

Report on the

RCLA Network Conference 2010

Bridging the Gap



Wednesday 30 June – Friday 2 July 2010
Sedgley Park, Manchester

Contents

	page
Starting point	3
 Day One	
Input: The Parish	4
Table Group Lectio: The Early Christian Community	4
Input on Early Christian Community in Acts	4-5
 Day Two	
Liturgical Catechesis	5
• Reflecting on our practice – liturgy, scripture, catechesis.	6
• The task of passing on the faith – the whole community	
• RCIA 75 – suitable pastoral formation	6
Signposts: Word, Worship, Community, Service	7
Role of Sponsors	7-8
Table Task:	
• Job description for a sponsor, formation needed and on-going support	
9-11	
‘Speed Dating’	
• An opportunity to share what has been energizing in various diocesan settings	
12	
 Day Two Afternoon Input: Looking at the French Diocese of Evry	 12-13
Comments, questions, reflections on the role of sponsor	13-14
 Input: RCIA as a way of being Church – formation in a parish setting as outlined in the General Directory for Catechesis (71)	 15
Table discussions: on level of catechesis/formation for sponsors	
16	
 Day Three	
Key questions	17
Encounter with Jesus leads to	
Challenges – a balancing act	17-18
What do you take away?	
RCIA Network business	19
Regional Study Days 2011	
19	
Closing Liturgy outline	20

Bridging the Gap

The starting point for the 2010 RCIA Network Conference was the first period of RCIA: Evangelisation and Pre-Catechumenate. It was facilitated by Martin Jakubas, a priest of the diocese of Arundel and Brighton, and former member of the RCIA Network Executive, with many years' experience of the Rite. Martin is a member of the Bishops' Conference Liturgical Formation Sub-Committee, and chaired the working party producing guidelines for the Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (CICCA). Liturgies for the Conference were prepared by Martin Foster, Bishops' Conference Acting Secretary of the Department for Christian Life & Worship, and also an RCIA Executive member.

The Conference was attended by 50 members of the Network from 14 Dioceses:

- Arundel & Brighton, Brentwood, East Anglia, Hexham & Newcastle, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Salford, Shrewsbury, Southwark and Westminster, with representation from the Bishops Conference Department for Christian Life & Worship, and the Bishops' Conference Home Mission Desk.

The first period of RCIA is described in the Rite as a time of no fixed duration or structure, for enquiry and introduction to Gospel values, providing opportunity for seeds of faith to be nourished, watered, and slowly, without pressure, to break open, shoots beginning to find their way towards the light in the heart of the enquirer. All this happens, the rite tells us, in the various circumstances of daily life, and it goes on to say that all the followers of Christ – the whole community - are obliged to spread the faith according to their abilities.

The Conference aims were to explore this period, looking at the characteristics of a Christian community that is attractive to outsiders through the lens of our present reality in parishes - to question where the enquirers might come from, and what they are seeking. Following on from this, to look at what it means to be an open, welcoming, community that reaches out, and then accompanies and cares for those who come – and that through actually engaging with the Rite and seeing it as intrinsic to the mission of Christ, the community becomes a 'sponsoring', witnessing community. The hope was that these themes would come alive through the experience of gathering together and sharing wisdom, session input, work & ministry in table groups, liturgy, prayer and reflection.

The report follows the process of the Conference, giving those unable to participate a flavour of these study days. In addition perhaps readers may find some ideas in the report that will stimulate reflection on the practice of RCIA in their own parish communities, .

Day One (Wednesday)

Welcome and Opening Liturgy: *Gospel of the Day: Luke 9: 51-62* 'I will follow you wherever you go'

Delegates from North, South, East and West were invited forward to present a symbol of their parish community, and leave it on display.

Session One – Input & sharing: The Parish:

The Parish is part of what makes me 'me'. I am part of what makes it 'it'! It is a place of ministry. It is a place of mission. SO what lies at the heart of parish? What is the mission of your parish?

Responses:

- Place for equipping disciples
- To be empowered as the Body of Christ in and for your/our lives
- Connected to families – keeping the Catholic faith alive and well – passing on the faith, welcoming people to church
- Mixed community, mixed mission – from old (SVP etc) to young families (teaching, social action)
- To be all inclusive, no matter what race, culture, background
- To further the knowledge of Jesus – one way being through welcome – particularly in huge multi-ethnic parish
- The liturgy is our 'window'
- 'found a newsletter on the bus' and it caught my attention – 'there is something here I want'

Question: Is there a benchmark we can go back to? To ask ourselves 'how are we doing?'

