



Christian Initiation  
Australia Network

# NETWORK NEWS

Spring 2020

## Words from the Chair



Greetings Friends!

After the election of the new executive at the September biennial general meeting, I assumed the role of interim chair of the

executive until the positions are ratified at our February 2021 meeting.

On behalf of the rest of the executive, I would like to thank the outgoing chair, Sharon Brewer (ACT), for her diligent leadership since summer 2019. She has been a source of inspiration to all of us on the executive. Thankfully, Sharon will remain a member of the executive. I would also like to thank Mandy Robinson (VIC) for graciously accepting the nomination to continue in her role as treasurer, which was a vote of confidence in her work over the years. I also thank Ross Privitelli (VIC) who has stepped down from the executive after serving as secretary for more than two years. Both Ross and Mandy have been very generous in offering their time, experience and skills to serve CIAN. I also thank Anne Smith and Deacon Michael Moore who have stepped down from the executive after providing a valuable contribution. Finally, I would like to welcome Lisa McKerr (QLD) as a new member of our executive: she brings a wealth of experience in RCIA which will help in CIAN's work to promote RCIA in Australia.

For further information about the work of CIAN over the past year, I would refer you to our

former Chair's report, delivered by Sharon Brewer at the September BGM ([page 2](#)). During the BGM, Sharon presented the results of her research into the implementation and vitality of RCIA in Australia. A summary of her report entitled, [Are Parishes Ready, Willing and Able to Welcome People into the Catholic Faith?](#), is provided on our [website](#) and a condensed summary on [page 8](#).

In case you are wondering who I am, here's a brief background. I have worked in evangelisation and catechesis for about 20 years, including mission trips to Belize and Jamaica, and obtained my PhD in theology from Marquette University, USA. Currently, I am the Director of the Office of Evangelisation & Catechesis for the Archdiocese of Hobart, where I've worked for the last six years offering faith formation course in Scripture, liturgy, evangelisation, theology, and philosophy through the Verbum Domini Biblical & Catechetical Institute. I also advise parishes on evangelisation initiatives and facilitate evangelisation events like the Evangelium Conference for parish evangelisation, Gracefest for youth, Christmas carols (500+ people), Light a Candle for Christmas in the mall, etc. I've had the enormous privilege of facilitating RCIA for the cathedral, as well as organising the Rite of Election for the Archdiocese of Hobart. It's a busy role with many opportunities to journey

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Christian Initiation Australia Network seeks to support all those who share the vision of the RCIA

# CIAN Biennial General Meeting Report

## Words from the Chair

### 14 September 2020

Thanks everyone who joined in the biennial general meeting. Had COVID-19 not taken hold of our world we would have held our BGM in July at the [Alive in the Spirit Conference](#) to have been held in Wollongong. Alas, we were forced to gather via Zoom on 14 September 2020.

The last time many of us met together was at the 2018 National Conference held in October in Melbourne. You will recall it was a terrific conference, not only because of the keynotes and workshops (all of which were excellent), but there was something special about having a large group of people coming together who are committed to the ministry of sharing their faith and their love of Jesus. Time will tell whether or not these face-to-face conferences will ever be the same again.

In this report I'd like to do two things. Firstly, a quick summary of what has happened over the last two years, and to thank members of the Executive team.

So, firstly a quick summary. If you are new to the Christian Initiation Australia Network (CIAN), then I'd invite you to visit our website and read through our electronic newsletter – Network News – this is the best way to get a complete picture of the work of CIAN.

**National Conference:** This was a tremendous success both in terms of numbers and especially for providing formation for those new to the RCIA ministry. We also managed to run the conference at a slightly better than break-even event. I would also like to acknowledge here, Rob Cosgrove. Rob was one of the driving forces behind the conference and was also the Chair of CIAN at that time. Rob has been an inspiring leader in the ministry of the catechumenate.

**Network News** – we have managed to put out at least three editions each year, and the analytics tell us that it is well read, and well shared – if you are a member who has been sharing our articles etc, then, many thanks.

**Website** – we have been tinkering with our website over the last couple of years, but in recent months it has been a larger overhaul. It has taken us a while to get the members only section working, but we are somewhat closer now. The website and Network News are our best ways of sharing resources and providing formation on how to effectively offer the RCIA process in your parish. We are constantly in search of good photos and good news stories – if you have any, please share them with us. It is very important that we find ways to encourage and support those in this ministry.

