

National Policy Document
for the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults



RCIA

Aotearoa

New Zealand

Welcoming New Members

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Pastoral Letter

1. Welcoming new members is one of the most wonderful experiences in the life of the Church. It brings new life and vigour not only to the newly baptised but to the whole Church community.
2. In the early Church, people seeking baptism spent a long time in formation. As more people were baptised as infants, this process, known as the catechumenate, almost disappeared.
3. When the bishops of the Second Vatican Council were considering effective ways to spread the Good News to the world in the twentieth century and to enrich the life of the Church with new members, they decided to restore the adult catechumenate.
4. Introduced in 1972 and presented in final form in 1986, the Church's *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) is now the norm for **all** who desire to become Catholic.

Children of catechetical age should be initiated in the same manner as adults (**RCIA 3**).

5. So the rite is not optional: it is the **normative** way that the Catholic Church welcomes new members.
6. To people who grew up with the notion of Church as a place where the priest did all the important things, the RCIA presents a vision of the Church that is vastly different. The RCIA involves everyone – all Catholics, laity and ordained alike, share the work of responding to those who desire to follow Christ with us, as members of the Catholic Church.
7. What happens in the liturgical rites of the RCIA journey is powerful and important. The catechumens and candidates learn to 'turn more readily to God in prayer' as they pray with the community. They walk with catechists and sponsors to come 'to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation', and learn 'how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church' (**RCIA 75**).

8. The Rite tells us that, as well as initiating people into the teachings of the Church, we are initiating them into a community of believers who express their belief in the liturgy they celebrate together and in the lives they lead.
9. The RCIA challenges us, as a community, to be:
- people of the Word
 - people of Eucharist
 - people of hospitality
 - people of the story of salvation history
 - people of conversion
 - people of mission.
10. The role of this community, beautifully expressed in the words of the Rite itself, is ‘to surround the Elect with prayer, so that the entire Church will accompany and lead them to encounter Christ’ (**RCIA 108**).
11. The implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* in parishes is to be in accord with the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Policy *Welcoming New Members*.

✠ John Dew
Archbishop of Wellington
President NZCBC

✠ Patrick Dunn
Bishop of Auckland
Secretary NZCBC

✠ Denis Browne
Bishop of Hamilton

✠ Colin Campbell
Bishop of Dunedin

✠ Charles Drennan
Bishop of Palmerston North

✠ Barry Jones
Bishop of Christchurch

✠ Peter Cullinane
Bishop Emeritus
of Palmerston North



Implementation

OVERVIEW

12. The richness of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* enables us to claim it as a way of being Church. Its journey of faith moves through four stages or phases: (i) from the period of the enquiry through (ii) the period of the catechumenate through (iii) the period of purification and enlightenment in Lent to (iv) the period of the mystagogy after Easter. These stages are separated by a process of discernment and are celebrated by liturgical rites:
- The **Rite of Acceptance** into the catechumenate
 - The **Rite of Election** at the beginning of Lent
 - The **Rite of Christian Initiation**: the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, at the Easter Vigil.

MINISTRIES

13. Ministries in the RCIA begin with the assembly: the primary minister is the community of the faithful. Its ministry is exercised through concern for others, hospitality to newcomers and, above all, through wholehearted participation in the liturgy.
14. The local bishop is always the ordinary minister of Christian initiation, with special concern for the preparation and baptism of adults. In practice, the bishop usually delegates the responsibilities for this process, and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, to parish priests.

Welcoming new members is one of the most wonderful experiences in the life of the Church.

Ministries in the RCIA begin with the assembly ...

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15. Within the ministering assembly are those who are particularly responsible for the process of preparation. In addition to the priest or lay leader, these include:
- a coordinator
 - catechists
 - ministers of hospitality
 - sponsors and godparents
 - deacons.

CATECHUMENS OR CANDIDATES?

16. The RCIA is primarily intended for unbaptised adults or children ‘who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts’ (**RCIA 1**). Their initiation is not only a matter of intellectual assent to the Church’s teachings but also incorporation into a living community of faith. The Easter Vigil is the normative time for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Therefore, initiation outside the Easter season requires the permission of the Bishop.
17. The full process of the catechumenate may not be necessary for all candidates, i. e. for those baptised in other Christian churches. Those candidates who have been baptised but have never received any instruction in the Christian way, the liturgy or the Scriptures may be included in many parts of the formation process and its rites, with due recognition of their baptismal status. Other candidates, however, may have received substantial formation, are often confirmed members of their baptismal churches, and are still, or were formerly, active members. In their case, the length of the formation will vary and reception into full Communion may be celebrated at an ordinary Sunday Mass.
18. Children of catechetical age should be initiated in the same manner as adults (**RCIA 3**).

