



Rev. Elio Capra SDB

## WORDS FROM THE CHAIR

Dear RCIA friends,

How time flies! Advent and Christmas are upon us. The liturgical year concludes with the Feast of Christ the King. With this feast, the liturgy asks us a very challenging question: "As you come to the end of the liturgical year, is Christ your King? Is Christ the number one in your heart and in your life?" If you are anything like me, you probably would answer: "Yes, at times I have made him my King. But at times, I have put my own little plans, my own self-interest ahead of him."

And so, as the new liturgical year begins, we are invited to continue our journey of making Christ our King. This is a time during which we reflect on the coming of the Lord in four different ways.

The first way to celebrate the coming of the Lord happens during the first Sunday of Advent. We reflect on the final return when the Lord will come in his final glory to gather all creation and to bring it back to God, its original glory and destiny.

The following three Sundays remember and celebrate the coming of the Lord who came to live among us two thousand years ago. The main characters along this journey are John the Baptist (second and third Sunday) and Mary (the fourth Sunday).

The third coming of the Lord celebrates the fact that Christmas is not a remembrance of a past event. It is an event that must take place today in our own hearts. Christ must be born again in the hearts of all those who see in Christ the ultimate and complete act of love for all human beings, for the world and for all creation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

Finally, the fourth coming of the Lord celebrates the fact that, if Christ is truly born in our hearts, we will then go forth as his messengers, as his witnesses, as his missionaries so that Christ will be born again in our world until he truly becomes Christ, the King of all humanity and the King of all creation.

*continued...*

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# Australian Catechumenate Network

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This is the message, the invitation and the challenge that John the Baptist and Mary give us. John is presented as the Watchman and the Awakener, inviting us to watch out for the coming of the Lord in our society, in our world and especially in our own hearts. Mary is presented as the Listener and the Mother of the Lord, inviting us to listen and receive God's message so that we too, like her, become mothers of God by bringing forth Christ to the world by what we say and what we do.

May Advent and Christmas be a time of blessings for each one of you. May Advent and Christmas be a time of spiritual growth for all your catechumens and candidates as they watch, awake, listen and respond to the God who longs to be born in their hearts.

Elio  
21/11/2011

## **CELEBRATING THE RITES OF THE CATECHUMENATE PART 3**

by Elizabeth Harrington

Education Officer - The Liturgical Commission - Archdiocese of Brisbane

The first two articles in this series looked at the rites for the Periods of Mystagogy and Catechumenate. With Lent less than 3 months away, this third and final part examines the liturgical rites during the Period of Purification and Enlightenment that coincides with Lent. Again the article focuses on those liturgies that are described as 'belonging to' this period rather than the major transition rites of Election and Enrolment of Names and Sacraments of Initiation.

### **Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names**

In this liturgy the Church makes its 'election', the choice of those catechumens who are ready to take part in the sacraments of initiation. The acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God, in whose name the Church acts. It is also called the enrolment of names because as a pledge of fidelity the candidates inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for initiation. (RCIA 106b)

### **Rites Belonging to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment**

#### **Scrutinies**

In order to inspire in the elect a desire for purification and redemption by Christ, three scrutinies are celebrated. From the first to the final scrutiny the elect should progress in their perception of sin and their desire for salvation. (RCIA 130)

Some people are uncomfortable with the term "scrutiny" because they feel that it is intrusive or hypocritical to pry into the lives and motives of those who wish to join the church. Because of those misgivings, the term "rites of healing and strengthening" is sometimes used instead. The ritual book says that the purpose of the scrutinies is to "heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect" and "bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good". The rite also describes the scrutinies as "rites for self-searching and repentance". (RCIA 128)

The word 'exorcism' is also one that is sometimes replaced with terminology considered more acceptable. In my experience, however, it is those involved in initiation ministry who find the concept troublesome rather than the candidates for initiation, some of whom have had real experiences of evil.

Every time we celebrate the sacrament of baptism, we ask the questions, "Do you renounce Satan... and all his works...and all his empty promises?" These are serious questions. We should consider them carefully before answering. And that is what the elect who are preparing to be baptised at the Easter Vigil spend much of Lent doing. In the light of God's word, they examine their lives and ask the entire Christian community to pray that whatever is weak and sinful within them may be eliminated and that whatever is good and holy may be affirmed.

After the homily and silent prayer, the power of Jesus over all sin is proclaimed in a litany of intercession. The intercessions are general petitions incorporating some issues from readings of the day. They may also name some particular struggles faced by the elect.

The scrutiny is followed and reinforced by the exorcism - a prayer said by the presider with outstretched arms over the elect asking for their deliverance and strengthening. The catechists, godparents and other ministers may lay their hands on the heads of the elect in an ancient sign of forgiveness, healing and empowerment. The assembly can be invited to extend hands over elect during the exorcism.

Effective celebration of the scrutinies is assisted by the use of placement (elect and godparent standing in the midst of the assembly) and gesture (elect kneeling or standing and bowing heads, laying on of hands).

### **Presentations**

Unless for pastoral reasons they have been held during the period of the catechumenate, the Presentations take place after the celebration of the scrutinies. The Presentation of the Creed follows the first scrutiny. The elect commit the Creed to memory and recite it publicly as their profession of faith on the day of baptism. The presentation of the Lord's Prayer occurs during the week after the third scrutiny. When the elect have been baptised and take part in their first celebration of the Eucharist, they will join in saying this prayer with the rest of the assembly. The handing on to the elect of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts that have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church's faith and prayer, is an aspect of the enlightenment which they experience during Lent.

