

RCIA Network of England & Wales

NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 4
DECEMBER 2007

Accompanying the Journey Network Study Days 2007

In June and July the Network organised 3 Study Days in Tooting Bec, York and Derby. Over 150 people attended in all. Each of the days followed a similar pattern with input and reflection on discernment in the morning and a choice of two workshops in the afternoon on the liturgies of RCIA and 'Why some people walk away?' The days began and ended with prayer. A couple of participants have written up their experiences of the days.

Renewing, affirming, encouraging York 2007

The Conference this year, held at the Church of English Martyrs York, was one of three regional one-day events. It was very competently led by Caroline Dollard with a team from the dioceses of Middlesbrough, Leeds and Nottingham.

The morning session on the general theme of 'Accompanying the Journey', involved discernment and the skills required for beginning the process of 'walking alongside' those who come to RCIA.

The very thorough presentation was packed with detail which, due to the constraints of time, needed to move along at a pace in order to include so much material, ranging from understanding the rite, to asking us to examine the ways in which we journey and relate to those on the journey with us. One of the very pertinent issues needing reflection, which has warranted an article in *The Tablet* in the series 'Parish Practice', is the apparent necessity of concentrating on the time limit of working towards the Easter Vigil for Reception, instead of the freedom of allowing the Spirit to move more slowly as each person feels called.

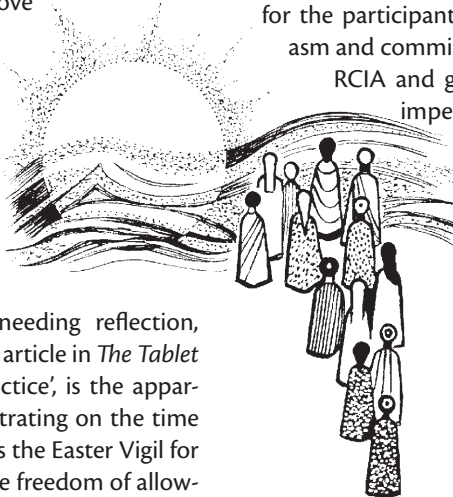
The parish presentation which followed examined some of the problems incurred in

setting up an RCIA Group, particularly in the development of the awareness of the need for catechesis through the growth of the various gifts which can gradually emerge within the parish. It demonstrated very genuinely the typical difficulties often experienced in finding resources and subject matter and how valuable is the support and encouragement of the clergy, especially the parish priest. One useful suggestion well worth considering was a retreat at diocesan level for those ready to sign the Book of the Elect.

The group discussion afterwards was on the 'tool box' approach, a new idea to create a basic set of helps to the catechist and those on the journey.

The workshops in the afternoon created an excellent opportunity to reflect on either why some new Catholics walk away or on how to use the Rites within the parish liturgy. However, there was insufficient time for in-depth development, application or feedback.

Overall, the conference was well put together and, certainly, well worth attending. It was renewing, affirming and encouraging for the participants, increasing enthusiasm and commitment for the work of RCIA and giving fresh ideas and impetus for the future. It



has given the opportunity, in the weeks following, to absorb the process and to review parish and diocesan practice with the possibility of introducing effective changes.

There is much support for the idea that, in future, there will be a two year cycle of a full two day residential conference one year and regional conferences the next. This should provide greater

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facility for deeper reflection on the process of RCIA in England and Wales as well as the opportunity of more time for prayer and to meet and share with others throughout the country.

Angela Joyce

A true conversion of the heart Derby 2007

On July 11th I sat down with a group of fellow catechists united in our desire to renew and update our catechetical practice. After an opening liturgy our studies began with a presentation on 'Accompanying the Journey'. As I listened to the speaker I was struck by the challenges posed by good practice. However, I was not downcast. I knew that involvement in RCIA was demanding and I also knew that I could not hope to fulfil the ideal requirements. But I am a hopeful sort of person and I felt that as long as we do our best and trust in God all will be well.

