

RCIA Network of England & Wales

NEWSLETTER
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Discerning Communities Notes from the RCIA Network Conference 2006

As we prepare to meet inquirers what is uppermost in our minds?

The bi-annual RCIA National Network Conference gathered last September. The conference took place at Roehampton University and input came from Philip and Susie Sheldrake. Philip was formerly a Jesuit involved in a variety of fields of work, including spiritual direction. Susie is a lawyer and a psychologist. The theme of the conference 'Discerning Communities' was rather intriguing. For those of you involved in RCIA, just ask yourselves, who discerns the way forward with inquirers? How is serious discernment built into our RCIA process? And for all of us, how do we discern, in light of the gospel and teaching of the church what God might be asking of us – at home, at work, in our parishes, our schools?

Listening with the ear of your heart

Our first input came from Susie on the theme of reflective listening, beginning with five questions:

- *Why is listening important?*
- *How do we learn to be listening people?*
- *What are the 'key values' for listeners?*
- *Can we develop a spirituality of listening?*
- *How do we become reflective listeners?*

Through these themes, Susie really challenged our RCIA practice. In RCIA, our key skill is listening and the listening Catechist or Sponsor encourages the enquirer or catechumen to listen reflectively also. Susie went on to suggest that listening needs to become for us a strategy for life – we need to develop a culture of listening – and furthermore, that listening is perhaps one of the most tangible forms of healing

Susie quoted Herman Hesse in Siddartha – "Vasudeva listened with great attention; he heard all about his [Siddartha's] origin and childhood, about his studies, about his seekings, his pleasures and needs. It was one of the ferryman's greatest virtues that, like few people, he knew how to listen. Without saying a word, the speaker felt that Vasudeva took in every word, quietly, expectantly, that he missed nothing. He did not await anything with impatience and gave neither praise nor blame – he only listened. Siddartha felt how wonderful it was to have such a listener who could be absorbed in his own life, his own strivings, his own sorrows."

This led us into reflection on our own practice and experience. We shared a time when we felt

that we had been really listened to. When it came to looking at our own practice of RCIA, our key questions became

- *Is our RCIA based on a culture of listening or a culture of teaching?*
- *Does our preparation focus on how to create a listening space or the input we need to give?*
- *How might we do both?*

The questions are worth checking with our own RCIA catechists in our parishes. How does this ask us to develop our skills and practice?

Discernment: We believe in a God who speaks in and through the processes of everyday life (Ignatius)

Philip offered input on discernment beginning with what we understand 'discernment' to be. Discernment is 'recognising what is', 'practical wisdom', 'distinguishing what is life-giving' and asked that huge question: How can we learn to detect the voice of God?

To be discerning people, we need to be close to that deeper sense of self and the closer we are to God. The closer we are to the things that hold us back, the more we are able to change them. Philip's Jesuit background led him to focus on the writings of St Ignatius. He spoke of discerning the life-giving things (those that bring consolation) and those that are destructive (things that bring desolation) and also the fact that things can be deceptive. What appears to be life-giving might in reality be destructive.

If someone through the journey of RCIA had a deepened spiritual life but was never baptised, would we be worried about it?

Through this question, Philip encouraged us to focus on our own discernment process and who does the discerning. Our roles as catechists, sponsors or priests is not to discern for our catechumens or candidates, but to allow them to become discerning people and to discern the voice of God in their lives for themselves.

Models of Accompaniment

To draw the strands of the conference together, Philip and Susie offered some caricatures of models of accompaniment.

Where do you find yourself???

When you've been a Catholic as long as I have – or a 'bad case of the magisteriums'. This is about anyone of the group adopting a claim to

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greater experience or authority. We're not really interested in the candidate and their story, just knowing the answers.

The Agony Aunt – Believing that the accompanier is there to answer/solve whatever problems arise whether moral, psychological, emotional, intellectual or practical. This takes responsibility away from the candidate and create dependency. This is more about the catechists own needs than those of the candidate.

Leading from behind – being overly nervous or cautious, indecisive. See which way the candidate or group is going and follow!

Blind Man's Buff – or 'your guess is as good as mine', 'we're all in the dark together'. Shows that the catechist doesn't actually know their stuff and puts great responsibility on the priest as the catechist always has to ask about problems.

