

Introducing the Newsletter

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One could say that the **RCIA NETWORK** of England and Wales has been in existence since 1989 when a group of RCIA practitioners wrote out a blueprint for future work. This was:-

- To critically analyse experience of the RCIA at diocesan and parish level.
- To identify and confront the key issues in the RCIA.
- To look afresh at the relationship of the RCIA to the ongoing change in the Church and in the wider context of society in England and Wales.
- To focus on methods and approaches for the development of the RCIA.

The purpose of this newsletter is to encourage more effective networking. We hope particularly that it will act as a bridge between the perceived ‘experts’ and catechists working within parishes.

It will also enable the sharing of resources, ideas etc.

The RCIA NETWORK Newsletter will be produced twice-yearly. This one includes reports from the ‘Exploring the Possibilities’ days together with the handouts which were given out at those days. I encourage you to respond to the various requests that you will find; this will enhance the idea of the Network.

I also invite you to consider whether you or someone you know would like to be nominated to join the Executive. You may think that this will be a chore, but I can assure you that our meetings are interesting, fun and much is achieved in a reasonable amount of time. Please consider joining us.

JUDY MAKIN
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

‘Exploring the Possibilities’

RCIA & Irregular Unions

At the three Network days this autumn, Paul Robbins of the Liverpool Marriage Tribunal, and Fr John Arnold from Westminster, led sessions about Irregular Unions. These had been asked for as being among the commonest, and often the most difficult of the pastoral situations that can arise when people approach the Church with a view to becoming Catholics or renewing their dormant practice of Catholicism.

Both speakers stressed the importance of taking a sensitive approach. This must be based on a clear understanding of the Church’s teaching (taken from the words of Jesus in scripture) that a valid marriage cannot be dissolved. The Church’s teaching is expressed in Canon Law, but also in many other documents; the teaching in *Gaudium et Spes* on the importance of conscience was particularly cited, as were many statements about the need for pastoral care and handling.

The steps, which can be followed when someone approaches the Church already involved in a second marriage – their or their spouse’s – are outlined on the flow-chart enclosed. The three key points from it may be

summarised as:

- 1) Establish if the present union can be regularized – normally by determining that previous unions were not in fact valid marriages; there are various possible ways of looking at this.
- 2) Establish if an ‘internal forum’ solution is possible and appropriate (due attention being given to reducing the possibility of giving scandal).
- 3) Help the couple to make an informed decision about what is and is not possible.

A helpful practical point was made during the sessions – that it is important that all involved in RCIA groups should have a clear agreement about whose responsibility it is to look into these questions; and that this should be done early in the time-scale.

If you would like further information please contact the Editor.

URSULA LEAHY

Man has in his
 heart a law
 inscribed by
 God

(Gaudium et Spes 16)

Children of Catechetical Age - RCIC

Background :

Where coming from

During the Network Conference of 2004, a small group of Network members emerged from the "post-it" sessions who met together to address the increasing occurrence of children aged 6/7+ in their parishes who were coming forward, either with their parents or from their own initiative, requesting Baptism. They shared

- experiences, understanding of the Rite for children, resources and areas of concern;
- that this particular section of the Rite is seemingly not widely known or conveniently overlooked;
- that there is a lack of resources, especially English, as opposed to American.

This group eventually met in April 2005 for a day to explore further what had begun in Leeds. The result was a resource list, a commitment to "spread the word" and to aim for producing a set of guidelines. Two members of this group, Elizabeth Anderson and Linda Pennington were then approached by the Network Executive to produce a presentation on the subject at this year's set of days. What follows is a summary of that presentation.

Looking at the Rite

Paras 242-306, English Study Edition, read in context with the whole RCIA)

a. Who is it for? (§242)

Christian initiation, in the form of the RCIA, is intended for children, not baptised as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age, are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith, at the direction of their parents or on their own initiative. Whatever their starting point we must remember that they cannot be treated as adults. So, how we catechise these children very much depends on each child and each pastoral situation. It may be possible to incorporate them with other Catholic children, such as R.E. Groups for children in non-Catholic schools, so that they have a community experience of faith, as well as help, example and support from their parents. (§244 & 245)

b. The Process & Timings of the Steps of Initiation (§243; 246-284)

Just as with adults, initiation is a process, extended over several years if needed before they receive the sacraments and is marked by several steps.