See Acts 2: 41-17

Table group lectio divina on this text about the early community of Christians

responses

- Communal life – held all in common – sharing/meals together etc, sense of being close knit – Gk *koinonia* living in one another's pockets – what's yours is mine and mine is yours
- Gathered for breaking of bread – in homes
- Gathered for Prayers
- Daily meeting in temple at first, but then witnessing at the Gates of the Temple
- Witnessing by example – attractive to outside
- Praising God
- Sharing lives – social/practical, service of those in need
- Signs and wonders
- Generous giving
- Evangelising – for others to accept and be baptised
- Teaching of the apostles

Input: Early Christian Community in Acts

Didache – teaching – education – where is the place of education in our parishes? For Sacraments, homilies, scripture study, schools, discussions etc...

Koinonia ‘living in one another’s pockets’ in parish community, parish life, visiting the sick & bereaved, sharing lives. Also – ‘to be together’ – sense of unity of focus, prayer, Eucharist, and from this, go out to live our faith. Caring about each others needs, and supporting, particularly in touch times... to give out of our own necessity and not of our excess, it is our duty to support, eg to come to funerals in the parish etc.

Klassis arton breaking of bread – Good liturgy nourishes faith, bad liturgy destroys it

Proseuche the prayers – regular prayer (eg Prayer of the Church). When does your parish come together to pray? (house groups, morning-evening prayer, exposition, mothers prayers, stations of the cross and of the resurrection

Marturion – witnessing – evangelisation. Where do we see it in our parishes? In the Church? School gates – whole vision of the school, and the witness to families; testimonies of those received into the church, practical witness through sponsoring Credit Union for example, taking part in Civic ceremonies, walks of witness, working with other church groups for social justice – wherever the members of the church are, there is Christian life in action.

Question: When people come along, what do they say they saw? What are their reasons for coming? Perhaps to a wedding, baptism or funeral. Perhaps cant articulate, but it is something that you were doing in the parish... or they met someone who is a Catholic... and want to belong themselves.

Diakonia service – visiting the sick, soup kitchen/care of homeless, asylum support, youth clubs, families support, support of unemployed, prisoners and their families, etc. Also to see catechesis as a form of service. Recognising inclusion of people with special needs. Family life itself is full of opportunities for service.

Each of the above characteristics of Christian/Parish life feed off one another... eg good worship can lead to good witness and to questioning what education we need for the parish.

Day Two (Thursday)

Session: Liturgical Catechesis

One aspect of our 'moving forward' as church is in liturgical catechesis. What is going on that enables the parish to be vibrant/living/attractive? What is bridging the gap for people on the outside looking in? How is scripture used – what is your experience of this aspect of the liturgy, and how do you enter into it. What is the quality of your worship – does it drive others away, disengage, send to sleep, with no power and might of God obviously present – how effective is our liturgy? If ineffective – we are lost! So the opposite – what IS vibrant liturgy? What is liturgy that empowers all the life of the people of the parish and enables all the different aspects of Christian discipleship to flourish? What is liturgy that forms us for mission?

Liturgy & Catechesis for weddings/marriage – with the preparation, including all the mixed marriages – real opportunity – people want to get married in church for all sorts of reasons... how can we build on this? Lots of opportunity for meeting places! Convalidations are on the increase, for example. But others will 'go and get married elsewhere – cant wait for annulment... don't want to enter that process...

What are the 'meeting places' for us with contemporary life/values?

At the level of the official church, we can seem very disapproving – eg one local Polish church refusing to baptise babies of unmarried couples... not seen as opportunity there.

What are we preparing people for?

Sacramental moments? Ritual? Or Life?

Do we encourage 'coffee-shop Catholics' – eg 'Can I have one of those please' (Baptism) Response often: What Mass do you go to? You are expected to raise your child RC... What solutions have we come up with?

- **RCIA and CICCA**
- **Adult formation**

Task: Passing on faith is not the task of the few but of the **whole parish community** – it is the task of the whole church to catechise – how can we make this happen? How can we bring everyone in the community into the process?

Principle parish activities involving the whole community:

- Catechetical ministry
- Liturgical ministry
- Pastoral ministry (to parish, and outside the parish)

How do we live this out? Raise awareness of the tasks of whole community and enable whole community to participate in the tasks?

