

RCIA Conference July 2008

Forming Threshold Companions

Contents

Day One:

Gathering Prayer and Opening Session: Why Form Threshold Companions?	2
RCIA 9 : Everyday life of the community as the context	3
RCIA 129: Reflection on being ‘profoundly united with Christ’	3-4
Individual/Table reflection: Where does Christ seem absent? Where is the Body broken ..	4
Comment from Bishop Brian Noble	4
Evening Liturgy outline	5

Day Two:

Implications for our practice : exploring our practice through the lens of the Easter Triduum	5-6
Mystagogical reflection on the experience of previous Evening’s Liturgy	7
Scripture Reflection Process	7
Comments and questions arising from the Scripture Reflection process	8
‘Dismissal’ and the Word of God as basic/core to initiation process	8
Liturgy & the proclaimed Word of God	8
Feasting on the Word: 4 central actions	9
Candidates and dismissal?	9
Revisiting RCIA 75: formation/apprenticeship in a way of life – liturgy & catechesis	10-11
Ponder and explore: what do you take home?	12
Mystagogy on the Experience of the Eucharist	12-13

Day Three:

Mystagogical reflection on the total experience of the Conference - Insights, Support/Encouragement/challenged/disturbed	14
North & South Groups gathered : questions to think about together.	15
Closing Liturgy outline	15



Email: caro@ccrcharity.org.uk
www.ccrcharity.org.uk

RCIA Network Conference Report 2008: Forming Threshold Companions
Facilitated by Dr. Sheila O’Dea, 2-4 July 2008, Manchester

Linda Pennington, as Convenor, thanked Bishop Terence Brain for being present, and he in turn welcomed the attendees to his Diocese of Lancaster, before he left to prepare for Australia and World Youth Day. Bishop Brian Noble of Shrewsbury was attending the Conference.

In our Gathering Prayer, the refrain for the Conference ‘*Stand, O stand firm, stand O stand firm, Stand O stand firm and see what the Lord can do*’; the opening prayer, “increase our eagerness to listen to the Word and our willingness to respond to it”, enthronement of the Word, proclamation of the Word, Blessings: ‘May your ears be opened to hear God’s Word, and your mouth to proclaim God’s praise.. with the signing of our senses, and shared Sign of Peace, brought us to the ‘threshold’ of the conference, inviting us to cross over and engage with our whole selves in the process.

The space was set up ‘**café style, with round tables**, 10 pre-arranged groups of 7 people per table

1. Opening Session: Wednesday 2nd July, 2008 Dr Sheila O’Dea

1.1 Why form (threshold companions)?

- Still today there is a lack of connection between ‘living the faith’ and the pastoral formation envisaged in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- There is still a lack of connection between the community and the catechumens.
- There is still a ‘6 or 9 month catechumenate’ – no vision for a year round catechumenate.
- There is still a feeling of this is something we do in term time and have the holidays off

1.2 A way of being Church

- 2 studies in US and Canada on RCIA – both concluded that ‘mystagogy’ was the weakest period.
- Sheila O’Dea commented that the conclusions were not clear. From her point of view, the reason mystagogy is weak is because we are *not* doing the catechumenate in the way it is envisaged in the Rite. We are not apprenticing people into a way of living.

1.3 Apprenticeship into a way of life?

- What does this mean?
 - eg I can’t live in Ireland unless I know its football team, its history, its way of being.
 - ie how to live in an Irish community....
- This affects how we go about RCIA... it is apprenticeship into a way of life.

1.4 Proverbs 29:18 – ‘my people perish for lack of vision’.

- Vision in RCIA is about US! It is about who we believe we are!
- From the perspective of leadership – it is people who dare to dream, and then en flesh the dream and find ways to make it a reality.
- Leadership will INSPIRE us to live the Rite and work with it
- Leadership is inspired by the community, the liturgy and RCIA itself.

1.5 See RCIA 4: *‘the initiation of catechumens is a gradual (sacramental) process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.’*

- We were invited to notice the verbs in article 4 above... ‘reflect’...‘renew’...‘provide’.
- We are *reflecting* on what the paschal mystery means in our lives, all the ‘dyings’ and ‘risings’ that go on every day, and our participation in the paschal mystery through our Baptism.
- *Renewing* – ever time someone ask to know more about us, it becomes a question for ourselves.. a challenge! Why and I here? How do I live?
- The challenge is how *do* we live the life of the baptized Christian? It is much easier to give a talk than reflect and share how it impacts on us personally!

1.6 See RCIA 9:

*‘In the light of what is said in Christian Initiation (General Introduction 7) 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**. In the various circumstances of daily life, even as in the apostolate, all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading the faith according to their abilities. Hence **the entire community must help the candidates and the catechumens through the process of initiation:***

during the period of the precatechumenate, the period of the catechumenate, the period of purification and enlightenment and the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy.’ (and then it lists 5 points specific to the community’s role in each period and each step.