The Bluffer's Guide to Spiritual Conversation – basically, if I talk long enough, people seem to go away happy.

Tea and sympathy – all we have to do is listen with a reassuring kindly smile.

The caricatures certainly raised a few uncomfortable smiles among the group, probably because we could recognise elements of each within ourselves!

Our conference drew to a close with the celebration of Mass in the College Chapel.

- Pictures from the Conference can be found on the Network website:
www.rcia.org.uk/Events/Sept06

Using the Rite Music:

Music & RCIA 1

In most of our parishes we have become used to singing in the liturgy by all. Whether it is a distant echo or a full throated roar when we come to celebrate Mass, we sing. We usually expect to sing at other rites of the Church: Confirmations, Weddings and Funerals. Interestingly if we went to one of these liturgies we would have some sort of expectation about what we might sing — we would probably comment on an unusual or out of place choice. This is one way of saying in the broadest sense that these rites have a 'repertoire'. I wonder if one reason why many ask about music & RCIA is that we have little sense of a 'repertoire'.

Another reason is that we are still learning how to celebrate the liturgies of RCIA. We know, and that's a broad 'we', what a funeral is about and what will happen whereas the Rite of Acceptance — does Miss Smith in the 3rd row from the back know what to expect, do we? I guess that behind the question about music and RCIA is a longer statement which would go something like: 'we tried the Rite of Acceptance but it did not go as well as when we did in the Summer School 10 years ago perhaps we weren't using the right music'. Now the right choice of setting may help but first we need to know what we are looking for.

In this series I hope to look at the different liturgies of RCIA and both see what music is needed and make some suggestions but first some thoughts about what we are looking for.

The liturgies of RCIA can feel very different and slightly alien to us. In part this because they are rich in symbol and gesture and mark stages on the way. They also presume an engaged assembly. Here is a liturgical Catch-22: the liturgies presume an engaged assembly but they main way that they become engaged is through participating in the liturgy itself. This is part of the role of music therefore to both help people to participate and to express their participation.

Now this music is often different to what we may be singing, for the most part, on a Sunday or at a wedding or a funeral. Take The Rite of Acceptance the *Affirmation by the Sponsors and the Assembly* the affirmation by the assembly is a short sung phrase: *We praise you, Lord, and we bless you.* To each of the signing of the senses all sing: *Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!* What is needed can be called 'ritual music' — music that helps the rite to work. In this case short acclamations sung by all.

I always have a slight dilemma at this point. Am I saying that the only things to sing in RCIA liturgies are a special set of responses based on the texts in Rite. Well the suggestion of a repertoire above is a reminder that some music can be reserved for just particular circumstances — to take an extreme example we do not sing Christmas carols in July. So there can be advantages in developing a special repertoire for RCIA — the

idea would be that over the years we develop an association between the music and what we celebrate. On the other hand it seems to me that the themes (or even theology) of the Rite are so central to the liturgy and the Church that we would be a very impoverished parish if we did not know anything that spoke of calling or praise of Christ.

It might be useful to give an example of something that is both familiar and is, I think, a good example of ritual music. Many will be familiar with the video 'This is the night'. You may recall that after each Baptism everyone sings the 'Celtic Alleluia'. This has always struck me as a simple and effective response to the challenge of the rite. The rubric suggests that 'each baptism may be followed by a short acclamation sung or said by the people' for suitable texts it directs you to the Appendix where there are a series of short sentences from the New Testament. What the Celtic Alleluia achieves here is a number of things. First of all it fulfils my criteria of familiarity — everybody knows

it. This has important consequences in that people can sing it without needing to find a service sheet — they are not distracted from what's going on — it allows them to participate.

