

RCIA Network of England & Wales

NEWSLETTER
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Welcoming children into the Church

Callum was adopted at the age of 4. His father, Steve, a practising Catholic, took Callum to Mass with him from time to time and his wife, Jo, a nominal Anglican, occasionally accompanied them. When at Mass, Callum went with other children to the Liturgy of the Word for children and made a few friends there – so much so, that he asked his Dad if he could come every week and from there his interest in the Church grew.

When he was 8, Callum asked if he could be baptised “like the other children were”. He joined 2 other children, also seeking baptism, for the weekly sessions for the Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (CICCA). Callum had a lively mind and asked a lot of questions. At the same time, his mother had also begun to take more of an interest in the Catholic Church and attended the Journey in Faith (RCIA) adult sessions.

When the Easter Vigil finally arrived, Callum was so excited at the thought of being baptised – and then confirmed and receiving Holy Communion for the first time. His mother and father stood with him at the font, together with his god-mother. Immediately after his Baptism, with water still running down his face and neck, he and his mother flung their arms around each other – Jo was in tears. The whole church was touched by their spon-

aneous demonstration of joy. Jo herself was then received into the Church.

Callum is one of an increasing number of children in Dioceses up and down the country, coming to the Church seeking initiation. Reasons for their decisions vary: a Catholic friend or relative, going to a Catholic wedding or funeral, being in a Catholic school and others. Some parishes tell of large numbers coming forward: as many as 20 children or more in some parishes.

Part II of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (from para 242) contains guidance on the initiation of children between the ages of 7 and 14. Over the past three years, a working party of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, has been meeting to draw up guidelines to help parishes implement the Rite adapted for children.

The Working Party has now completed its draft text and has presented it to the Liturgy Formation Committee of the Bishops' Conference Department for Christian Life and Worship. The Committee welcomed the work that the Working Party had done and see it a valuable contribution to the Church in this country. The final document will be presented to the Department at its Autumn meeting and should, hopefully, be published in the new year.

Inside this issue:

Welcoming Children	1
A Pastoral Letter	2
Brief News	3-4
Rite of Election — a Bishop's perspective	4

Children follow the same process as the one for adults, marked with several steps and with liturgical rites. It is a process that can be extended over a number of years, if necessary as the initiation of children requires a conversion that is personal and developed, appropriate to the age of the child. It is a time of suitable catechesis, during which they are given the opportunity to ask questions and to explore the Catholic faith. Their faith is nurtured and is supported by their family, friends, sponsors, catechists and the parish community. Apart from the catechesis that will take place within a small group, they will learn to live as part of an apostolic community – attending Mass, learning to pray and being involved in an appropriate way in social action, such as helping with CAFOD projects or packing shoe boxes to be sent overseas.

The decisions about whether the time is right for them to move through the different stages of the process and the discernment as to their readiness to be initiated into the Church will be made in coordination with the parish priest, the catechists and their parents. The parish community is called upon to support and pray for them throughout this process – and then to welcome them warmly into the community. It is hoped that these children will then live their lives surrounded by love and by a faith, lived out in the Church in the world.

Susanne Kowal



Pastoral Letter of the Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries

Concerning Adult Catechumenate and Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church

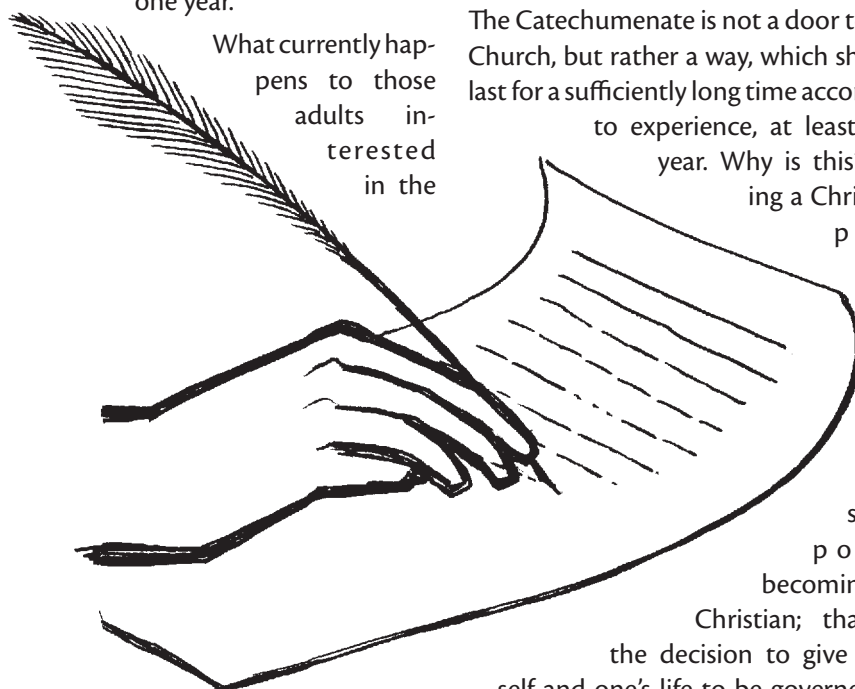
The Nordic Bishops' Conference covers Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway & Sweden. There are 8 bishop members of the Conference and in all of these countries Catholics are in the minority