- In **RCIA 9**, it names the everyday-life of the community – the responsibility of all the baptized, the community as responsible – every member! A parent in a family will be attentive not just to one child, but to every child they have. We are always called to proclaim Christ (and ‘if necessary to use words’ St Francis)

Q: What would it look like to BE the Body of Christ in our world?

- RCIA 9 refers to the ‘various circumstances of daily life’ – ie in our homes, by example, personal circumstances, linking people, in community gatherings, at work, at play... how do we act? Because the folks we are initiating are going to look like us!
- Eg... in a Blessing ritual, rather than the person being blessed to stand facing the priest and have just the one person blessing, the priest could invite everyone in the congregation to hold up their hands in blessing as that one person faces them... thus the whole Body of Christ is being active... What does that look and feel like? A very different experience! In the Rite, the Community is asked to give testimony about the person – how can they if they don’t know them?

RCIA 10-16 name particular ministries, **but RCIA 9** comes **first**, and you will find in ALL documents, the whole **community** is named and talked about first, and then the other ministries are named from within that. **The Community calls people for Baptism**, not ‘RCIA’, not the ‘team’, not the leaders. Any focus on ‘leaders’ should shift to the community. Who are the people in the community who can accompany these catechumens? Who will get alongside them and connect? If we have our own copy of the Rite, we can read and mark it and know it and learn how to en flesh it.

1.7 Q: There is a catechumen in your community: So what? What impact?

- Causes us to question: who are we as ‘church’? How do we do liturgy? How do we do catechesis? How do we do ‘mission’?

1.8 Exercise: Brainstorming – Images that come to mind when you think of the following:

- **Q: ‘RCIA forming threshold companions’: What image captures this for you?**
 - birthing/midwife; experiencing entrance/rejection; we are always beginning; seedbed/nurturing; opening a door; embracing; elastic band – the tension, bungy; kaleidoscope; sharing treasure/invitation to share and become treasure.

(1) COMPANIONS: friends, understanding, interested; close mutual side by side; share life’s joys and sorrow; enjoy things together; eat together; there for you when the going gets tough/don’t let you down; enabler/soul mate/confidante; journeying; faithful; offer and receive challenge

(2) THRESHOLD: doorstep ‘come in’; go away!; crossing over; open/closed; gatekeeper; ‘who are you’, ‘Come and see who we are’, What do you want? ‘Can I help? ‘I’m lost’... ‘Can you help?’ ‘I’m looking for’..... energy; movement.

(3) FORMING: apprentice; learning; showing; example; modeling; shaping; becoming; gradually taking shape; gradually growth to realizing potential; metamorphosis; grace at work; maturing; evolving; outside help/inside is up to you; the work of the Potter

1.9 Reflection on Being Profoundly United with CHRIST

- Dr O’Dea drew our attention to **RCIA 129** – ‘the elect must have the intention of achieving **intimate** knowledge of Christ and his Church, and they are expected to progress in genuine self-knowledge through serious examination of their lives....’
- Intimacy is not something that happens in your head! It is not about ‘programme’ or ‘content’.
- Church says that in this sacramental process, we are opening/trying to achieve ourselves (and themselves!) **intimate** knowledge of Christ and the Church. The General Directory for Catechesis (**GDC 80**) speaks of putting people not only in touch but in communion and intimacy with Christ. This communion has the effect of leading people to want to unite themselves to everything that Jesus united himself with.

1.10 Dr O’Dea then asked us to reflect on 2 questions, and then share in pairs and then round the table, only what you want to share, and speak in 1st person ‘I’.

QI Where does Christ seem to be absent? (in family, parish, diocese, local community, county, country, world....)

- Jealousy in structures ‘this is our patch’
- ‘you cant do that’
- Lack of integrity between saying and doing
- Fighting.... Peoples.... Countries....
- Social settings... who are you? Who do you think you are? Divisions/barriers.
- Countries that face starvation/intimidation/violence – ‘the devil at work’ (Zimbabwe)

Q2 Where does the Body of Christ seem to be broken? (family, parish etc as above)

- Lack of loving acceptance of one another, newcomers and old, in parish, in local community, county, country world...
- Family arguments/alienation – broken relationships
- Terror/religious intolerance
- Ecumenical pain
- Rich/poor divide
- Fear of people who are different from ourselves

1.11 Now listen to the Scripture from the Gathering Prayer again: Luke 4:18-19, 21

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord’s year of mercy’.... Then he said to them ‘Today these prophetic words come true even as you listen’.

- Today this is being fulfilled in your hearing.
- What are the implications for the Body of Christ – absent and broken – in your reflections?
- THIS is what we are about!
- Dr O’Dea finished with a poem by Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Street Corner Christ’.