Secondly, why not just applause? Well, apart from the need to sustain a constant level of enthusiasm the question might be who is being applauded. Singing 'Alleluia' reminds us that we are praising God for what he is doing in our midst. Lastly singing Alleluia after each baptism helps to pace the celebration and to mark each one out. It's not too long so that it does not feel as though the music is holding up the rite From this example I would like to draw out some characteristics of ritual music:

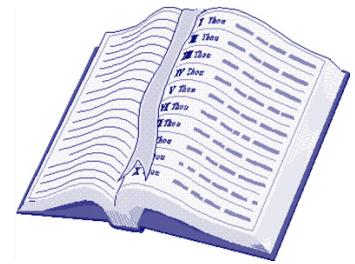
- *It helps people to participate in the rite;*
- *It both articulates what we are doing and also helps us understand what we are doing;*
- *It is integral to rite, helping to highlight its structure and also it gives the rite pace and a sense of flow.*

Choosing good music for the liturgies means that you need to have understanding of the rite, an appreciation of the particular moments in the rite and an idea of what type of music will be appropriate.

I hope the example of the 'Celtic Alleluia' reassures that we are not necessarily looking for the strange and the obscure. We are lucky that musicians and composers are becoming more aware of the need for music that helps us to sing the rites. We are also now far more familiar of the idea of short songs or refrains — we do not see music and think 5 verse hymn or song. In the next article we will lay another foundation before looking at the individual rites: Music and Prayer.

Martin Foster

Prayer at the Giving of a Bible



*Receive this bible.
Hear God's word with us.
Learn and tell its stories.
Rejoice in its good news.
Discover its mysteries.
Honour its commandments.
May God's life-giving word,
sweeter than honey,
inspire you
and make you wise.*

This prayer is taken from *Rites on the Way* part of the Church of England's *Common Worship*. It is part of the material for Initiation and is based on the Catechumenate. More details here: <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/feature.asp?id=2391500>

The Sacrament of Charity & Christian Initiation

Sacramentum Caritatis is Pope Benedict's response and summing up of the recent Synod. The theme of the Synod in 2005 was the Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church. Because of the centrality of the Eucharist to the Church the synod was wide-ranging in the subjects it considered. The Holy Father weaves together many themes under the structure of the Eucharist, a mystery to be believed, celebrated and lived. This pattern will be familiar from the Catechism and the GDC — could be a shorthand for describing catechesis in RCIA.

With this underlying framework I would suggest that the whole document has much to offer those involved in RCIA perhaps in particular the third section, A Mystery to be Lived, about the consequences of participating in the Eucharist. In this short piece I would like to concentrate on 3 paragraphs that have direct relevance to Initiation. I will do them in reverse order.

64. Mystagogical Catechesis.

One of the central themes of the document is that the liturgy, well celebrated, is a source for catechesis and theology. In paragraph 64, the longest in the document, Pope Benedict offers a methodology for mystagogical catechesis. In doing this he picks up the encouragement for this catechesis expressed in *Spiritus et Sponsa* by his 'beloved predecessor' John Paul II. More than that he preaches what he preaches — Benedict's sermons are noticeable for drawing on not just the texts of the liturgy but also the experience of the celebration.

Christian formation has 'always had an experiential character'. While a systematic understanding of the faith should not be neglected formation is 'centred on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ. Mystagogy has three elements:

- it interprets the rites in the light of the events of our salvation — what does this tell us about Christ, what light does it shed on his Paschal Mystery?
- it presents the meaning of the signs contained in the rites — the purpose of this is not merely to understand them but to be 'more sensitive the language of signs and gestures';
- it brings out the significance of the rites for the Christian life — mystagogy demonstrates the link between what we celebrate and our missionary responsibility.

To do this 'those responsible for formation must be adequately prepared'.

46. The homily

The need for formation is also apparent in the paragraph on the homily. In a stark opening sentence Pope Benedict says: 'Given the importance of the word of God, the quality of homilies needs to be improved'. Homilies should relate the proclamation of the Word to what is being celebrated and the life of the community.

What is true of many Church documents is true here, I would suggest, that you need to read the whole paragraph rather than just pick the sentence you agree with. The short description of the purpose of the homily provides a foundation for the rest of the paragraph which I think has potential consequences for RCIA.

The Pope endorses the proposition of the Synod that resources should be drawn up for thematic homilies that taken from the pillars of the catechism: the profession of faith, the celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ and Christian prayer but on the basis of the Lectionary and presumably that speaks to what is being celebrated and the life of the community. Though what is being sought is quite complex (and could easily be done badly) it seems to me that this is an affirmation of the Lectionary as a source of catechesis. It is also a reminder that Lectionary based catechesis is never the easy option but is perhaps, when done well, is the most demanding and creative form of catechesis.