### **Preparatory Rites on Holy Saturday**

The Rite offers a model for celebrating the Preparatory Rites on Holy Saturday - song, greeting, reading of the word of God, homily, chosen rite(s), concluding rites. Possible Preparatory Rites are:

#### *Recitation of the Creed*

The rite of recitation of the Creed prepares the elect for the profession of faith they will make at their baptism.

#### *Ephphetha Rite*

The ephphetha rite, or rite of opening the ears and mouth, serves to remind the elect their need of grace so that they may hear the word of God and profess it.

#### *Choosing a Baptismal Name*

The rite of choosing a baptismal name may be celebrated on Holy Saturday, unless it was included in the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens.

#### *Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens*

The anointing with the oil of catechumens is part of the liturgy of baptism but may be anticipated on Holy Saturday to simplify the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

### **Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation**

The climax of the journey towards initiation occurs at the Easter Vigil, where, in the midst of the community, the elect are baptised, confirmed and come to the table of the Eucharist.

### **Conclusion**

Catechesis assists catechumens to participate fully, consciously and actively in liturgy; celebrating liturgy forms them into the paschal way of life by transforming hearts and minds. This close relationship between liturgy and catechesis implies that all liturgical celebrations involving catechumens need to be carefully prepared and well celebrated. Catechetical and pastoral formation which flows from the liturgy depends on celebrations in which the signs and symbols, music and silence, words and gestures clearly and strongly evoke the presence and action of God in our midst.

## Emmaus and Beyond– The Discipleship of Mystagogia

By Karen Hart

The Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel [Lk 24:13-35] directs our Christian faith with Christ as our guide: our eyes are opened to recognise Him; we then set out to share this Good News with our companions. This lived discipleship is the reality of Mystagogia. From the moment of The Rite of Acceptance the Church embraces the catechumens and candidates with parental affection:

“From this time on the Church embraces the catechumens as its own with a mother's love and concern. Joined to the Church, the catechumens are now part of the household of Christ, since the Church nourishes them with The Word of God and sustains them by means of liturgical celebrations.”  
[RCIA #47]

As every household knows, the loving bond nurtured within never ceases, but rather must become open to enable those within to mature in their own particular manner.

A certainty in life is growth, hopefully progressive, which involves moving from one stage of life to the next. The depiction of the RCIA Rites as doorways that lead candidates from one phase to the next is familiar to us. Human life is a series of continuous doorways we pass through, for example: primary to secondary school; student to professional; single to married life; couple to family. This movement often encompasses feelings of loss, yet the excitement of newness spurs us on to further discovery and confidence. The subjective process of transition depends on our character, attitude and support services. The two disciples in the Emmaus narrative begin their journey despondent over the tortured death of their hero, Jesus. Though Cleopas and his friend are joined by Christ as they return to Emmaus, something prevented them from recognising Him.

During the catechumenate, the role of the RCIA team is to ‘begin with Moses and all the prophets, and interpret to them the things about Christ Himself, in all the Scriptures;’ [Lk 24:27] effectively representing the presence of Christ to the Emmaus candidates. The example Christ presents us with in the Emmaus story is that as soon as the two disciples receive the blessed and broken bread from Christ, He physically vanishes

from them. Christ's attendance to their needs takes on a deeper understanding, since now, by His nourishing from within, He is food for the mystagogical path forward. This natural transition also applies to the RCIA team, who move from weekly meetings to walking alongside the neophytes as we are communally fed and joined through the Paschal Mystery.

The Elect may be viewed as adolescent on the bridge to adulthood, which includes developing an understanding of rights and responsibilities, and of faith as lived discipleship embodying the *caritas* of love for others. The RCIA team must remember that while it has nurtured with a mother's love the faith development of Christian initiation, we are walking with adults, not children. During the phase of *Purification and Enlightenment* the team, in developing an expectation of independent ownership of faith, can lay the seeds of affirming the Elects' autonomy and commissioning at Pentecost. This parallels the natural stages of life, and prepares the Elect to understand that the discipleship of their relationship with Christ will involve experiences of struggle, growth and inertia; that the *Ordinary Time* in the Liturgical cycle supports continued faith development.

Throughout the process of RCIA, we nurture and guide those on the conversion journey home to Christ, humbly appreciative that we too travel this same road to our heavenly destination with measured and continuous purpose.

*“Thus a dynamic process develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of His definitive and absolute love in the entire personal and social life of man.*

*Therefore an educational growth process is necessary, in order that individual believers...may patiently be led forward, arriving at a richer understanding and a fuller integration of this mystery in their lives.’*

[*Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981) # 9]

*continued...*

The need for a welcoming and supportive parish for new members in the Church is well acknowledged. The celebrations gradually acquaint candidates with the wider parish community and simultaneously make known to the parish the joy of adult Christian initiation in their midst. The role of sponsors, to introduce and deepen this sense of belonging, is essential to developing comfort and familiarity with the parish and wider Church. Invitation to join one of the many parish ministries develops the sense of the individual becoming part of the parish community through active involvement in the mission of the parish life.