2. At the end of the Opening afternoon session, **Bishop Brian Noble** was invited to give a personal response. He made the following points:

- There is a need for clarity about the equality in a group, and where that is appropriate.
- Donal O’Leary in his book ‘A Matter of the Heart’ (in response to On the Way to Life) says how vitally important it is that we don’t confuse ‘formation’ with providing of ‘information’, because we are still in danger of providing doctrinal information... but what we have heard from Sheila O’Dea this afternoon is that we are in the business of formation, and this is about a way of life that we are trying to live, and helping people to immerse themselves in.
- ‘Community’ is a bit of slippery customer – an idealized picture can emerge, and its very easy to fall into the trap of everything being ‘cosy’ and ‘warm and lovey-dovey’. A group member on my table said ‘Has the Body of Christ ever been anything else but broken?’ When we talk of introducing people into ‘community’ how do we do that? le into the messiness of the Body of Christ? We need people to know this reality! This has profound consequences. When talking of introducing people into community, and that it is the ‘responsibility of the whole community’, what are we talking about? The church is like a series of concentric circles, with the most committed at the centre, and rippling out the those who are still members but don’t get involved apart from the Mass and sacraments, and those who don’t come to Church at all but say ‘I am a Catholic’. They are still part of this ‘community’ who have ‘responsibility’. Image of the Church we project must be TRUE to life, and not unrealistic lovey-dovey totally committed. Not sure of the consequences of this! But.....

Following Bishop Brian’s comments, the Conference went for their first meal together, followed by:

Evening Liturgy of the Word:

Song: *O Word of God, come into this space, O Word of God come send us your grace.*

*Open our minds; show us your truth. Transform our lives anew’ (Ricky Manolo CSP, pub OCP,2002)**

Gathering Action: *As we sang, one person from each table came to light the table candle from the central candle and return with the light to their table group. We reflected on the first session, ‘reflecting, renewing, and the challenge to provide’... ‘in everyday life circumstances...to proclaim Christ’. We had named images conjured up by the words... ‘forming threshold companions’... and thought about what growing in intimacy with Christ might look like and feel like.*

The Word proclaimed: Acts 12:1-11, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18, and Matthew 16: 13-19 from the previous Sunday. Sheila led reflection.

Psalm: I called in my distress, God set me free. From every kind of fear, God set me free. God set me free. (Collegeville Composers Group, 2005)*

Response to reflection: 'Jesus you are the bread we long for. Jesus you are the word we need. Jesus here in your gathered people today, you live to show us the way.' ((Bernadette Farrell, 1999, OCP)*

Closing: Stand O Stand firm and see what the Lord can do! (Cameroon, arr. By John Bell, 1990, Wild Goose Resource Group)*.

* see separate list of all music used in the Conference liturgies available on www.rcia.org.uk

DAY TWO: Thursday 3 July 2008

3. Session One: 'Stand O stand firm... and see what the Lord can do.' God in our midst, with us as we begin our day together.

3:1 Opening questions: in pairs, and then in our 'table' groups

Yesterday, we began to consider the implications for the Body of Christ for what we are doing in RCIA.

Q: What things are stirring up inside and have fired up your spirit?

Q: Following from the task yesterday (where is Christ absent? Broken body?) what are the implications of brokenness and absence of Christ for us as the Body of Christ?

3:2 Input/facilitation: After time in pairs and in table group sharing, Dr O'Dea then facilitated an exploration of these questions through the lense of the Liturgy of the Easter Triduum, which constantly calls us to transformation and on-going conversion.

- We **feast** richly at the **Table of God's Word**....
 - We are called to be transformed by the Word... the Word is light... the Word is liberation, is covenant, is an experience of death and resurrection....
- We **wash one another's feet**
 - Washing feet also calls us to transformation, not just service, but allowing ourselves to be the Body of Christ. It is easier to ignore the washing of the feet, but we listen to Christ and we know that this action in the community causes us to be transformed into the Body of Christ!
- When **we light our fires**...
 - To light the fires of faith in our community, our world
 - A call to transform!
- In the **waters of Baptism**, all of us are changed...
 - Adult baptism – the going down into the water and the rising up out of the water... we are renewed... we too hear our call to die and to rise...
- **Eucharist:** eating and drinking the Body of Christ...
 - In the world , you are the Body of Christ... BE the Body of Christ you are called to be!
 - We are transformed A life-long process

3:3 The conversion journey never ends!

- **RCIA 75**... catechesis: see this paragraph for our outlook and conduct... calling for conversion of mind and action... this is the kind of conversion we are all constantly being called to....
- Have you ever lived with someone who has arrived? Painful!!
- No! We have *not* arrived! We are constantly called to conversion

3:4 Look at the Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate (RCIA 48-74)

- Signing of all the senses, with the sign of the cross and presentation with the Gospel
- As incarnate people, every sense is important – we engage the whole person in being the Body of Christ.
- This is about the candidates – but it is also about US!
- We are signed. We are called to live by Gospel values, 52 weeks of the year,
- Sunday after Sunday after Sunday... we **dismiss** (pastoral notes see RCIA 44 & 83, for Rites, see 67, 123, 142 for example)the catechumens to feast on the Word of God, and the Word of God forms and transforms. The Word of God forms US... and we need to LISTEN and allow it to form us!

3:5 See Rite of Election

- Called by name – powerful image... to be called by name.
- What does it mean to be called by name?

