

April 2006

KEEPING YOU UP TO DATE

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Keeping you up to Date

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On behalf of the Executive I hope that you all had a happy and restful Easter, with many wonderful celebrations!

The Members Directory is growing nicely and it is not long before the updated database will be emailed to members. Should you know of anyone who wishes to be added to this directory please go to the Network website and download a form, ask them to complete this and send it to Fr. Allen Morris on Allen.Morris@CBCEW.Org.uk.

RCIA Network Website

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Our first issue of the Newsletter seems to have been well received and most successful.

In this issue are articles in relation to discernment within the RCIA, since this is the topic requested for the Network conference this year.

I would encourage you to make this newsletter your own by offering suggestions for articles, writing articles yourself or commenting on articles etc to me. Perhaps we could develop a 'letters' section.

Discernment in the RCIA

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The RCIA Network Website can be found on www.rcia.org.uk. We have Martin Foster to thank for its design, he has also agreed to keep it up to date for us. Do take a look and let us know what you think of it so far. It has many connections which you will find useful.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Conference in September.

The Gift of Scripture

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JUDY MAKIN
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

*RCIA Network Conference
2006*

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RCIA Network Website

The RCIA Network now has a website so why not point your browser towards - www.rcia.org.uk The website is quite simple and includes 4 areas of information:

might be useful to other people - send it in or if you have found some other good websites out there - send the details in. If you are responsible for website - please add a link to www.rcia.org.uk



- [Events](#) - Conferences & Day meetings organised by the Network.
- [Newsletter](#) - reports on events, working groups and other news.
- [Resources](#) - some links to what is available.
- [About Us](#) - further information about the Network.

Send any comments, thoughts, ideas or contributions to **Martin Foster** - webmaster@rcia.org.uk

MARTIN FOSTER

A website is as good as the information that it contains so if you have some material that you have developed that

Assistant Secretary
Liturgy Office, Department for Christian
Life and Worship Catholic Bishops'
Conference of England and Wales

Discernment in the RCIA

A number of RCIA catechists speak of catechumens and candidates who participate enthusiastically in the parish Journey in Faith meetings, in the Rite of Election and in the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, but who soon after Easter stop coming to the Sunday Eucharist and lose their connection with the parish. One such story comes from a catechist in the Leeds diocese. He speaks of a candidate engaged in the parish RCIA process:

He "was very keen; he kept talking of his 'feelings' and how he couldn't wait to be fully received into the Church. He was so positive. I discerned that in some ways he was enthusiastic, which is good, but I also felt he was relying on his 'feelings' too much. There was not enough depth to his faith. However the RCIA wheels were turning! It was as if nothing could stop them...he wanted to come in. Who was I to stand in his way? He came in with great noise and acclamation; he came to Sunday mass for a few months and then stopped altogether. I asked him why and he didn't know the answer. I never see him now, but wonder what we did wrong, if anything."

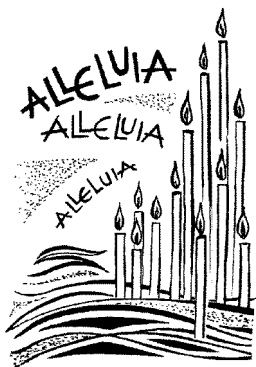
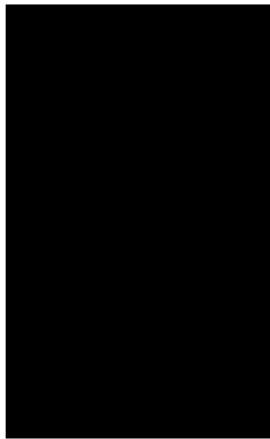
This story highlights the dilemma for many parish RCIA groups. On the one hand there is a candidate who is an active member of the group, who is keen to be initiated into the Church and who has already journeyed some way along the RCIA process. At the same time the catechist has some misgivings because he discerns that the candidate is focussing too much on his own feelings and emotional response to the preparation process and not enough on his response in faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. In addition the catechist speaks of the 'RCIA wheels' already turning as if it is now too late to discuss with this candidate his readiness for initiation. The misgivings of the catechist prove to be justified as the neophyte soon abandons all involvement in the parish and yet cannot say why.

This may be a familiar scenario to many catechists who may wonder how such situations could be avoided or managed differently. The Rites themselves offer guidance on discernment especially at two particular points in the process.

The first point of discernment is during the period of evangelisation and pre-catechumenate and before acceptance into the order of catechumens. The RCIA states that "before the rite (of acceptance) is celebrated sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions. With the help of the sponsors, catechists, and deacons, parish priests have the responsibility for judging the outward indications of such dispositions." (RCIA 43)

The second point of discernment is during the period of the catechumenate and before the Rite of Election. The Rites state that "before the rite of election the bishop, priests, deacons, catechists, god-parents, and the entire community, in accord with their respective responsibilities and in their own way, should, after considering the matter carefully, arrive at a judgement about the catechumens' state of formation and progress" (RCIA 108). The Rites further state that "to exclude any semblance of mere formality from the rite (of election), there should be a deliberation prior to its celebration to decide on the catechumens' suitability. This deliberation is carried out by the priests, deacons and catechists involved in the formation of the catechumens, and by the godparents and representatives of the local community. If circumstances suggest the group of catechumens may also take part. (RCIA 109)

The RCIA clearly states that two times of discernment should take place for each enquirer/catechumen/candidate to see if they are ready to move to the next step of the journey and that the process of discernment should be collaborative, involving all who have been involved in their formation. The RCIA also points out that 'sufficient and necessary time' should be given to this process, highlighting that there should be no rush to move catechumens/candidates along the process if they are not ready. "The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough – several years if necessary – for the



conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong" (RCIA 76).