17–19. The Eucharist & Christian Initiation.

Part of the first section, the Eucharist, a mystery to be believed, is an exploration of how the Eucharist relates to the other Sacraments beginning with Christian Initiation.

The section has a number of points. The Pope stresses the close link between Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist and therefore emphasises that reception of the Eucharist should be seen as the goal of the sacramental life. This leads to the call for reflection on the order of the sacraments of initiation noting the difference between the customs of the Eastern Church, the practice of the West regarding the initiation of adults and the procedure adopted for children. The criteria given are which practice better enables the faithful to put the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation and how effective are current approaches to Christian Initiation so that the faithful can be helped to mature both within our communities and so that they a reason of hope for others. These criteria could be applied to any parish process. To put them another way: Are the sacraments of initiation the source and summit of the process? Does the process form people in a community of faith? Does this community have a mission?

Sacramentum Caritatis can be downloaded from the Vatican website: [www.vatican.va] and is published by Catholic Truth Society [www.cts-online.org.uk]

Martin Foster

News

Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age

Good News! – The first meeting has taken place of the Bishops' Conference working group who will be exploring what is needed to support the Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (CICCA) in England & Wales. This is a project of the Formation Subcommittee of the Liturgy Committee which is part of the Department for Christian Life & Worship. The group of eight met at Vaughan House on April 19th and have agreed to begin to develop guidelines for CICCA. Bishop Alan Hopes joined the group for part of the first meeting and affirmed the work that was undertaken. Members of the working group are Liz Anderson, Anna Dupelycz, Fr Martin Jakubas (Chair), Fr David Jennings, Susanne Kowal, Fr Michael McAndrew, Linda Pennington (Secretary) and Veronica Robbins.

If you have experience of preparing children of catechetical age for the sacraments of initiation please contact Linda Pennington at linda.pennington@hinsley-hall.co.uk with details of your experience and recommended resources.

Linda Pennington

Regional Study Days 2007 Accompanying the Journey – through prayer & discernment

The theme this year will be *Accompanying the Journey* and will pick up some of the issues raised by the 2006 Discerning Communities Conference. There will also be the opportunity to explore some of the 'Ritual Moments' of the RCIA and to reflect on 'Why Some People Walk Away' soon after their initiation.

Dates and venues

- Saturday 30th June - Christian Education Centre, Tooting Bec
- Thursday 5th July - English Martyrs, York
- Wednesday 11th July, The Nottingham Diocesan Centre, Mackworth, Derby

Time: 10.00am – 4.00pm;

Cost per person £30. Cost per parish/team £50

For further information/booking please contact Martin Foster
020 7901 4851;
email: Martin.Foster@rcia.org.uk

Conference 2008

A date for your diary:

14–16 July 2008
Ampleforth Abbey, York

Resources from CASE

Evangelisation Resource

A Must-Have for Parishes



"Every Catholic should have a copy..." is what just one of the Bishops said when asked to comment on the publication of an innovative new evangelisation resource for England and Wales.

Two years in the making *The CASE Directory: An annotated list of Evangelisation Resources for Catholic Communities of England and Wales*, aims to offer all tiers of the Catholic community an accessible guide to evangelisation resources and opportunities at a local and national level. Priests, catechists, RCIA leaders and all those active in parish life are being particularly invited to use and promote the resource.

Bishop Malcolm McMahon of Nottingham Diocese holds overall responsibility for CASE (the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation) who made the resource. He said, "Every Catholic should have a copy of this invaluable resource. It promises to be of immense practical use to all tiers of the Church and is in itself a great sign of hope."

It's the first time that such a diverse collection of resources have been collated. Chapters include: Parish and Area Missions, Parish Focused Resources and Forms of Small Christian Communities, Youth Programmes and School Missions, Welcoming Back Returning Catholics, Training / Formation Centres and Courses, Prayer Groups, Initiatives, Groups and Communities with Particular Ministries, Web Resources and Printed Resources. Director of CASE, Mgr Keith Bartrop, said, "The Directory is a great sign of hope for the Church. It sends out the clear message that the Church is full of evangelistic potential and that the cup is definitely half full and not half empty. The resource has something in it for everyone."