It was in the session after lunch that the shock to complacency came and I felt compelled to ask myself this question. Is my best good enough and what changes do I need to make as a result of what I've just heard? The statistic we had been given, and which was responsible for my heart searching, was this – **50% of converts eventually lapse from the regular practice of the faith.**

However, the alarming statistic was followed by the findings of a study carried out in the Diocese of Plymouth, which looked at the factors which encouraged new Catholics to keep up the practice of their faith. There were things which might encourage retention. They centred on the importance of community involvement during and after RCIA. The ways to do this include:

- regularly bringing RCIA to the attention of the parish. For example, during Sunday Mass
- giving full attention to the mystagogia process in the weeks following reception
- sponsor training which includes the sponsors' role after the candidates have been received in to the Church

Views varied in our small group discussions as to how much catechists and sponsors bore responsibility for the integration of the new Catholic into community life and how much it was the responsibility of the new Catholic to be proactive. My thoughts were that we need to discern between those who can fend for themselves and those who may need more support in order to integrate. For example, there is a significant difference between someone who comes to Mass with their Catholic family and who has in effect been a parishioner before reception, and some one from a non-Christian background who is unfamiliar with parish mores.

Implicit in the debate on how we should proceed, was the issue of faith versus understanding, process versus content. Or, as one participant at the Study Day put it, 'what we are seeking for our converts is a true conversion of the heart.' Surely a true conversion, not just a facility to recite church dogma, lies behind a life long practice of the faith and it as a faith community that we support our new members, rather than leaving them to flounder in a sea of teaching in isolation from the life of the community. It was well worth attending the Study Day to be reminded of this crucial fact.

Ann Finlay

On the website can be found pictures and resources from the Study days.

- www.rcia.org.uk/Events

Praying in Song:

During the Catechumenate there is the opportunity that each meeting should include a time of prayer. The Rite provides a model together with some prayer texts. In paragraph 82 the purpose of the prayer is explained:

- to respond to what they have heard, learnt and shared so that it is implanted in their hearts.
- to introduce them to different ways of prayer.
- to explore the elements of the liturgy and the liturgical year.
- to prepare them to enter the Sunday assembly.

Music can provide a way in to each of these elements. To use pieces that are sung at Sunday Mass is one way of both making a connection with that celebration and learning to be part of that celebration — the use of the same Alleluia to greet the proclamation of the word, for example. Music is one of the ways that we can mark the seasons of the year — Christmas carols are the most obvious example but each season has its particular sounds. Music is integral to many

forms of prayer. It can also express many different types of prayer: petition, praise, acclamation and lament.

Above all music can connect mind and heart. Through music

what we have heard can be both the word on our lips and the song in our heart. One of the reasons we use music in prayer and liturgy is because it can help us to remember and provide something memorable. How often do you find yourself recalling, without thinking, a melody and how often is it the key to unlocking memories?

A key resource for this is the psalms. They have provided a model of prayer for the Church since its beginnings. The psalms teach us that we can bring to God in prayer all of our lives. Through the psalms we can express our emotions to God. Psalms are the hymnbook of the bible and to match the words with melody can be a potent combination. To sing the psalms does not necessarily mean the whole psalm has to be used — it can be only a single verse or a refrain.

An important resource could be the Common Responsorial Psalms. They are found at the back of the Lectionary and were designed to replace the psalm of any Sunday — not just to make life easy for the musicians but also so that that congregation

Music & RCIA 2

could get to know a particular psalm. There are a couple or so Common Psalms for each season and they are good for capturing the flavour of a season. An example for Advent would Psalm 24 (25), *To you, O Lord, I lift my soul* (Cantate 40). The refrain could be used to introduce a time of prayer, as a response to a reading or as a response to prayers of intercession. Another example, one of the Lent Common Psalms, Psalm 90 (91), *Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble*, (Cantate 46) could be used in a similar way. If they are also sung at Sunday Mass it is possible that they can assist all 4 points of paragraph 82: they help people to participate on a Sunday, they are closely linked with the liturgical year, psalms are key to many different forms of prayer and through being part of scripture they help implant it in people's hearts.

