastor encouraging other parish groups to support the OCIA process, would be central to successfully implementing a parish program to reinvigorate the faithful. That does not preclude small changes having an impact on some of the parishioners and on the Catechumens and Candidates; or, for some parishioners to be moved to join the OCIA Team.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

I pray that this short book will give both those trying to begin an OCIA process in their parish as well as those seasoned OCIA Ministers who are looking to refresh their process some ideas about how to move forward. You should accept that the OCIA process is more than a catechetical class of facts to be learned. It is a faith journey leading to conversion and a deepening relationship with God, our heavenly Father and our redeemer. Knowing every person is infused with the Holy Spirit, needing only to freely accept grace, we each can transform how we live our lives with faith, hope, and love and for justice for all.

Every person who enters the OCIA faith journey with their past-history experiences, traumas, joys, and sorrows must be accepted for who they are and where they are in relationship with God. The OCIA process must be welcoming and supportive. Having a year-round process allows all to be welcomed whenever they are ready to take that first step. Welcoming them as we would a new member of our family, because that is indeed what they are, with kindness and compassion will help them feel that they have found their home.

One is formed in the faith by reflecting on one's life experiences, the Scripture readings, and how Scripture guides us in our life's beliefs, virtues, and actions. The goal is catechesis, learning and embracing the Church's core beliefs, Tradition, and way of life in a manner that determines who we are, not just what we know. All can renew their faith by involving OCIA Catechumens and Candidates in the life of our parish Church and likewise the parishioners in the OCIA process. Doing OCIA well can lead to a more stimulated, participatory, and faith-filled parish.

*In concluding this book, I pray for all those who read it and use it, for all those to whom they minister, and for all those in their parish with whom they celebrate the liturgy, and with whom they reach out to love and serve others as disciples of Jesus Christ. May you all be blessed as you embark on or continue the journey of faith formation through the Rite/Order of Christian Initiation of Adults process. May the grace of God fill your hearts and souls. --Pat Duda*

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Forms for Registration, Sponsors, and Record-Keeping

- I keep a copy of the forms that follow for my own information with their contact information, and I make a note when I turn the original in to the records person in the parish. Note that a baptismal certificate is required if a Candidate was validly baptized. Some parishes may require a birth certificate for those being baptized.
- The Registration Form is also for your information to assess if there may be a marriage irregularity so it can be referred to the pastor or his delegate as soon as possible.
- The Registration Form can be handed off to the person who keeps the records and prepares the Baptismal Certificate at your parish.
- The Sponsor Form should be required early so there is no question if the person is eligible to be a Sponsor, especially if the Sponsor is out of town.
- The Sponsor Form also is turned in to your records person.
- The Record Keeping Form is simply for your own information to keep track, especially because people may be coming into the Church at various times, or you have a large group and someone may be absent for a rite. It also records when a birth or baptismal certificate is received. You may ask if the records person wishes a copy.
- Let your Catechumens and Candidates know that Sacramental records are kept in the parish where they are baptized. Therefore, Catechumens' records are kept in your parish and Candidates' Sacrament of Confirmation record will be kept in your parish where Confirmation and First Eucharist were celebrated and sent to the parish in which they were baptized, if a Catholic parish.

**Order/Rite of Christian Initiation (OCIA/RCIA) Registration for the Journey**  
**Parish \_\_\_\_\_**



**Please attach/bring a copy of your BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE (if Baptized).**

Full Name (First, Middle, (Maiden, if have one) Last):		Date of Birth:	
Street Address:		Birth Location (City, State):	
City, State, Zip:			
Cell Phone:		Email Address:	
Other Daytime Phone:			

Father's Full Name (First, Middle, Last):	Mother's Full Maiden Name (First, Middle, Last):
---	--

Have you been baptized? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DATE _____	If Yes, Baptism location Church: City, State
If yes, in what faith?	Have you regularly attended another Church? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, what Religion/Denomination?

Are you currently married? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, Spouse's Name (First, Last):  By Official: Catholic Priest <input type="checkbox"/> Civil <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Catholic Minister <input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, were you married in the Catholic Church? <input type="checkbox"/> Other Christian Church? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> YES NO If yes, Date:  Parish/Church: City, State:
--	---

Have you ever been divorced? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, how many times? _____	If yes, was the marriage(s) annulled in the Catholic Church? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
---	--

If married, has your spouse been married previously? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, how did your spouse's marriage end? Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> If divorced, was your spouse's marriage annulled in the Catholic Church? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
--	--

What brought you to RCIA? Are there any particular questions or concerns you hope to get answered? (Answer on the back.)
---

**BELOW FOR OFFICE USE ONLY (You may begin thinking about this, but do not fill in.)**

Sponsor's Name	Chosen Saint's Name for Confirmation

Form Revision Date: 09/03/2022 by Pat Duda, St. John XXIII Catholic Community OCIA Coordinator



Parish Where Celebration of Baptism or Confirmation Is to Take Place

**Affidavit of Eligibility for the Ministry of OCIA/RCIA Baptism or Confirmation Sponsor**

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print complete name)

affirm that:

- I am a baptized member of the Catholic Church.
- I am at least 16 years old.
- I have made my First Holy Communion and received the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- I am not married outside of the Catholic Church, nor am I cohabitating (living outside of marriage with someone).
- I normally attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance/Confession) at least once a year, and go to Holy Communion at least once a year in the Easter Season.
- I understand and accept the responsibilities which I undertake as a sponsor for this person.  
I will assist the Church community and will help this person, by example, word and action, to live as a faithful Christian in communion with, and according to, the teachings of the Holy Catholic Church.

Name of Person to be Sponsored \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Sponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

This person is a member of my parish and has affirmed that they fulfill the canonical requirements to be a sponsor for Baptism or Confirmation.

PARISH SEAL

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Pastor, Delegate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parish

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State

Archdiocese of Santa Fe, "Affidavit of Eligibility, for Ministry of Baptism or Confirmation Sponsor" (Albuquerque, NM: Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 07/05/2012 revised 9/20/05). Altered slightly by author. [www.archdiosf.org/sacramental-policies](http://www.archdiosf.org/sacramental-policies).



# CHRISTIAN INITIATION PROCESS INFORMATION FOR RECORD KEEPING

Name \_\_\_\_\_ RCIA Start Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parish \_\_\_\_\_

## I. For an Unbaptized Person

1. Birth Certificate or Record received by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of Participation in the Rite of Acceptance \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date of Participation in the Rite of Sending \_\_\_\_\_
4. Date and location of Participation in the Rite of Election  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Date of Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Sponsor(s)/Godparents(s) Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Affidavit of Eligibility/Letter of Good Standing Received \_\_\_\_\_
7. Priest Conferring Sacraments \_\_\_\_\_
8. Confirmation Name \_\_\_\_\_

## II. For a Baptized Person

1. Baptismal Certificate or Record received by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of Participation in the Rite of Welcoming \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date of Participation in the Rite of Sending \_\_\_\_\_
4. Date and location of Participation in the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Date of Reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Sponsor(s)/Godparents(s) Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Affidavit of Eligibility/Letter of Good Standing Received \_\_\_\_\_
7. Priest Conferring Sacraments \_\_\_\_\_
8. Confirmation Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B: A Short Historical Look at Initiation into the Church<sup>96</sup>

I include this historical summary for OCIA Ministers who wish to know more, or are interested in history. I found it interesting because the ancient documents' descriptions of the baptisms of the early times of the Church are so close to the Sacraments of Initiation today. This is not something the Catechumens or Candidates would need to know. It is a reference for you in case someone presses you about "going back to the way things have always been done" normally referring to the fifteenth century or so—a pre-Vatican II outlook of Church. This would also be a good topic for an adult formation offering so more parishioners are aware of the historical changes in the initiation process over time.

The early Church celebrated Baptism, anointings with oil, and the celebration of Eucharist at Easter. Scriptural references mention Baptism as both before (Acts 2:38) and after (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-48) the Holy Spirit filled converts and mention Baptism both in the name of the trinity (Matt. 28:19) and of Jesus (Acts 2:38; Acts 19:5). The laying of hands with the Holy Spirit coming down on the people after being baptized (Acts 8:17; 19:6) is a pre-cursor to our present-day Confirmation. Archeological finds include Baptismal fonts "with three steps leading down into a pool of water"<sup>97</sup> with some outside of the church building proper.