**TeamRCIA** – we are grateful for the support of TeamRCIA, and have forged close links with them. They continue to provide quality resources, and were very generous with their time when they visited Australia in August 2019.

**Development of a revised Constitution.** This has been a large undertaking and will help us have clarity about how our network should work and how our Executive Committee should operate.

**Meetings:** The Executive have continued to meet monthly providing an opportunity to work through various matters of general business, but to also get a feel for what is happening in the ministry of RCIA around the country. In May 2019, the Executive gathered in Canberra, with some members using video conferencing. This was a great opportunity to be together and talk through some of our bigger tasks, and to enjoy some good fellowship. Given the costs of such gatherings and the difficulty of travel at present, these face-to-face meetings are likely to be a rarity.

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alongside people who are coming to faith in Christ, or seeking to go deeper in their relationship with him. I've served as a member of the CIAN executive since late 2018.

The news on the CIAN membership front is that we have over 50 paid up members! This has been a great response to the call for new members back in August. For those who have yet to renew their memberships, a reminder notice will be sent out in the coming weeks. We are still hoping to increase membership so please spread the word amongst your colleagues. The treasurer's report is included in this edition for your information.

Wishing you a blessed Advent season.

Dr. Christine Wood  
E: christine.wood@aohtas.org.au  
M: 0408 321 002

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## CIAN 2020 Biennial General Meeting Report

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**Logo and network name:** The Executive spent quite a bit of time discerning whether or not we should change the name of the network and our logo. In terms of the network, whilst the name doesn't quite nail it in terms of 'searchability' on the internet, we sensed that if we could promote the CIAN better, especially in diocesan offices, then we might become better known. In terms of the logo, this is an ongoing discussion and something for the new Executive to determine.

**Conferences:** The Executive decided not to offer a Conference in 2020, but to work with other lay groups in organising the [Alive in the Spirit Conference](#). God willing, this Conference will go ahead next year and CIAN will be a part of the organising committee again. We will be working with the Pastoral Ministry Network (formerly NAPPA) and the Mission Planners Network of Oceania – members of these networks are often the people who are involved in evangelisation in their dioceses, parishes and other communities, so it is great that we can work together.

And now to the acknowledgements:

Firstly, to those who are leaving the Executive. To Deacon Michael Moore from Adelaide and Anne Smith from Albany, WA who have both decided not to renominate, we thank them for their prayerful and wise support of CIAN. To Ross Privitelli, from Melbourne, who has been the Secretary of CIAN, and who has offered us his legal expertise in the drafting of the new constitution. Ross has completed three terms with CIAN and we are grateful for his energies and insights into the RCIA ministry.

To Mandy Robinson, our treasurer, for keeping an eye on the books and our expenditure.

To Max Norden, our technical wiz who had us using Zoom video conferencing long-before COVID-19 made it a household name. Max also edits the Network News and has done a lot of work in filming and editing, and has contributed to the website.

To Stewart Bazzica, who is an ex-officio member and has been managing our website upgrade, and providing much useful advice on other matters.

To our other Executive team members, Dr Christine Wood (Hobart) and Kathy Horan (Adelaide) for their input to our meetings and other activities.

I acknowledge Clare Schwantes who is the representative of the National Liturgical Council and attends our meetings as an ex-officio member. For those of you who are unaware, CIAN, or more rightly, the RCIA, sits within the Bishops Commission for Liturgy.

Finally, to all of you who are doing the privileged work of journeying with others as they draw closer to Jesus, and as they become members of our Catholic family. In those moments of accompaniment, the quiet chats over a cuppa, the reassuring text or in the celebration of the liturgies that are integral to the RCIA process – we thank you.

Sharon Brewer,  
September 2020

## Treasurer's BGM Report

I came to serve on the CIAN Executive at the Perth Conference in 2016 and assumed the role of treasurer after I confessed to being a trained book-keeper. There was no formal handover from the previous hard-working treasurer Ben Brooks, for Ben had answered a call to enter the seminary and had moved to Rome long before the Perth Conference.

The usual practice of CIAN in implementing a Biennial Conference, is to liaise with an Australian diocese, where a generous Bishop has his RCIA/Liturgy/Evangelisation staff to run the practicalities, opening a Conference bank account and, with CIAN providing the funds for a deposit, which was \$5000 for Perth. Perth diocese also made around \$7,500 of fundraising available as seed money. For the Perth Conference, CIAN also agreed to cover the expenses for Nick Wagner, coming from the USA, as keynote speaker. The structure of Conference fees also

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# Treasurer's Biennial General Meeting Report—14 September 2020

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allowed for a membership fee to the CIAN, meaning all attendees become financial members, with anyone who was unable to attend needing to renew their membership via the website.