See RCIA 75: we offer 'suitable pastoral formation aimed at training them in the Christian life...' Suitable pastoral formation – not just about the head, but it is AWESOME – it is about the experience of the parish on Sunday, and reflecting on this liturgical experience, with the spotlight being on the catechumens/candidates/elect at the various stages.

Not just about 'knowledge' or 'changing morality' – what IS the LIFE they are being invited into? The life of the disciple? What is suitable pastoral formation for a disciple?

RCIA 75, 1-4

1. Word of God and teachings of the Church
2. Living and praying the liturgical life of the community
3. Following the example of the rest of the community as they live out the Christian life
4. Working to spread the gospel (And BE the Good News for others) through the apostolic work of the community.

What are our expectations of those who come? How are they enabled to enter into the mysteries we celebrate?

Liturgical catechesis: responding to all their questions: (Why do you make the sign of the cross, etc.. why sit, stand, kneel... etc..) In our parish communities we are a real mix – what is Christian living in our context? What is Christian witness in our context?

Session: The signposts will be Word, Worship, Community and Service

- **WORD** – at the heart of catechesis, and Word that we celebrate needs to be the *driving force* behind all catechesis, and opportunity offered every time we meet, for jumble sale preparation or church cleaning... a ten-minute sharing, with question: how do we 'work', clean, serve better (or whatever the ministry) as a result of this Word?
- The starting point for any group of people working in the Church in whatever capacity is the Word of God, the Gospel of the day... this is how the community as a whole is engaging in the catechetical process. Word to guide and direct, the guiding principle for all, and not just those preparing for sacraments.
- **WORSHIP** – is the source and summit – we look at the Gospel for the coming Sunday, - Q what is the catechetical effect of being well prepared? Worship becomes more vibrant – we do it more carefully together, all having our part to play, all touched by the Liturgy. If Word and Worship are there, then the next two will follow and flow from it.
- **COMMUNITY & SERVICE**

Centrality of the Word of God for the life of the Community

The readings for the coming (some do preceding) Sunday are the focus for all the catechesis

Liturgical texts are also source of catechesis – the action and the word together give meaning at the heart of the sacrament (every word, every action is an encounter with Christ CCC) eg use of water – in daily life, and then in the sacrament

Challenges? Responses from the Conference tables:

- Spirituality is about all human growth
- Cleaners – to affirm them that they are living the Gospel in their role

- Priests – sometimes find it difficult to open to the Word interpreting their lives – so used to be ‘in control’ and ‘studying’ the Word and ‘interpreting’ – that to allow the Word to interpret them can be difficult
- The pain – we share it with others, who are in difficulties of all sorts – marriages, society, sexuality – all sorts of things that prevent them starting the journey in the eyes of the Church – how can we be compassionate – what can we do about this ‘de-selection’? – we say ‘Welcome’ but ‘not you, sorry – you can only come so far, but not to the table...’ What are ways through this?
- Use of ‘The Wednesday Word www.wednesdayword.org.uk for reaching families in catholic schools, many of whom not coming to church – real pathway here – opportunity for outreach, invitation, welcome

Session:

The Role of SPONSORS – in accompanying the journey/bridging the gap

Table task

- The role of the sponsor, including who needs accompanying in our parishes, why, and how do we respond?
- What formation would the sponsors need?

Each of the tables used a large sheet of flip chart to provide their job spec and formation requirements – these were attached to the walls, and the conference delegates were then invited to ‘tour’ the contributions and make comments, and ask for points of clarification.