At what point does the RCIA team release the bonds of 'motherhood' which have developed? If we analyse that, received into the Church at Easter, the Neophytes begin the probationary time to drive alone, then the commissioning of them at Pentecost involves their maturing into independence. The experiential reality of life is undefined, that "*continuous, permanent conversion ...is brought about concretely in steps which lead us ever forward.*"

[*Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981) # 9]

The integrity of faith demanded by the RCIA team is to encourage this freedom, while appreciating that the permanency of conversion will include times of struggle and doubt. The RCIA team, while remaining available to the Neophytes, should create a sense of free will, whereby the Neophytes begin to take ownership of their faith and how they will live their mystagogia.

The great conversion story of St Augustine reminds us that our life is in constant tension of choice. Augustine's theology explained that we each possess emotional baggage that makes us who we are; it is inescapably part of us and should be viewed as strength of our humanness to learn, choose, change and develop. It is part of our *being* human that we search for our maker, seeking completeness only when we unite with our divine architect: "*You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*" [The Confessions of St Augustine]

In the fast pace of life today, if our intentions are not met quickly, there is a tendency to drift away or move on. The role of the RCIA is to meet those on the journey to Emmaus, while

being reassured that Christ will *open their eyes* and walk alongside us all. Our challenge is to kindle the spirit within, sharing our Christian faith and belief in '*The Way, The Truth and The Life*', [Jn 14:6] and continually pray for each other, united in human sympathy, for together we journey home to Christ.

### Need resources? Need to advertise events in your Diocese?



Come visit your website at

<http://www.ozcatechumenate.org>

Your website contains articles and tools to help teams with the RCIA process and a place to share upcoming events. This website exists for our members and contains valuable articles and links on topics such as Tools for the process, Mystagogia and Initiation of Children, as well as copies of presentations and papers from past conferences.

This month we have some wrap ups and photos from the various state conferences around Australia. In addition we are collecting stories from people who have experienced the process and want to share the excitement with others. The stories collected so far can be found in Our Stories section.

If you have an idea that you think can be shared or an event coming up in your diocese please forward the article or idea to Stewart Bazzica by email to

[bazzicas@au1.ibm.com](mailto:bazzicas@au1.ibm.com)

# SPONSORS

A Workshop by Loretto Lynch at the NSW/ACT RCIA State Conference 2011

## Why have sponsors?

Very few of us can meet people in unfamiliar surroundings without some trepidation. Many times enquirers come to their first few meetings alone. Some already have support from spouses or friends, others know no other Catholics. If we can place ourselves in their shoes maybe the “why” question quickly becomes answered.

- Companionship
- Mentor
- Model
- Someone to share thoughts and questions
- Witness
- A sounding board
- Sponsors have a key role in the rite (*cf RCIA 10*)

## Roles and responsibilities of Sponsors

- Attendance and companionship at Sunday Mass, meetings and rites
- Follow up between meetings
- Providing feedback to coordinator, especially if there is a concern
- Be present at all the rites
- Take the catechumen or candidate to parish gatherings
- Introduce them to parishioners at Mass
- Be part of the discernment process

## Who can be a Sponsor?

- Fully initiated, practising, committed Catholic
- Member of the parish community
- Maybe similar age and interest
- Spouse is not recommended, could be a valuable extra dimension
- Team member if necessary, roles should not overlap

## Qualities

- Committed Catholic
- Someone able to make the same commitment to meetings and rites
- Good listener, tolerant, patient
- Sensitive to others’ needs
- Friendly
- Someone willing to tell their own faith story
- Someone with empathy for the enquirer
- Someone who respects our faith even if they struggle with some aspects of it

## Finding sponsors

- Discern: look at lists, sit in church and observe, ask others for their opinions.
- Get to know your fellow parishioners!
- Ask a person face to face or phone them. Don’t decide for them (that she/he is probably too busy, etc.) but allow the person to make his/her own decision. Even if people can’t accept, they are always happy that you have asked them!

Give the person some time to think about it then contact him/her after a few days.  
Make sure this person knows the role and responsibilities, and provide an outline of what will be happening over the next 6-12 months.  
Maybe ask the enquirer if he or she has a relative or friend in the parish who might be their sponsor but be careful, the decision belongs to the team.  
Have a group of "sponsors in waiting".

## Formation

Spend one session with the sponsors training them in their role in RCIA.  
Gather them again in the middle (for any problems) and at the end (to help you discern the readiness of the catechumens and candidates).  
Provide them with a Retreat day with the team.  
Prepare/practise them to celebrate the rites.  
Provide suitable reading: parish/diocesan library, resource centre.

## Possible resources:

*Companions in the Journey, Sponsors and Spouses in RCIA* Chuck Blankenship ISBN 0-7648-0911-3

*Guide for Sponsors* Ron Lewinski ISBN 0-930467-05-1

*So you've been asked to be a Sponsor* Peter Maher (out of print)

(Fr Peter is Parish Priest of Newtown NSW and may still have copies if you request them)

## WA State Conference

The RCIA State Conference was this year hosted by the Archdiocese of Perth. The Conference was a great success due to the enthusiasm and interest of the 50 participants who travelled from Bunbury and Geraldton Diocese, including members from Margaret River and Mandurah, along with a wide representation from parishes in Perth.

The Opening Address by Archbishop Hickey was particularly special since the Archbishop's retirement is imminent, and this RCIA Conference is the last His Grace will address in his official capacity as Archbishop of Perth. His address focused on the conference's theme 'Transforming', and included the transforming nature of the journey of faith.