The *Didache* (pronounced dī' də kāy) was written in the late first to early second century and taught how to live one's life along with other catechetical teachings. Its instructions on Baptism are:

*"And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water." Further it states, "But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord."*<sup>98</sup>

Around the same time period Justin Martyr (ca. 150), Irenaeus of Lyons (born ca. 140) and Tertullian (born ca. 160) all spoke of catechesis and how one should be living one's life. Justin called those baptized in the Trinity "Enlightened and Purified." Irenaeus' catechesis was based on salvation; Tertullian emphasized that one must live the Christian way of life. Origen, the head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria from 202-234 applied the Gospels to the concerns of the culture in which they lived, during a time when and in a place where theology was frequently discussed.<sup>99</sup>

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96. Material for this section was largely taken from Lawrence Mick, *RCIA: Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989) with the author's permission (book no longer in print). For another source see: Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter 4; also available online:

[https://www.elcaminosantiago.com/PDF/Book/Christian\\_Symbol\\_And\\_Ritual.pdf](https://www.elcaminosantiago.com/PDF/Book/Christian_Symbol_And_Ritual.pdf).

97. Mick, 14.

98. Peter Kirby, *Didache*, trans. by Roberts-Donaldson, *Early Christian Writings*, June 19, 2020. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>. Note that the *Didache* is also called the *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.

99. Mick, 15-16.

As the Gospel spread, a more formal process was developed due to three pressures Mick identifies: (1) People were not familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) or the time of Jesus' life; (2) Because of pagan and heretical teachings in competition with Christianity, catechesis had to be standardized and strengthened so that all Christians were "well-formed in Christian beliefs;" and, (3) Those admitted had to be scrutinized to make sure they were able and willing to live a Christian life.<sup>100</sup> Hippolytus (ca. 215) in his *Apostolic Tradition* spoke of examining those wishing to enter the Church and gave detailed instructions on the initiation process. Mick notes that in the fourth century, the initiation process included, in general: (1) Admission into the sacraments followed a three-year period of "study, prayer, and service;" (2) Catechumens "were dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word" since they could not participate in the Eucharist; and, (3) Catechumens, when ready to receive the sacraments, entered "a period of spiritual preparation," with "a scrutiny of their lives and prayers of exorcism, followed by an enrollment for baptism" (the "origin of Lent").<sup>101</sup> Mick continues that the Easter Vigil celebration in the West included: "the 'opening' of the ears and mouth to hear and speak the Word of God;" renouncing Satan; anointing with oil "as a sign of strength for the struggle with Satan," blessing of the font "by invoking the Holy Spirit to sanctify the waters." Baptism included "immersion three times;" then they were "clothed in white garments...anointed with oil," possibly "presented with a lighted candle...and together [with the assembly] celebrated the Easter Eucharist."<sup>102</sup> These actions are all a part of our Easter Celebration today. Excerpts of Hippolytus' writing given below also demonstrate that many of today's practices are not "new," but mirror those of the early Church; much should sound familiar to those who attend the Easter Vigil Liturgy:

*16.<sup>1</sup>New converts to the faith, who are to be admitted as hearers of the word, shall first be brought to the teachers before the people assemble. <sup>2</sup>And they shall be examined as to their reason for embracing the faith, and they who bring them shall testify that they are competent to hear the word. <sup>3</sup>Inquiry shall then be made as to the nature of their life...<sup>4</sup>Inquiry shall likewise be made about the professions and trades of those who are brought to be admitted to the faith...<sup>5</sup>If a catechumen or a believer seeks to become a soldier, they must be rejected, for they have despised God...<sup>6</sup>If a man has a concubine, he must desist and marry legally; if he is unwilling, he must be rejected...*

*17.<sup>1</sup>Let catechumens spend three years as hearers of the word. <sup>2</sup>But if a man is zealous and perseveres well in the work, it is not the time but his character that is decisive.*

*18. <sup>1</sup>When the teacher finishes his instruction, the catechumens shall pray by themselves, apart from the believers...*

*19.<sup>1</sup>At the close of their prayer, when their instructor lays his hand upon the catechumens, he shall pray and dismiss them; whoever gives the instruction is to do this, whether a cleric or a layman. <sup>2</sup>If a catechumen should be arrested for the name of the Lord, let him not hesitate about bearing his testimony; for if it should happen that they treat him shamefully and kill him, he will be justified, for he has been baptized in his own blood.*

*20.<sup>1</sup>They who are to be set apart for baptism shall be chosen after their lives have been examined: whether they have lived soberly, whether they have honoured the widows, whether they have visited the sick, whether they have been active in well-doing. <sup>2</sup>When their sponsors have testified that they have done these things, then let them hear the Gospel.*

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100. Mick, 17.

101. Mick, 18.

102. Mick, 19.

<sup>3</sup>Then from the time that they are separated from the other catechumens, hands shall be laid upon them daily in exorcism and, as the day of their baptism draws near, the bishop himself shall exorcise each one of them that he may be personally assured of their purity...<sup>7</sup>They who are to be baptized shall fast on Friday, and on Saturday the bishop shall assemble them and command them to kneel in prayer. <sup>8</sup>And, laying his hand upon them, he exorcises all evil spirits to flee away and never to return; when he has done this he shall breathe in their faces, seal their foreheads, ears and noses, and then raise them up. <sup>9</sup>They shall spend all that night in vigil, listening to reading and instruction. <sup>10</sup>They who are to be baptized shall bring with them no other vessels than the one each will bring for the eucharist; for it is fitting that he who is counted worthy of baptism should bring his offering at that time.

21.<sup>1</sup>At cockcrow prayer shall be made over the water. <sup>2</sup>The stream shall flow through the baptismal tank or pour into it from above when there is no scarcity of water; but if there is a scarcity, whether constant or sudden, then use whatever water you can find...<sup>3</sup>They shall remove their clothing. <sup>4</sup>And first baptize the little ones; if they can speak for themselves, they shall do so; if not, their parents or other relatives shall speak for them. <sup>5</sup>Then baptize the men, and last of all the women...<sup>6</sup>At the hour set for the baptism the bishop shall give thanks over oil...this is called the "oil of thanksgiving". <sup>7</sup>And he shall take other oil and exorcise it: this is called "the oil of exorcism"...<sup>9</sup>Then the presbyter, taking hold of each of those about to be baptized, shall command him to renounce, saying:

I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy servants and all thy works.

<sup>10</sup>And when he has renounced all these, the presbyter shall anoint him with the oil of exorcism, saying:

Let all spirits depart far from thee...<sup>12</sup>And when he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say thus:

Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty?

<sup>13</sup>And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe.

<sup>14</sup>Then holding his hand placed on his head, he shall baptize him once. <sup>15</sup>And then he shall say:

Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead?

<sup>16</sup>And when he says: I believe,

he is baptized again. <sup>17</sup>And again he shall say:

Dost thou believe in [the] Holy Ghost, and the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

<sup>18</sup>He who is being baptized shall say accordingly: I believe, and so he is baptized a third time. <sup>19</sup>And afterward, when he has come up [out of the water], he is anointed by the presbyter with the oil of thanksgiving, the presbyter saying:

I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ.

<sup>20</sup>And so each one, after drying himself, is immediately clothed, and then is brought into the church.

