

RCIA Network of England & Wales

NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 8
DECEMBER 2009

One of Us — Study Days 2009

The two National RCIA Network study days held in June 2009 provided an opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas of best practice. The theme was the role of the liturgical assembly.

I attended the day held at Tooting Bec on Saturday 13th June, where the morning session was led by Nicky Stevens.

The opening liturgy gathered us songfully into a worshipping assembly. Ephesians (4:1-6) helped us reflect on our calling as members of one body. We then dispersed to reflect on the assemblies we had each come from and to share with our neighbour examples of what we gave thanks for, what challenged us, inspired us and what hopes we had for our respective communities.

Starting with a look at parish ministries we were reminded that 'the people of God' are listed first (#9), while catechists come last (#16). This set the tone for the place of the assembly as emphasised in the general introduction (#7), reinforced in the Rite of Acceptance by the affirmation of the community (#53), and throughout the catechumenate (#75.2). The *General Directory For Catechesis 'GDC'* (ss. 68, 220), gives a similar emphasis.

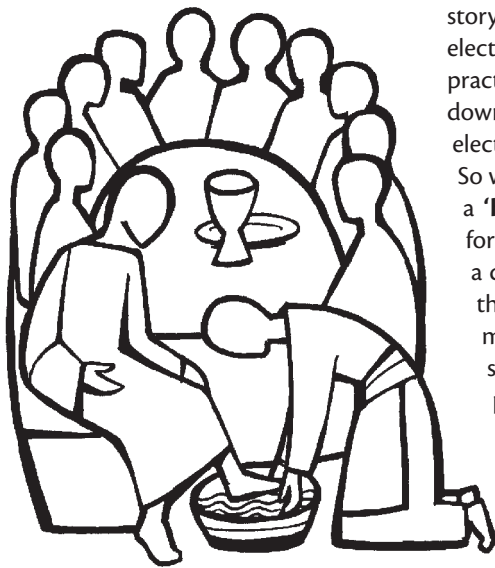
We then explored some of the responsibilities the baptised have as 1) the liturgical assembly and 2) the apprenticing assembly. Nicky spoke of how we have to be realistic because we are initiating into a messy real life church. Rarely will the whole liturgical assembly be present at one time: some parishes have more than one Sunday mass, while statistics show that many re-

gard 'regular' mass attendance as occurring every two to three weeks. Given 'the initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful' (RCIA 4), this will have an impact. Also, initiating new members into our communities is a two way process, but do we always allow the initiates to change us?

Suggestions for helping the assembly to a consciousness that they are a primary symbol included having them attend celebrations during the catechumenate. This happens naturally if they occur at Sunday Mass, though it does need some planning and prior reading of the rite. It also helps to give the catechumens some experience of church, and the practice of celebrating the Day or our Lord.

When looking at the Apprenticing Community [AG 14] we heard of a resource by Gerry Galipedau *Apprenticing for Christ* and a story of a college trained electrician whose first practical job was spent down a hole getting an electric supply to work. So we had the image of a 'hole' providing the formation. This struck a chord with many of those present. How much time do we spend showing people where the hole is, whereas the way to learn how to become members of the community is by **becoming** members of the community.

We then spent some time in discussion of who in our parishes we might want to apprentice people to, people who give witness to their Catholic faith. These are the people we are looking for. Our task is to facilitate



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the involvement of others in the parish. Discussion of ways to involve the community included introducing catechumens to someone you know will befriend others and asking if they could visit for coffee, or using existing groups eg to accompany an SVP member on a visit.

In the afternoon there were two workshops. Diana Klein led 'Receiving the Baptised' and Theresa Barber 'Formation for the Team'. Both facilitators provided handouts.

I attended Theresa's workshop and there was a lot of positive input and opportunity for practitioners to draw on one another's experiences. We tied in with the morning session when looking at resourcing a team. The benefits of having a pool of catechists, including those from other sacramental programmes, as well as someone from music ministry, and having resource to the assembly, were discussed.

In addition to the principle resources of RCIA and GDC we looked at a handout from *Wayfaring* (Margaret Silf, 2001, DLT) and discussed how resources don't need to be restricted to holy things to reflect a person's faith journey. Using pebbles, an acorn, seeds, seashells, or something that is special to the individual can be quite moving.

We heard some stories of hope, including how in one parish they have a mystagogical team, and for the first time had started a second group of enquirers on Saturday morning, so meeting all year round. This was characteristic of our final session: of sharing something each would take away from the day, hopes for our own communities and the practice of RCIA.