The highlight of the Conference was the key note speaker, Fr Tony Chiera from Bunbury Diocese, whose uplifting presentation of the transforming effect of RCIA on each of us, the parish, and wider universal Church set the tone for the days' events. Fr Tony included a depiction of the parish as a *Village Well*, which we are all drawn to, are replenished by, and return to for familiarity and comfort.

The evaluation feedback from the Conference was overwhelmingly positive. The 3 **workshops on-Prayer** and Spirituality; Sharing RCIA between parishes; and Transforming the Parish and its role in the RCIA process were of topical interest to the theme of *Transforming*

## DATES TO REMEMBER

*"Dear Diary"*

**What is happening?  
in your Diocese / Parish  
for RCIA Please let us know**



## ACN 2012 National Conference

Thursday 11 October (7pm)  
to  
Sunday 14 October (3pm)

Robertson Gardens Comfort Inn & Suites  
281 Kessels Road, Nathan

The Conference will explore the following topics:

- 1) Ministries in the RCIA process
- 2) Formation of those involved in the Process
- 3) The Rites in the RCIA process
- 4) The implementation of an ongoing catechumenate.

**For more detailed information on what is happening check out the ACN web site**

<http://www.ozcatechumenate.org>

## VICTORIA STATE RCIA CONFERENCE REPORT

“Welcoming the Children” was the theme for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) Victorian State Conference which was held in Ballarat recently. Keynote speakers Sr Ursula O’Rourke and Mrs Mandy Robinson provided plenty of ideas and challenges for those who attended.

Participants were reminded of key areas of the RCIA process - RCIA is an activity that involves the whole parish community, that the sponsors are chosen by the parish, that there is a need to reread the Rite each year prior to beginning each catechumenate journey, and that separate RCIA process should be run for children aged 7-12, teenagers, and adults, with ideally three teams of catechists who would meet regularly.

A new pastoral reality is the large number of children of catechetical age who want to be baptised, possibly because many of their peers are baptised. These children are to go through the catechumenate. It can take several paths - “catch up” with their peers, baptise the children and enroll them in a sacramental program, an REC group for teenagers, or **to do what the Church asks us to do by following the guidelines of Christian Initiation of Children who have reached Catechetical age (#242-306)**. There is no RCIC as such. Rather the RCIA must be adapted to meet the needs of children of catechetical age.

Although the Rite of Election is not mentioned in the Christian Initiation of children who have reached catechetical age, it was suggested that the Rite of Election should still be part of the process for children. Hence there are 3 steps for children who are of catechetical age - The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the Rite of Election, and the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.



One model of adapting the RCIA for children of catechetical age (7-17) was presented. This model involves asking the children seeking baptism to attend Children’s Liturgy of the Word during Sunday Mass regularly, and dismissing them at

the end of Children’s Liturgy of the Word to receive further instruction accompanied by their parents and catechists. The people who attended the conference were told that, for children, the Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate and a scrutiny (one scrutiny only is required for children) can be adapted and used during Children’s Liturgy of the Word. A format

for these adapted rites is available on [www.cam.org.au/evangelisation](http://www.cam.org.au/evangelisation), by clicking on the RCIA link and downloading a copy of A Parish Experience.

It was suggested that, when children of catechetical age seek baptism, the parish find sponsor families for the children and the parent(s).

It was also recommended that the RCIA team be commissioned each year.

Kathleen Reimert  
RCIA Coordinator  
St Patrick’s  
Pakenham Victoria



## Community at the Heart of Initiation NSW/ACT State RCIA Conference

The *General Directory for Catechesis*, the Church's document on faith education, invites us to realise that initiation is the work of the whole community and that the community itself sustains and forms those seeking initiation into the faith (GDC, 69 & 220). Our active participation in parish life and liturgy is a 'yes' to initiating, welcoming and sharing our faith through word and action with those who come seeking to join us. As stewards of the gift of faith we are all called to this initiatory task.

How might we make our 'yes' to the community's role in initiation a stronger reality within our Dioceses? This was the underlying theme of the recent NSW / ACT State RCIA Conference held in the Diocese of Wollongong from the 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> September 2011. Over 50 delegates from all around NSW and the ACT gathered to discuss conversion and the fundamental role of the community in the initiation process.

Conversion of heart is a vital part of initiation and delegates were presented with an overview of this process by Shane Dwyer from the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn. Firstly, focusing on scripture, Shane invited us to remain open to the depth of meaning and challenge that scripture reflection can provide. He suggested that our core question when approaching Scriptural reflection is: "what is the Truth that God is communicating to us here and now through each passage of Scripture?"

Secondly, Shane invited delegates to consider that the catalyst for spiritual growth or conversion is 'a question'. The 'question' may come in a variety of formats: where are you Lord; who are you; why are you persecuting me; etc. Such questions begin a journey within each of us, as they did for their original respondents (Adam & Eve, Andrew, Saul). It is this journey of discovery that we support in the initiation processes. It is a journey enquirers started well before meeting us and will continue for the rest of their lives.

Catechesis or faith formation is the process by which this initial conversion to Christ is fostered and developed. The aim of catechesis is

ultimately the development of a relationship with Christ. Thus, our catechetical practices need to be much more than simple transmissions of information about Christ or Christianity. It was from this basic understanding of catechesis that our second and third keynote addresses, given by Elizabeth Harrington from the Archdiocese of Brisbane, broke open four principle areas of catechesis, namely: Word, Worship, Community Life, Mission or Service.