22. <sup>1</sup>Then the bishop, laying his hand upon them, shall pray, saying:

O Lord God, who hast made them worthy to obtain remission of sins through the laver of regeneration of [the] Holy Spirit, send into them thy grace, that they may serve thee according to thy will; for thine is the glory, to the Father and the Son, with [the] Holy Spirit in the holy church, both now and world without end. Amen. <sup>2</sup>Then, pouring the oil of thanksgiving from his hand and putting it on his forehead, he shall say:

*I anoint thee with holy oil in the Lord, the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and [the] Holy Ghost.*

<sup>3</sup>*And signing them on the forehead he shall say:*

*The Lord be with thee;*

*and he who is signed shall say:*

*And with thy spirit.*

<sup>4</sup>*And so he shall do to each one. <sup>5</sup>And immediately thereafter they shall join in prayer with all the people, but they shall not pray with the faithful until all these things are completed.*

<sup>23.</sup> <sup>1</sup>*And then the offering is immediately brought by the deacons to the bishop, and by thanksgiving he shall make the bread into an image of the body of Christ, and the cup of wine mixed with water according to the likeness of the blood, which is shed for all who believe in him... <sup>5</sup>And when he breaks the bread and distributes the fragments he shall say:*

*The heavenly bread in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>6</sup>*And the recipient shall say,*

*Amen.*

<sup>7</sup>*And the presbyters—or if there are not enough presbyters, the deacons—shall hold the cups, and shall stand by with reverence and modesty... he who gives the cup saying:*

*In God the Father Almighty;*

*and the recipient shall say, Amen. <sup>9</sup>Then:*

*In the Lord Jesus Christ; [and] he shall say, Amen.*

<sup>10</sup>*Then: [In the] Holy Ghost and the holy church; and he shall say, Amen. <sup>11</sup>So it shall be done to each.*

<sup>12</sup>*And when these things are completed, let each one hasten to do good works, and to please God and to live aright, devoting himself to the church, practising the things he has learned, advancing in the service of God.<sup>103</sup>*

Constantine declared Christianity was no longer an illegal religion (313 CE) so persecution was generally stopped and whole families and communities were being baptized together. St. Augustine (fifth century) noting infants were being baptized, came up with a theology to match the practice. Augustine's logic according to Mick was: (1) We baptize infants; (2) Baptism is for the removal of sin; therefore, (3) He posited original sin. Later, the practice followed that infants must be baptized because of original sin—a reversal of Augustine's argument.<sup>104</sup>

Over the next few centuries, for practical reasons, the Sacraments of Initiation became separated. Because the bishops' local Churches had grown larger and outside the city limits, the bishops were not able to baptize all infants. Therefore, the faculty to baptize was given to the parish priests who then also administered first Eucharistic (the consecrated wine if infants were unable to chew the bread). In the West, the bishops kept the postbaptismal anointing with oil for themselves. Parents, knowing their child had been saved through baptism, were not vigilant in

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103. Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, translated into English with Introduction and Notes by Burton Scott Easton. Gutenberg EBook #61614 (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, March 14, 2020). <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/61614/61614-h/61614-h.htm#tch9>. Produced by Stephen Hutcheson and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>. This citation must include the following as per the reference: *This eBook is for the use of anyone in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.*

104. Mick, 23.

bringing the children to the bishop for the anointing so the anointing, known as confirmation, became to be administered much later. (The Eastern Church allowed the parish priest to administer baptism and confirmation so the three sacraments of initiation remained together even until today.) As centuries passed, various local synods called for confirmation to be conferred by the child's first, then third, fifth... and later fourteenth birthday.<sup>105</sup>

By the thirteenth century the Church's focus had shifted from Mass as a Eucharistic meal to the elements of the Eucharist as the body and blood of Christ. The laity (including the baptized infants) were no longer allowed the sacred wine. There was also a concern that infants might spit up the Eucharist; therefore, first Eucharist, previously administered at baptism, was delayed effectively separating all three sacraments of initiation.<sup>106</sup> In addition, most people felt unworthy to receive Communion so most people stopped doing so. Today, the emphasis is once again on participation in Christ's death and resurrection as initiation into the Church rather than washing away original sin.<sup>107</sup> Pope Pius X in 1910 also declared frequent Communion was to be encouraged .

With baptism recommended to be full immersion (more suitable)<sup>108</sup> or pouring water over the head rather than a trickle of water over the forehead and anointing with an abundance of oil for Confirmation, the symbolism of death and resurrection in Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit can once again fill the initiate as well as the larger community with the reality of the sacrament.

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105. Mick, 20.

106. Mick, 23.

107. Mick, 23.

108. RCIA Rites Book, General Introduction, no. 22.

## Appendix C: A Sample Retreat Appropriate for the Lenten Period

### The Sacraments of Reconciliation, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist

**Objectives:** Retreatants will experience a deepening sense of self-reflection and repentance in preparation for First Confessions or Baptism. Retreatants will explore the signs and symbols of the Sacraments of Initiation and deepen their understanding of the graces received.

#### Notes:

1. This retreat is ideally five hours including morning break and lunch; it could be two shorter retreats.
2. Choices are given for resources for the activities. If you have access to the internet and projection capabilities you may show videos, prepare PowerPoints, and play music. If you do not have internet access, all can be done with paper resources.
3. Presentations of reflections/meditations can be as simple as reading an item aloud or watching a video with silent reflection and journaling, or can be more interactive such as reading an article together followed by a discussion and journaling.
4. Candidates may celebrate their First Rite of Reconciliation during this retreat. If it is a small group and time allows, sponsors and/or Ministry team members may also celebrate Reconciliation. Confessions can be heard during the morning break, during the lunch break or may be scheduled by appointment ideally in the week following the retreat.
5. You have permission to reproduce, type up and hand out, or show on a PowerPoint presentation, any of those items below as needed for a retreat in your parish. I suggest you make separate handouts for each set to distribute as needed so retreatants do not move ahead. Except for the words, give credit to me: Copyright, Appendix C in *Order (Rite) of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA/RCIA) Handbook*, Patricia Duda, Albuquerque, NM, 2023.

#### Opening Activities

1. Welcome the Elect, Candidates, Sponsors, and OCIA Ministers. Let them know that the theme of the retreat will be two-fold: reflections and meditations (1) on God's mercy and forgiveness, and (2) on God's graces conferred upon receiving the initiation sacraments.
2. Provide the retreatants with a journal or have them bring one they have been keeping.
3. Either pray aloud a prepared prayer slowly with pauses and quiet relaxing background music or use one from the internet to set a reflective tone for the day.<sup>109</sup>
4. Allow a couple minutes to reflect silently.

#### **First Half of Retreat (or Half-Day Retreat): Focus on the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

All activities are done slowly with time for reflection and journaling. Discussion is encouraged during some segments with quiet reflection for others.

1. Present a reflection on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Some resources are:

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109. For example, [www.ScriptureToGo.com](http://www.ScriptureToGo.com), "Thank You Lord: A Thankful Prayer Meditation," Nov 22, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5chzFJJ31RY>. This website has many prayers to choose from.

- a. Fr. Mike Schmidt's YouTube video "*Making a Good Confession.*"<sup>110</sup>
  - b. Children's grade level resources for First Confessions.
  - c. Pray the *Litany of Humility* by Cardinal Merry del Val.<sup>111</sup>
  - d. Pray and meditate on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-10).
2. Allow time for the participants to journal their thoughts.
  3. Present a second reflective resource for discussion on the healing power of reconciliation. Resources are:
    - a. "*Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession, Session 1: Where are you?*"<sup>112</sup> from the series on Formed.org or another from that series.
    - b. Read and discuss one of the articles from the *Catholic Updates* on the Sacrament of Reconciliation.<sup>113</sup>
  4. Ask participants to think of a time when they felt they had harmed their relationship with someone or when participants felt someone had harmed them. Allow time to journal their thoughts about their experience. Share as appropriate allowing a participant to pass if they wish.
  5. Present a meditation on the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and the Two Greatest Commandments (Matt. 22:37-40; Luke 10:27; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18).<sup>114</sup> Allow time for silent reflection and journaling.
  6. Present a meditation on Catholic Social Teaching.<sup>115</sup> Allow time for silent reflection and journaling.
  7. Allow for discussion of any topic on the 10 Commandments or Catholic Social Teaching that touched the participants as time allows.

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**Break Time:** 10 minutes to grab a snack and drink. If you can have a priest present during this time, he can hear the first Confessions of the Candidates (others in the group may be invited to do so as well if time allows). Confessions may continue during the next activity which lends itself to participants coming and going.

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110. Mike Schmidt, "Making a Good Confession" (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, Ascension Presents, 12/9/2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5chzfHJ31RY>.

111. There are many resources for the "Litany of Humility" if you do an internet search.

112. Paul McOusker and Justin Leddick, "Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession, Session 1: Where are You?" (Greenwood Village, CO: Augustine Institute Studios, April, 2022). <https://watch.formed.org/forgiven/season:1/videos/where-are-you>.