Job Description	Formation	On-going Care
<p>Table 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A willingness to work as part of a team • Guided by the Priest and nominated leaders/catechists • Someone who is in relationship with the person either already in relationship or introduced – e.g. an accompanier • A long-term and ongoing commitment • A practicing Catholic • Prepared to witness to their own faith journey • Prepared to echo the church’s teaching • A good listener • Open to training and formation • Non-judgmental 	<p>Table 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A day/afternoon/evening to introduce the role and share our stories • Meeting with the community of sponsors/leaders a few times a year – including prayer and spiritual development and on-going reflection* • Affirming peoples’ gifts and talents 	<p>Table 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual reunion or party • Ongoing enrolling and commissioning • Giving a sense of being ‘called and chosen’ and affirming the role <p>*also here</p>
<p>Table 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully initiated and regularly practicing • Witness to their own faith • Good listener • Availability • Ability to connect with community (social outreach) • Openness to learn and share (social justice) • Non-judgmental • Respect for confidentiality (CRB checked) 	<p>Table 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is RCIA – process and Rite • Understanding faith development • Basic knowledge of scripture • Worship and Liturgy resources • Group dynamics <p>*3 evenings modelling RCIA sessions</p>	<p>Table 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support • Days of reflection/retreat • Opportunity for spiritual direction • Ongoing formation • Sharing good practice/experience • Join the RCIA Network
<p>Table 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be disciple <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) communion and intimacy with Jesus (ii) living their faith (iii) part of local church community • commitment to befriend, prepared to develop relationship/support • willingness to share faith • enthusiastic about their faith – honesty and integrity <p>must be Confirmed</p>	<p>Table 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and communication skills • Discernment • Time-management • Understanding of RCIA process • Understanding of Church teachings <p>Scriptural formation ‘How to’ – feel comfortable with <i>lectio</i> etc.</p>	<p>Table 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources – people, websites, bc someone to listen to sponsor – express concerns, someone to ask advice/answers if unknown • Reviewing – opportunities for reflection and evaluation • Retreat opportunities <p>Prayer – ongoing support from parish commu</p>

<p>Table 4: Job Spec and Formation combined</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person of faith within the community plus skills in faith-sharing • Accepting and supporting of others plus listening skills plus discernment skills • A prayerful person, plus prayer skills • Participation in an RCIA group plus basics of RCIA – concept behind it • Openness to new learning and supervision • Being alongside others 		<p>Table 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray together and meet for annual re • Regular support from a named, trained person – either one to one or group • Regular review <p>Regular resourcing</p>
<p>Table 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘RCIA 53: ‘help another find and follow Christ’ • A member of the parish community • A person of faith • Willing to help to bring another to Christ through witness, prayer, friendship • Willing to commit and invest time to meet regularly with candidate • Willing to undertake formation • Willing to attend RCIA sessions • Discreet, friendly, open • Prepared to undertake CRB 	<p>Table 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the role and the Rite • Skills in discernment, listening, confidentiality • Praying with another person • Understanding other roles within RCIA process <p>Exploring questions together</p>	<p>Table 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of sponsorship skills • Reflection with others fulfilling their role <p>Annual celebration of thanksgiving</p>
<p>Table 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised, practicing Catholic • From the local worshipping community • Ability to commit time/energy • Willingness to share personal faith story • Desire to grow in prayer life • Good, patient listener and communicator • Limited contract available 	<p>Table 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance people skills • Team support and apprenticeship • RCIA process • Scripture and faith formation 	<p>Table 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and supervision/mentoring • Retreats • Team building • Sustaining faith • Forum for sharing questions • Openness to change/transition

--	--	--

<p>Table 7:</p> <p><i>Person Spec:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptised • Good listener • Trustworthy • Lived faith – balanced • Open to questions • Honest about own faith • Enthusiasm/good sense of humour (GSOH) • Interested in people/community <p><i>Job Description</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfil baptismal calling • Commit to accompany someone as they prepare for Baptism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) to get to know the person (ii) to share their experience of being Catholic (iii) to draw into the life of the community liturgically and socially • Willingness to take part in initial and ongoing formation and support 	<p>Table 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening skills • Basic scripture skills • Team approach • Basics of RCIA • Boundaries and safeguarding • Reflection skills 	<p>Table 7:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual – with co-ordinator • Peer – socially and spiritually • On-going formation as group and with other ministries
--	---	--

Thursday Afternoon Session 1: 'Speed Dating'

Delegates were invited to 'speed date' (ie spend 5 minutes) at each of 11 small tables, meeting other delegates who were speaking with enthusiasm about a particular resource or event that they were involved in. The following 'dates' were available:

1. Family Catechesis: Mary Crosby, Bromley
2. Home Mission Opportunity – post Papal Visit: Clare Ward, Home Mission Desk at the Bishops' Conference
3. RCIA Network Website – pages for enquirers: Martin Foster
4. Home-School-Parish: a model from the Leeds Diocese: Linda Pennington
5. Rite of Election: Southwark model & *Seeking God Together* resource: Molly Styant
6. *Seeking God Together national resources* produced by the Network: Caroline Dollard
7. The Wednesday Word – Gospel for home-school-parish: Dannie Firth
8. Paris Conference on the Catechumenate: Susanne Kowal
9. Catechist Training Pack: Patrician Carroll, Scotland
10. Summer School on Mission, 27-20 July 2: Alex Heath, Northampton Diocese
11. A model for RCIA in a transient situation (military bases): Brendan Fulham

