

Pastoral Components of the Christian Initiation Process:

From Initial Motivation to Firm Conviction to a Catholic Worldview

The Rite of Christian initiation...is designed for adults 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)

A 'Person to Person' Endeavor

The pastoral work of the catechumenal process is accomplished through the love and labor of many people, including the following:

- ✦ Bishop and clergy
- ✦ Hospitality folks
- ✦ Sponsors
- ✦ Small group leaders
- ✦ Intercessors
- ✦ Catechists
- ✦ Parish members
- ✦ Facilitators for Reflection on the Word

This pastoral work is a *people to person* endeavor—many people impacting this one person for the Lord. Pastoring involves both **information** and **formation**. By instruction and by example, the catechumens and candidates learn who God is, what he wants, and how to follow him as a member of the Christian community. Through the pastoral attention of others, participants are informed about Jesus and formed in him.

Why “pastor” (from their initial motivation to firm conviction)?

The pastoral work of the Church is necessary:

- John 14:5** Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?
- Acts 8:31** How can I understand unless someone guides me?
- Romans 8:26** For we do not know how to pray as we ought.
- Romans 10:14** And how are they to hear without a preacher?

Pastoring is necessary because they don't know the path—how to live an authentic Christian life. The community of the faithful is to provide information, formation, and a sincere and open witness to the life of charity.

Confidentiality in the Process

Confidentiality is a crucial prerequisite to and hallmark of pastoring in the catechumenal process.

- ✦ Members of the team must be people in whom the catechumens and candidates can confide.
- ✦ The conversion process may involve crises and battling with very personal and painful issues.
- ✦ The principle that should govern pastoral activity is the virtue of prudence. (see CCC 1806)
- ✦ Obtaining intercessors to pray for troubled participants is vital; this does not necessitate revealing much information.

Use of the Adult Learning Model

The adult learning model in relationship to pastoring includes:

- ⊗ Creating an atmosphere comprised of adult Catholics who are prepared to accept inquirers where they are, and to open their lives to them.
- ⊗ Using small groups to foster relationships and dialogue.
- ⊗ Providing witness to the Christian life so that the application of a session is immediately evident—this means avoiding 'stacking-up' information that adults cannot make use of in their lives—always connecting right belief with right practice.
- ⊗ Giving attention to providing liturgical experiences and opportunities for apostolic service in the context of the Christian community.
- ⊗ Planning for the fact that participants will have difficulties and crises; such situations are often a sign of developing conversion.



The Period of the Precatechumenate

During this period inquirers “should receive help and attention” so that they may:

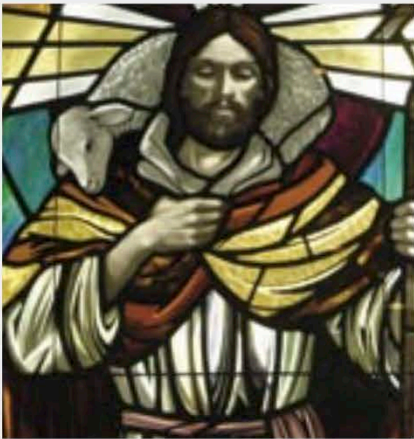
- ✠ Purify their intentions
- ✠ Clarify their desire to cooperate with God’s grace (see RCIA 38)

Whatever their original reason for beginning, it is a good one. It must be cultivated and encouraged so that they can come to the conviction that they cannot imagine living the rest of their lives outside of the Church. Changes in lifestyle should accompany this period as folks turn away from sinful patterns and turn toward God in Christ. The following signs should mark this period:

- ☞ Evidence of first faith manifested in repentance
- ☞ Interest in a prayer life
- ☞ Growing desire to study and learn what God has revealed
- ☞ A sense of the Church (see RCIA 42)

This is the time to include many varied testimonies of faith and the Christian life. It is also the time to connect inquirers to parishioners who could become friends. Godparents and sponsors should be chosen with care taken to train them to be companions on the journey. Intercession for the individual inquirers should begin.

The Period of the Catechumenate



During this period the example and guidance of godparents, sponsors, team, and the entire parish is crucial because it is from them that the catechumens and candidates learn (RCIA 75.2):

- ✠ 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 begin to recognize and to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds
- ✠ To practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation
- ✠ To be strengthened in faith and conversion

The Church is like a mother to the catechumens and candidates and so we must take steps to know each person well, making room for them in our hearts and lives:

- ✠ Love and confidentiality must be the hallmarks of those caring for the catechumens and candidates
- ✠ Encouragement, gentle direction, example, and advice, well-placed by the catechumenal team, will greatly aid the conversion process

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The **Penitential Rite** (see RCIA 459–472), the **Scrutinies** and the **Exorcisms** illustrate the pastoral focus of this period: The guidelines (RCIA 141) states that the Scrutinies are celebrated in order to:

- ⊕ Deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan
- ⊕ Protect them against temptation
- ⊕ Give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life (see John 14:6)

These Rites, therefore, should:

- ✠ Complete the conversion of the elect and candidates
- ✠ Deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ
- ✠ Help them to carry out their decision to love God above all

RCIA 142 explains that before they receive the sacraments of initiation:

...the elect must have the intention of achieving **an intimate knowledge** of Christ and his Church, and they are expected particularly **to progress in genuine self-knowledge** through **serious examination of their lives and true repentance**.