113. Redemptorist Ministry, *Catholic Update 100+ Set: Topics for RCIA* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2019). Choices are C0906A, C1602A, C1503A, C8909A, C9701A, or C8212A.

114. USCCB, "Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten Commandments," 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Examination-of-Conscience-Ten-Commandments.pdf>

115. USCCB, "Examination of Conscience in Light of Catholic Social Teaching," 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examination-conscience-in-light-of-catholic-social-teaching>

8. Poem Activity
  - a. Supplies: scissors, white and/or colored paper, glue sticks, four small containers with words for poem as below.
  - b. Suggested poem words are listed below on four separate pages.
    - i. Make copies of each page on a separate color (if available).
    - ii. The number of copies should equal at least one column more than the number of participants. For example, one copy for 1-2 participants, two copies for 3-5 participants.
    - iii. Cut the words out and place each set (all one color/copies from the same page) in a separate container.
  - c. The instructions for the participants are below. There is no restriction on which set of words (colors) are used in which lines. (You may also have some scrap paper with designs or colored pencils so they can decorate their paper.)
  - d. Read the following instructions to the participants or prepare a handout:
    - i. Choose three words from each of the four containers, 12 total. Let the Holy Spirit within you choose as you randomly pick without looking.
    - ii. Choose a solid-colored [or white] piece of paper.
    - iii. Arrange your words into a “poem” on the sheet of paper either horizontally or vertically with 2-4 words per line. When satisfied, glue them down.
    - iv. While doing this, think about the examination of conscience experienced earlier, or your confession (if you made one), and on how you’d like to change your life to put God at the center.
    - v. Journal notes about what your poem means to you.
  - e. Play quiet meditative music in the background to add to the ambience.
  - f. Ask for volunteers to present their poem to the group with the meaning they found in it as the Holy Spirit moved them.
9. Present a meditation based on Ignatian spirituality. One resource is IgnatianSpirituality.com such as *An Examen “From Ashes to Glory”* By Joseph Tetlow, SJ<sup>116</sup> or a similar reflection as the site may change what it offers. A suggestion is to have different readers read different sections and pause for meditation or journaling after each portion.
10. Present a Closing Prayer. The YouTube video *A Prayer for Guidance*<sup>117</sup> is one resource. If you pray one aloud such as the Memorare, the Confiteor, or the Lord’s Prayer, pause between sentences to keep it meditative.

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116. Joseph Tetlow, “An Examen from Ashes to Glory,” (Ignatian Spirituality: Loyola Press, 2009-2023), <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/an-examen-from-ashes-to-glory/>. There are many resources here; if you click on the small black box that says “Examen” you will find others.

117. [www.ScriptureToGo.com](http://www.ScriptureToGo.com), “A Prayer for Guidance” music by Kevin Macleod, May 28, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0GuHxznGQY>



Stillness	Stillness	Stillness
Calmness	Calmness	Calmness
Love	Love	Love
Hope	Hope	Hope
Peace	Peace	Peace
Tranquility	Tranquility	Tranquility
Joy	Joy	Joy
Faith	Faith	Faith
Trust	Trust	Trust
Gladness	Gladness	Gladness
Light	Light	Light
Happiness	Happiness	Happiness
Approval	Approval	Approval

Broken	Broken	Broken
Guilt	Guilt	Guilt
Sadness	Sadness	Sadness
Tears	Tears	Tears
Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Transgression	Transgression	Transgression
Dishonesty	Dishonesty	Dishonesty
Crushed	Crushed	Crushed
Anguish	Anguish	Anguish
Offense	Offense	Offense
Misconduct	Misconduct	Misconduct
Darkness	Darkness	Darkness
Wrongdoing	Wrongdoing	Wrongdoing

Surrender	Surrender	Surrender
Contrition	Contrition	Contrition
Contrite	Contrite	Contrite
Remorse	Remorse	Remorse
Regret	Regret	Regret
Sorrow	Sorrow	Sorrow
Submit	Submit	Submit
Repentant	Repentant	Repentant
Grief	Grief	Grief
Regret	Regret	Regret
Downcast	Downcast	Downcast
Mournful	Mournful	Mournful
Remorseful	Remorseful	Remorseful

Compassion	Compassion	Compassion
Mercy	Mercy	Mercy
Forgiveness	Forgiveness	Forgiveness
Empathy	Empathy	Empathy
Sympathy	Sympathy	Sympathy
Release	Release	Release
Confidence	Confidence	Confidence
Fidelity	Fidelity	Fidelity
Accepting	Accepting	Accepting
Understanding	Understanding	Understanding
Kindness	Kindness	Kindness
Loyalty	Loyalty	Loyalty

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**45-MINUTE LUNCH (PROVIDED) BREAK**

**CASUAL CONVERSATION**

**NOT A WORKING LUNCH – A TRUE BREAK**

**(However, Confessions can be heard at this time if not during the morning break.)**

**The following is the afternoon session. Note that the morning and afternoon sessions are independent of each other should you wish to use one or the other for a mini-retreat.**

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**Second Half of Retreat (or Half-Day Retreat): Focus on the Sacraments of Initiation**

There are many resources for Sacraments you can access both online and in print (the Redemptorist Ministry *100+ Catholic Updates* are a good resource). Holy Week and the **Easter Triduum** services should be discussed and the retreatants encouraged to attend if at all possible. It is assumed by this time the Sacraments of Initiation have been discussed a few times throughout the Period of the Catechumenate.

1. Present the role of the bishop in the local church as our shepherd. The following points should be included:
  - a. The bishop represents the Church.
  - b. The bishop is a reminder that we are part of the larger “local” church, his Diocese (or Archdiocese).
    - i. We are also in communion with all the global Roman Catholic Churches of the world as well as the Eastern Rite Churches in communion with us.
    - ii. In addition, we walk in solidarity with all Christians.
    - iii. In fact, we join with all good people of the world.
  - c. The bishop can give parish pastors the faculty to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation which he normally does for all the parish Easter Vigil Confirmations.
2. Explain common Christian symbols: the Cross (an early symbol), the Crucifix (about 5<sup>th</sup> Century), the Alpha and Omega (beginning and end from Rev. 1:8, 22:13), the Chi Rho (from the first two letters of the Greek word *Χριστός* that translates to Christ in English).
3. Ask the question: Why do Christians often use the fish symbol? (unless it has been discussed previously during the Catechumenate). It is a Greek acrostic (first letter of each word) for the phrase *Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior* in Greek.

English	Greek	Latin	Greek first letter name	Spells “fish”
Jesus	Ἰησοῦς	<u>I</u> esous	Iota	
Christ	Χριστός	<u>C</u> hristos	Chi	
God’s	Θεοῦ	<u>T</u> heos	Theta	
Son	Υἱός	<u>Y</u> ios	Upsilon	
Savior	Σωτήρ	<u>S</u> oter	Sigma	

Early Christians would draw half the fish with their foot in the sand while speaking to someone they met. If the person to whom they were speaking drew the other half, they'd know it was safe to speak to them about Christianity. They also used it to mark a place of Christianity.