The general recommendation is that the Rites are celebrated with a small congregation of family, friends and a representative number of the parish community (§247). Experience from the group, however, shows that, on the whole, children enjoy and sometimes relish being involved in large celebrations, particularly the

Rite of Election. The watch-word is "adapt", do what is appropriate for the group.

- *Liturgical rites of acceptance into the order of catechumens (§250, 251)*
The recommendation is that this rite takes place outside the celebration of the Eucharist.

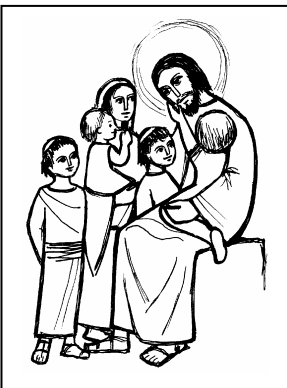
(An interesting "omission" in the English Edition is that there is no mention of an adaptation of the Rite of Election, whereas there is in the American edition....)

- *Penitential rites or scrutinies (§267-270)*
As with adults, these should be celebrated during Lent, if initiation is to be celebrated at Easter; if not at the most suitable time, and adapted to benefit those who are not catechumens. They may also coincide with the first celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation: an interesting aspect in the planning and provision of First Reconciliation.
- *Celebration of the sacraments of initiation. (§280-284)*
If possible, initiation involving all three sacraments should take place at the Easter Vigil or a Sunday. This is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the Rite for children: explaining to a parish community how a child is being confirmed at a much younger age than a baptised Catholic teenager. §246, states that the "candidates should, if possible, come to the sacraments of initiation at the time that their baptised companions are to receive Confirmation or Eucharist".
- *Mystagogy §306*
Again, as with adults, provision should be made for a period of post-baptismal Catechesis, adapting the guidelines made in §234-241.

c. Conclusion

Attempting to implement the Rite can be viewed either daunting or challenging! Daunting in that it can seem there are too many choices in how to implement the Rite; can put into question already established practices of sacramental preparation of Catholic children baptised as infants; challenging in that we may find ourselves having to explain to a parish community how and why children are being Confirmed at an age younger than that of Catholic children baptised as infants. The Rite by encouraging us to adapt can also give the impression that it lacks direction and something concrete to follow. As ever, resources are seemingly in short supply. We must remember that the RCIA is normative and so is the section addressing children of catechetical age.

Do not keep the children from me

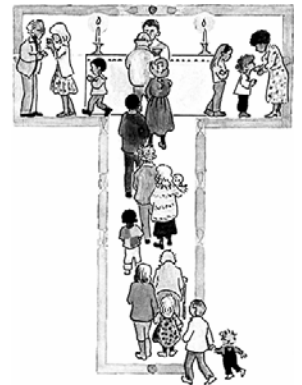


Where next?

The group of Network members wish to continue collating experience, resources, practice and hope to enable networking among practitioners who are having to address the initiation of children of catechetical age. If you would like to know of any resources, wish to receive a copy of the current resource list or contribute in any way to this conversation, please contact me.

Finally, news of progress in the right direction. Bishop Alan Hopes, Chair of the Liturgy Committee of the Department of Christian Life and Worship, has agreed that a working party be set up with the remit of producing a set of guidelines on initiating children of catechetical age. Please pray for a fruitful outcome.

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Summary from the three days of 'Exploring the Possibilities'

Participants from all three days found the two input sessions and handouts very useful: It was "good to have a couple of issues to get our teeth into". The opportunity to meet other practitioners and to share, listen, discuss and reflect was highly valued. The existence and work of the RCIA Network was acknowledged as important and the recommendation was that it should be advertised at parish level. "Knowing that there is life or people alive to the potential of RCIA" was seen as crucial as was the need to encourage greater ownership of RCIA at parish, deanery and diocesan level. In the future it was suggested that there

should be more opportunity, at Network gatherings, for people to meet in small groups and exchange good practice. Input would be welcomed on how to attract enquirers, on prayer and liturgy, on training, formation and commissioning of catechists, on the Mystagogy period and on resources. A number of participants asked for further regional one-day events but an equal number preferred a 2/3 day conference. The overall feeling at each event was that people enjoyed the venues, friendship, support, prayer times and food!