- ‘Look at all the names you are called by...why? What do they mean?’... story of a woman who was brought to tears through this exercise... she had not be called by name since she retired 6 months ago.
- Writing your name in the Book of the Elect
- Listening to your name called out...
- Name says so much about who we are as people

3:6 See **Scrutiny**

- Laying on of hands
- No words
- Invoking the Spirit – calling the Spirit on one another...
- Spirit sends us to be Body of Christ in our world

3:7 **Triduum**

- **Lavish Baptising, Anointing, Eating, Drinking**
- Nothing worse than running out of bread and wine! (story of a Liturgy when ran out of consecrated bread...(but not the wine)... at end of Mass, celebrant apologized... message came across that the wine was ‘a little extra’ that wasn’t as significant as the consecrated bread...
- Little ‘*dabs and dos*’ doesn’t have the same impact of calling us to transformation
- We are the Body of Christ but we are not yet the Body of Christ....
- Call to witness to the action of God/Christ in our world
- Called to be a people who proclaim Christ

3:8 **So initiation Question yesterday: ‘Why form threshold companions?’**

- We re-discover where we are going
- Introducing people into a way of living
- Apprentice others on this journey
- Dr O’Dea when asked another group to Ponder a time as an apprentice...& Ponder time as a mentor
- Some in group named ‘parenting’ as both apprenticing and mentoring.
- We are BOTH ...
- With our catechumens and candidates, we RE-discover what it means to be threshold companions, ie community...
- A community that mentors
- How is the community doing this already?
- Listen to the language... language forms us to re-discover...

4:1 **Dr O’Dea led a mystagogy on last night’s Liturgy, liturgy being ‘primary theology’.**

The group were asked to feedback on (1) the EXPERIENCE itself –what did it feel like? ...

- in different ways, variety....
- (2) Draw out the deeper significance of the experience... what did it say about GOD?
 - God with us, as we began our time together....
 - (3) What did it say about this Community?
 - Solidarity, shared vision, huge awareness of one another, power of silence
 - (4) What did it say about the Word of God ?
 - Brings us into community
 - All hear in different ways, individually... difference reflecting God’s variety/personal/individual
 - Nourishment for all
 - Powerful
 - Proclamation was in the ‘whispering’ round the table
 - Every time you hear, it is different – it speaks NOW
 - The Word will always be different!

4:2 This reflective/feedback was modeling what happens when catechumens are dismissed. We used the 2nd reading today, but mostly it would be the Gospel. Can use any of the readings (1) overall impression of the word, and then (2) reflect on the Gospel.

Catechumens not ‘dismissed’ or ‘sent out’ for discussion! But for Liturgy to continue... and out of this the sharing and questions emerge...(1) to (4) in 4:1 above.

4:3 Dr O’Dea gave a handout on the Scripture Reflection Process, as follows:

METHOD	DYNAMIC OF THE PROCESS
<p><i>Introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Call to mind God’s presence <p><i>First Movement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proclaim the Gospel ○ Invite: reflect silently on the word, phrase or image that strikes you from this Gospel (2 min) ○ Silence ○ Invite: name the word, phrase, or image <p><i>Second movement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proclaim Gospel again ○ Invite: reflect silently on what in your life or experience is being touched by the word, phrase, or image that struck you (5 min – may include some journaling*) ○ Silence ○ Invite: share what in your life or experience is being touched by the word, phrase or image that struck you. <p><i>Third movement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proclaim Gospel again ○ Invite: reflect silently on what this shared Word of God is moving you to do. ○ Silence – possibly further journaling ○ Invite: share what this shared Word of God is calling you to do. <p><i>Conclusion:</i></p> <p>Conclude with one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Psalm ○ Other scripture ○ Intercessions ○ Praise ○ Other...prayer 	<p>3-fold dynamic of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proclamation ○ Silent reflection ○ Sharing reflection <p>Dynamic of the Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Getting to know the words, phrases, images of the Scripture in its own language ○ God speaks to us at the heart of our human experience ○ When God speaks God’s Word, God awaits our response (Intro to Lectionary) <p>Dynamic of this form of Scripture Prayer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is <u>prayer</u> – not discussion. (It may lead to <i>later</i> discussion, exploration of topics arising**) ○ Responses are always in the first person ‘I’ ○ Silent reflection and sharing help to deepen our ‘hearing’ of God’s Word both personally and communally. ○ Used over a period of time, the reflection moments may include time for journaling, and such journaling may enable persons to notice their own spiritual journey <p><i>S.O’D for RCIA Network Conference, 2008</i></p> <p><i>*Note: could combine reflection with drawing/creative response as well as or instead of journaling response dependent on individual/group</i></p> <p><i>** after the concluding prayer, could then ask ‘Are there any questions that arising from the readings..</i></p> <p><i>Send people out to continue to reflect/digest..</i></p>

4:4 Questions that arise, following our engagement with this process (from the floor)

- Formation of Clergy for this
- Create a culture of Gospel reflection/reflection on the Word in the parish – eg...any groups or meetings to begin with this.. and get people used to the ‘repetition’ of the proclaimed Word
- **Dismissal** – surely this is the single most important challenge for us to get to grips with and do!?
- It is about *reflecting*

5: I Sheila O’Dea commented – on Dismissal and the Word of God as the basic way of initiation

- We are talking about re-discovery of all of this in RCIA
- It is only for very serious reasons that we do not ‘dismiss’
- We need to find the right language for dismissal – ‘feasting on the Word’ sending people out to continue to feast....
- Find ways – let the community experience the Word of God in this wayperhaps we have ‘Catholic problems’ here and have not stayed with it to explore its benefits before...
- We have been and become too casual in dismissing the dismissal! Because it is named as THE basic way of initiation – the primary time for community and catechumens to gather
- The catechesis comes from the Liturgy of the Word...