*... as well as initiating people into the teachings of the Church,
we are initiating them into a community of believers ...*

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An RCIA Structure

... FOR AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

19. The process of Christian initiation is described as ‘gradual’ and as ‘a spiritual journey ... that varies according to the many forms of God’s grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place’ (**RCIA 5**).
20. The Church in Aotearoa New Zealand is unique. The process, structure and planning of the catechumenate therefore needs to reflect the face, the heart and the way of life of the Church here in this land.
21. While the structure continues to be marked by the paschal and liturgical character proper to the RCIA, the process can be adapted to best suit the unique needs of the local Church.
22. For example, the parish RCIA team will need to recognise that the New Zealand calendar year is characterised by four school terms, an academic year from February to October, and a long Christmas/New Year holiday period.

Sound and effective planning for the RCIA will take these, and other aspects, into account.



Pastoral Priorities

23. Given the understanding of the RCIA outlined above, the following steps towards implementing the RCIA in Aotearoa New Zealand should be regarded as pastoral priorities in each parish:

- The RCIA process should not be rushed.
- The enquiry period, the first stage of the process, would normally begin in February. However, for pastoral reasons, a number of enquiry periods may take place as, and when, necessary.
- Ideally, the catechumenate or second stage of the process, should extend for a period of not less than twelve months.
- The period of post-baptismal mystagogical catechesis would usually extend from after the Easter Vigil to Pentecost.

A programme for the ongoing formation of the neophytes ought to extend for one year until the anniversary of their initiation (**RCIA 240**).

24. The model calendar indicates how the structures could be implemented.

... the rite is not optional: it is the normative way that the Catholic Church welcomes new members.



... FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RCIA IN PASTORAL AREAS

25. In a number of places, the RCIA is being implemented in pastoral areas or clusters of parishes. The following points may be useful.

rites

26. The liturgical rites are best celebrated in each parish.

Dismissal (*SENDING FORTH*)

27. The Dismissal (*Sending Forth*) is understood as normative for the catechumenate and is necessary for candidates:
- in order to emphasise the importance of the Liturgy of the Word
 - as a gesture of hospitality.

It should be used from the Rite of Acceptance until the Rite of Initiation (**RCIA 67**).

Catechetical Sessions

28. Ideally, the *minimum* time for the preparation for catechumens is one year.

The basis for this catechesis is the *Lectionary*. (See the *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997 – **GDC 30**; see also *Sharing the Gospel Today, The Catechetical Directory for Aotearoa New Zealand*, 2011 – **CDANZ 2.2**)

... [the RCIA] brings new life and vigour not only to the newly baptised but to the whole Church community.

When the bishops of the Second Vatican Council were considering effective ways to spread the Good News to the world in the twentieth century and to enrich the life of the Church with new members, they decided to restore the adult catechumenate.

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The National Liturgy Office website, www.nlo.org.nz, provides practical advice and guidance for local teams and catechists in the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This can be accessed under the heading for Ministries.

Both the *Lectionary* and the *RCIA Aotearoa New Zealand Ministry Support* will be integral resources in the preparation and delivery of catechesis for the RCIA in this country.

PARTICIPANTS

29. If geographically viable, a cluster of parishes may decide to celebrate the rites in their respective parishes on the Sunday, but join together on a weekday for the catechesis sessions.

In this case, the catechumens and candidates are dismissed in the usual manner from the Sunday assembly in order to reflect further on the Word of God; then later in the week, all the catechumens and candidates gather in one place for catechesis.

MINISTERS

30. A number of ministers will be required:
- the parish assembly is the primary minister of the RCIA
 - the RCIA team is made up of members from all parishes, if possible
 - the catechumenate coordinator plays a key role in the structure
 - catechists must be formed and capable of taking leadership roles
 - one of the ordained is designated as pastor to the group
 - sponsors come from the catechumens' own parishes.

... the RCIA presents a model of Church that is vastly different. It involves everyone: all Catholics, laity and ordained alike, share the work of responding to those who desire to follow Christ with us, as members of the Catholic Church.

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Glossary

Here are some of the more important RCIA terms.