Both these settings can be found in *Cantate* (Decani Music). This is a collection of short songs for worship, many of them drawn from the psalms, which is designed to be used with few musical resources, even unaccompanied. One of the consequences of

*Through music
what we have heard
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song in our heart.*

a certain model of ministry is the danger we think only those who are music ministers can sing or start a song — it would be similar if we thought that as we have welcomed the rest of

use don't need to be welcoming. The effect of this is many people think they cannot, or are perhaps to shy to try, start a song in a group — do we need someone to start 'Happy Birthday'? It may be best to start with something safe such as an Alleluia but it is possible! As a musician I would say that live music, however croaky and uncertain, is better than recorded music. Another reason why music is important in prayer and liturgy is that it involves our bodies — it is a physical act. It is through singing and doing, breathing and opening our lips that we can recall what God has done for us and offer him thanks and praise.

Martin Foster



What they are saying in Rome...

Cardinal Hummes, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, wrote a letter to Catechists to mark his first year in the post. The following is an extract.

First of all, I want to express my admiration for your often untiring ecclesial service in the area of the transmission of Catholic faith to so many catechumens and those entrusted to you who have been already baptized.

I assure you of my affection, as my dearest brothers and sisters, committed to the good fight of faith, which often requires heroic sacrifices, to which, nonetheless, you respond with joy and perseverance.

In daily faithfulness to God and man, you continue to be and represent a real asset for your parish communities. You are one of the most promising signs with which the Lord endlessly comforts and surprises us.

In a dedicated fashion and with passion, seek to acquire and exhibit that image, which is required of teachers, educators and witnesses of the truth, by faithfully passing on that truth to contemporary man, in all of its fullness and integrity.

Be able to strengthen your faith, "always ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (1 Peter 3:15), with prayer, with continuing education, with charity. Be always joyful and zealous so that, also through your work, "in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion" (1 Peter 4:11).

I urge you to pray and cultivate with trust a relationship of love, devotion, attentiveness and silence with the Lord.

In a world which is often hopeless, in the grip of violence and selfishness, let every gesture, every smile, every word of yours be a living testimony that the Lord is victorious over sin and death, and that love is possible!

Rediscover the deep roots of your witness in baptism and confirmation. Nourish your service as catechists with the food of the strong: the Eucharist.

Reveal the face of Christ to all those you meet, through the grace and faithfulness of your service.

May the Spirit of the Lord render your life new and make communion among you grow.

Pope Benedict XVI has been using his address at General Audiences to reflect on the Fathers of the Church. The following is an extract from his reflections on St Ambrose.

In the early centuries of Christianity, reading Scripture was thought of strictly in terms of being proclaimed, and reading aloud facilitated understanding, even for the one who was reading it. The fact that Ambrose could read through the pages only with his eyes was for Augustine a singular capacity for reading and being familiar with Scripture. In this reading — in which the heart seeks to understand the word of God — this is the 'icon' we are talking about. Here one can see the method of Ambrosian catechesis: Scripture itself, profoundly assimilated, suggests the content of what one must announce in order to achieve conversion of hearts.

Thus, according to the teachings of Ambrose and Augustine, catechesis is inseparable from the testimony of life.

The catechist may also avail himself of what I wrote in "Introduction to Christianity" about theologians. Educators of the faith cannot run the risk of looking like some sort of clown, who is simply playing a role. Rather, using an image from Origen, a writer who was particularly appreciated by Ambrose, he should be like the beloved disciple, who rested his head on the Master's heart and there learned how to think, speak and act. In the end, the true disciple is he who proclaims the Gospel in the most credible and effective manner.

In his new encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict writes about the dialogue at the beginning of the Rite of Baptism of Children, and also found in the Rite of Acceptance.

Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what 'life' really is. He begins to perceive the meaning of the word of hope that we encountered in the Baptismal Rite: from faith I await 'eternal life' — the true life which, whole and unthreatened, in all its fullness, is simply life. Jesus, who said that he had come so that we might have life and have it in its fullness, in abundance (cf. Jn10:10), has also explained to us what 'life' means: 'this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn17:3). Life in its true sense is not something we have exclusively in or from ourselves: it is a relationship. And life in its totality is a relationship with him who is the source of life. If we are in relation with him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life. Then we 'live'.