"Where is the entrance?" If someone needs to ask this question, the architect has probably made a mistake. Entrances need to be recognizable and inviting, unless one wants to keep away uninvited guests.

What, then, about the entrance to the house of the Church, the entering of persons into the community of the faithful? Can the entrance be easily recognized, or must one enquire about it from someone? For centuries this did not pose a problem: becoming Christian and entering into the community of the faithful, the Church, took place through Baptism.

Faith is personally encountering Jesus Christ and becoming his disciple. Continuous effort is required in order to think as He thinks, to be of the same opinion as He, to live as He lived. St. Cyprian of Carthage was once asked, "What would you do to convince a person of Christianity?" He responded, "I would let him live with me for one year."

What currently happens to those adults interested in the



Christian and Catholic faith and who are received into communion with the Church; who wish to enter into this house, the Church? This question is often posed by the people in some of the Nordic countries. Due to changes of Church and society, no longer are all children baptized as infants; for example because the parents want to let the children decide about matters of faith by themselves; or because the parents themselves have left the Church. In our Nordic countries there is, however, a growing number of converts; that is, people originally from other Christian communities and Churches, who wish to join the Catholic Church.

For these adults, who are in search of the Church's entrance, the Second Vatican Council has revived the way which had existed from almost the beginning of the long history of the Church: the Catechumenate. This Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, which was promulgated in 1972, was meant especially for the "young Churches" of Africa and Latin America, whereas in Europe, often until this day the only way to prepare for Baptism has been and is by receiving private instruction from a priest. The Adult Catechumenate, however, offers us in the Nordic countries an excellent opportunity for evangelization, both of those who are searching as well as of the parishes.

The Catechumenate is not a door to the Church, but rather a way, which should last for a sufficiently long time according to experience, at least one year. Why is this? Being a Christian

the Lord Jesus Christ requires development.

It may be that people become interested in the Christian faith and, particularly, the Catholic Church after having experienced and participated in one of the great feasts of the liturgical year. They feel drawn by the liturgy and the community. Some have had an experience of God, which has as if lit a fire in their search and longing. These are good and important preconditions, although alone they are not enough for making the decision. Additionally, a confrontation with one's ideals, values, expectations and hopes for life must also come. The relationship with God, with Jesus Christ must grow and mature, be able to overcome challenges to the faith, and deepen.

The Catechumenate offers different phases on the way to becoming a Christian, each of which is begun solemnly with its own rite. The interaction of liturgy and catechesis results in a living and lasting growth into communion with the Church. For example, the baptismal candidates are, when being received into the Catechumenate, asked the following question: "What do you ask of God's Church?" Being able to answer this question presupposes a process of interior clarification and of making the decision. Later during the Catechumenate, the candidate is initiated into the Christian doctrine, he participates in the feasts of the liturgical year, and learns better and better to explain and understand the happenings of everyday life on the basis of the Gospel. With this he naturally needs help, as one cannot be a Christian or become a Christian alone. The Catechumenate as the way into the Church is always a way which is walked within a community. This community is realized in Catechumenate groups (they are the Church in miniature form). In addition to the baptismal candidates or converts, the groups include some members of the parish, the priest and also the sponsors, who support and closely accompany the candidates.

presupposes becoming a Christian; that is, the decision to give oneself and one's life to be governed by

Brief News

Also here the phases and the feasts of the Catechumenate assist the way. For example, in one such celebration, the baptismal candidate is given the "Our Father" prayer, which he may pray with the parish henceforth. In this way, the baptismal candidate grows step by step into the parish community. The candidate learns that being Christian means also taking responsibility for the life of the parish, and giving one's strengths and gifts to be used, in order that the parish be living and growing.