Candidate: a baptised Christian who is preparing to enter the Catholic Church. Candidates must be distinguished from catechumens (see below). Note that the Rite document uses the term candidate to refer to those participating in one of the rites celebrated during the process (such as the Rite of Acceptance). This may include enquirers, catechumens or baptised Christians.

Catechesis: this is the art of helping people to mature in faith. It is defined in the *General Directory*

for Catechesis (1997) as ‘nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it, and communicates it in many ways.’ (**GDC 105**; see also **CDANZ, p. 73**).

Catechist: one engaged in catechesis (see above).

Catechumen: an unbaptised person who has been welcomed into the Catholic community and who is preparing for the sacraments of initiation.

Discernment: this is the process by which the church community measures the conversion of the enquirer, catechumen and candidate. For example, before someone may be accepted for baptism, the community must make a judgement about his or her readiness (**RCIA 112**).

Dismissal (The): this is the term for the ritual following the Liturgy of the Word at the Sunday Mass by which catechumens, with their catechists and sponsors, are sent forth to reflect on the Scriptures and further explore the life of faith.

Elect (The): term for catechumens who have celebrated a Rite of Election and are pursuing a time of reflection and spiritual preparation (normally during Lent) prior to receiving the sacraments of initiation.

Enquirer: someone exploring the Catholic faith prior to making a decision to seek to join the Catholic Church. An enquirer

may also be called a 'pre-catechumen'.

Neophyte: a newly initiated person.

Period of the Enquiry (The): the first phase of the RCIA during which potential catechumens or candidates are encouraged to ask questions about the Catholic faith. Also known as the Period of Evangelisation/Pre-Catechumenate.

Period of the Catechumenate (The): the second phase of the RCIA process following the Rite of Acceptance. During this period catechumens and candidates, with the help of catechists and sponsors, strive to deepen their faith as they prepare for the Rite of Election.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment (The): the name for the third phase of the RCIA. Usually during the Lenten period, it is a time of reflection in preparation for the celebration of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

What happens in the liturgical rites of the RCIA journey is powerful and important.

Period of the Mystagogia (The): the fourth and final phase of the RCIA process. It follows the celebration of initiation and usually occupies the time between Easter and Pentecost. During this Easter season the new Catholics reflect on their faith journey and prepare for its continuation in the midst of the People of God.

Rite of Acceptance (The): is the liturgical celebration by which those who have completed the Enquiry phase declare their intention to become members of the Church. Through this rite, the catechumens and candidates enter into the Catechumenate phase, where they strive to deepen their faith.

Rite of Election (The): is usually celebrated in the presence of the bishop on the First Sunday of Lent. This liturgical rite marks the journey from the Period of the Catechumenate to

the Period of Purification and Enlightenment.

Rite of Christian Initiation (The): celebrates the completion of the journey of preparation. The Elect are baptised, confirmed and welcomed to the Table of the Eucharist for the first time. The Candidates (who have already been baptised) are welcomed into full communion with the Catholic Church through a formal profession of faith; they are confirmed (if this has not already happened) and are welcomed to the Table of the Eucharist.

Scrutinies: these rites are usually held on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. They are for the Elect (unbaptised) only and are intended to help and strengthen them in their spiritual preparation as they travel towards Easter and the sacraments of initiation.

The RCIA challenges us, as a community, ...

The implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in parishes is to be in accord with the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference's Policy Welcoming New Members.

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Resources

PRIMARY RESOURCES

1. The Holy See. ***The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults***. Revised Edition. The Roman Ritual Approved for Use in New Zealand by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. St. Paul's Publications: Strathfield, 2003.

This book is essential to any formation and celebration of Christian Initiation of those who have reached the age of reason. This is the ritual edition.

2. The Holy See. ***The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults***. Study Edition. St. Paul's Publications: Strathfield, 2003.

This paperback study edition is useful for RCIA team members.

3. The Congregation for the Clergy. ***The General Directory on Catechesis***. St. Paul's Publications: Strathfield, 1998.

4. New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. ***Sharing the Gospel Today. The Catechetical Directory for Aotearoa New Zealand***. NZCBC: Wellington, 2012.

5. New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. ***National Curriculum for the RCIA***. (In preparation)

SECONDARY RESOURCES

A list of secondary resources and useful links will be posted on the NLO website (nlo.org.nz).



RCIA

What happens in the liturgical rites of the RCIA journey is powerful and important. The candidates and catechumens learn to 'turn more readily to God in prayer' as they pray with the community. They walk with catechists and sponsors to come 'to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation', and learn 'how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church'.

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*Aotearoa
New Zealand*