Sue Petritz

Becoming the Body of Christ

All Hallows College Dublin 28th June – 3rd July

Becoming the Body of Christ — A Challenge to the whole Community of the Church

A week long conference, organized through the Archdiocese of Dublin and principally led by Sheila O'Dea, Director of Liturgy at All Hallows College explored the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and its implications for the life of the Church and community in Ireland. The experience of adults seeking to be received into the Catholic Faith is a relatively new one in a country which has traditionally been up to 95 percent Catholic. The changing patterns of immigration and migration over recent years along with changes within the culture of the country has brought the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (known as the RCIA) to the fore in new and exciting ways. The recent traumas which have had such an impact on the very psyche of the country and church community gave a profound sense of hope and realism to the gathering in Dublin.

The key features of the conference were:

- The importance of 'Getting to know the Rite itself' becoming familiar with it – letting it become an extension of one's very being.
- Exploring the power of the liturgies – adapted to the reality of the participants.
- Reflecting (mystagogically) on the key liturgies celebrated the previous day
- Exploring both the experience of the RCIA and the theological ideas underpinning the Rites
- Emphasising the fact that the Rite is about the whole community growing into the Body of Christ and not just the Catechumens and Candidates.
- Working in partner pairs, dialogue groups, social gathering and craic.
- The powerful witness of the Brackenstown Parish: candidate, catechist, sponsor and parishioner from the pew added greatly to the overall experience of the week.

The importance of 'Time' – taking time and giving time to allow the rites to embed themselves both in the candidates' lives and the parish life was strongly to the fore. Taking seriously the Liturgical Year and having the confidence to believe that the liturgy, which is primary theology, has within itself the power to bring us deeper into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' life, death and resur-

rection was the most profound challenge of the week. This is especially true for the whole Mystagogy period not just for the neophytes but for the whole community of the parish.

The quality of the Liturgical celebrations over the week reinforced and supported the importance of taking both Liturgy and the Liturgical Year seriously. The richness of each celebration was very skillfully enhanced by the sheer quality of the music and apparently spontaneous phrases put to music which emerged out of the day's reflections by Pat O'Donoghue who is the Director of the Liturgy Resource Centre and Director of Music for the Archdiocese of Dublin.

For me the most significant liturgy was the adaptation of a Rite of Scrutiny based on the story of Lazarus. We were invited to reflect on those areas of our lives, and the life of our Church and Country which are deadly and which keep us entombed and also on the areas of our lives and the life of our Church and Country which are live-giving. When these were fed back, Pat took the phrases and incorporated them into a litany of prayers within the Scrutiny. For the three people over whom we prayed, their companions and the chief catechist along with myself as Leader of the liturgy it was deeply moving- we touched into areas of our lives which, in many ways were Grand Canyon Deep. The wisdom of Sheila O'Dea for us to take time together after the liturgy was profoundly helpful. I am still processing the richness of that liturgy. Even if we never meet again Alpine, Marie, Lynette and their companions along with Colette, who took the role of catechist, and I will continue to be part of one another and carry one another in our prayer. Afterwards one remark from the wider group was "Isn't it sad that so many parishes are deprived of the experience when the Scrutinies aren't celebrated".

The importance of celebrating the Rite of Dismissal, as envisioned through-out the Rite, was re-enforced through-out the week. The Rite of Dismissal, along with taking at least one Liturgical Year as part of the process, offers such rich possibilities for the candidates to feast on the Word of God. We do a great dis-service both to the candidates and the

community by not giving this part of the journey its due importance:

Feed on the Word of God - Discover the Real Presence of Jesus in the Word - Week after Week – Sunday after Sunday. Take at least one Liturgical Year – have confidence in the power of the Word to bring about conversion and a transformation in a person's life.

At the end of the day and at the end of the week the central message was: - Be familiar with the Rite, Take it Seriously, See the world through the eyes of Grace rather than through the eyes of Sin, at the same time don't underestimate the power of sin. Be brave, prepare the liturgy and allow its power to shape your life. The witness of Gareth and the parish of Brackenstown more than supported the cry of St Paul in Ephesians 4:14-16

"We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."

A debt of gratitude for such a moving week goes to all 111 participants and the presenters, all of whom contributed greatly to the week, along with the administrative staff. As W B Yeats might say:

"I write it out in a verse

- Colette Furlong and Damien McNeice
 - Dermot Nestor and Ciaran O'Carroll
 - Sheila O'Dea and Pat O'Donoghue
 - Ken O'Riordan and Patricia Holden
 - The gifted skills of Grainne Clinton
 - Mary Dent and Ewelina Kluczniok
- All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born."*

May it continue to be as blessing.

Ken O'Riordan



Network News

RCIA Network Conference 2010

A date for your diary

The Network Executive invite you to our next network Conference: 30 June – 2 July 2010. We have booked Sedgley Park in Manchester and we are looking at the Enquiry period as a possible theme.