Hundreds of initiatives and groups are featured in the Directory which includes their contact information. The resource can also be found online; this has the added advantage of including a search engine to enable users to type in key words and find what they are looking for at the press of a button. Michelle Moran, Director of Ministry for the Sion Catholic Community for Evangelism, in Brentwood said, "This new Directory is a timely resource. It serves to remind us that we are certainly not alone in our many and various groupings, and encourages us to make fruitful contact with our partners in mission."

Copies of the resource can be ordered by ringing tel. 020 8458 3316, or writing to: Directory, CASE, 114 West Heath Road, London. NW3 7TX.

- Email: info@caseresources.org.uk;
- Website: www.caseresources.org.uk

The cost is £5 and cheques would be made payable to "CASE".

Seeker Centres & Tailor-made Events for Enquirers

Donation only tailor-made events for people enquiring or interested in Catholic spirituality are being offered in one of the most picturesque parts of North Wales.

The Franciscan Friary at Pantasaph, Flintshire, is opening wide its doors to offer four "Seeker Centre" events during the next twelve months to enable spiritual explorers and those interested in Catholic life to find out more. The events will take place at the Friary, which is also home to the National Shrine of St Pio, on: 29th April 2007, 8th – 10th June 2007, 14th October 2007 and 25th – 27th January 2008.

Br. Loarne Ferguson is one of the organisers and said, "This is an opportunity for people to dip into Catholicism without having to make any

commitment. The Centre has been up and running nearly two years now and we're really looking forward to welcoming people during 2007 who want to explore and experience authentic spirituality. Everyone is welcome."

A local lay team, along with Friars, run the events and hope to provide visitors with a welcoming and informal space where they can ask spiritual questions about Christianity. The project is being run in partnership with the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE) whose director, Mgr Keith Bartrop said, "The Centre came about in response to people, who are not Catholics, telling us what they were looking for – there is such a genuine thirst to experience authentic spirituality – and that's what these events aim to provide." A "spiritual tour", meditation time, time for questions and story telling are just some of things being offered in a relaxed setting. Team members will also be available to talk to people on a one to one level.

Emma is a previous attendee and said, "I saw the poster. I thought 'I should do that' then didn't have the courage, but somehow ended up there anyway and my life has been changed for the better."

Catholic parishes in the north of England and Wales who run an RCIA group or who have contact with enquirers are invited to advertise this event in their newsletters and local networks – to invite neighbours and friends. For more information please see: www.life4seekers.co.uk Alternatively call CASE: 020 8458 3316

STOP PRESS: Urban Seeker Centre, Birmingham - open every week day!

Daily the doors of St Michael's Church, Moor Street, Birmingham, are open from 2 – 5pm. Volunteers are available for questions and conversation. For more information please tel. 0121 643 0940.

Celebrating Family – Blessed, Broken, Living Love



In 2004 the Bishops of England & Wales led the Listening 2004 process in which families of all kinds answered questions about the reality of their lives.

Celebrating Family is the

Bishops' response to the listening process and covers three years. Three key themes have been identified, one for each year:

2006 – Everybody's Welcome

2007 – Home is a Holy Place

2008 – Passing on the Faith

Next year, 2008, the focus is on how families pass on the faith to one another. Elizabeth Davies, who is the Marriage & Family Life Project Officer for Celebrating Family is asking for some help with this theme as follows:

Are you supporting parents as first teachers of their children in the faith in your parish or school? The Passing on the Faith working group is looking for examples and stories of good practice (ideas, experiences, processes, resources etc) from the local church. Please help us to identify work that may help others in supporting parents (and grandparents) to pass on faith in God to the next generation.

Contact: goodideas@passingonthefait.org.uk or write to the Marriage and Family Life Project Office, CBCEW, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX.

See www.passingonthefait.org.uk for more information about this initiative of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

RCIA Network

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You will find on the website up to date news, resources (including—new—Parish Practice articles from the Tablet) and links to information from the newsletter