4. Provide pictures of the symbols (at least as many of each one as participants) for the sacraments below and glue sticks. Keep the symbols of each sacrament separate.
  - a. Symbols of Baptism: **Water, Oil, Candle/Light, White Garment, Sign of the Cross**
    - i. Other Baptismal or General Symbols are: Dove, Sea Shell, Chi-Rho (may include Alpha and Omega) [Do not provide pictures of these, just the major symbols above, but you may present it to them.]
    - ii. Tell the participants to choose one of the Baptismal symbols, to paste it into their journal and to write why they chose that one, what the symbol means to them, and what that meaning signifies to them as they prepare for the sacrament (or received it for some participants).
    - iii. Pause. Share/Discuss.
  - b. Symbols of Confirmation: **Laying of Hands, Oil, Flames, Dove, Cross**
    - i. Tell the participants to choose one of the Confirmation symbols, paste it into their journal and write why they chose that one, what it means to them, and what it signifies to them.
    - ii. Pause. Share/Discuss.
  - c. Symbols of Eucharist (Thanksgiving to God, Holy Communion, Come to the Table): **Wheat, Bread, Grapes, Wine, Chalice, Host** (host can also be pictured in a pic, ciborium, and/or Monstrance and explain these if you have not previously during the Catechumenate).
    - i. Tell the participants to choose one of the Eucharistic symbols, paste it into their journal and write why they chose that one, what it means to them, and what it signifies to them.
    - ii. Pause. Share/Discuss.
5. Read the points below as a reminder of what the Eucharist means to Catholics:
  - a. Transubstantiation: ((The points to be included are taken from the USCCB site and are quoted here.<sup>118</sup>)
    - i. “The transformed bread and wine are truly the Body and Blood of Christ and are not merely symbols.”
    - ii. “When Christ said “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” the bread and wine are transubstantiated.”
    - iii. “Though the bread and wine appear the same to our human faculties, they are actually the real body and blood [of Christ].”
  - b. Reflect on the Reception of Holy Communion. (The points to be included are taken from the USCCB site and are quoted here.<sup>119</sup>)
    - i. “The Communion Procession is an action of the Body of Christ.”
    - ii. “At Christ's invitation, extended by the priest acting in Christ's person: ‘Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb,’ the members of the community move

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118. USCCB, “The Eucharist: What is the Eucharist?” 2021. <https://www.usccb.org/eucharist>.

119. USCCB, “The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass,” 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/the-reception-of-holy-communion-at-mass>.

- forward to share in the sacred meal, to receive the Body and Blood of Christ which is the sign and the source of their unity.”
- iii. “In fact, each time we move forward together to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, we join the countless ranks of all the baptized who have gone before us, our loved ones, the canonized and uncanonized saints down through the ages, who at their time in history formed a part of this mighty stream of believers.”
  - iv. “This action by Christ's body, the Church assembled for the Eucharist, is manifested and supported by the Communion Chant, a hymn in praise of Christ sung by the united voices of those who believe in him and share his life.”
  - v. “The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* takes this hymn very seriously, mandating that it should begin at the Communion of the priest and extend until the last person has received Communion.”
  - vi. “For some, however, the singing of this hymn is perceived as an intrusion on their own prayer, their private thanksgiving after Communion. In fact, however, this hymn is prayer, the corporate thanksgiving prayer of the members of Christ's Body, united with one another.”
- c. Holy Communion – Journal: What are your feelings, expectations, and/or anticipatory emotions about being able to share in Holy Communion with your parish faith family?
  - d. Pause. Share/Discuss.
6. Community Support – Read the three points and the supporting helpful hints or hand these out and allow plenty of time for the participants to reflect and journal.
    - i. Think of a time when you were struggling. It can be as simple as how to perform a task, or as difficult as living through a traumatic experience. Pick something you are willing to share with the group.
    - ii. Did you reach out to someone or did someone see you needed help and reach out to you?
    - iii. Who helped or guided you?
    - iv. How did you feel after the assistance was received?
    - v. Pause for journaling.
    - A. Who is your hero?
      - i. Who would you like to be your mentor (she/he can be a person from the past)?
      - ii. Who accomplished activities similar to what you'd like to do?
      - iii. Who embodies/embodyed what you'd like to become?
      - iv. Pause for journaling.
    - B. What is your role in the faith journey as a parishioner?
      - i. How does our parish community support you in your faith journey?
      - ii. How can the parish community better support you in your faith journey?
      - iii. How can you support our parish Catechumens and Candidates in the future?
      - iv. Pause for journaling.
    - C. Discuss as a group (or small groups) the points above. Then ask questions such as, “After thinking about who guided you in your time of need, your hero, and our parishioners, would you change your answers to any of the questions?” “Did you think about your chosen saint for your baptismal/confirmation name?” “Do you see many around you who can act as guides or heroes?” To whom can you be a guide or hero?”

7. Read the following: It is the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to send to us that gives us the graces we need to be strong in faith and in living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Read aloud Psalm 104:30 and John 14:25-26 and 15:26-27.
  - A. Read the following: The list of the SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT comes from Isaiah 11:2-3 and our patristic fathers; note the New American Bible may leave out one line and different synonyms are used in different translations. Read Isaiah 11:2-3 from any Bible and as a group what these terms means to them in their personal lives.
    - ❖ Wisdom
    - ❖ Understanding/Insight
    - ❖ Counsel/Right Judgment
    - ❖ Might/Courage/Power/Fortitude
    - ❖ Knowledge
    - ❖ Piety/Reverence
    - ❖ Wonder/Awe/Fear of the Lord
  - B. Ask the participants to choose one of the Gifts of the Spirit (you may have a copy for them to refer to) that they believe is a strength of theirs, or that they will like to receive.
  - C. Tell them to draw a picture or image in their journal that represents that gift to them. Read (or hand out) the following prompts for them to complete:
    - i. My gift, \_\_\_\_\_'s, image is...
    - ii. I chose this gift because...
    - iii. I drew this image because it represents...
    - iv. This gift is important to me because...
  - D. Share.
    1. Read the following: The NINE FRUITS (VIRTUES) OF THE HOLY SPIRIT come from Galatians 5:22-23. Read the passage from any Bible. Discuss as a group what these terms mean to them in their personal lives.
      - ❖ Love
      - ❖ Joy
      - ❖ Peace
      - ❖ Patience
      - ❖ Kindness
      - ❖ Generosity
      - ❖ Faithfulness
      - ❖ Gentleness
      - ❖ Self-control
    - f. Ask the participants to journal the answers to the following questions (read or hand out):
      - i. What fruit(s) of the Spirit do you think are strongest in you? Weakest?
      - ii. What fruit of the Spirit will you like to develop in yourself?
      - iii. What would you like people to say about you when describing you to another?
    - g. Share.
8. Moving Forward
  - a. Read: When admiring good qualities in others, or when we feel a twinge of regret that we are not what we should be, we are experiencing God's call in us to develop these qualities or ideals ourselves. We regret when we fail to abide by God's call.



- b. Read Prayer (or hand out and read together):  
*O Lord, give us the graces to accept and demonstrate the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit as we continue our faith journey after the completion of our Rites of Initiation. As St. Paul said (1 Cor. 13:13) it is faith, hope, and love that last. Let me always strive to be virtuous and to work against my vices. I ask this of God the Father, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, in communion with the Holy Spirit. AMEN!*
9. Read: We'll take 15 minutes to reflect upon today before we close with a prayer and go our separate ways. Look over your journal notes and think especially of any action items you want to take. This Lenten Season and Holy Week coming up should be a time of final preparation for you to ready yourself to come fully into the Church. You are strongly encouraged to attend the services for Holy Thursday and Good Friday that set the stage for the finale of Easter Vigil. In addition, you are also encouraged to spend Holy Saturday in reflection and prayer as much as possible.
10. Closing Prayer: Prayer of St. Francis – Sung if possible.<sup>120</sup>

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120. If you search for “Song Prayer of St Francis” on the internet can find several versions if none in your group can lead the singing.

## Appendix D: Sample Prayers for Opening and Closing Gatherings

Change or Modify as Needed or Desired

### Common Catholic Prayers:

Our Lord's Prayer; Hail Mary; Prayer of St. Francis; Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel; Prayer to the Holy Spirit; Memorare; Confiteor; and others.

### Opening Prayers for "Opening the Word" Gatherings:

*Oh Lord, open our minds and hearts to hear your Word today that we might grow in understanding of our faith and of our calling as your disciples.*

*Dear Lord, bless our minds and hearts that we may truly understand this reading and embrace the wisdom it gives. Bless our soul and give us courage and strength to act each day as a firm disciple bringing the lessons to life.*

### Closing Prayers for "Opening the Word" Gatherings:

*Heavenly Father, Jesus our brother, and Holy Spirit, infuse in us a love of you as we encountered you in the Scriptures today. Let us hold you in our hearts and minds as we go about our daily activities so that we may reflect your love to those we meet. Help us to stay true to your teachings as we make decisions about how to act with charity.*

*Lord, we heard your parable today and know that it is true for us today as well. Help us to better understand your ways that we might be faithful disciples. Help us to respect and reach out to all who are needy in body or spirit. Let us be true disciples by spreading the Good News.*

*O Lord, your disciple Paul preached that .... May we also see ourselves (admonished, encouraged...) as were those of his time. St. Paul was a true disciple spreading the Good News throughout the land. May we also have the courage to speak out when we encounter injustice, to invite when we encounter one searching for faith, and to live in a way that shines the light of Christ in our homes, communities, workplaces, and world.*

### Closing Endings for any Prayer:

Add a reference to the reading discussed. Add prayers for anyone not present that day or anyone who has shared a difficulty.