Day Two (Thursday) Afternoon Session 2:

Group Lectio at the tables on the Gospel of the day – the healing of the paralysed man

Session Input: on the experience of the Diocese of Evry, S.E. Paris

- A new diocese was created in 1968 . An opportunity. Church in France had been through a time of 'crucifixion'. Clergy mismanagement, loss of faith, Baptisms had dropped off, lack of priests.
- Diocesan Gathering: full of conflict – disbanded – not the way forward!
- Synod: a canonical state – a real process with elections to synod, and timeline with action and consequences.
Decisions were made:
- To abolish the concept of 'parish' – no longer to be the administrative concept to underpin Catholic life
- Pastoral sectors created – with teams in each sector, including religious, ordained, lay, working together to develop the Church across the sector. Named people, contacts, availability for different ministries.#
- RCIA at heart of this development – all that we do in the church has initiation at the centre – so the way forward was driven by RCIA (which had been developed in France from the 1950's)

Diocese of Evry and RCIA

- Saw need for developing 'house groups' – to welcome initial enquirers. Enquirer enabled to ask their questions, and move forward with their journey. Could remain in this house group for as long as they wanted. Basis: Scripture and the questions of the enquirers.
- When ready, moved into Catechumenate: organised in a whole 'sector' arrangement, minimum of 2 years duration, sometimes up to 4-5 yrs

- Rites happened when people were ready – for some the Rite of Acceptance, for others, to receive symbols of their journey stage.
- **Development of ‘Accompagnatures’ or sponsors**
 - These ‘sponsors’ journeyed/accompanied the catechumen through all the stages. They were formally trained and were a resource for the Diocese.
 - Main Diocesan events – 2 or 3 a year – for the sponsors (not catechists) for their on-going support and formation
- RCIA enabled re-development of the whole faith journey for the community as well as those who came
- Lifted the consciousness of the whole faith community - to do mystagogy – reflect on the mysteries celebrated
- Confirmed by the Bishop 1 year after Baptism and Communion

Questions

Q: What is the role of the priest in the formation of candidates/catechumens?

A: In each ‘team’ there would be Priest(s), and the team was for the whole pastoral sector, not just for RCIA.

Q: How does the whole community recognise their responsibility to accompany? To sponsor?

A: initially seen as just adults for Baptism, but then, what about parents bringing their children for baptism? Helps the parents explore their own faith and then to accompany their children

Same for bereavement – to see this as accompaniment – role of community members

Q Is there a way of development of this ministry of accompaniment in incorporating people into caring for one another/about the life of the community as a whole?

A: In Evry their experience increased their social awareness – of people and their needs, eg asylum seekers. Increasing membership and in returners too.

10 years ago, Developed a national register of Sponsors – across the whole of France – with 9000 Baptisms, and 26000 in the catechumenate.

Summary Questions to reflect on

- What does it mean to be ‘local church’?
- How do we broaden the sense of responsibility in the community? For nourishing and nurturing new members?
- **Job specification for sponsors?:** is there something useful to learn
 - Nature of the job, what is the formation? Ongoing care for the sponsors.

Comments/Ideas from the Tables on the Group Task Flip Chart sheets: Job Specs, Formation needs and on-going care for Sponsors

- Celebration of Thanksgiving for the ministry – once a year, for all they do in journeying with the catechumens
- Could be too descriptive – put people off. Recognise skills within the individual and encourage them to come forward, rather than a ‘list of qualities needed’
- Gives us a ‘level’ – what we might be looking for
- Know what letting selves in for
 - Responsible to
 - Accountable to

