

The Role of the Community

Seeking the
Living God

To understand that the life of the Community is the context for 'apprenticeship' in the Christian way of life

Links to other sessions in this series:

Pre-Catechumenate & Evangelisation

- Prior to Pre-Catechumenate or Where do people come from?
- Discernment in RCIA

Catechumenate

- Catechumenate — integration in Community
- Discernment — Prior to Election

Roles in RCIA

- The Liturgical Assembly



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Prayer

God is our Creator,
and in him all living things have their existence.
God enlightens our minds,

so that we may come to know and worship him.
God sent his faithful witness, Jesus Christ,
to announce to us what he has seen and heard,
the mysteries of heaven and earth.

We acknowledge with joy that Christ has come, and we
are open to his Word.

In one another's company,
may we come to experience ever more deeply
the love in which we are held,
and strive together to pattern our lives on the Gospels.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

adapted from Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens,
RCIA 52 B & C

Listen to Scripture

Those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized,
and that day about three thousand persons were
added. They devoted themselves to the apostles'
teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the
prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and
signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed
were together and had all things in common; they
would sell their possessions and goods and distribute
the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they
spent much time together in the temple, they broke
bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous
hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the
people. And day by day the Lord added to their number
those who were being saved.

Acts 2:41-47

Read & Reflect

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

In the light of what is said in *Christian Initiation General Introduction* 7 the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ. In the various circumstances of daily life, even as in the apostolate, all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading the faith according to their abilities. Hence the entire community must help the candidates and catechumens throughout the process of initiation.... In particular:

1. During the period of evangelisation and pre-catechumenate, the faithful should remember that for the Church and its members the supreme purpose of the apostolate is that Christ's message is made known to the world by word and deed and that his grace is communicated. They should therefore show themselves ready to give the candidates evidence of the spirit of the Christian community and to welcome them into their homes, into personal conversation, and into community gatherings.
2. At the celebrations belonging to the period of the catechumenate the faithful should seek to be present whenever possible and should take an active part in the responses, prayers, singing and acclamations.
3. On the day of election because it is a day of growth for the community, the faithful, when called upon, should be sure to give honest and carefully considered testimony about the catechumens
4. During Lent, the period of purification and enlightenment, the faithful should take care to participate in the rites of the scrutinies and presentations and give the elect the example of their own renewal in the spirit of penance, faith and charity. At the Easter Vigil they should attach great importance to renewing their own baptismal promises.
5. During the period immediately after Baptism, the faithful should take part in the Masses for neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter Season, welcome the neophytes with open arms in charity, and help them to feel more at home in the community of the baptised.

RCIA 9

Act

- What are some first steps (or new steps) can we make as a Team to help the Community understand its role in initiation of new members?
- What else could we do?

Prayer

Holy Mystery of God,
You renew us in our minds and hearts,
and we have tasted the sweetness of your Word.
In the fellowship of your Spirit,
may we grow together in deepening
our grasp of the paschal mystery, making it part of our lives.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen

As we leave this place, may the Lord be with us to protect us.
Amen

May the Lord guide us and give us strength.
Amen

May the Lord watch over us, keep us in His care, and bless us
with His peace.
Amen

Further Reading & Resources

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1999) p 166-167
- Vatican II Council: *Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church*,(AG) 14
- *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for Clergy) (London:CTS, 1997): 41, 53, 54
- *Code of Canon Law New Revised English Translation* (London: Harper Collins, 1997) Codes 519,529(2), 530.
- *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Approved for use in the Dioceses of England and Wales* (London: Burns & Oates, 1987, reprinted 2004): 4, 9(1-5), 75 234, 235

The Role of the Community

PRIOR READING

If you have time before the session take time to read the following extracts from Church documents as an introduction to the session There is space to make you own notes in the right hand column.

The parish remains the pre-eminent place for catechesis (sharing faith... by example first). It must rediscover its vocation, which is to be a welcoming family home.

John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 67



The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumenate in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.

RCIA 4

The catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity. This is achieved in four ways:

1. a suitable catechesis...
2. As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation. Thus formed, '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 a 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. Since the Lord in whom they believe is a sign of contradiction, the newly converted often experience divisions and separations, but they also taste the joy that God gives without measure' (AG 14)
3. The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites...
4. Since the Church's life is apostolic...

RCIA 75



'Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making of oneself a disciple of him. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him, and to live as he lived. In this way the believer unites himself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church.

GDC 53

'this comprehensive formation includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life'... 'this (formation) lays the foundation of the spiritual edifice of the Christian, nurtures the roots of his faith life and enables him to receive more solid nourishment in the ordinary life of the Christian community.

GDC 67

As it is formation for the Christian life it comprises but surpasses mere instruction. Being essential, it looks to what is 'common' for the Christian... and finally, being initiatory, it incorporates into the community which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith'

GDC 68

Initiatory catechesis lays the basis for the Christian life of the followers of Jesus.

The process of continuing conversion goes beyond what is provided by basic catechesis. In order to encourage this process, it is necessary to have a Christian community which welcomes the initiated, sustains them and forms them in faith. 'Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes the catechumen at a certain stage of his catechesis. The accompaniment which a community gives to the initiated is eventually transformed into their being totally integrated by the same community.' GDC 69

'Continuing formation in the faith is directed not only to the individual Christian, to accompany them in their journey towards holiness, but also to the Christian community as such so that it may mature also in its interior life of love of God and of one another as well as in its openness to the world as a missionary community... Approaching this ideal little by little demands of the community a great fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, the constant nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing education in the faith, listening all the time to the Word.' GDC 86

'These are the profound reasons for which the Christian community is in herself living catechesis. Thus she proclaims, celebrates, works and remains always a vital, indispensable and primary locus of catechesis.' GDC 141

Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian Community'. ...the community accompanies catechumens, and with maternal solicitude makes them participate in her own experience of the faith and incorporates them into herself' GDC 254

Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian Community... It is the community that welcomes the catechized in an environment 'in which they will be able to live in the fullest way what they have learned.' GDC 220

The Christian community not only gives much to those who are being catechized but also receives much from them... They bring to the community new religious and human wealth... Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized, but also brings the community itself to maturity. GDC 221

The parish community is called to be a fraternal and welcoming family where Christians become aware of being the people of God... the parish is the usual place where faith is born and where it grows. GDC 257



'The quality of the community's life will greatly affect the formation of catechumens. The presence of catechumens challenges the community to be credible, to be the body of Christ they claim to be.' Nicky Stevens.,



When time is not invested in formation of the adult faith community, Dunning describes the ensuing disaster as 'pouring the new wine of adult initiation not into the new wineskins of a spirit-filled community, but into the old churchskins of tired structures and institutions epitomized by enquiry classes and lectures. They will initiate new members not into a community but into a book and a priest. They will invite catechumens not into a lifelong journey that varies for each person but into a terminal programme of classes with a few perfunctory mechanical liturgies thrown in and call it a catechumenate. They will lose the new wine by pouring it into old churchskins' James Dunning, Echoing God's Word