*We ask this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.*

*We ask this in the name of our Lord. Amen.*

*We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, son of the Father, in unity with the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

For Advent Season:

*Heavenly Father, we await the celebration of the coming of your Son incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us not be so caught up in the preparations for gift giving, decorations, and gatherings of family and friends, that we fail to prepare our hearts and souls to receive Jesus more fully.*

For Advent Activities:

*Lord, grant us the determination to focus on the activities we have chosen for this Advent season, that doing so may help us to grow in holiness and devotion. Lord, may our effort to reach out during this season as true disciples, recognized for our love of others, help another family who is in need.*

For the Christmas Season:

*Jesus, my brother and my God, now that the frenzy of Christmas with friends and family has subsided, help us to reflect upon the mystery of the incarnation. Although we cannot wrap our minds around the awesomeness of God coming to eat and drink with and to preach to and serve human beings, we know that it is true. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts and souls as we try to be humble, compassionate, and of service as you were.*

For the Lenten Season:

*Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, as we prepare for the celebration of your passion, death, and resurrection, may we work to deepen our spiritual and prayer life, may we commit to a sacrificial activity to keep your sacrifice in our minds, and may we reach out in service in a special way during this Lenten Season.*

For Lenten Activities:

*Lord Jesus Christ, who through your Passion, Death, and Resurrection have set us free from sin, reside in us during this Lenten Season. Give us the strength and courage to hold fast to our Lenten promises to fast in some way either from an activity or by adding an activity, to pray each day, and to give alms by reaching out in some way to those in need. Lord, let us draw nearer to you as we approach our Easter Vigil celebration.*

For the Easter Season:

*We rejoice in the Lord who is risen and who sent the Holy Spirit to be with us. May we recognize the gifts and fruits of the Spirit within us that we might embody them in our daily lives. Let us always strive to live a virtuous life and to tamp down our vices. May we reach out to those around us in love and compassion always working for the common good.*

A book of prayers or a search online will provide many other options.

Appendix E: Example of an OCIA Gathering (1.5 hours) using Groome’s Method<sup>121</sup> for a Sunday Meeting after Mass

**Theme:** Waiting for and preparing for the coming of Christ during Advent. This would be related to life experiences of waiting and preparing for a big celebration as well as how to reach out to others who are looking forward to the Christmas celebration. This is based on the liturgical readings for the Second Sunday of Advent, Year B.

**Note:** More information is given than may be used depending on the amount of discussion time. This is so that the facilitator can enrich the discussion as needed. Reflecting on only one of the readings is also a choice but including three here gives you three examples. Bracketed sections give expected answers to questions or are notes.

**Reflections:**

1. Greetings, welcoming, and opening prayer.
2. Ask: Think of a time you have awaited a coming celebration. How did it feel to have to wait? Were you so busy they didn’t have time to think about the upcoming celebration or did you have time to really contemplate the upcoming event? Wait two minutes to formulate their answers so they are free to listen to others. They can jot down ideas in their journals if they wish. They share their thoughts.
3. Say: The first reading is from the beginning of Second Isaiah (Is. 40:1-5, 9-11).
  - a. Say: Note that the book of Isaiah has three authors determined by the topics discussed with their placement in time, and the writing style. The people are nearing the end of their exile in Babylon—the Assyrians are rising in power and expected to conquer Babylon. The Assyrians allow their subjects to live in their original lands and practice their religions. Note that “Zion” and “Jerusalem” refer to the people, not places. [Biblical catechesis.]
  - b. Reading is read by facilitator or volunteer.
  - c. Ask: What is the tone of the first half of the reading? Pause, then discuss. [The guilt of past sins is paid for by their exile, so it is a comforting tone.]
  - d. Ask: Do you see two contrasting images in the second half? Discuss. [Highway is made straight as befitting a ruler to come back in glory; but he carries them in his arms as a shepherd does his lambs.]<sup>122</sup>
  - e. Say: Picture yourself as an occupied people hearing that the end of your suffering is coming soon. What will you think of a God who rules with a strong arm yet carries the lamb in his arms?<sup>123</sup> Is this the ruler you’d expect or wish to see? Discuss.

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121. Patricia Duda, “Catechetical Session Plan: RCIA Gathering for Second Sunday of Advent, Year B” (Albuquerque: *THEO 520 – History and Models of Catechesis*, St. Norbert Master of Theological Studies Program, November 21, 2020). Unpublished. This method of reflecting on life experiences, then reading Scripture, then back to today’s life and how one can be transformed with reaching out to others in service as disciples is taken from Thomas Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: Harper One, Harper Collins, 2011).

122. Elaine Park, Konrad Schaefer, and Douglas Leal, *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word: 2018, United States Edition* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2017), 8.

123. Park, et al., 8

4. Say: The second reading is from the Second Letter of St. Peter (2 Peter 3:8-14).
  - a. Say: This was written in the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE when the Romans destroyed the Temple and the city after a Jewish revolt that began in 66 CE. Only a section of the West Wall remained (and is still standing today). The followers of Christ had expected the Second Coming soon, but were still waiting 50 years later. Recall the Gospel last week warned them to be ready because they didn't know when the householder would return. We will see that in today's second reading as well, proclaiming the Lord will come like a thief. [See also in The Gospels of Matthew (24:43-44), and Luke (12:30) as well as Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 5:2)]. Also, all three synoptic Gospels, Matthew (24:30), Mark (14:62), and Luke (21:27) speak of the Son of Man coming on the clouds.<sup>124</sup> They were expecting Jesus to return in glory in their lifetimes. Biblical catechesis.]
  - b. Reading is read by facilitator or volunteer.
  - c. Ask: What is said about the passing of time? Discuss. [For the Lord, one day is like a thousand and a thousand like one day. The Jewish people of the time knew their Hebrew Scriptures. They would recall Psalm 91 says the same.<sup>125</sup> Catholics today who do not study Scripture are at a disadvantage because many do not know the scriptural references. [If the topic arises: a good study Bible, such as the Catholic Study Bible, will give them this information if they read the introduction and the footnotes.]
  - d. Ask: Does God scold them for being impatient? Answer. Why not? [No, the Lord himself is patient and waiting for all to repent.]<sup>126</sup>
  - e. Say: The images of the coming of the end time, apocalyptic times, are not meant to be literal, but are to encourage righteous living until the coming of the new heavens and the new earth. Note, not just resurrected human beings, but all of creation is to become new. Therefore, the second half of the reading speaks of "conducting themselves in holiness and devotion." We'll hold this thought until we've looked at the Gospel.
5. Say: The Gospel is from the beginning of Mark (Mark 1: 1-8). Recall the three-year cycle has changed to Mark rather than Luke for most of the Gospel readings as a new liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent.
  - a. Say: This is the earliest Gospel, about 60-70 CE before the destruction of Jerusalem. Note we'll hear the same passage as in our first reading of a voice crying out from the desert to prepare the way of the Lord. This would remind the Jewish people of the path to freedom from Egypt. This time it is John the Baptist who is calling for a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. John's clothing would remind them of Elijah, also as a desert prophet. Again, a mighty one is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.<sup>127</sup> [Biblical catechesis.]
  - b. Reading is read by facilitator or volunteer.
  - c. Ask: What is John calling the people to do and how does that relate to the verse about holiness and devotion from the second reading? Think back to our first reflection

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124. Park, et al., 9.