The Perth Conference was an undoubted success as a time of education and renewal of all who serve in the ministry of the RCIA. The funds in the CIAN account was \$14,793.23 at end of September 2016, when I assumed responsibility, but with over \$3000 still outstanding for the costs for the keynote speaker Nick Wagner, effectively leaving just over \$11,000.

The new committee resolved to begin planning the next Conference in 2018, hopefully in Melbourne. By this time all dioceses around Australia were undergoing “restructure” with cutbacks in personnel and there was a deep reluctance of any Bishop committing to the support of a National conference. Archbishop Hart did eventually give permission for the RCIA Biennial Conference to take place in Melbourne but could not commit to any financial assistance.

With some deft work from Rob Cosgrove, the Executive Chair, CIAN was gifted \$13,249.35, which were the remaining funds from ADF, which had been wound up. All monies were transferred to CIAN, but half \$6,624.67

## 2020 Biennial General Meeting Finance Report

<b>Inflows:</b>	
Perth Conference Surplus	\$ 2,475.80
Deposit Return Alive in Spirit Conf.	3,000.00
Memberships (outside of Conferences)	2,075.00
Donation to CIAN (from ADF)	6,624.67
Donations (other)	646.00
Bank Correction	202.06
Interest	58.93
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>\$ 15,082.46</b>
Holding funds from NCE (from ADF)*	6,624.68
Melbourne Conference Income	33,386.51
<b>Total Inflows for the period</b>	<b>\$ 55,093.65</b>
<b>Outflows :</b>	
TeamRCIA fees for 2016 Conference	\$ 3,269.42
Perth Conference fee 3,069.42	
Video production fee 200.00	
Deposit Alive in Spirit Conf.	3,000.00
Bank Charges	97.92
Exec Committee Meeting Costs 2017	4,422.09
Exec Committee Meeting Costs 2018	4,436.34
Exec Committee Meeting Costs 2019	4,722.65
Administration	4,960.23
Melbourne Conference Expenditure	32,399.55
<b>Total Outflows</b>	<b>\$ 57,308.20</b>
<b>Net operating profit/loss for the period:</b>	<b>-\$ 2,214.55</b>
Current assets represented by:	
Cash at the end of the period	\$ 12,578.68
Funds held on behalf of NCE	-\$ 3,053.60
<b>CIAN Fund</b>	<b>\$ 9,456.80</b>

were to be reserved for any expenses for NCE when assisting with RCIA.

So, the Melbourne Conference 2018 “Ignite the Spark” was the first CIAN conference fully sponsored and organised by the CIAN volunteer committee.

This Conference was attended by 107 people, all of whom became financial members @ \$35, when deducted from the surplus of \$4558, left \$813 added to our coffers. Moving on from Melbourne, brought even deeper economic cuts within the workings of the Australian Catholic Church, but as the team gathered in Canberra on May 2019, to consider the options, the news arrived that the Proclaim Conference for 2020 had been cancelled and the CIAN was given the opportunity to join with NAPPA and OMPN and the “Alive in The Spirit” conference planning began. This conference has been postponed due to Covid 19, and is evolving in the digital world.

The main expenses for CIAN are in having FTF planning meetings, with the high costs of airfares and accommodation. We have also have monthly on line meetings, of course Zoom now being a household name. Keeping our website current also has costs, but are kept to a minimum by the hard work of our volunteer webmaster Stewart Bazzica.

And now we have to deal with a pandemic and currently \$12,578.58 in funds, \$3,053.60 of which is for use by NCE.

As part of a rework of our Website, CIAN [memberships](#) are now able to renewed on line as Credit card or EFT payments, and reminders will be sent pretty much straight after this meeting. Please do be in touch if you have any queries

Mandy Robinson ,  
[treasurer-cianetwork@outlook.com](mailto:treasurer-cianetwork@outlook.com)



# Sue Xueqiao's Faith Journey Through RCIA

I come from Harbin, the capital city of the most northeast province in China, Heilongjiang. My hometown used to accommodate Russian and Jewish immigrants, and there are still many churches that survive, but I have not been to any of them since my family had no Christian relatives or friends when I was young. My mother follows her younger sister and sister-in-law to believe in Buddhism. My father has no religion, but he is quite open to the concept. He likes reading, and usually paraphrased the connections between the establishment of modern western civilization and Christian faith in society, and told me not to exclude any possibility of religion and faith in the future, even though our school education in China is atheistic. This is my earliest recollected contact with a spiritual life, Christianity, and faith.