- The catechumens are not being 'kicked out' but being positively sent out for a deep experience of the Word...
- We need to get rid of the old idea of the Word being of secondary importance
- The Depth of the Word...
- We didn't grow up on it! It didn't have that important place...
- How can we help the community to experience the Word as primary formation for us all?
- What are we re-discovering? What have we let go of too easily?

5:2 Starting point is the LITURGY itself. The Proclaimed Word of God

- We feast on the Word.
- See *Introduction to the Lectionary*... the whole mystery of Christ unfolds during the course of the liturgical year....
- In response to the question about content, it is not constitutions and catechisms that help people to be formed...
- The whole mystery of Christ unfolds in the Liturgy
- Use the Liturgy of the Word, Sunday after Sunday.... Every week of the year...
- We all hear differently... people who knock on the door in September will not all be ready at Easter! Or if they knock on the door in May, are we there for them, or do we say 'Come back in September?'
- The Liturgical year is the 'programme' of formation – the Word proclaimed becomes our Text for working with people in the whole community as well as those on the initiation journey.
- It is the most profound and important content!
- And it unfolds every year, throughout our whole life
- We need that experience of the Liturgy of the Word in order for the mystery of Christ to unfold...
- It is always new... we hear it fresh today
- There is new meaning, new power....
- Living and active word
 - (see intro to Lectionary for all of above)
 - No programme is as good as 'What is God saying to us today?'
 - Christ is always present in the Word – real presence,.... But the question is asked 'is Christ really present in the Word...YES, Christ is really present in the Word and the Community as well as in the consecrated bread and wine.
 - There is no such thing as being 'a little bit present'... you either are or you are not.... So Christ is present in different ways, but one is not more present than the other...
 - We still don't 'grasp' this 'real presence'
 - We are adults – lets talk about it and don't let the head take over... take time to experience it, and then reflect 'is Christ present?'
- Introduction to the Lectionary – we are called to 'drink deeply from the *living* waters of the Word of God'
- The Church is built up and grows through experience of the Liturgy of the Word... wherever we are... at a party, at a football match, in a Queue, at home... so not just in a narrow sense...
- God speaks... and God awaits our response
- A real encouragement for us to listen – cos God is waiting, patiently, for our response, in the whole of our lives... how we live!
- Church teaching says that it is **in the proclaimed Word of God that the faith is passed on** to every generation... ie not in schools and lectures and courses...
- We are enriched by the Word.... Before we had our Liturgy other things became 'substitutes'
- We struggle...with what most of us have in our 'short memories' but the Church has a much longer memory... where it says the Word has the central place for passing on the faith.
- We use a 'schools' model – with topics, and classes, and content....because perhaps we don't really *trust* the Word.... Or perhaps simply because that is our only experience
- Introduction to the Lectionary is visionary 'the church has always honoured the Word and the Eucharist – with the same reverence'...
- We could name thousands of experiences were this has *not* been true for us... with massive altars and rickety lecterns... silver and gold vessels and throw-away missalettes... only 'special people' can be extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion but 'anyone' can read.

- So we haven't got this 'into our guts' yet...that the church is nourished at the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist (Intro to Lectionary 10)
- This 'Table' language... feasting on the Word, the Table of the Word, every Sunday... and we only do it with catechumens and candidates what we do with ourselves...So... As long as we don't do it with ourselves, we will resist doing it with catechumens and candidates.

Story: a young seminarian was doing group reflection on the Readings only because the parish had catechumens and candidates... and then asked the question: Why aren't we doing this more broadly... amongst ourselves in the parish. Groups were formed, and 15 years on, parish groups are still meeting, in their homes... it goes on and on....

What is in the RCIA is only there because the assumption is that we are doing it ourselves! They are becoming Body of Christ with us.

5:3 Feasting on the Word has 4 central actions:

- **PROCLAIM** – use the GIFTS among the people. Challenges us to think... do we have the gift to proclaim?
- **LISTEN** – we are slowly growing in our ability to listen. Something that perhaps you find more in a Children's Liturgy of the Word... (an 8 yr old having 'moved up' into the adult celebration commented 'he's not making any sense', because she had learned to *listen* in the Children's Liturgy of the Word)
- **RECEIVE** –receiving the Word into our hearts and lives....
- **RESPOND** – within the Liturgy..but in our whole lives.

And in all of the above actions, a lot of silence is called for... more than a little pause...time to really be silence... and a silence has to be led... so lead people into it... we need to take time... nobody moves, no action... sit in silence and reflect.