These statements on discernment from the Rites can offer guidance for all who are involved in supporting and forming those who seek initiation into the Church.

- In your parish how do you discern or evaluate when an enquirer, candidate or catechumen is ready to move to the next period or step of the RCIA?

- Who is involved in the discernment process?
- How is the enquirer/candidate/ catechumen involved in the discernment process?

LINDA PENNINGTON

Member of the RCIA Network Executive

The Gift of Scripture

In his letter written at the end of the Millennium Year Pope John Paul wrote approvingly of how catechesis is 'drawing new life from attentiveness to the word of God.' (*Novo millenni Ineunte* 39). The importance of enabling personal encounter with the living word is all the more important in our time because of the way that contact with the Christian tradition has been lost by so many.

To promote a fuller valuing of the Scriptures, and to encourage greater use to be made of the Scriptures in building up the Christian community, the Bishops of England and Wales have recently published a teaching document, *The Gift of Scripture*. It is short and easy to read, and might be a suitable thing to give to catechists to inform their work and to give to catechumens and candidates so that they might better understand and appreciate the Scriptures and their honoured place in the Church. It is available from CTS, price £3.95 (www.cts-online.org.uk)

Over recent years Lectionary based catechesis has found a secure home in many parishes, as a way of structuring a catechumenal programme – firmly basing it on the Sunday Lectionary – without constraining the initiation processes in the way that firmly thematic approaches quite commonly will do. A process of formation which makes use of the Christocentric shape of the Liturgical Year and of the Sunday Lectionary has great advantages in ensuring that the formation offered to catechumens meets the requirements of the Church:

(A catechesis) planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. (A catechesis which) 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. (RCIA 75)

However a good lectionary based catechesis is time consuming. Those groups which base a weekday evening session on the Sunday readings not uncommonly find they are able to engage only with one reading, or even only with the readings and not adequately explore the various issues of belief and faithful living that they raise.

The practice of Sunday dismissal is one solution to this problem. It remains a solution which unfortunately remains much neglected in England and Wales. Yet the dismissal of catechumens and candidates after the homily on a Sunday, to continue their reflection on the scriptures is a most effective way of providing time and space for drawing deep nourishment from the word of God itself, and at the same time helping to free up time in the other weekly catechumenal meeting to explore in greater depth the issues raised.

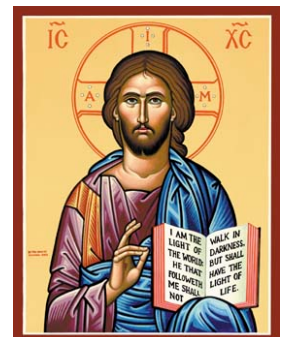
Sunday dismissal catechesis **and** a mid-week session. It seems to me a clear case of where both/and is much to be preferred than either/or.

Oh, by the way, a wealth of resources to assist with reading and applying *The Gift of Scripture*, and with the worthy celebration of the Liturgy of the Word can be downloaded from <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturgy/Resources/Scripture/index.html>

FR ALLEN MORRIS
National Liturgy Office
Member of RCIA Network Executive

'You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.'

Acts 1:8



'DISCERNING COMMUNITIES'



The Spiritual Journey of the RCIA

With

Susie and Philip Sheldrake

Wednesday 6th – Friday, 8th September 2006

Starting with lunch 12.30 on Wednesday and finishing before lunch on Friday.

At

*Digby Stuart College, Roehampton University
Roehampton Lane, London, SW15 5PH*

Cost: £185.00

Further booking forms to be found on www.rcia.org.uk

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As you already know, the RCIA Network conference this year is on discernment within the RCIA. Your Executive has spent some time in preparation already in that there have been long fruitful conversations with Susie Sheldrake. Susie and Philip have a wealth of experience and expertise in the field of 'Spirituality'.

Together with Susie it was decided that the focus of the three days would be on reflective listening and making choices in order to ascertain the skills which are required when accompanying someone in their response to their conversion experience. In other words,

helping people to offer an account of what it is to be spiritual

Hopefully these words will be a taster for you of the good food that is to come at the conference itself where Susie and Philip will help us explore, through a process of discernment, the Spiritual Journey of the RCIA.

Alongside this newsletter comes the booking form for the conference this. Please send your cheque and booking form to Fr. Allen Morris, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PL; Or E-mail: Allen.Morris@CBCEW.Org.uk

The next RCIA Network Newsletter will be published in November 2006