The celebration of becoming Christian through Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist forms the summit of the Catechumenate.

However, the Catechumenate is not only a good opportunity for the baptismal candidates or converts to follow the path which leads into the house of the Church; it also offers a great opportunity to the parish itself. If someone ever has attended the event when an adult baptismal candidate goes before the parish community and expresses his desire to be baptized and to be received into communion with the Church also he unexpectedly encounters the question of his own Baptism, his own belonging to the Church, his own faith. It then becomes clear that the Church does not only have a mission; she is Mission and cannot cease to be missionary.

The Catechumenate makes one sensitive to the task of this mission, which has been given to all Christians: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) It then becomes clear that when people come to us and ask, "How may I enter?" it is not enough that we guide them to priests or others working in pastoral tasks. Parishioners are also needed, who prepare the newcomer a kind and friendly reception, and are willing to share with him their own faith. This sharing enables the parishioners to strengthen their own faith and renew their own Baptism.

The practice of the Catechumenate with its celebrations and rites helps in its part to revive the sacramental signs and rites. Especially in our Catholic liturgy there is a richness of these symbols and rites. However, habit and obviousness can cause the danger that the significance and understanding of these holy rites is obscured. Supporting baptismal candidates or converts on the way of Catechumenate may itself become a catechesis for the parish, during which also good Catholics can rediscover the richness of liturgy and be nourished by it.

Here in the Nordic countries we are already using the Catechumenate in a few of our parishes. Let us imagine that even more parishes would begin to take advantage of the Catechumenate and a larger amount of baptismal candidates might grow in this manner on the way into the Church. Through this, what could change in our parishes? New groups would be formed, the parishioners would have the possibility to again find their faith, the newly-baptised who are inspired by the Holy Spirit would commit actively to the parish, for example as catechists, lectors, etc. The responsibility for others would grow, as the members of the parish would be concretely responsible for accompanying the seeking baptismal candidates. The consciousness of the mission of the parish and of the whole Church would grow, and the connection between faith and life would become clearer. The parishes would gain an attractive and radiant power and, as a consequence, draw more people to themselves. In this manner, beginning the Catechumenate would aid the renewal of the whole parish.

We bishops wish to encourage all the faithful, priests, parish councils, pastoral councils and the councils of the different religious orders to discuss within themselves and ponder, if and how a Catechumenate could be founded in more parishes. We would like to encourage maybe one step at a time that the different phases and rites of the Catechumenate would be realized for the adults who are preparing for Baptism or for the reception into full communion with the Church.

- <http://www.nordicbishopsconference.org>

Bridging the Gap

"Where is the entrance?" might be questioned raised at the Network Conference 30 June – 2 July 2010 at Sedgely Park Centre, Manchester.

We will be exploring what are the qualities of an initiating parish, how might the community become involved as sponsors, what happens in the period of Evangelisation and Pre-Catechumenate.

There are still some places available:

- <http://www.rcia.org.uk/Events/2010/index.html>

KIT (Keeping In Touch)

A parish ministry for Catholics who are looking for a way back to the Sacraments.

My introduction to KIT began in 1993 when I was invited to be an RCIA sponsor for my daughter's friend who was interested in joining the Catholic Church. A lady who had also joined the group told us during the first meeting that she was already a Catholic, but had been away from the church for many years. As the meetings went on, we heard more and more of her sad story, her anger at how she had been treated and her guilt at having been away for so long. So disturbing was this for the three people looking to join our church that the RCIA team met urgently to seek a solution.

Thus KIT was born! Four of us split off from the RCIA team and began training for a new ministry of outreach to Catholics who wanted to return to the Sacraments. Within the first year six local non churchgoing Catholics had already joined the new group, with the meetings following a very different agenda from the familiar RCIA process! From those small beginnings, KIT has now become known in many parishes and dioceses in the UK.