My later encounter with God was somewhat tortuous. When I began my Master's degree and worked in Guangzhou, China, there were many Christians among my classmates, friends, and colleagues. They were kind, calm, and humble, welcoming and friendly.

My first Bible in Chinese was a gift from a Korean friend who preached to one of my Uni classmates and helped her convert to their congregation. I joined them and learned lots of Bible stories during that time. People there are optimistic, lively, and cheerful, and I often spent my weekends with them, reading the Bible and listening to their interpretations of Bible stories. However, after some months I felt uneasy about them. There were only young people in this church, and their preaching sometimes contradicted other teaching based on the Bible. After considering what I have witnessed, searching online, and talking about my confusions with other Christian friends, it turned out that this particular group was a heresy in South Korea so I left that church.

Later I turned to follow my colleague to a house church in Guangzhou where there was preaching in both Mandarin and Cantonese. I went there with my friend to listen to their preaching each

week until I set out to Australia for my Ph.D. degree.

I felt God summoning me in autumn 2018 after I have been tutoring in Joseph Tonien's subject for one session. (Joseph is a St Francis Xavier Cathedral parishioner, Wollongong, and himself a neophyte through RCIA, and staff at Wollongong University).

One day Joseph asked if my classmate and I would like to join a meeting with him. Since Joseph was always kind to his students, tutors, and colleagues, we went with him without any hesitation. On the way to Wollongong Uni Building 67, we asked what we should do in the meeting, and he answered just listen and observe. I found it was a weekday Mass held by the Uni of Wollongong Catholic Society. I

felt that it was not a coincidence, but that it was the time God calling me to continue my seeking of him. Consequently, I kept going the Wednesday Mass at Uni.

At the beginning, I felt a little embarrassed since I had no idea how to behave or respond during the Mass since it was very different from my experience in the other churches. After some months I started to understand the liturgy and

began joining in singing the psalm during Mass. Joseph and his wife Thanh also invited me to other events, including the kids' choir on Christmas Eve and witnessing the Baptisms at the 2019 Easter Vigil Mass.

I felt serene and peaceful during each liturgy and could sense the joy coming from the hearts of the congregation. From my perspective, each Catholic that I have met is calm, has a positive attitude, and a peaceful demeanour, of which I was a little envious when I first began this journey. During this time I encountered a personal crisis while pursuing my degree in 2018. The people who stood with me and helped me get through it were all the Catholics at the Uni, particularly Professor Willy and researchers – Guomin, and Joseph. Father Mark De Battista, the chaplain to the Uni also helped ease



Sue's baptism by Bishop Brian Mascord, during COVID-19 restrictions, September 2020 at St Francis Xavier Cathedral Wollongong.

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# Neophyte Sue Xueqiao's Faith Journey

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my anxiety after chatting with him. I was amazed that the support I got was mostly from people who were honest, upright, and courageous, and at the same time were all faithful Catholics. With their help, I got out of my troubles to continue my research journey.

In early 2019, I began going to the Sunday Mass routinely, and participating in the RCIA process. RCIA offered an opportunity for close contact with the Catholic traditions and clarification of my confusions as a Catechumen. Team members Denis and Clare helped expel my confusion about the Catholic faith, and different parishioners' conversion stories helped me as well. Meanwhile, I kept reviewing my journey through RCIA, prudently looking into my inner thoughts on why I wanted to be a Catholic and consider whether this was what I desired to believe and follow.

Participating in each week's RCIA discussion meeting and the Sunday Mass with Denis, Clare, and another Catechumen Ayla, I felt that this was what I was searching for. I was gradually feeling the sense of my conversion deepening and looked forward to my initiation and being a full participant of this Catholic community. The decision to be fully committed to this faith journey came naturally. I am longing for God and expect and want him to guide my future life. I look forward to living in the image of God as I have witnessed other Catholics around me who are faithful and live a joyful and fruitful Christian life.