125. Park et al., 9.

126. Park, et al., 9-10.

127. Park, et al., 11.

- today on awaiting a special celebration—how might this impact how you would prepare for Christmas? Pause to think about this, jot notes into your journal if you wish. [A good time for a refreshment break.]
- d. Say: John is telling the people to ask for forgiveness and repent in order to live in holiness. Advent is a time to prepare ourselves. We are awaiting the coming of Christ. Recall from the second reading, we are looking forward in hope for a new creation “in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace,” to be devoted, to be of service “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.” (2 Peter 3:8-14).
  - e. Ask: How might you prepare for Christmas differently than in the past? What are some concrete ideas for yourself, if you wish to share personal experiences, or you may share general ones, that can be done during Advent? [Various answers to first question. Service ideas, work on prayer life, read scripture of each day (available online<sup>128</sup>) reach out to forgive someone or ask for forgiveness, try to change a bad habit that affects a relationship, etc.]
  - f. Can we participate in an Advent project as a group? [Mention any Advent activities of the parish such as a giving tree, food or clothing drive, etc.]
6. Closing Prayer: This prayer is ad lib and normally addresses some of the points that were brought up in the discussions. For example, one might say, “*Grant us the determination to hold ourselves to the activities we have chosen for this Advent season that doing so may help us to grow in holiness and devotion. Lord, may our effort to reach out during this season as true disciples recognized for our love of others help another family who is in need.*” Alternatively, a closing prayer prepared prior to the gathering can be read.

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128. c.f., USCCB, “Daily Readings,” 2023. [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

## Appendix F: Discussion Topics

**A list of topics that you may want to discuss as they come up in the Sunday Liturgies. Please read Chapter 5 and do not simply see this list and run with it. This is not what catechesis is all about! These topics should come up naturally with the readings.**

I present it in bullet form without any particular sequence to be followed although I've tried to group similar topics together. I have gleaned ideas from several sources listed in the bibliography. Some of the items I included in case you have questions asked and need quick answers (although the *Catholicism All-In-One for Dummies*<sup>129</sup> is great for that). **I've also included an annotated bibliography of catechetical resources following this table.**

### SCRIPTURE AS REVELATION

- A library of books by various authors writing at various times to various people with various writing styles/genres
- Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament,
- New Testament – The Good News

### HEBREW SCRIPTURES (OLD TESTAMENT)

- Old Testament Fathers
  - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
  - Moses, David, the Prophets
  - God speaks and works through others
- Hebrew/Jewish people
  - God's chosen ones
  - Monotheistic unlike the pagans who have many gods
- God is:
  - Creator of all and all is good
  - Omnipresent (everywhere at once)
  - Omnipotent (all-powerful, he holds creation in his hands)
  - Omniscient (all-knowing)

- Prophets: not foretelling the far future, but speaking God's message to the people
- 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)

### NEW TESTAMENT/THE GOOD NEWS

- Two Great Commandments
  - Love God and Love Neighbor
  - See Deuteronomy 6:1-19; Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31
- God is Love; God is merciful, compassionate, forgiving...
- The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-10; Luke 6:20-26)
- The Lord's Prayer (Luke 11: 1-4)
- Faith: Who Jesus is, what he did, what he taught. Our trust in God.
- Jesus' Ministry:
  - Baptized by John the Baptist
  - To the sick
  - To the lame
  - To the blind
  - Ate with sinners
  - Came to save all
  - God's Kingdom

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129. Kenneth Brighenti, et al. *Catholicism All-In-One for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015).

- Jesus promised to send the Spirit/Paraclete
  - Psalm 104:30
  - John 14:25-26
  - John 15: 26-27
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit:
  - Wisdom
  - Understanding/Insight
  - Counsel/Right Judgment
  - Might/Courage/Power
  - Fortitude
  - Knowledge
  - Piety/Reverence
  - Wonder/Awe/
  - Fear of the Lord
  - See Isaiah 11:2-3
- Fruits of the Holy Spirit:
  - Love
  - Joy
  - Peace
  - Patience
  - Kindness
  - Generosity
  - Faithfulness
  - Gentleness
  - Self-control
  - See Gal. 5:22
- Tradition
  - Teachings of Jesus' disciples down through the ages
  - Church teachings
- Salvation by Faith and Deeds
  - Salvation through faith in Jesus' deeds and right relationship with God
    - Served others
    - Instituted the Eucharist
    - Established the Church when he commanded disciples to go and spread the Good News and baptize
    - Sent the Holy Spirit

- Salvation through Deeds: Justice – right relationship with all others
  - Work for the common good
  - Stand in solidarity
  - Respect the life and dignity of all
  - Care for creation
  - Participate in family and community
  - Alms for the poor
  - Dignity of work and workers

### **OUR CREED**

- Trinity: One God but three distinct persons through all eternity
- Jesus born of Virgin Mary
- (Mary was conceived immaculately, without sin, because she was to be the Mother of God)
- Passion: Suffering, Death, and Resurrection that delivers us from sin
- Rose from the dead and ascended into heaven
- Will judge all at the end of time with a new creation
- Holy Spirit: Sent as Jesus promised, spoke through the prophets, gives us gifts and fruits with graces
- Four Marks of Church
  - One (c.f. Ephesians 4:5-6)
  - Holy (we strive to be)
  - Catholic (lower case “c” universal but diverse)
  - Apostolic (successors to Peter, but all of us too)
- Communion of Saints:
  - Those who have been canonized
  - All those who have died and gone to heaven
  - All those living a good life
  - We ask saints to intercede for us in prayer – we do not worship or adore them



- Resurrection of the Body
  - All will have glorified bodies at the end of time
  - Jesus ascended bodily to heaven
  - Mary was assumed into heaven body and soul – Jesus took her to himself
- Life everlasting

### **THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST (THE MASS)<sup>130</sup>**

- Liturgy in Greek is “work of the people;” all are called to fully participate!
- Introductory Rite
  - Entrance
  - Greeting
  - Penitential Act
  - Glory to God
  - Collect
- Liturgy of the Word
  - First Reading (usually OT)
  - Responsorial Psalm
  - Second Reading or Epistle
  - Gospel Acclamation
  - Gospel Reading
  - Homily
  - Profession of Faith (either Nicene or Apostle’s Creed)
  - Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)
- Liturgy of the Eucharist
  - Presentation of the Gifts and Preparation of the Altar
  - Prayer over the Offerings
  - Eucharistic Prayer
  - Preface
  - Holy, Holy, Holy
  - First half of prayer, including Consecration

- Mystery of Faith
- Second half of prayer, ending with Doxology and response Amen
- The Lord’s Prayer
- Sign of Peace
- Lamb of God
- Communion
- Prayer after Communion
- Concluding Rites
  - Optional Announcements
  - Greeting and Blessing
  - Dismissal

### **SACRAMENTS**

- Sacraments are sacred signs that bring God’s love and grace to us through signs and symbols
- Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, First Eucharist
- Vatican II notes that adults (over age of seven) receive all three Sacraments of Initiation together
- Baptism
  - We are only baptized once so we accept most other denomination’s baptisms
  - Flowing water, immersion preferred
  - Anointing with oil
  - Words of trinitarian form
  - Candle, white garment
  - Baptismal promise
- Confirmation
  - We only receive confirmation once
  - Laying of hands and oil
  - Gives knowledge, strength, and grace
  - Sealed as belonging to God

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130. See USCCB, “Rediscovering the Mass,” 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass> for much information on the Mass.

- Eucharist
  - It may be celebrated many times
  - One listens to the Word of God and receives the true, Body and Blood of Christ in the substance of bread and wine
  - It is not just a symbol or remembrance, but the real presence of Jesus Christ
  - Transubstantiation: the substance/elements are changed to the Body and Blood of Christ while the appearance of the elements are not
- Penance-Reconciliation-Confession
  - It may be celebrated many times with absolution by priest “in the person of Christ”
  - Gives grace through words of repentance (act of contrition), absolution, and penance
- Anointing of the Sick
  - It may be celebrated many times (not just at death and not a requirement at death)
  - Oil
  - Laying of hands
  - Penance and Eucharist may be included
- Matrimony
  - It prepares for service work for the world
  - Priest or Deacon does not confer, but witnesses
  - Grace through vows between two people
  - Must consent freely
  - Commitment for life
  - Be open to children

## Holy Orders

- It prepares for service work
- Laying of hand by bishop
- Anointing with oil
- Words of ordination
- Both deacons and priest are ordained ministers along with bishops

## LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE

- Theological Virtues:
  - Faith (believe and commit)
  - Hope (trust and confidence in God)
  - Love/Charity (give ourselves to God and others)
- Cardinal Virtues:
  - Prudence (recognize what is right and important)
  - Justice (respects life and works for the good of others)
  - Fortitude (courage to do what is right)
  - Temperance (moderation, restraint)
- Spiritual Works of Mercy:
  - Admonish sinners
  - Instruct the ignorant
  - Counsel the doubtful
  - Comfort the sorrowful
  - Bear wrongs patiently
  - Forgive all injuries
  - Pray for the living and the dead
- Corporal Works of Mercy:
  - Feed the hungry
  - Give drink to the thirsty
  - Clothe the naked
  - Shelter the homeless
  - Visit the sick
  - Visit the imprisoned
  - Bury the Dead

- Sin
  - A turning away from God, separated from God
  - Original Sin: born into an imperfect world (Adam and Eve turned from God)
  - Venial Sin: hurts our relationship with God and others
  - Mortal Sin: A complete turning away from God and keeps us from a life of grace
  - To be a mortal sin must meet three conditions:
    - Sin is of a serious matter
    - The sin is committed with full knowledge
    - The sin is committed with full consent, freely chosen
  - Sins may be of omission as well as of action
- Seven Capital Sins or Deadly Attitudes (against the virtues):
  - Lust (chastity)
  - Greed (generosity)
  - Envy (gratitude)
  - Gluttony (temperance)
  - Sloth (zeal)
  - Anger (gentleness)
  - Pride (humility)
- Free Will
  - We have a choice to do good or not
  - We must choose to live a moral life that respects all life
  - We choose to work for social justice
  - We have an obligation to work toward the good of all people as disciples of Jesus
  - We must work toward eliminating injustices embedded in our workplaces, institutions, and community

## **THE CHURCH: THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

- Precepts of the Church
  - Attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation
  - Holy Days of Obligation: Mary, Mother of God, Jan 1; Ascension of our Lord, 40 days after Easter (may be moved to a Sunday); Assumption of Mary, Aug. 15; All Saints Day, Nov. 1; Immaculate Conception of Mary, Dec. 8; Christmas, Dec. 25
  - Reconciliation at least once per year
  - Reception of Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season (Easter to Pentecost)
  - Observe days of fasting and abstinence
    - Days of fast in the US: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (two small meals not to equal one normal meal and one small normal meal)
    - Days of Abstinence: Ash Wednesday and all Fridays in Lent (no meat or poultry)
  - Help provide for the needs of the Church
- Liturgical Year: Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time (after Epiphany) Lent, Easter, Ordinary Time (after Pentecost)
- Types of Prayer: adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, praise
  - Formulated prayers, e.g. the Hail Mary, Our Father, Come Holy Spirit, blessing before meals, or spontaneously
  - Forms can be meditation, examination, contemplation...
- Sacramentals: objects of devotion: cross or crucifix (crucifix has corpus) rosary, stations, holy water, holy oil, candles, cross, statues, incense, santos, ...

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESOURCES FOR OCIA CATECHISTS

The following resources may be useful; I especially recommend the first five.

Brighenti, Kenneth, et al. *Catholicism All-In-One for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015. This is a very readable, in-plain-language catechism. This is a good book to give to Inquirers as my past pastor recommended. I have spot compared it to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (reference below) and it is true to the teachings. I recommend you do not use it as a textbook, nor assign it as reading. Simply tell them it is a reference book for their use as needed (although some do in fact read the entire book). This is available in various online and physical bookstores.

Redemptorist Ministry. "Catholic Update 100+ Set: Topics for RCIA." Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2019. They have collected over 100 of their Catholic Update publications by various authors on various topics and sorted them by topics they deemed appropriate for each period of the OCIA. This set is available at [www.liguori.org/catholic-update-100-set-topics-for-rcia.html](http://www.liguori.org/catholic-update-100-set-topics-for-rcia.html). These are excellent for facilitators' knowledge on a particular topic as tied to Sunday liturgical readings. They also publish "The Word into Life" and "Journey of Faith" series for OCIA gatherings; also available on the website.

Stolberg, Joyce. *God Calls You by Name: A Journey Through the Rite of Christian Initiation Catholic Sacramental Preparation Process – Catechist & Director's Edition*. Colorado Springs, CO: Mother's House Publishing, 2012. This book is intended for Catechumens to each have and use on their faith journey. It includes discussions of most of the topics in the table above. It also has a detailed table of contents, a good glossary of terms, an index or topical list of the questions and answers in the text, and a list of additional suggested readings by chapter. In addition, **it has a Lectionary-Based Catechesis outline for all three liturgical cycles**. Although I do not recommend these for the participants, it has a lot of information for the OCIA Ministers. The publisher has a website where you can look at sample pages: [www.godcallsyoubyname.org/index.php/menugcybnbooks](http://www.godcallsyoubyname.org/index.php/menugcybnbooks).

Paprocki, Joe. *Called to be Catholic: Essentials of the Catholic Faith for Ages 12-15*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014. This is a good simple source that gives the essentials of our faith that merges with the listing of topics I gave above.

Gensler, Gael, and Steven Lanza. "Apprentices in Faith." Cincinnati, OH: RCL Benzinger Publishing LLC, 2009. This is an excellent online, membership resource that includes liturgical, scriptural, and doctrinal resources keyed to the OCIA process with easy to implement session information for each Sunday. A subscription is required (one for all catechists in a parish) and includes the "Young Apprentices" resources for children and youth. Samples can be viewed for free at [www.apprenticesinfaith.com/samples](http://www.apprenticesinfaith.com/samples).

Camille, Alice. *Invitation To Catholicism: Beliefs † Teachings † Practices*. Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's Press, 2001. This book would be a good study book in Catholic Christian tradition and practices for an OCIA Team formation activity.

Klocke, Vicki, et al., ed. *Diocese of Covington RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual*. Covington, KY: Diocese of Covington, 2015. <https://covdio.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RCIA-Policies-and-Guidelines-Manual-9-3-15.pdf>. This post includes a list of topics for the liturgical season; and a list of topics with subtopics and related CCC chapters.

Link, Mark. *The New Catholic Vision Correlated with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Teacher Manual*. Cincinnati, OH: RCL Benzinger Publishing LLC, 2017. This fourteenth printing is in a more user-friendly format and follows the Catechism's order of topics. Available at <https://store.rclbenzinger.com/product/new-catholic-vision-correlated-catechism-catholic-church-0> at a very reasonable price.

Malone, Miriam. *Enter the Rose*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 2005. This book includes two CDs and downloadable files for a variety of retreat formats that OCIA Teams can use for those coming into the Church.

Schreck, Alan. *The Essential Catholic Catechism: A Readable, Comprehensive Catechism*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000. This catechism is keyed to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is more readable and has twelve chapters organized in a different manner than the previous catechisms above: summarized as Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Church, Prayer and Sacraments, and Catholic living today.

TeamRCIA.com. *TeamRCIA*. San Jose, CA: TeamRCIA.com. Cofounded and Codirected by Nick Wagner and Diane Macalintal. They offer a free newsletter that includes articles to help understand the RCIA process and will answer questions submitted in a timely manner. A membership includes more detailed training videos and more.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops Publishing, 2006. A more readable version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is divided into four parts: The Creed, The Sacraments, Christian Morality, and Prayer.

Three publications specifically for formation of Catechetical Ministers are:

RCL Benziger. *Echoes in Faith 3.0*. Dubuque, Iowa: RCL Benziger, 2017. This is a subscription for individuals or groups for an on-line program with many resources.

Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization. *Directory for Catechesis: New Edition*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 2020.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 2005.

Note: In the introduction there is the statement about the OCIA process that reminds us of the way to catechize:

*“The restored catechumenate seeks to foster a committed conversation through a systematic catechesis based upon a more thorough integration of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, through liturgical catechesis, proper pastoring, and insertion into the parish community. These four aspects lead people to a life of faith in Christ, hope in his promises, and charity toward those in need. This life of faith, hope, and charity is nourished through communion with Jesus in the Liturgy, above all in the Eucharist.”*

There are a set of worksheets for a parish to assess their process and to work through this book online: [www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/living-disciples/upload/7-571-missionary-disciples-ndc-worksheets.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/living-disciples/upload/7-571-missionary-disciples-ndc-worksheets.pdf).

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