The community, through all its activities, assists the formation process in each one of these areas. Here are some questions we might ask: In our liturgy and worship, are the symbols big and bold? Do we use a variety of liturgical texts, music, forms and rituals through which to express our faith? How are our liturgies themselves passing on the faith we live? As we pass on the teachings of our faith, and our understanding of scripture, do we use a variety of resources and sources, making the most of the web, journals, DVDs etc. to create a dynamic process? Are we assisting enquirers throughout the process to become known to people across the whole community and the many ministries in which parishioners are involved? Finally, do we provide enquirers and catechumens with experiences of the church on mission through services such as St. Vincent De Paul?

All of us have gifts to offer this ministry, whether it be a friendly smile and hello, a word of welcome or providing an opportunity to have a chat with someone about their faith journey. Some people might have the gift of sharing the gospel with those who seek us out or simply being able to include a new person in an area of ministry. Through offering our gifts in the service of our community we are able to take up this responsibility for initiation.

Conference participants also enjoyed the opportunity to attend a variety of workshops on topics such as the role of sponsors, catechesis, the period of enquiry, the use of scripture and an introduction to the RCIA. The spirituality of discernment and how to integrate individual needs in our process was also discussed.

Many thanks go to everyone who put so much time and effort into making this a successful conference and we look forward to the next one in 2013.



NSW Conference Delegates

## South Australia State RCIA Conference in the Riverland

Last October, 35 participants from the Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Diocese of Port Pirie gathered in Berri for the biennial RCIA State conference

The guest speakers were Fr Kevin Taylor JCL Judicial Vicar for SA & NT, and Ms RoseMarie Black, co-ordinator of RCIA in the Sale Diocese, Victoria. These two guest speakers led us into very informative discussion regarding the pastoral issues which parish RCIA teams find themselves facing.

Fr Kevin dealt with the marriage tribunal processes which assist people who join the RCIA process with marriage annulment issues. Fr Kevin was able to enlighten our leaders about the tribunal processes, and dispelled many myths which have grown up around that. Fr Kevin showed us a very pastoral side to his work and by allowing full discussion gave much confidence to our RCIA leaders in talking about the issues with potential Catechumens and Candidates.

RoseMarie facilitated discussion in table groups of people from the same regional areas. The participants were able to gain much encouragement from one another through dealing with particular local issues, such as the special

concerns facing the Port Pirie Diocese which has centres in a very large geographical area.

The conference also allowed the parish teams to “come away and rest awhile”. The enjoyable moments were the conference dinner for which a number of sponsors donated the wine, and a boat trip down the Murray to Lock 4. The parish RCIA teams feel now they are refreshed and ready to be fully engaged again in their parishes.

Br Patrick Cronin cfc  
Archdiocesan Co-ordinator RCIA



# Preparing a RCIA Session on Advent and Christmas for Catechumens and Candidates

Ross Privitelli

Another end of year break-up party? Let me check my diary. It's so good to catch up with friends. The year is winding down; a small vacation; a fresh start next year. Many RCIA teams are going into recess in December and January. People are busy. They go away. Against this mindset we have the short liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas - a time of spiritual expectation, preparation and conversion, and a time that calls for patience. But sometimes there is little opportunity for RCIA groups to meet with Catechumens and Candidates during Advent and Christmas to explore and experience the riches of these seasons.

**Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,  
But bid for, Patience is!**

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

The aim of an Advent and Christmas Session is to enable Catechumens and Candidates to experience a sense of expectation, preparation, joy and celebration of the manifestation of Christ, "the light of the world", through the Incarnation of the Son of God. During this period of joyful spiritual preparation, Catechumens and Candidates may also develop an awareness of sin, a sense of repentance and a growing desire to be filled with Christ, as the light of the world who overcomes darkness. Their minds may also be directed to the second coming of Christ at the end of time. The seasons of Advent and Christmas play important parts in the process of the spiritual conversion of Catechumens and Candidates. During this period of preparation and celebration of the birth of Christ, they will be comforted that Christ is calling them to follow him and that they are being challenged to transform their lives by personal encounter with Christ and union with God.



Catechumens and Candidates are unlikely to be familiar with the religious and spiritual meaning of Advent and Christmas. The RCIA team should use all the resources available to them, but preparation for a RCIA session on Advent and Christmas will come down to words, music, language, narrative, symbols and rituals of the seasons. These essential elements are "mediators" between the Catechumens and Candidates and the Divine. They create an environment where Catechumens and Candidates can participate in what is being performed and can alter and affect their developing relationship with God.

A number of important Rites in the RCIA process can take place during Advent and Christmas. Parishes sometimes celebrate the Rite of Acceptance for Catechumens in the first week of Advent. It may also be possible for parishes to hold non sacramental Penitential Services for Candidates during this time in accordance with paragraph 384 of the RCIA text. The Anointing of Catechumens is another powerful rite that can be celebrated. But it is a pre-baptismal rite, and not applicable to baptised Candidates. Blessings and Minor Exorcisms may also be carried out during this time, within a Celebration of the Word or during a RCIA session or meeting.