News

RCIA Network Conference 2008

Next year's Conference will be:

- Wednesday 2 – Friday 4 July 2008 at Sedgeley Park, Manchester

This is a change from previously announced in the last Newsletter — apologies for any confusion.

The Executive is looking at the theme of Formation. The following questions indicate some of the initial thoughts: What formation does a parish team need? How do we form the whole parish for RCIA? What ways can a diocese offer formation?

We will be assisted in this task by Shiela O'Dea. Shiela is currently Director of Liturgy at All Hallows in Dublin and before that was an Assistant Director of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate. She is a skilled facilitator with a wide knowledge and experience of RCIA.

- Details as they become available will be posted on the website — www.rcia.org.uk/Events — and in the next Newsletter.

Walking the Rite way RCIA Network Blog

The latest addition to the website is a blog *Walking the Rite Way*.

- www.rcia.org.uk/blog

The aim of the blog, which started at the beginning of Advent, is to provide a forum for ideas and comments. Every Monday a new piece will be posted. The small band of writers have been encouraged to take any aspect of RCIA and provide comment, reflection and ideas.

There is an opportunity to add comments — to share ideas and experience.

- If you would like to become a member of the writing team contact Martin Foster [Martin.Foster@cbcew.org.uk]
- This information was sent by email to members. If you did not receive it — it means we either don't have your email address or we have an incorrect one. Please send an email to Martin Foster to update our records.

*All our lives
are the moment
of Baptism.*



RCIA and Catholic Social Teaching: *an uneasy combination?*

A couple of years back, we held a Diocesan Study Day for RCIA Catechists. The workshops available included RCIA and Catholic Social Teaching. A number of people who asked for details were rather confused by the title of the workshop: "Is that Justice and Peace then?" or "What has Justice and Peace got to do with RCIA?" or again, "We already do a CAFOD session." It seemed that somewhere along the way we'd lost this dimension of catechesis, begging the question "what kind of Church are we forming people for?" or perhaps, "what kind of Church are we forming?" Is it really possible to undertake the journey of RCIA without reference to social justice and the social and political issues surrounding us? If the answer is yes, then we have to ask how our personal faith connects with our public and communal life.

Paragraph 75 of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults states 'the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey. Already sharing through faith in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, they pass from the old to the new nature made perfect in Christ. Since this transition brings with it a progressive change of outlook and conduct, it should become manifest by means of its social consequences and it should develop gradually during the period of the catechumenate.' How can we support this aspect of the journey?

- *If your starting point is the Sunday gospel, always ask the question "How does this passage from scripture connect with the issues we see in the news this week?"*
- *Use some of the CAFOD prayers and liturgies during RCIA sessions – visit their website at www.cafod.org.uk to see the variety of resources available. The livesimply resource pack includes prayers and discussion materials.*
- *Identify major campaigns and events as part of RCIA – e.g. livesimply, Prisoners of Conscience Week, CAFOD Fast Days, Fair Trade fortnight and acknowledge them during RCIA and parish gatherings. This doesn't always require input, but raising the issues during general discussion and sharing.*
- *If you invite parish members to share an aspect of their life and ministry in the parish, find out if there is a Justice and Peace contact or CAFOD volunteer who would be able to share something of their passion for social justice issues.*
- *If there is a parish or diocesan Justice and Peace event or a regional CAFOD event taking place, take part as an RCIA group.*

The key is to integrate this aspect of Catholic teaching into our ongoing journey of faith and conversation rather than create something else to do or another box to tick. If you do want any further information or want to share something you already do and think others should hear about, then let us (the exec) know.

Paula Bailey

Up till now you have been called a Catechumen, one who hears from the outside.

You heard hope, but you didn't see it. You heard mysteries, but you didn't understand them. You heard the Scriptures, but you didn't understand their depth.

But now you are hearing a sound not from outside but from within, for now the Spirit lives in you and makes your mind God's home.

Cyril of Jerusalem
Procatechesis. 6

RCIA Network

This Newsletter is produced by the RCIA Network Executive for the RCIA Network. Views expressed are not necessarily those of either the Executive or the 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

