

Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and Children's Initiation

1. We have catechized candidates for reception into full communion (baptized, non-Catholics) who are ready to be received into the Catholic Church, confirmed and receive Holy Communion. Must we wait until the Easter Vigil to fully initiate them into the Catholic faith?

No. Candidates for reception into full communion who are catechized may complete their initiation with a profession of faith, confirmation and Holy Communion once they have been appropriately prepared. In fact, the National Statutes for the Catechumenate, approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 11, 1986, state that the ordinary time to receive candidates into full communion in the Catholic Church is at a Sunday Eucharist of the parish community (#32). However, for pastoral reasons, candidates may be received at the Easter Vigil as long as a clear distinction is made between the elect and the candidates.

2. I have heard that if the parish receives baptized catechized non-Catholics into full communion with the Catholic Church outside the Easter Vigil, the receiving priest cannot confirm them. Is this true?

No. In fact, for baptized catechized non-Catholics the receiving priest must confirm them (Canon 883:2) when they are received into full communion and receive Holy Communion. No special permission is needed from the Archbishop to do this. The faculty comes from the universal law of the church.

3. Then these candidates for full communion might not take part in the Rite of Election or the Scrutinies. Is that OK?

Yes, that is acceptable. The Rite of Election and the Scrutinies are designed for catechumens (the unbaptized), not the baptized. The Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church (RCIA Part II: 5.) takes place when the catechized candidate is prepared and does not follow the rites for the catechumens (unbaptized) or for the baptized uncatechized Catholic.

4. If this is the case, then can the unbaptized (true catechumens) be fully initiated into the Catholic Church at times other than the Easter Vigil?

No, except for serious pastoral need and then only with the permission of the Archbishop. The Church does not want to deprive the catechumens of the Lenten season, the Rite of Election, the Scrutinies and the Triduum experience.

5. A catechumen wishes to celebrate his/her marriage in the church. Is this possible before he/she is initiated?

One of the privileges of being a catechumen is the right to celebrate one's marriage in the church. However, here are a variety of factors that influence the complete response to this question:

First of all, the RCIA. Appendix III: National Statutes for the Catechumenate 10, states: "The marriages of catechumens, whether with other catechumens or with baptized Christians or even non-Christians, should be celebrated at a liturgy of the word and never at the Eucharistic liturgy." Chapter III of the Rite of Marriage is to be followed, but the nuptial blessing in Chapter I, no. 33, may be used, all references to Eucharistic sharing being omitted." Because only baptized persons may validly receive a sacrament, the

marriage between a catechumen and a baptized person or an unbaptized person is not a sacrament. "When the catechumen already [validly] married to a baptized person is him- or her-self baptized, that marriage becomes a sacrament at the moment of baptism. . . It is neither necessary nor desirable to renew consent or in some other way celebrate this marriage again after baptism."

-For a catechumen marrying another catechumen or a catechumen marrying an unbaptized person, no dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult (canon 1086 2) is required.

-For a catechumen marrying a Catholic, the dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult is required (canon 1086, 2).

-A catechumen marrying a baptized non-Catholic in the Catholic church does not require the dispensation from disparity of cult nor the requirements of mixed marriages because neither party is Catholic. (canons 1124-1125).

The information above is a brief summary. For a more complete response, see THE CATECHUMENATE AND THE LAW. A PASTORAL AND CANONICAL COMMENTARY FOR THE CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES by John M. Huels (LTP, 1994). Additional information is also available from the Office of Worship (505-831-8191) and the Archdiocesan Tribunal Offices (505-831-8177).

6. What about baptized uncatechized Catholics: may they participate in the Rites along with the catechumens?

These baptized candidates do not participate in the same rites as the unbaptized catechumens. There are specific rites for the baptized uncatechized candidates that recognize their Baptism while preparing them to complete their Initiation. These rites may be celebrated with the candidates alone (RCIA Part II: 4) or they may be combined with corresponding rites for the catechumens (RCIA: Appendix I: Additional (Combined) Rites) but the distinction between the unbaptized catechumens and the baptized candidates must always be preserved.

7. When may the baptized uncatechized candidates (Catholic) be confirmed and share in the Eucharist for the first time?

The permission to complete the initiation (Confirmation and Holy Communion) of baptized uncatechized Catholics is only given when celebrated at the Easter Vigil.

Archbishop Sheehan has given this permission for baptized uncatechized Catholics, after proper formation, to complete their initiation at the Easter Vigil and the presider needs no special permission to confirm and admit them to Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil if they have participated in the RCIA process.

In this Archdiocese, baptized uncatechized Catholics may not complete their initiation through confirmation and the reception of Holy Communion together, except for the Easter Vigil. Outside the Easter Vigil, baptized uncatechized Catholics, who are sufficiently prepared, may receive Holy Communion for the first time at any Sunday Eucharistic liturgy with the assembly, but must wait to be confirmed until the Archbishop or his delegate comes to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation at the parish or until the Archdiocesan celebration of adult confirmation. In extreme cases, special delegation may be sought from the Archbishop.