An RCIA session on Advent and Christmas can incorporate any of the above rites within the session itself, and can assist Catechumens or Candidates prepare for any rites planned during a Mass or a Celebration of the Word. The RCIA team may exercise a degree of creativity and adapt the session to the meet the needs of the Catechumens and Candidates. The following is a suggested format that may be of some assistance:

## Prayers (Opening / Closing Prayer)

The RCIA team leader or members may wish to prepare the opening and closing prayers for the session with an Advent or Christmas theme. It would be helpful to obtain copies of Advent and Christmas Prayers and make adaptations where appropriate. Take note of the words and phrases used to evoke an Advent theme:- come; long expected; excite in me; joy; hope; prepare our hearts; prepare us for his coming; searching for the light of your Word; the dawn of his coming; welcome the light of his truth; open our heart in welcome; remove the things that hinder us; may darkness not blind us; the joy of salvation; the earth rejoices; the hope of the Saviour's coming; looking forward with longing; Christ's return at the end of time; the coming of your Son; watchful hope; or a Christmas theme:- the heavens rejoice; the earth be glad; He has come; the Son of God is born; shining star; the Word made flesh; the bright dawn; welcome Christ; the dawn of salvation; the birth of your Son; gratitude; humility; a child born; filled with wonder; shine; new light; the light of faith; holy night; Jesus Christ our light; true light; glory breaks on the world. A simple opening Prayer may be as follows:

Lord, as we gather here today  
Fill our hearts and being  
With the wonder of your presence.  
Grant that we may come to love and know you  
With receptive minds and generous hearts  
As we search for the light of your Word.  
Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour  
And give us the strength to grow in love,  
That the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing  
In his presence and welcoming the light of truth.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

## Scripture Reading

An appropriate scripture reading may be selected for sharing and reflection after, or in place of, the Opening Prayer. The group may use Lectio Divina to pray with the Scripture. It would be helpful, beforehand, to obtain copies of the Sunday Advent and Christmas Readings from the Lectionary, in order to choose the reading and develop themes for contemplation. The following are the readings for: Year B: Advent

### 1st Sunday of Advent:

Mark 13: 33-37. Stay Awake! You never know when the Lord will come.

### 2nd Sunday of Advent

Mark 1:1-8. Make straight the paths of the Lord.

### 3rd Sunday of Advent:

John 1: 6-8. 19-28. There stands among you, unknown to you, the one who is coming after me.

### 4th Sunday of Advent:

Luke: 1:26-38. You will conceive and bear a son.

## Year B: Christmas

### Midnight Mass:

Luke 2:1-14. Today a saviour has been born for you.

### Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God:

Luke 2: 16-21. The shepherds found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the crib....When the eighth day came they gave him the name of Jesus.

### The Epiphany of the Lord:

Matthew 2.1-12. We have come from the East to worship the king.

Another option may be to focus on being receptive to God's will during Advent and Christmas. An excellent reading for this purpose is Philippians 2:5-11:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The RCIA group can then reflect on the importance of becoming receptive to God's divine will, through the "self-emptying" of one's own will.

## **Information Session**

The Session may now move to a shared discussion on Advent and Christmas with a greater focus on content. One or more team members may wish to prepare something beforehand to initiate discussion, for instance on the meaning of Advent and Christmas, or the history and tradition of these seasons. A helpful way to deal with this is to focus on the symbols and rituals of the seasons. Advent symbols include: the Advent Wreath, Advent Candles, Liturgical colours, the Jesse tree and Advent Calendars. Advent rituals include: the blessing of the Advent Wreath, Candle lighting ceremony; the absence of the Gloria during the Mass and penitential celebrations. Christmas symbols include: the Christmas Manger and Nativity scene, Christmas Candle, Christmas tree, Christmas star and lights, the Holy family. Christmas rituals include: the blessing of the Christmas Manger and Nativity scene, the blessing of a Christmas tree, Christmas hymns and Carols.

## **Blessings**

Blessings are powerful and sometimes under-utilised rites of the RCIA, which have the ability to connect with Catechumens and Candidates. It is often the transcending moment when theory and practice interface. The RCIA text provides wonderful Prayers of Blessing in paragraphs 97 A -I. Another rich resource is the Book of Blessings which contains the order for blessing of an Advent Wreath, a Manger or Nativity Scene and a Christmas Tree. With creativity, the use of appropriate Advent and Christmas symbols, such as a brief candle lighting ceremony, and some minor adaptations to the Prayers of Blessing, the blessings can instil in Catechumens and Candidates courage, joy and peace. Often the RCIA session concludes with a blessing.

## **Minor Exorcism (or Healing Prayers)**

Minor Exorcisms apply only to Catechumens and have a different focus than Blessings. They have a penitential overtone. The RCIA team should discern when it is appropriate to use a Minor Exorcism during an Advent and Christmas RCIA Session. If a special need arises one of the prayers of Exorcism set out in paragraphs 94 A-K may be used with appropriate adaptations for the season of Advent and Christmas.

## **Planning & Preparation: Anointing of Catechumens and Penitential Service for Candidates**

If there is an Anointing of Catechumens or a Penitential Service for Candidates planned in the Advent or Christmas season, it is important to explain it to them beforehand. The RCIA team and the Parish Priest should prepare the liturgy for the celebration of the Word and select appropriate prayers for the Anointing with reference to paragraph 101 of the RCIA text. The preparation for a Penitential Service for Candidates is more challenging and perhaps not as common.

