



The role of the RCIA team leader

Objective: The first step is to clarify exactly what a team leader is supposed to do. This session will discuss the leader's role in enabling the parish community to take on their responsibility for the initiation process.

The primary minister of the catechumenate—the community

The catechumenate is built on the principle that the community hands on the tradition. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) says over and over again that the primary minister is the assembly—the whole community, the faithful. The section on ministries and offices describes ministry as belonging *first* to the faithful (RCIA 9). In fact, the faithful are mentioned ten times, beginning with article 4, which says that the initiation of catechumens “is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.” There is no mention of a catechumenate team. Pastor, deacon, catechist, sponsor and all the faithful are listed. Catechumenate director/coordinator and catechumenate team are American creations to assist the implementation of the rite. It is our effort to get “all the baptized” involved in the process and enable them to carry out their “concern.”

Adapt the RCIA for leadership

In more parishes than not, the pastor delegates the role of coordinating the catechumenate to a lay person, sister or brother, or deacon. The terms “catechumenate coordinator,” “catechumenate director,” “catechumenate team,” and “team leader” are not found in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The development of these roles is an adaptation for providing the pastoral care required by the rite. This adaptation usually occurs in one of three ways:

1. The catechumenate team leader is a full-time staff person (lay person or religious) who is a parish minister, director of religious education, liturgy coordinator, etc., whose responsibilities include implementing and coordinating the catechumenate. This person more often than not has professional ministerial formation and in many cases a graduate degree in pastoral ministry or religious education.
2. The team leader is a part-time staff person and, quite likely, has another full-time job. This person has qualifications similar to the above. However, this coordinator usually has less time

and more extensive responsibilities in his or her regular work and family.

3. In the third situation, there is a volunteer (or the volunteered). The volunteer is usually someone from the parish whom the pastor asks to direct the catechumenate without salary. Usually this is a lay person who more likely than not has little or no formal preparation for ministry. In this situation, the coordinator works with the pastor or staff for training, preparation, leadership development, and implementation of the catechumenate. This person may also emerge in a parish where a professional paid staff person has been the coordinator and moved on. Whether or not the volunteer will be paid a salary by the parish becomes an issue for the parish and staff involved.

RCIA leadership is a ministry of enablement

Whatever the situation of the catechumenate team leader, this ministry is a ministry of enablement. The team leader is to enable the parish community to be the central element in the formation of the catechumens.

In the implementation of the rite, the team leader is many things: organizer, coordinator, counselor, supporter, dishwasher and room arranger, and spiritual guide. However, the first and foremost ministry of the team leader is enablement of the community! All other qualities, responsibilities, and characteristics flow from this core ministry.

The word *enablement* is related to the word *ministry*. It suggests not only a function, but a way of being. The ministry of enablement in the catechumenate, and in the whole life of the parish, is crucial for the ongoing renewal and life of the parish. It is also, despite our best intentions, quite difficult to practice, because enabling others means letting go of *my* agenda, *my* control. Enabling means sharing my gifts and talents and helping others to name and share theirs. Letting go means that the work may not be carried out as “I would like it.” It is realizing that my way is not the only way! Letting go means working your way out of a job that you may have worked long and hard to have!

Equip the saints for ministry

We are all aware of Paul’s description of particular gifts— “some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12, NRSV). This last phrase is key to the ministry of enablement: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

The key word for the catechumenate coordinator/pastor is *equip*, which means “to build up.” The coordinator/pastor builds up the body, the community of the faithful, which is the primary minister in the RCIA. The function, then, of the catechumenate coordinator/pastor is to enable or to equip men and women in the body of Christ for the work of initiating adults into the community. The pastor of the parish carries this responsibility beyond the catechumenate, whereas the catechumenate coordinator explicitly works within the catechumenate.

This ministry of enablement is the process by which we make it possible for others to find both the strength and authority to fulfill the purpose of their Christian lives. As parish coordinators/pastors we

enable the ministry of sponsors, catechumenate team, catechists, godparents, assembly, and ultimately of the catechumen/neophyte. We strengthen and affirm the gifts of these men and women so that they in turn can use them “with authority” in building up Christ’s body in the world. The ministry of the coordinator/pastor makes it possible for others to minister. The coordinator/pastor stands with them, walks with them, helps them to be about their mission as church.

How do we organize this? It is one thing to talk about the catechumenate coordinator/pastor as an enabler. It is quite another thing to create an organized process so that it takes place. In the next session, we’ll look at the five models for organizing RCIA leadership, and we’ll talk about the most effective model for your parish.

Please go to <http://tinyurl.com/wpeval1> to evaluate this session.