Dismissal comes out of this context of celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.



5:4 Issue of Baptised Candidates in this context (ie dismissal)?

- Some can be dismissed (see RCIA Chapter 4 on Uncatechised adults and RCIA Chapter 5 on Reception of Baptised Christians)
- 'Catechesis' is not 'did they go to a Catholic school?' or ' they have been sitting in the pew for 25 years' but '**Did this baptized person grow as a follower of Christ?** And '**What might this baptized person need?**' and with careful discernment along these lines (Ch 4 for insights), we can then say, Yes, we are respecting their Baptism.
- People are *not* looking to 'get done' – and they can see the purpose and wisdom of dismissal as a very positive experience... we see these people growing and changing.
- Yes, it is easy to ignore 'dismissal' and give all sorts of reason why not to dismiss. It takes courage to start... but people's experience of it is very good. So be discerning, especially with candidates.

5:5 If feasting at the Table of the Word is a CORE activity, other meetings are 'extra'.

- Open your 'dismissal' up to visiting catechumens from other places/parishes who may be on holiday in your area...call them all forward with your own candidates and catechumens. One visiting New York catechumen's parish started dismissal as a result of such an invitation made to that catechumen whilst on holiday in the Bahamas! He was blown away by the experience and brought it back to his parish.
- So always be ready to dismiss: 'Are there any catechumens here?'
- Some parishes **use Ministers of the Word, trained them by doing the process**, and then used them on a rota to lead the dismissal Liturgy of the Word with catechumens and candidates. After Mass, everyone joined the dismissal group ... this little parish came up with a way to work it because they believed in it!

5:6 Parish Priest's main ministry is preaching/breaking the Word, and presiding.

6.1 How can we rediscover/rethink the Liturgy of the Word as central to our process?

- **Intimate connection between catechesis and liturgy** – see this in particular in the proclaimed word of God, in the Sunday Liturgy, through the whole liturgical year.
- **RCIA = apprenticeship in a way of living including the gathering for Liturgy** – Liturgy is the privileged place of catechesis.

6.2 RCIA 75: 1, 3, & 4 describing the period of the catechumenate

- Extended period, suitable pastoral formation and guidance
- Aim: training them in the Christian life - Brought to maturity – in 4 ways:

1. Gradual and complete, suitable catechesis, according to liturgical year, solidly supported by celebrations of the Word, Appropriate acquaintance with dogmas..A profound sense of mystery...

3. Suitable liturgical rites...Purified little by little... strengthened....

4. Learn how to work actively with others.. witness...

Sheila O'Dea quoted John Moriarty 'Dreamtime'.....Concluding line.... 'my educated European head is in trouble'.

6:3 RCIA 75 1 & 3 speak of formation in a way of life, illustrating the intimate connection between liturgy and catechesis.

What is Catechesis? Eg... in Church teaching...

- Intimate knowledge of Christ and his Church... (RCIA)
- a moment in evangelization....(General Directory for Catechesis (GDC))
- Constantly and faithfully the Living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ, whom God has sent for all (RCIA 36)
- Echoing of God's word (GDC)
- Sowing the Word of God (GDC)
- Humanity impregnated by the Word of God (John Paul II)
- Intrinsically bound to liturgy (GDC)
- Whole mystery of Christ unfolds during the liturgical year (GDC and RCIA)
- Definitive aim = communion with Christ (GDC)

6:4 RCIA 75 speaks of 'complete' – how? What?

- **In the Liturgical year!** That is the only way, and its not about 'arrival' but every year unfolding.
- **Liturgy is an action of Christ and the Body of Christ...** not just text, scripture, Word, ...but so much more... 90% of human communication is non-verbal.
- In times past, 'Father... 'read' or 'said' or 'had' Mass. It was something the priest 'did'.
But the community celebrates Eucharist, the community baptizes, the community confirms.
- **Community with Christ** , and within the community we have particular ministries.. and these particular ministries never replace the community but support them in their action.
- **Liturgy is primary theology** – it always celebrates the Paschal Mystery and our participation in it, and this mystery shapes our identity and belief, and is always transformative, and out of this comes the rest of sacramental theology....
- Liturgy nourishes us for life in the world... transforms us...
- It is not the Liturgy that is the problem – it is the way we do it! We worry about words and leave out peace, and we malnourish people.
- Liturgy is the privileged place for catechesis – it is who and how we are to be in intimate relationship with Christ
- Liturgy is the source and summit – we bring everything about ourselves and our lives to the Liturgy, and bring Liturgy back into our lives.
- The priest fulfils the essential role to preside and to preach... when Presider doesn't preach well, or the Minister of the Word doesn't proclaim well, then the catechist has a hard time!
- Liturgy sends us to be Body of Christ in the world – to mission - so not 'to do things well inside these 4 walls' – but to send out to be Christ in the world.
- The aims of our liturgy and catechesis are intimate relationship with Christ/communion with Christ.
- Liturgy makes it possible for us to live and proclaim the reign of God, the mission of Christ (Luke 4:16-21)

7.1 Discipleship – in the midst of our ordinary lives, wherever that is. We are formed by the community with whom we relate.