## Service & Mission

Since the Church's life is apostolic, Catechumens and Candidates should also learn to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church (paragraph 75.4 of the Rite). During the period of Advent and

Christmas much can be gained by Catechumens and Candidates if they become involved in parish activities or groups such as St Vincent De Paul, local Soup Kitchens and Asylum Seeker Centres. They may also be able to help with the Church environment for Advent and Christmas and the preparation of Christmas Hampers. During this period of time, it may also be helpful for RCIA team members to regularly meet up with Catechumens and Candidates, especially if they do not have strong connections with the parish. These matters can be explored during the RCIA session.

## Take Home Reflection

With the planning out of the way and with a concluding Prayer or Blessing, the RCIA session can come to an end. Spiritual conversion remains the key element in the RCIA. A simple poem about Christmas makes this connection beautifully - better than a thousand words.

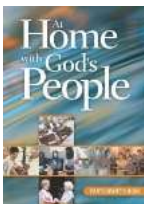
Moonless darkness stands between.  
Past, the Past, no more be seen!  
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me  
To the sight of Him Who freed me  
From the self that I have been.  
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;  
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;  
Now beginning, and alway:  
Now begin, on Christmas day.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

## Resources for Catechesis



*'Become one Body one Spirit in Christ'* is a professional DVD ROM resource produced in Australia by Fraynetwork to assist the entire English-speaking Catholic world with the implementation of the revised Roman Missal



***At Home with God's People*** new revised version

For further information about the *At Home with God's People* book, supplementary material for each topic, a copy of the *Catechist Handbook* and online ordering visit the web site:

[www.ahwgp.com](http://www.ahwgp.com)

***"Living Easter Anew"*** by Rev Dr Elio Capra SDB: It is a four page pamphlet outlining the mystagogical journey through the Triduum and it can be purchased from John Garratt Publishing on [www.johngarratt.com.au](http://www.johngarratt.com.au) or on 1300 650 878.

## Let me tell you a story

**Many parishes are still in transition between the instruction model of catechesis and the RCIA emphasis on conversion to Christ and the gospel way of life. Focusing on the importance of shared experience and dialogue points the way forward**

Minutes before Sunday Mass was about to begin, the parish priest introduced a new practice. He said that lay people, as a mark of reverence, are now to bow before receiving Communion. After Mass, one woman commented to another woman who had not bowed that she must have missed the explanation. The woman replied that she had heard it, but asked if this change was implying that she had not been receiving Communion reverently up to now.

It was reminiscent of my schooldays, when the whole class was told off because a few had misbehaved - and it was often those who had not misbehaved who took the reprimand to heart. Introducing changes to liturgy is a long process. A good example is the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The Bishops of England and Wales told us this rite is the exemplar and rule for all Christian initiation; they commended it to the attention of all parish communities and directed that it be implemented by the first Sunday of Advent, 1988. More than 20 years later, however, the rite's existence is a complete revelation to some people. I am director of a pastoral formation programme and the

fact that many of our students come from parishes where the RCIA is still not fully implemented raises big questions for me and others involved in adult faith formation. When lay people come to study with us, are we simply storing up trouble by making them aware of the extraordinary richness of a rite that they will be powerless to implement?

A corresponding question arises for priests who send their parishioners to study with us: will those parishioners then want to change the way things are being done, without due sensitivity to what is already happening? Although more than two decades have passed since the RCIA was reintroduced, many parishes are still in the transition period between the instruction model, with its focus on imparting the fundamental teachings of the faith, and the RCIA model with

its focus on conversion to Christ and the gospel way of life.

Many of the students on our EPS (Education for Parish Service) programme are parish catechists, and we constantly invite them to apply the theology that we teach to their own parish situation. In relation to the RCIA, students are taught a sound knowledge of the rite, with its various stages that lead to the liturgical celebrations. The RCIA represents a template for evangelisation and catechesis, based on the underlying principles of welcoming, grafting one another's stories together into one pilgrimage journey, being open to each other and together to the promptings of the Spirit and allowing oneself to be thoroughly immersed into the community through liturgical celebrations. These principles are the principles that underlie the ethos of the EPS community.

Students are not taught how adult initiation should take place in their parish. They learn that change takes place gradually through interaction with others; it is not forced. Classes take place on Thursdays during term time; and, because the students have a whole day of teaching, a considerable amount of group work and class discussion is included.

While practically all our students are Catholic, the backgrounds from which they are drawn are diverse. Many have experienced the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council. Listening to the thinking of the others, the students become aware of the narrowness of their own perspective. Hearing others bear witness to the activity of the Spirit in unfamiliar ways serves to bring home the extraordinary richness of the Catholic tradition.

The students are encouraged to engage with the people of their parish in the same way when it comes to making changes. They come to realise that they will only find out where people are through dialogue; and interaction with other students provides a taste of the diversity to be expected. And respectful interaction with other

students is itself an exercise in dialogue.

No adult (baptised or not) is a blank sheet of paper, waiting for knowledge or correct procedures to be impressed upon it. Faith formation is never merely a matter of passing on academic knowledge or performing set exercises. It is a coming together of spiritual beings in open dialogue, each with their own history - the prior story that constitutes their own personal pilgrimage thus far. The word educate in its Latin root means to draw out: *educare*. Catechesis is a matter of drawing out from the experiences of those involved those moments in their lives when they have been most acutely aware of their encounters with God - helping them to recognise the workings of the Spirit - and bringing them into relationship (or into deeper relationship) with Christ.