- And how long for (not 'life'!)
- Best practice of 90% of secular charities – say what you are asking people to do
- Role description – important in terms of the whole catechumenal team – how do you distinguish between roles: eg catechist and sponsor? See the complementary nature of the roles – they are different!
- Find a way of saying 'whacky people need not apply' – brining own agendas/ideologies/'orthodoxy' and disrupt lives of all/tear a group apart - can be a problem! Eg...An experience of an 'ultra orthodox' person in the group made for an 'interesting year' but they did grow – it was hard'!
- However don't lose sight of fact that 'whacky' person can bring treasure to the group – bringing more people into the church than anyone else!
- 'All are welcome' – yes, it is a minefield. People who come as enquirers will often 'catechise' the group as they bring their treasure to the mix.
- Is this something someone volunteers to do, or are they invited? Is it a 'call' from the community?
- Do we need a psychological assessment? Catholic baggage? We are affirming the need for constant training in what it is to be a Catholic
- Openness about who comes along to RCIA , yes, but group needs to discern who the Sponsor is. Do people choose their own sponsors? Not really – needs to be discerned by the parish team.
- Do we have 'parish sponsors' AND sponsors who the enquirers bring themselves? Chosen by an individual who says "This person can help me become a good Catholic"?
- Use of language can cause confusion eg 'non-baptised' catechumens need sponsors and godparents?
 - Candidates are already baptised – just a sponsor needed
- A sponsor 'accompanies' as in the French
- French diocese – are they/we still talking about 'RCIA Groups' when it is the way of being Church, and refers to the whole community. As long as parish things RCIA is a 'group thing', cant move forward. Yes, we have to live with this history/baggage... cant 'start again' but can encourage whole community responsibility/engagement. It is the way in which we celebrate our oneness in Christ and how we go out to share with others.
- When does the job end! – for the non-baptised, at the point of Election, do they stop being a sponsor? And we move to Godparent? Or can they both continue to the end?
- Sponsor continues to end of mystagogy, and life-long friendship continues in the life of the Mass Time community
- Godparent should be involved in the life of the catechumen from the beginning, not at the end... not an isolated role... but it is different.. Like a 'foster parent' role.
- Developing a relationship as a sponsor (or godparent) with the candidate/catechumen – described as 'walking hand in hand together' to help this person find and follow Christ (see Rite of Acceptance).

Gathering Comment from Martin Jakubas:

Keep returning to the Rite for the roles of Sponsor and Godparent – and ask how do we put flesh on these bones? Lift the Rite off the page and into our lives... description/set of actions... to become alive and active in us

All sorts of insights above lift it off the page and make RCIA real. We have begun/continue an exploration. We continue to live with the question: How do we make the initiation of those who come the concern of the whole community/a way of being community.

Input Session: 'Community'

RCIA as a way of being Church – it is the living out of our faith, as in the doctrine of the Church (eg Vatican II Constitution: on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, and on Revelation *Dei Verbum*)

All sorts of levels and styles of formation going on, continuing , over the years. Whenever the enquirer turns up, we are there, ready to meet their needs.

A look at the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)

What do we find? What do we think in response?

(Background to GDC translation - Two texts: one in Latin, and one in English, translated by a Spaniard – a literal translation - which makes for rather awkward reading in English – but there is treasure in it!

NB In any Roman document, the ORDER in which the document presents its points is important).

GDC Article 71: for continuing education in the faith, the ministry of the word uses many forms of catechesis. Among these the following may be highlighted:

(1) The study and exploration of Sacred Scripture, read not only in the Church but with the Church and her living faith, which helps to discover divine truth, which it contains, in such a way as to arouse a response of faith. The '*lectio divina*' is an eminent form of this vital study of Scripture.

Comment from MJ: Scripture for the Church: 'Revelation' is passed on in the temporary Canon of Scripture we call the Lectionary. We pass it on. This is the experience of God that people have (edited by those who put the Canon together). The Lectionary in this particular moment in history is the way we pass on our faith – so the most fundamental form of catechesis uses the Lectionary as its primary source – Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, the Word of God provides our fundamental catechesis. Whatever else we offer/do, we need to start where the Church is at this particular point in time, ie using the Lectionary (the seasons and times will be guided through the Word of God in the Lectionary).

(2)¹ A Christian reading of events, which is required of the missionary vocation of the Christian community. In this respect the study of the social teaching of the Church is indispensable.....()

Comment from MJ: 'its main aim is to interpret these realities , determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching.' ie Justice/peace as a thread that runs through everything we say and do in response.

(3) Liturgical catechesis, prepares for the sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy.....() it must be regarded as an eminent kind of catechesis..