LINDA PENNINGTON

"It was good to have a couple of issues to get our teeth into"

Making the Connection: RCIA and Evangelisation

Written by

Clare Ward of CASE



Representatives from the RCIA Network Executive and the recently launched national evangelisation agency met in June for an innovative exchange of ideas and resources.

The Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE) was officially launched just over a year ago by the Bishops of England and Wales to support, resource and equip the Church in the urgent task of evangelisation. The five strong team is headed by Mgr. Keith Bartrop who is a former rector of Allen Hall Seminary.

A significant part of the Agency's work is to run the long established Catholic Enquiry Office which offers free advice and information to non-Catholic enquirers. The Office currently deals with around 80 email enquirers monthly and peaks at nearly 14,000 unique web visitors monthly.

The purpose of the meeting with the RCIA Network Executive was to begin to explore ways in which the two constituencies could work together and share resources. A number of promising ideas, including the offering of evangelisation training and formation days for RCIA Network members, will be pursued after the September Network meetings.

In the meantime, CASE resources can be accessed from: www.caseresources.org.uk. Their website for non-Catholics is found at: www.life4seekers.co.uk.

Alternatively please email info@caseresources.org.uk.

CLARE WARD



RCIA Network – The Future

EDITED BY

Fr Allen Morris, Liturgy Office, Member of RCIA Network Executive

One of the things that the RCIA Network can be justifiably proud of is the work done by what I have termed the 'Kiddy Kat' working group. This is the group of members who enthused by a discussion at Leeds in 2004 went away and did work on the issue of the initiation of children of catechetical age. The first fruits of that work was presented at the Regional meetings this autumn. It has also been taken up by the Bishops' Conference Liturgy Committee who will be setting up an official working party to develop a brief document, along the lines of *Liturgy of the Word with Children: Guidelines* to be issued for encouraging best practice in Dioceses.

There are many other topics that would benefit from such attention. These are some of those mentioned raised by Network members at the Autumn meetings.

- First Evangelisation: the challenges and opportunities
- Exploring the models of initiation presently in use
- Retreat experiences and RCIA
- Faith and Culture
- RCIA and Travellers
- Developing an evaluative resources list



Would you be interested in joining a small group to look at one of these? Are there other ideas you'd like to put forward? If so please contact me. I've volunteered, not to lead a group or even organise it, but simply to help members interested in working on a topic get in touch with one another, and being the liaison point for that group to the Executive.

So, if anything grabs your attention, please email me at [morrissa@cbcew.org.uk](mailto:morrisa@cbcew.org.uk)

Notes from the Newsletter Editor

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This is the first Newsletter, which, I hope, meets with your approval. It, together with the enclosures, has reached you by 'snail mail'. Future issues will be delivered by E-mail, so please help us to keep our records by completing the enclosed blue sheet entitled **Members Information** and returning it to me by the end of November. Please note it has two sides! Those who attended the September Region days will have completed one already.

If you do not have email, then we will send you your newsletter by post.

The second reason for us requesting this information is that a Directory of members of the RCIA Network is being compiled. Eventually it is hoped to place this on a Website.

Please let me know of anyone who may be interested in receiving this newsletter since it is hoped that this and future issues will act as a 'bridge' between Diocesan workers and Parishioners who are interested and work within the RCIA.

This Newsletter belongs to you!

If you have information of articles, videos etc or if you have been working in a way within the RCIA which has been found useful, please do not hesitate to write an article and send it to me for inclusion in the Newsletter. (in Word if e-mailing).

RCIA CONFERENCE 2006

DISCERNMENT IN THE RCIA

With

Philip Sheldrake and Susie Hayward

Wed 6th to Fri 8th September 2006

At

Digby Stuart College,
Roehampton University, London SW15 5PU

NB. The proposed extra day, Sat 9th Sept has been cancelled.

The next RCIA Network Newsletter will be published in April 2006