

LITTLE-KNOWN WAYS TO TURN YOUR RCIA INTO AN ADULT PROCESS—EVEN FOR CHILDREN



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

5. The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place.

—Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 4-5

1. Why is an adult-centered process important for initiation?

- ⇒ For the first five centuries, the norm in the church was adult initiation
- ⇒ To battle heresy, Saint Augustine used the non-normative practice of infant baptism to explain the role of human nature in the purpose of baptism
 - The purpose of baptism is to wash away sin, therefore, infants must have some sin that needs to be washed away (beginnings of theology of original sin)
 - Led to worry about limbo and hell for unbaptized infants who die
- ⇒ With all this, adult catechumenate died out, and baptism as initiation into a way of life was diminished
- ⇒ Second Vatican Council restored the adult catechumenate, and adult initiation reestablished as norm
- ⇒ Adult initiation is important not simply because it is a return to an older practice
 - Infant baptism remains a highly valued pastoral practice, but it is not the “norm” for discipleship
 - Sacramental process of baptism-confirmation-eucharist is a sacred sign of our faith journey that is lived out and taught in the catechumenate process
- ⇒ The preparation and initiation of adults and older children tell both the catechumens and the faithful who we are as church and why we exist

“A norm has nothing to do with the number of times a thing is done, but it has everything to do with the standard according to which a thing is done” (Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, p. 108)

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2. What does an adult process look like?

- ⇒ Adults and older children engage in “training” process for Christian life (RCIA 75)
- ⇒ Training takes form of apprenticeship (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, 14)
- ⇒ Apprenticeship adheres to six principles of RCIA (RCIA 4-5; see handout)
- ⇒ “Adult normative” principle requires we use appropriate adult learning methods in which learners:
 - need to know why something is important to learn
 - need to make their own decisions
 - have lots of previous experiences of grace that we must respect and build upon
 - are ready to learn, but on those things they believe they need to know — which may not be what we want to teach
 - don’t want to learn “topics;” they want to learn things that apply to their lives
 - are motivated by internal pressures; we tend to apply external pressures

3. How do we make RCIA an engaging process for adults and even for children?

1. Establish a climate conducive to learning
2. Create a mechanism for mutual planning
 - Where have you been?
 - Where are you now?
 - Where do you want to get to?
 - How do you plan to get there?
 - How will you know you have arrived?
3. Diagnose the needs for learning
4. Create objectives that will satisfy these needs
5. Design a pattern of learning experiences
6. Conduct these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials
7. Evaluate the learning outcomes and re-diagnose learning needs

—Based on research by Malcolm Knowles

How to use this process with children

- ⇒ Always involve the parents
 - Or grandparents, or some adult who will be responsible for the faith journey of the child
- ⇒ Apply the principles of the RCIA and adult learning methods to the parents
 - Involve the children in a mutual planning process along with their families
 - Involve the children’s baptized peers and religious education processes
 - Do not force the children into a predetermined schedule or number of months or years

4. What would happen in our parishes once we move to an authentic adult formation process?