Our experience has been that most returning Catholics are looking for something quite distinct from those approaching our Church for the first time. They are already familiar with the Mass, the Sacraments, the prayers and the basic teachings, although their experience of these may have been very

different from that of today's mass goers. They are far more likely to need healing, reconciliation and updating on the changes since Vatican 11. Rather than evangelisation and catechesis they are looking for a listening ear (and a box of tissues!) as they share their faith stories, and a reassurance that they are still deeply loved by God. Sin and guilt are major preoccupations and the KIT meetings are a great opportunity for healing. Some returners simply need the space to vent their anger or frustration at their treatment by a member of their church, or to come to a new understanding of Church as a very human and fallible body but which will give them all the love and support and strength they need in their journey through life. An agenda such as this is neither useful nor appropriate for those approaching the Catholic Church for the first time.

So if you find returning Catholics coming to your RCIA group, you may prefer to send them to the nearest KIT or Landings group – or do what we did and start a KIT group in your area to serve their special needs.

- www.kit4catholics.org.uk — for further details
- enquiries@kit4catholics.org.uk for further information.

Certificate in RCIA Catechesis

On June 26th 2010, Maryvale Institute launches its new course, the Certificate in RCIA Catechesis. This course is a joint project between Maryvale Institute and the Association of Catechumenal Ministry. The course is a one year distance learning programme which includes 3 Study Days and a Retreat Day held at Maryvale. Students receive specially written course books, which they study at home, while the Study Days offer the opportunity for developing fellowship and deepening spirituality as well as attending lectures.

Maryvale was the first Catholic home of Cardinal John Henry Newman and thus it has been a particular joy and privilege to be part of the team working on the development of this course and aiming through Maryvale's unique collaborative learning methodology, to fulfill Newman's vision of an educated laity.

- email — rcia@maryvale.ac.uk;
tel 0121 360 8118.

Teresa Kehoe, Course Director RCIA

The Rite of Election

In the last Newsletter we asked Fr John O'Toole to give a priests' perspective on RCIA to mark the Year for Priests. In this issue we have asked Bishop Kieran Conry, for a bishop's perspective. He reflects on the Rite of Election, a key point for the involvement of the bishop in the Rite.

The new dimension to the Rite of Election this year was the new date. Instead of the first Sunday in Lent, the date chosen was the day before. The reason for this was simple: the previous year there had been too many people to fit easily into one celebration.

The Rite of Election stands beside the Chrism Mass as one of the most joyful celebrations of the year, and it is ironic that they both take place in Lent. But it is also significant, that they remind us of the origins of the Lenten season.

In other languages, the word for the forty days leading up to Easter tend to reflect precisely that: that it is forty days (from the Latin Quadragesima). But the English word comes from the old Anglo-Saxon, and refers to the lengthening of days and the fact that Spring is upon us – pointer to the fact that Easter in its Jewish origins, Passover, was a Spring festival of the new lambs born to the flock and the first harvest of wheat, the elements of the Passover supper.

But one of the most significant aspects of the Rite of Election is that it gives meaning to the RCIA. Very often in parishes, it seems that the RCIA refers to a course of instruction: the lessons given to aspiring Catholics between September and Easter. But the title refers to the Rite, the liturgical progress of the catechumen (originally) towards membership of the body of Christ's faithful. This would, in the early years of the Church, have been a process covering a number of years, when the catechumen would associate him or herself to the worship of the Church, but would be barred from full participation. At the presentation of the gifts the deacon would shout in Greek *tas thyras*, 'the doors' and the non-baptised would be shut outside while the Eucharist went forward – there was no such thing as infant baptism in the early days; this

would only come later when the teaching of original sin and the mass conversion of the so-called barbarians required that whole families were received into the Church.

So as the catechumen proceeded towards reception into the Christian community, the scrutinies were put in place. They are reflected in the questions still in the Rite of Election – "Have these people joined with you in prayer and reading of the scriptures?" And in the final forty days before Easter, the catechumens came before the bishop for the final scrutinies and the Rite of Election; if the community judged them to be ready, they would be accepted or elected for admission. In those final forty days, the rest of the community would be invited to join with them in prayer and fasting as they made their final preparations for the joyful moment of their admission into the family of the Church.

So the Rite of Election is a reminder of what Lent is for; it is a time of preparation for the joy of Easter. It is not actually primarily a time of repentance, but a time of prayer and preparation for the joyful celebration of Easter, something felt most consciously by the new members of our Catholic community. It is an opportunity offered to us all to reflect on what is happening in the Church at that time of the year. It is far more important than giving up chocolate.

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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