After the disappointment of having my Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil deferred because of COVID-19 restrictions, in the middle of September, with the faithful Catholics in my life who were also my motivations to be a Catholic, I was baptized, confirmed and could receive the Holy Communion for the first time. I know that this initiation is another start of the next part of my faith journey. I feel that I am on track now and will keep going on

this path.

During COVID's hard time this year, I joined one of the [Faith Circles](#) groups so I could keep in contact with all the people who have been part of my journey. Our group includes Max, Denis, Julie, Christine, Joe, and Stewart. It is a Zoom meeting each Tuesday evening, reading the Gospel, listening to others' reflection on it, learning the background of the Gospel, discussing and exchanging understanding with each of them. In addition, updates about happenings in the Parish as well as parishioners lives are shared, giving me a sense of being part of a bigger community. We also



Neophytes Sue and Ayla and their RCIA faith journey support team including God-parents, sponsors and team members with Bishop Brian Mascord.

pray together for those who are in need of God's mercy, love and support. Faith Circle leads me to contemplate about Gospel verses, and through discussions among the group, I usually become more

enlightened about how to practice God's Word in my daily life. Especially at this COVID time, Faith Circles has provided me with frequently catching up with people in our Catholic community so that I don't feel isolated but well supported and cared for by the community. Everyone matters and we're concerned about others during COVID so we keep praying for our brothers and sisters. I also feel relieved and closer to God as I get more perspectives and a deeper understanding of the Gospel after each [Faith Circles](#) meeting.

As the COVID situation improves, I visit Joseph and Thanh to pray the Rosary with them each Sunday afternoon. For me, repetitively praying the Rosary each day is a reminder of Jesus's suffering and Holy Mary's grace, and an aid for me to carefully follow the Catholic traditions, repent and practice Catholic spirituality. Besides teaching me how to pray Rosary, Joseph and Thanh lend me books on the saints so that I get to know others belief in God, what they see and feel, and how they handle their tough journey through life.

# RCIA Gems from the New 'Directory for Catechesis'

Dr. Christine Wood, Director, Office of Evangelisation & Catechesis, Archdiocese of Hobart

The Vatican released a new *Directory for Catechesis* in June this year. This is only the third of its kind over the last 50 years. Rooted in the renewal of the Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II's letter, *Catechesi Tradendae*, the *Directory's* Preface identifies two aims of catechesis: "maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and message of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The *Directory* is a crucial document for those involved in running RCIA because it explains the place of the kerygma – both the proclamation and the content of the Gospel (n. 58) – in the catechumenal process. Indeed, readers will discover we are always coming back to the kerygma in our catechesis. The heart of the kerygma is an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, which involves the call to repent from sin and to believe in the gospel. The *Directory* provides the following examples of the kerygma: Matt 1:23; Mk 1:15; Jn 3:16, 10:10; Acts 10:38; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 12:3, 15:3; and Gal 2:20. I recommend studying, and even memorising, these passages.

Pope Francis summarises the kerygma this way:

The kerygma is trinitarian. The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father's infinite mercy. On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment (*Evangelii gaudium*, 164; cf. *Directory*, n. 68).

When enquirers come to the parish, we begin by building relationships with them, removing obstacles to faith, and gently proclaiming the kerygma. This initial proclamation aims at evoking an initial expression of faith, which is then nurtured throughout the catechumenal process. The *Directory* beautifully explains that the one who proclaims the kerygma witnesses to their own personal experience of Jesus:

In the kerygma, the active figure is the Lord Jesus, who manifests himself in the testimony of the one who proclaims him; the life of the witness who has experienced salvation therefore becomes that which touches and moves the hearer (n. 58).

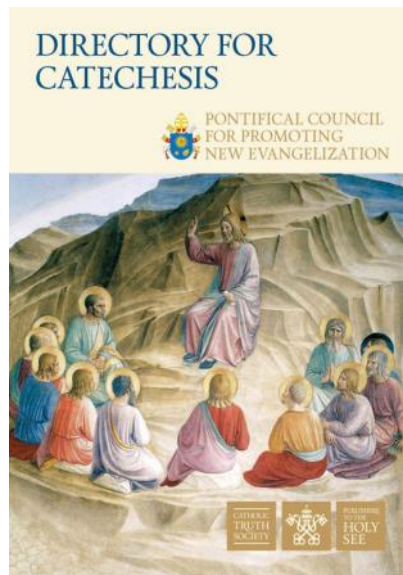
Once changed by an encounter with Christ, the enquirer moves into the catechumenate, where the RCIA catechist begins to unpack the kerygma. "The catechesis of Christian initiation is a *basic, essential, organic, systematic, and integral formation* in the faith" (n. 71). It is for this reason that the *Directory* states that "the period of the *catechumenate* properly so called is set aside for comprehensive catechesis" (n. 63). It envisions much more than a lectionary-based catechesis during the catechumenate. It requires a comprehensive explanation of the Catholic faith. Again, this comprehensive catechesis is kerygmatic in character insofar as it is always returning to the core gospel message to foster a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ.