I think this is what the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity was referring to when it talked about "those elements of truth and grace which are found among people" as "a secret presence of God". It is always a humbling experience to be let into this "secret presence" - whether you are accompanying someone studying theology, or you are part of a reflection group, or you are an RCIA catechist or whatever the circumstances.

This is a time of change in the Church. There are fewer priests and more lay people are looking for ways to deepen their love of God and their service to the Church. More and more of these people are benefiting from courses offering adult formation - catechists, pastoral assistants, parish secretaries or administrators, chaplains, musicians or others involved in pastoral ministry. Indeed, the Church teaches that it should be the model for all catechesis - and that this catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism. It could prove a most useful model for the implementation of the more recent liturgical changes that are now upon us.

■ *Anne Inman is the director of Education for Parish Service (EPS) in Southwark, working in partnership with St Mary's University College, Twickenham.*

**TO DO**  
**Consider** how easily you accept/embrace change. Find ways of implementing the underlying principles of RCIA in all aspects of parish life.  
**Identify** someone you know who might benefit from a pastoral formation programme.



## NN HELPDESK

The readership of *Network News* includes people with vast experience and enormous expertise in the Catechumenate. If you have a question or issue about the RCIA that you need help with, email it to the editor at [harrington@litcom.net.au](mailto:harrington@litcom.net.au). We'll publish your questions in future issues of *Network News* and ask our readers to offer their advice or suggestions.

### Question from last issue:

This year we have in the Catechumenate one woman whose parents had her baptised Catholic but who received no other sacraments and is uncatechised. Her husband not a Catholic but the children attend Catholic primary school. The 4 catechumens will naturally be dismissed, but do we include this lady because she is uncatechised, or does she have a prior right to remain in the community? What about her children whom she brings to Mass?

### Response:

Section 4 in Part II of the Rite, "Preparation of Uncatechised Adults", is the place to look for guidance in this case. It says there:

Even though uncatechised adults have not yet heard the message of the mystery of Christ, their status differs from that of catechumens, since by baptism they have already become members of the Church and children of God. Hence their conversion is based on the baptism they have already received, the effects of which they must develop. (376)

This, plus the overriding pastoral necessity of the lady being with her children during Mass, indicates that it is not appropriate for her to join the catechumens at the dismissal. Participation in the liturgy and being part of the community are important elements of her formation anyway. The team can use other means to offer catechesis to the lady, perhaps by providing material (articles to read, DVDs to watch, websites to explore) related to what her children are doing in RE at school.

### New Question:

We have a young man of 14, a refugee from the Congo, in the RCIA. Because of his very poor English we are struggling to find ways of sharing the Gospel stories with him. I am sure there are many parishes across Australia which, like ours, have a growing Migrant and Refugee community, so I imagine we are not the first RCIA team to face this situation. We are looking for suitable DVDs to use but have only been able to find children's resources and are really looking for something aimed at an older person. Would anyone know of suitable visual resources that might be out there?



**The Birth of Jesus**

painting by Elizabeth Wang,  
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## Australian Catechumenate Network

### Membership 2010 – 2012

The Australian Catechumenate Network (ACN) has been established to provide a community for people who are actively involved in the core task of welcoming and initiating people into the Catholic faith through the RCIA process.

The ACN is actively working on your behalf with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation. Through our web site we also provide access to resources shared from communities in Australia and world-wide.

Membership is available to all who are working with RCIA in their parishes.

#### Membership structure

(A) Individual membership \$50 – 2 years	(B) Parish Membership \$100 – 2years	(C) Corporate Membership \$500 – 2 years
Website Biennial national conference	Membership for Parish RCIA team members	Individual membership and public acknowledgement in Network News



## Australian Catechumenate Network Renewal

Period: National Conference 2010 – National Conference 2012 (2 Year Period)

Select Membership: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(A) \$50	(B) \$100	(C) \$500
Title:	First Name:	Surname:	
Parish:		Diocese:	
Corporate Name [ <i>if (C) selected</i> ]			
Address:( <i>mail address</i> ):			
State:	Postcode:	Phone:	Mob:
Email:			
Parish RCIA Contact:		Parish Email	
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### PLEASE MAKE ALL CHEQUES PAYABLE TO:

AUSTRALIAN CATECHUMENATE NETWORK or ACN

SEND TO:

Darren McDowell

Parish Services Team

Diocese of Wollongong

PO Box 1239

WOLLONGONG NSW 2500

email: [darren.mcdowell@woll.catholic.org.au](mailto:darren.mcdowell@woll.catholic.org.au)

**Web address for your "favourites":**

**Australian Catechumenate Network** - <http://www.ozcatechumenate.org>

Team RCIA - <http://teamrcia.com>

North American Forum on the Catechumenate - <http://www.naforum.org/wordpress>

RCIA Network of England and Wales - <http://www.rcia.org.uk>



ON BEHALF OF ALL THE NETWORK NEWS TEAM  
THANK YOU TO ALL  
WHO CONTRIBUTED  
TO THIS ISSUE OF  
NETWORK NEWS

We leave you with this short reflection:

LUKE 2:10.

*'Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people.'*

Next Issue will be circulated in February 2012  
so if you have any articles to contribute  
please send them in by 10<sup>th</sup> February 2012  
to the Editor:

**Elizabeth Harrington at:**

[harringtone@litcom.net.au](mailto:harringtone@litcom.net.au)

**Also if you have any resources you would like to suggest  
please let us know.**