¹ Numbers (1) to (5) put in to aid reference – they do not appear in Article 71, GDC

Comment from MJ: we need to reflect upon/explore our experience of the Mass

(4) Occasional catechesis which seeks to interpret determined circumstances of personal, family, ecclesial or social life and to help live them in the prospect of faith

Comment from MJ: eg a talk or discussion – need to find ways of making it memorable if its only occasional! We only remember up to 7% of the words of a talk.

(5) Initiatives of spiritual formation which seek to reinforce conviction, open new perspectives and encourage perseverance in prayer and in the duties of following Christ

Comment from MJ: need a MISSION of some sort/Retreat experiences – catechesis of this sort that helps people grow/stay on the journey

(6) A systematic deepening of the Christian message by means of theological instruction, so as truly to educate in the faith, encourage growth in understanding of it and to equip the Christian for giving the reason for his hope in the present world... 'perfective catechesis'

Comment from MJ: instructive/education, study at a higher level – theological – improving catechesis.

Table discussion questions:

- What is an appropriate level of catechesis for a Sponsor?
- What is the level of formation needed for this role/task?

Table discussion feedback:

- challenging the use of 'levels' in talking about catechesis, which isn't linear but spiral. There is danger if we associate a 'level' with a 'ministry' and deny people the opportunity to grow into other aspects of ministry.
- Key at first – to give people confidence 'you can do this' – and engagement with the Word of God in Scripture always does that
- 'courses' and 'talks' language! In GDC article 71, (1) on the list is Lectionary-based catechesis – this is for everyone, and particularly the RCIA 'team'
- Not 'levels' but 'moments' – we said (1) to(3) are most appropriate, and then (4) and (5) – to understand that they are being 'equipped', not to make them run away screaming!
- Not about being 'worthy' as a 'qualified' person
- To give confidence – " yes, you can reflect on the Word, you can 'read' the events of the times, you can reflect on your experience of liturgy".
- Basic question for a catechist is 'Am I open and willing to work with Scripture?' - and if 'Yes', then everything else will fall into place.

Final comments by MJ: a few caveats

There are some dangerous words here (in the GDC). Yes we all need it, but some of it some of the time, not all of it all of the time – some less frequently. We are building a mosaic of where we are as church in our world.

Day Three (Friday) Concluding Session:

Key Questions

- **What are we preparing people for (in RCIA)?**
- **We talk about 'conversion' – changing from one thing to another... from what to what?**
- **What is the effect of the encounter with Jesus?**

This is what our liturgy is about – **our Sunday Mass** – that people want to be there, to encounter Christ, and be nourished for the week

The encounter with Jesus leads to:

- A new way of living – scripture challenges us, its uncomfortable – 'I haven't dealt with that yet'. All part of the steps of conversion. Can I change, can I move into a new way of living, *metanoia*?
- New hopes – gather to pray with people, don't always want to be there, but somehow in that *mystery* the day changes. I can look at things in a different way, with new hope!
- New fears – I can recognise the troubles ahead, the reality, sometimes the church can feel like a 'closing down sale', and there is pain – for example, priests who have been submitted to batteries of psychological tests, people have said 'Catholics are all perverts and paedophiles' etc.
- New ways of looking back – memories, and making sense of things. Perhaps my old 'slavery' was necessary so that I could experience true freedom – be led through the 'red sea' and the 'desert' to the 'promised land' in my own experience
- Conversion – meeting with Christ – what are we being prepared for? A new way of living – Word, God, world, ourselves.

We are accompanying a person – in their encounter with Christ – and into a church that is painful too at times, but there in the mystery is new life!

So What is RCIA?

- What are we doing?
- Rather more than simply bringing people into the Church
- It is about transforming lives
- Are we living vibrant or fallen lives?

Challenges:

- finding ways through the challenges!
- Irenaus: being fully alive is what gives God glory....

- We are called to become what we are!
- Not stretched and pulled into something else! (like a pullover after being in a washing machine!)

A balancing act! The teaching of Jesus, the teaching of the Church

- What is the teaching of Jesus: very clear, no punches pulled, sometimes uncomfortable
- Church – teachings of the Holy RC Church which we are initiating people into...
- Sometimes difficult
- For Jesus often the most important person wasn't at the Table at all, but underneath! Anointing his feet! And She goes home rejoicing, converted...

Are they always the same?

We've got to find a way through this balancing act....

Fears?