7.2 It is apprenticeship into a way of living... not ‘talking about it’, but introducing the catechumen or candidate into the faith and life of the community. Eg... people won’t ‘understand’ justice... unless they are being brought along on the visits to the sick, or the project for the homeless... can’t just talk about it, but need to ‘do’ it for a few weeks, and then come back and talk about the experience... it will change us!

7.3 Apprenticeship..... in a way of life.... 4 ways

- **Proclaimed Word in Sunday worship, and catechesis ...**
- **Apostolic mission... Christ in the World**
- **Worship/praise/prayer....**
- **Community daily living... ordinary life...**

7:4 Community mentors people in these 4 ways, like 4 pillars... and we need all 4.

- We often see a massive pillar round catechesis...and other pillars can be missing.
- Apostolic mission, for example... not ‘ministry in the parish’ – we don’t baptize in order that people might ‘minister in the parish’ – it is living the Christian life out in the world.
- Question for the newly baptized: what difference does this make to your life?
- The 4 pillars need at least a whole liturgical year...
- We don’t apprentice people into ‘Tuesday Night Group Meeting’
- The ‘Mentoring Community’ – part of our task is enabling the whole community to mentor our threshold companions.

7:5 We allow for true mystagogy... no ‘lectures’ to teach the sacraments will work... the mystery must be celebrated and experienced... then reflected upon and lived....

- Story: Nellie *experienced* baptism – and *then* she knew what baptism was!

We allow for true mystagogy...after works of charity/ ‘corporal works of mercy’..... after purification and enlightenment... we know our guilt... we recognize our call to purification and enlightenment that is life long....

7:6 RCIA is a sacramental process... not just the Liturgy... it happens before, during and after Liturgy .

- Shows us who we are as Church – how to be the baptized people of God
- How to do Liturgy
- How to catechize
- How to mission
- Godfrey Diekman: What if the bread and wine changes and we don’t?
- JPII: Millions of RC’s receive the Body of Christ every Sunday. Why has so little changed?
- Farmer’s son, Sam: What get changed? Sam gets changed!

7:7 Ponder, explore, what do you bring home? Why are we doing this? How do we grow?

Responses:

- renew the vision
- authentic witness of Christ????
- Apprenticeship – learn by doing
- Community as catechist – do we believe it? Do we allow it to be true?
- Catechumen teaches us..(eg story of catechumen working in soup kitchen)
- Mentors *are* in our communities – find them as sponsors
- Tensions: formation/information... a struggle
- What they *need* to know... rather than what they are asking!
- Programmes/topics – not always what they want or need to know
- Do we make up our minds what they need to know... and worry about that? Even when we ourselves are not eg praying that way?
- Not ‘Do they know everything’ ... catechesis doesn’t mean stuffing people full of information – it’s about developing that personal relationship with Christ...

- Everything we believe is celebrated in the course of the liturgical year.
- **See Bishop's questions at the Rite of Election (RCIA 118)**... are they sincere in their desire.. have they listened to the Word of Christ and endeavoured to follow his commands... have they shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined with them in prayer...begun to walk in God's presence....? These are the bigger questions!
- Basic tenets: what are they? All will unfold in the liturgical year. Eg...
 - Incarnation – Christmas seasons
 - Resurrection – Easter
 - Trinity – every time we make the sign of the cross is the opportunity....
 - Sunday after Sunday after Sunday.....

Poem final line... 'those born here are holy'.....

We celebrated Eucharist together, Feast of St Thomas, with readings proclaimed 3 times and reflection in pairs and table groups in the Liturgy of the Word.

Evening Session:

8:0 Mystagogy on the Experience of the Eucharist

8:1 Q: Experience?

- Awareness/noticing other people... supporting one another
- Timelessness
- Women/men
- Felt invigorating/life giving
- Power of the silence
- Power of hearing the Word three times
- People crowding round the chalice during distribution... he really is in the middle of us....
- 'Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe'... and end of Mass blessing – connecting...
- Heard the Word together.... Raised longing to receive eucharist
- Just as the Father sent me... I send you... looking round everyone... we are sent... have I discovered what I have been sent to do?
- Wonderful atmosphere... contrast of radio on somewhere outside the room... not distracting.. added to prayer
- Aware of generations before us in this place (old Convent chapel)
- Room set out – tables round the edge.... And then central focus Table of Word and Table of Eucharist... movement..... to gather round
- Sensitive to what was happening with the music... everyone sensitive....
- 'what if the bread and wine change and I do not change.....' drawn deeply into this question again

Liturgy.... Experienced as primary theology....

8:2 The Ministers:

Q: Did the Liturgy say anything about Ministry in the Liturgy?

- Ministry of environment making it possible for us to enter the space.
- Well planned, well prepared
- Facilitators of the prayer of the community – enabling us (presider, cantor, proclaimers of the Word) enabled us to pray, sing, hear with new ears.
- Shift in practice... Eucharistic ministers came to and among the community
- Giving us broad sketch of the liturgy at the beginning... no surprises was good – what to expect
- Ministry to one another at the Table....
- Aware that people exercising ministry may have felt 'separated' or left out (eg music)

8:3 Q: What did Liturgy say about the Tables of Word and Eucharist?