Seeking the Living God

Update on the progress of the National RCIA Resource

'*Seeking the Living God*' is the working title of the series of resources being prepared for the formation and support of RCIA teams. The title, taken from RCIA 1 reminds us that those people *'who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith.'* are the inspiration for each of us to continually seek ways of living and sharing our faith.

peer review, held in July, refined and revised several of the draft editions, bringing them closer to publication. The resource will offer study material on the RCIA in general, reflecting on the constant guiding principles within the Rite such as liturgy and prayer. Each of the stages will cover topics relevant to that period; and there will be support material on the variety of roles for those involved in the process.

'*Seeking the Living God*' could be used by existing RCIA teams or for those who are beginning the process of RCIA in the parish. This resource will be available from the RCIA Network website so do keep checking the site.

Molly Styant

International Conference for Catechumenate

Paris, July 2010

The Institut Catholique de Paris is organising a Conference to consider *Catechumenate, Catechesis: new prospects*. The languages of the Conferences will be French, English and Spanish. It will be held in Paris in 6–9 July 2010. For more details contact Martin Foster.

Eurocat Vienna 2009

Four members of the Network attended the European Network on the Catechumenate in Vienna in May 2009. The theme of the meeting was *Integration* which was explored

in a variety of ways. The Conference included visits to parishes in Vienna to see aspects of integration. The meeting attracted over 70 people from across Europe. Further information and pictures can be found on the Network blog *Walking the Rite Way*.

Cafod Material

The Cafod spirituality team on their extensive worship website have issued some material for RCIA groups. The aim of the material is to integrate global social justice issues into RCIA and the website particularly recommends them for the period of Mystagogia. Experienced group leaders will find some useful material here.

- <http://www.cafod.org.uk/worship/rcia>

Northern Roadshow

Following last year's conference a number of northern dioceses got together to plan a one day experience of RCIA that could be used in each of the dioceses. Forthcoming dates: Hallam 6/3, Hexham & Newcastle 17/4, Leeds 15/5.

- <http://www.rcia.org.uk/Events/North.html>

A Diocese journeys with RCIA

Like many other dioceses in England and Wales in the late 80's and early 90's, Middlesbrough had a lively summer school officially launching widespread celebration of the Rite of Christian Initiation process in its parishes (1990). The then Bishop, Augustine Harris reminded people of what he referred to as the mind of the Church, in his document '*Serve the Lord with Gladness*' where he spoke of the Rite as:

'a process of encouraging those searching for God, including not just knowledge of what the Church teaches, but in addition, true companionship being extended to the hesitant enquirer as they take steps towards becoming members of the Body of Christ.'

And he concluded

'...The Holy Father has laid down the principles and given us liturgical landmarks..... it is not for us to fail those who wish to share our journey..... we are especially urged to be aware of the Church's instinct for sharing the Gospel, not merely as a set of truths to be known, but as a way of life to be shared and enriched.'

Fired up by the summer-school experience, many more parishes began engaging with

the process outlined in the Rite, and this is the foundation for so much that is good and active in the initiation of Christians into the Catholic Church in this diocese today.

Since 2004 a 'Working Group' of people involved in the initiation of adults has met regularly to reflect on the common threads and tensions that emerge from the tradition of celebrating the Rite over 20 years in the diocese. In 2007 a series of meetings entitled '*Exploring the Challenge*', was aimed at encouraging parishes to take up their responsibility as initiating communities. Adult Initiation was still seen by some as a 'fringe' activity of a 'group of people' not really related to the ordinary parishioner in the pew. Dr Sheila O'Dea to lead two days of reflection in the Diocese on engaging the whole parish community. In Summer 2008 13 members of the Diocesan working group attended the Network Conference '*Forming Threshold Companions*', coming back again to the experience of the whole community as ministers of initiation, with the Word of God as the pulse-beat at the heart of the journey in faith as presented between the covers of the ritual text..

The working group see as their key task to seek ways of encouraging people to look again at initiation of adults, and refresh their approach, moving away from old models that see conversion to Christ as introducing people to doctrine and ritual, towards thinking of the journey in faith more as an apprenticeship in Christian living, with the Word of God week in, week out, forming would-be disciples for sacraments. To this end, Dr O'Dea returns to the Diocese this September to give 3 days on '*Becoming the Body of Christ*'. We are hoping people will come and be inspired, challenged and transformed – to know that adult initiation and conversion is not something we do to others, and not even something that God does to us. As we journey with catechumens, the process propels us ever more deeply into the world of the Gospel, the living Word that speaks into and interprets our lives. More often than not, we have to leave accustomed ways to follow in the footsteps of Christ – and that leads to death before glory! We need the fresh vitality of the newly baptized to bring us back to more authentic discipleship – their companionship, energy and enthusiasm is catching! We begin to share our lives as that witnessing community. So Middlesbrough moves forward in hope!

Caroline Dollard

My experience of RCIA as a priest

In the Year for Priests we invited a priest member of the Network to reflect.