8. We have an RCIC for children in our parish. What sacraments may the children receive and when?

There is no Rite of Christian Initiation of Children (RCIC) in the Church. Children who have reached catechetical age (7) participate in an adaptation of the RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS. This process is often referred to as children's initiation but there are no rites specific to children, thus there is no RCIC.

Unbaptized Children.

- ∞ *According to Canon 852:1, unbaptized children who have attained the use of reason (catechetical age, generally considered to be 7 years of age) have the same rights as adults. These children are to be admitted to the catechumenate and led through the several stages to initiation at the Easter Vigil; that is, they are to celebrate baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion. This is supported by Canon Law 866 and the National Statutes of the Catechumenate #18 and #35. It is to be assumed that their time of preparation would not be less than that of children preparing for their First Communion (2-3 years) and that this preparation would include significant parental involvement.*
- ∞ *Archbishop Sheehan wishes to allow pastoral discretion with regard to children. If a pastor sees genuine pastoral need to delay confirmation of children with the use of reason until a later time, he may do so. No special permission is needed.*
- ∞ *Unbaptized children of catechetical age participate in faith formation and the adult initiation process adapted for children (RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS, Part II: Rites for Particular Circumstances, 1. Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age) for a minimum of two full years prior to their initiation. The three initiation sacraments for children of catechetical age (7+ years) are not received at three separate times but according to the RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS at the Easter Vigil. However, while Archbishop Sheehan wishes to allow pastoral discretion with regard to children, baptism and Eucharist are always received together by children of catechetical age. If a pastor sees genuine pastoral need to delay confirmation of children with the use of reason until a later time, he may do so. No special permission is needed.*
- ∞ *Unbaptized children who have not attained the use of reason (catechetical age, generally considered to be 7 years of age) do not participate in the Rites of Christian Initiation as outlined in the RCIA (Part II: 2); this rite assumes the child makes the profession of faith and one who has not attained the use of reason is not capable of this. Rather they receive the sacrament of Baptism according to the RITE OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN at a time other than the Easter Vigil. Baptism of children below catechetical age is the exception at the Easter Vigil (e.g., parents and their children who are not yet of catechetical age are all being initiated – this child/children would be baptized according to the RITE OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN).*
- ∞ **Baptized Children.**
- ~ *Children of catechetical age who were baptized in a separated ecclesial community and are seeking full communion are also considered adults for purposes of Christian Initiation. They may participate in liturgical rites marking their progress (RCIA #478). These children make a profession of faith, are received into the Church, are confirmed and receive Eucharist (RCIA, #490-498). Reception of candidates into the full communion of the Catholic Church may take place at a Sunday Eucharist of the parish (RCIA National Statutes, #32). Reception may also take place at the Vigil, for pastoral reasons (RCIA National Statutes, #34)*

- ~ Older children of catechetical age who were baptized Catholics as infants/children (below age 7) but have not yet received their First Communion are not candidates for the process of the RCIA. The formation process may be appropriate for them; however, none of the liturgical rites of the RCIA are appropriate for these children.

9. How and where is Reception into Full Communion recorded?

“When persons are received into full communion with the Catholic Church, after having been baptized previously in another Christian communion, an entry must be made in the Baptismal Register. The data concerning the Rite of Reception should be entered in the spaces provided for Baptism, and the data concerning the original Baptism should be entered in the ‘Notations’ column, especially the date and place.” (Sacramental Records Policy, Archdiocese of Santa Fe. June 2008. pg. 9) See the Sacramental Records Policy of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe for complete information concerning the entry of information in the Baptismal Register.

10. What is the length of the catechumenate?

“The period of the catechumenate, beginning at the Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and including both the catechumenate proper and the period of purification and enlightenment after election or enrollment of names, should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction and probation”. (National Statutes for the Catechumenate, #6).

11. When does the celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation for the elect (the unbaptized) take place?

The celebration of the sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for the elect (unbaptized) should take place at the Easter Vigil. (RCIA, #23)

Exceptions:

- ∞ if the Archbishop decides circumstances warrant: a change in time outside the usual times (RCIA #34.2);
- ∞ with the permission of the Archbishop, in the case of serious pastoral need
- ∞ danger of death (c. 865.2);

12. May a divorced person participate in the RCIA and be admitted to the Sacraments of Initiation?

A divorced person may participate in the RCIA process and receive the sacraments. There is no impediment to being received into the Church. However, it is important that they know the teaching of the Church regarding marriage. The divorced do not need to petition for an annulment before receiving the sacraments of initiation. They will need to petition for an annulment if they plan to marry in the future.

13. May a person who has been divorced, remarried and in need of an annulment participate in the RCIA and be admitted to the Sacraments of Initiation?

If a person is divorced, remarried, and in need of an annulment, they may participate in the pre-catechumenate, the Rite of Acceptance and the period of Catechumenate. They may not participate in the Rite of Election because they may not be “elected” or admitted to the sacraments until their annulment has been granted.