(ie 'This is what I experienced and this said.... X to me')

- Often Word can feel passive – but today... being FED... was active, and participation in that.
- Role of assembly in Liturgy of the Word was much more obvious than Liturgy of the Eucharist... felt there was an imbalance in action of the Assembly at the two tables
- Reverencing table of the Word
- Coming forward in table group, carrying forward the candle from the Liturgy of the Word to the Table of the Eucharist...made lovely connection
- Quality of 2 tables... (1) Minister of the Word held the Book(the proclaimed Word) and (2) Presider held bread and wine...
- Felt more nourished at the Table of the Word (note: SO'D: our positive experience of the Table of the Word is so rare that perhaps one *feels* it more when the experience is good)
- Expectation that everyone would receive Communion....

8:4 Q: What did the Liturgy say about God?

- Generosity of God
- 'He greeted them'
- 'in the middle of the Group'
- Christ is always offering himself to us... the invitation is always there...
- 1st reading – dwelling place of God... as we gathered, powerful image of Tent of meeting' – this is where God dwells
- Humility of God – surrounded by us... Ghandhi: 'When you are in the humblest hovel, remember God was there before you'

8:5 Q: From the Experience... we shift to a third level....

Things to wonder about, question, what is arising?.....

- Can we do it? Yes. Why would we want to? Reflection is private normally... unless it is shared
- HOW can we do that in Church? Tryit!
- Inclusive. But in the parish we are often exclusive....
- Example of Priests – Chrism Mass –in one Diocese, it was not promise to commitment – but everyone present invited to raise hands over priests who knelt and were blessed... very positive reaction from the priests... 'I haven't been blessed since I was ordained'.
- What are the kinds of things we can do to draw people into the action?
- Key question: Who is the community? Different members,... How we include people? Awareness...
- How many of us watched one another as we received... watch the community? We are still struggling with 'my communion' 'my Jesus' 'private moment' – but the ACTION at holy communion is eating and drinking together! And we are eating and drinking together to become the Body of Christ ... different parts making up body together.... And singing a refrain that keeps us connected with the action!

Day Three: Friday 4th July – Final Morning.

9.0 Sheila led us in a mystagogy of the experience of the Conference. The following was the feedback...

9:1 Insights

- a. Through experience, the 'doing', we are transformed
- b. Must must must read, study, pray with the Rite itself
- c. Its messy, so many different ways, and views, to hold together.... In communion,... but trust that this is God's gift, God's grace at work
- d. Scripture and prayer and joy and awareness need to be at the heart of the process
- e. Community is the initiating power
- f. Unless the WORD is the source of initiation, 'initiation' will simply be 'what we think you need to know'... Word forms us as disciples... Word is gradual and complete...

9:2 How were you supported/encouraged?

- g. By the Word and the way in which it was proclaimed

- h. By the music and prayer
- i. By the friendliness of the exec and the laughter
- j. Friendship
- k. The mystagogy sessions
- l. The 'table companionship' of the groups in café style setting
- m. Environment – sensitively arranged
- n. Sheila's input and encouragement... vision re-affirmed
- o. RCIA as way of life, body of Christ, being transformed into Body of Christ
- p. Word: 'I wont believe unless I do this' from the Gospel... in the doing, the experience, we are converted...

9:3 Challenged?

- q. The messiness of it!
- r. The need to share the vision again
- s. Is the Word 'reverenced' and seen as 'Table' to feast from? How can it become more so? The need to really work on this.

9:4 Disturbed?

- t. Lack of formation and vision... content driven negative response to RCIA and community basis for process.
- u. Difference – people who see things differently
- v. Power/control struggles – who is 'in charge'?
- w. Lack of humility
- x. Lack of 'Christ-centred' approach

9:5 What do we want from our enquirers, catechumens, candidates?

Through RCIA... to come/be/show us what communion with Christ looks like and feels like... to share life in Christ.

9:6 What do you want to bring home?

- y. Sheila!
- z. Fire, enthusiasm
- aa. It is Possible!
- bb. Keep going – 'Stand , O Stand Firm and see what the Lord can do.!'

9:7 The Table groups finished with thanksgiving prayer for the time they had spent together... and then after coffee moved into North/South Area tables, (the Middlesbrough Diocese being the largest single diocesan group met mostly at one table!)

North South Groups (no large group feedback on this session)

- One thing you would like to do this year
- First Step
- What would you need?
- Obstacles
- Supports/Resources

**Closing Liturgy:
Let us go rejoicing (1996, Bob Hurd)**

Word: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13. (proclaimed 3 times)

I, prisoner of the Lord, bid you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to measure of the full stature of Christ'.

Reflection: sharing on tables...

Stand O Stand Firm (Cameroon, arr John Bell, 1990 Wild Goose)
Lord's prayer

Blessing

CLDollard
August 2008