Support

Three words sum up my experience of RCIA as a priest: support, support, support. By this I mean both my awareness of the support I have received from others (and especially catechists) while working as part of an RCIA Team and also the support I have been able to offer as a priest-member of the various parish teams I have been privileged to work with.

Lewisham

When I was first ordained (in November 1978) RCIA was not known to me either in theory or practice. Those were the days of 'convert classes.' I can recall 'instructing a convert' one evening when I was a curate in St Saviour's in Lewisham in south-east London. As I was showing her down the stairs we bumped into two other 'coverts' who had been 'receiving instruction' separately on the same evening from the two other priests in the parish. In those days it never dawned on us to think of bringing enquirers together as a group or to offer anything other than a course of instruction. Most embarrassingly to confess it never dawned on me to pray with the person I was instructing. Of course, there were many good aspects to the 'one-to-one' approach and genuine bonds of friendship were created. A weakness was that enquirers were being introduced only to the priest rather than to the community as a whole and frequently could feel 'orphaned' when the priest moved on to instruct new converts or moved on to a new parish.

Tooting Bec

In the early 1980's I was working at the Southwark Diocesan Catechetical Centre (as it was then called) in Tooting Bec, south-west London, as the RE Adviser for Secondary Schools. Around that time I attended the National Conference of Priests in Birmingham and I remember Fr John O'Shea from Portsmouth diocese holding up a copy of the RCIA in the plenary session and saying: "this is a revolutionary document; in fact, so revolutionary that the Catholic Truth Society (CTS) have given it the dullest cover they could think of!". I was becoming more aware of the RCIA in its theory – and had attended the highly significant and hugely enjoyable RCIA Summer School in Southampton in 1984 – but, as yet, I had had no direct personal experience of RCIA at the parish level. That was to change when I was arrived as an assistant priest at St John Fisher, Merton in south-west London in September 1987.

Merton

At Merton there was a small but very well organized RCIA group run by two married couples. As I recall there were only two or three enquirers each year and so the numbers were small enough to meet in the two homes of the organising couples. Each week the couples would take turns either 'hosting' the evening or 'leading' the session. My role as a priest was to be present as part of the Team and to chip in to the discussions or to lead a prayer or read a scripture passage as chosen by the couple leading the session. Both couples were active members of the Teams of Our Lady (a support group for married couples) and very faithful and committed parishioners who were only too happy to introduce the enquirers to the community and the community to the enquirers. I have very fond memories of those RCIA sessions and of the friendships that developed. During them I had a certain freedom to 'sit back' and let the catechists take the lead. My specific role as a priest came in to its own at the parish liturgies celebrating the RCIA rites. It was always very moving and humbling to baptize or receive into the Church those whose stories of their 'journey in faith' had been shared in the RCIA group during the previous months.

Thamesmead

In 1990 I moved from Merton to be parish priest of St Paul's, Thamesmead in south-east London. St Paul's is a building shared by 4 Christian denominations (RC, Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed). Again, there was a small RCIA group, both tightly-knit and friendly. There were very few catechists available and so I had to take on a more explicitly catechetical role both in planning and leading the RCIA sessions. One of the enquirers kindly offered to be a secretary for the group and would run off copies of the material we would use for the coming week. I recall that we used the American 'Catholic Update' which people liked and found was 'meaty' enough to get the discussion going. The group was so friendly that it was stopping the discussion that was often the problem!

Thornton Heath

In 1999 I became parish priest of St Andrew's, Thornton Heath, a large parish in south-west London, with a Sunday Mass attendance of around 1300. There was (and is) a very strong RCIA Team there. My role as a priest was, once again, that of pastoral support for both the enquirers and the RCIA Team (of which one of the assistant priests was a member) as well as the liturgical cel-

ebrations culminating in the Easter Vigil when usually there were around 20 people to baptize or receive into the Church. I recall how nervous I was at my first Easter Vigil in the parish. It was my first experience as a priest of baptizing by total immersion (a tradition that had been introduced by my predecessor as PP at St Andrew's). I was converted by the experience! The coffin-like bath was such a powerful symbol of what St Paul says in that Easter Vigil reading from Romans (6:3-11) about 'when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life.'

Tooting Bec

Since 2004 I have been back at the Christian Education Centre (as it is now called) in Tooting Bec. As Director I am currently at one stage removed from the front-line of parish life. However, the vision and reality of the RCIA process continues to inspire and direct me and all the Team here. Our experience as a diocesan agency is that every parish has its own unique history and tradition and that priests vary not only in their personalities but also in roles they play (whether through choice or necessity) in the pastoral, catechetical and liturgical aspects of the RCIA process. Their physical presence at RCIA sessions is not always necessary but their pastoral support and liturgical leadership is crucial. As with all aspects of adult formation, the priest is a 'leading learner' who needs both to give and to receive support.

Fr John O'Toole

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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