- How often do we live out of our fears!
- What are we afraid of?
- Do we fear our senses, our bodies, what they are capable of? Sexuality? Priests all celibate/priestly caste? Fear of senses/as corporal beings?
- What else are we afraid of?
- To ordain married men?
- To ordain women?
- To give communion to divorced and remarried people

What a wondrous thing a human being is (GS 22)

It is only in the mystery of the word made flesh that the mystery of the human being truly becomes clear

Christ fully reveals – the NEW revelation of the Father, the mystery of God's LOVE... is fully revealed to us in Christ.

- Wondrous humanity!
- Made in the image of God
- Humanity – because of Christ, humanity has been raised to a dignity beyond compare... Jesus doesn't absorb humanity, but assumes and becomes human

God's Grace:

- Have we been mean with God's grace?
- It's a free gift!
- How many people do we say cant have it!
- It is ours to say so?
- Is it ours to be mean with?
- Can we control or contain God's grace!

'What we need now are heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity, share the joys and sorrows of the human heart and yet who are contemplatives who have fallen in love with God...(Benedict on priests today?)

- KNOW that God loves you!

- You are the poorest of the poor, bruised in spirit... Jesus did the job so that sheep could graze safely, for free... seek and find.

What do you take away? Discuss in table groups

Feedback from table groups

- Just how honest can we be? About our struggles?
- Commitment to our *own* formation – to get to a place of depth that enables a compassionate response, and recognise the cost of discipleship.
- Encouragement
- Yes initiation is a messy business
- Blood, water, pain in giving birth
- It's a messy business!
- Our lives are *not* straightforward and simple... but the Lord is a companion and gives us a way forward.. through the mountain ranges.
- We are not preparing people for anything apart from being fully alive.
- Yes, privileged steps... among a whole pilgrim people of God...
- We must not hide ourselves off in a 'corner'

Closing Network Business

Members of the Executive gave a brief report on current activities including:

- **National Resources:** *'Seeking God Together'* – pilots in Paris and Glasgow, preview at this Conference, and gradually made available on line via the website
- **Website:** new pages for Enquirers are in the making – easy to navigate, various pathways
- **CICCA:** Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age – hope for launch of these guidelines at the end of the year, 2010.
- Good connections with **Bishops' Conference** Departments: 2 members of the Exec from Department for Christian Life & Worship, and one member from the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis.
- **Eurocat** Bureau Planning meeting Helsinki 2010 and Eurocat Conference Ghent 2011

Looking forward: Regional Study Days 2011: It is planned to have two large regional study days in June 2001 – one in London, and one in West Yorkshire. There will be a carousel of workshops to choose from on these days, and to give an indication of where the interest lies and what workshops to offer, conference participants were invited to 'vote' (3 votes each), the results of which are as follows in order of preference:

1. Year-round catechumenate: ways of engaging (20)
2. Liturgy as Formative: liturgical catechesis (20)
3. Using Scripture in Catechesis: how is doctrine 'caught' and 'taught'? (13)
4. RCIA in Deanery or Pastoral Areas: how might it work? (13)
5. Sponsoring Community: What does it mean? How does it happen! (11)
6. Meeting God in Friend & Stranger: Interfaith implications for RCIA (9)
7. Role of the Clergy in RCIA: Priest, deacons (9)
8. RCIA: Basic Introduction (8)
9. Group Leadership Skills: Facilitation (7)
10. Canonical Issues (5)
11. CICCA: Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (8)

12. RCIA in an itinerant community – USAF Military Community (0)

Closing Liturgy: Mission

Gospel: Luke 10:1-12. 17-20 'The Lord appointed 72....'

Table reflection:

Each person in turn to share

- a word or phrase that caught your imagination
- What are you taking away

The others on the table then laid hands on and prayed for each person after their personal sharing, and sang for them: 'May God bless and keep you' (Christopher Walker ©)

Sign of Peace and words of encouragement on the tables

Blessing

Final Song: 'As the fire is meant for burning with a bright and warming flame, so the Church is meant for mission giving glory to God's name' (Ruth Duck, © GIA Publications)

We look forward to welcoming many old friends and new at the exciting new-style Regional Study Days next year! Don't miss out! Please do check the website for details www.rcia.org.uk. Further details/booking forms for a rich variety of workshop choices will be posted to members in the New Year.

Caroline Dollard, Convenor, RCIA Network,
On behalf of the Network Executive, August 2010