The Period of Mystagogy and the Neophyte Year

In this period of the catechumenal process, the neophytes must be welcomed and helped to continue in the journey that is the Christian life. RCIA 244 states:

This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through...

- ✦ Meditating on the Gospel
- ✦ Sharing in the Eucharist
- ✦ Participating in the works of charity

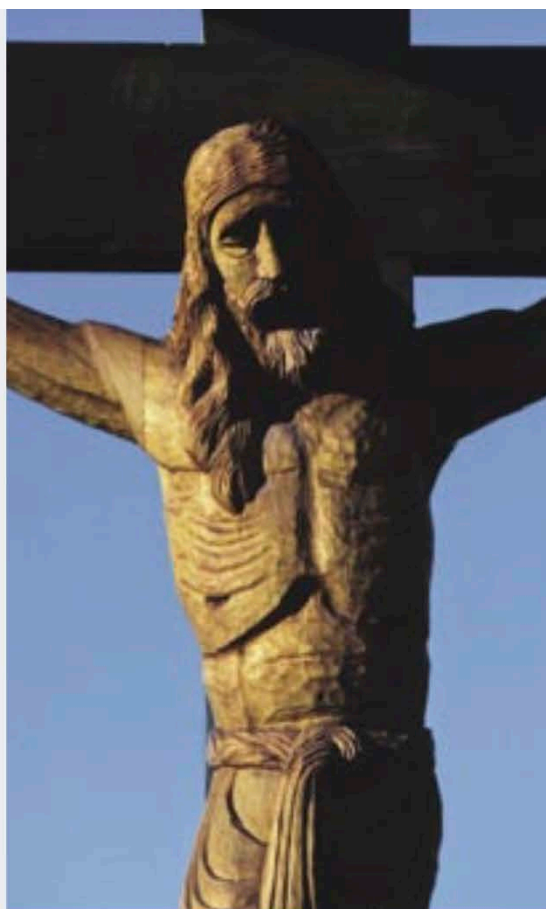
To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their pastors should give them thoughtful and friendly help.

RCIA, National Statutes for the Catechumenate 24:

After the immediate mystagogy or post-baptismal catechesis during the Easter season, the program for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation, with at least monthly assemblies of the neophytes for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the community.

RCIA 250: On the anniversary of their Baptism the neophytes should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment.

RCIA 251: To show his pastoral concern for these new members of the Church, the bishop, particularly if he was unable to preside at the sacraments of initiation himself, should arrange, if possible, to meet the recently baptized at least once in the year and to preside at a celebration of the Eucharist with them.



Towards a Catholic Worldview

CT 20: Catechesis aims, therefore, at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's Word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that Word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more with the Church to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity to his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to.

A Catholic worldview takes years to develop. For neophytes, the support, accountability, and witness provided by those in their faith community are essential. The key components of a Catholic worldview are:

- ✦ Recognizing Christ as Lord of all history and Lord of each life, through an understanding of God's plan for salvation
- ✦ Holding firm to general principles (moral and doctrinal absolutes) and applying them to particular situations
- ✦ Recognizing the sacramental reality of creation—God is with us
- ✦ Having a strong incarnational perspective—God works through human nature and through material things
- ✦ Recognizing the redemptive value of suffering
- ✦ Living a life of hope, directed to the last things

Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose Body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God. ~ ST. LEO THE GREAT

*The pastoral components
are the people who participate,
some intimately and others
from a distance, in Jesus' work
of conversion and discipleship...*

The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ. (RCIA, Intro., 9)

Christian Initiation during the catechumenate is not the concern of catechists or priest alone, but of the whole community of believers and especially the godparents, so that from the outset the catechumens will have a sense of being a part of the people of God. (Decree of the Church's Missionary Activity, 14)

Church Universal

Diocese

Holy Father

Parish Community

Local Bishop

Intercessors

The Faithful

Intercessors

- ❖ Pastor & Clergy
- ❖ RCIA Director & Catechists
- ❖ Godparents
- ❖ Sponsors
- ❖ Discussion Leaders
- ❖ Hospitality Folks
- ❖ Sponsor Coordinator & Intercessor Coordinator