Catechesis during the catechumenate is not limited to a formal catechetical session (although an integral Christian instruction is required!), but it also includes proclaiming the Word of God, liturgical action, and works of charity, so that the whole person – not just the mind, but also the heart, senses, and body – are all turned around to Christ (n. 65, 76).

Let me unpack this a little: this comprehensive catechesis is so much more than just the teaching of a doctrine class: it is about forming life-long disciples of Jesus Christ. It means talking to catechumens about their marriage, connecting them with the clergy, helping them develop their prayer life via *lectio divina*, etc., getting them involved in the big devotional practices of the parish, and immersing them in both the domestic church (Catholic family life) and the diocesan church.

With this sort of formation, catechumens develop the ability to feel, think, and act like Christ (n. 77) through the Church. This will enable them to become members of the Elect, and then be able to make a truly personal and intentional profession of Christian faith on the day of their baptism.

There are many other gems to be discovered in this new *Directory for Catechesis*, which can be purchased through Catholic bookstores like St Pauls Publications for \$29.95 plus postage (<https://secure.stpauls.com.au/product/10186>).





# Are Parishes Ready, Willing And Able To Welcome People Into The Catholic Faith?

A summary of a research report on the vitality of RCIA in Australian parishes (2017-2019)

SHARON BREWER, 25 NOVEMBER 2020



## READ THE FULL REPORT ON THE CIAN WEBSITE

Due to the limits of space, we are unable to print Sharon's full report here in Network News, however you can read the [complete document on our CIAN website](#).

My introduction to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was in our local parish in the late 1980s. Years later, when I was working as the parish sacramental co-ordinator, I administered the RCIA process and accompanied many people on their journey of faith. Then, as the diocesan RCIA coordinator for Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese I saw the various ways in which parishes offered the RCIA process. Over the last few years, a significant part of my work has been with the Catholic Enquiry Centre (CEC), a work of the Australian Catholic Bishops' National Centre for Evangelisation. A large focus of our ministry is helping enquirers navigate their journey into the Catholic Church.

For many years I have sensed that support for the RCIA process was waning. Maybe this was not surprising given the tragic things that have happened in our Church and a society that is highly secularised. It could easily be assumed that in this climate there would be little interest in the Catholic faith. And, if that were the case, what would the point be of implementing a RCIA process? However, in my work at the CEC, and from listening to members of the Christian Initiation Australia Network (CIAN), I am confident that there are people searching for God and who are interested in the Catholic faith. As well, there are people who want to return to the faith and others wishing to complete their sacraments of initiation. Thus, it has been disheartening to hear enquirers to the CEC relay stories of the lack of welcome they received when making their initial enquiries to a parish, and in some cases being told that they would have to go to another parish because RCIA wasn't being offered in the local parish.

These thoughts led me to propose a small-scale research project on the vitality of RCIA in Australian parishes as part of my ACU master's degree. In the second semester of 2019, a literature review was conducted to ascertain what other research had been done in this area. In short: in Australia, not much. There had been an attempt to survey dioceses quite a few years ago, but it appears no reports were published. There was certainly mention of RCIA, adult faith formation, outreach etc in the Plenary Council<sup>1</sup> reports. And from overseas there was some research by the US Centre for Applied Research (CARA)<sup>2</sup> and by sociologist David Yamane<sup>3</sup>.

With a lack of local research about what was happening, I launched into the development of a survey, welcoming input from a wide variety of people interested in this ministry. In early 2020 I distributed an electronic survey to every parish priest/administrator in Australia. Prior to the survey being distributed, a copy was sent to every diocesan bishop for his information. While the survey was addressed to the parish priest, he was able to delegate the completion of the survey to someone else in the parish, for example the RCIA coordinator or the pastoral associate. Parishes were sent a reminder about the survey after three weeks, technical assistance was offered and complete anonymity was assured. The survey process was approved by the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Human Research Ethics Committee. It was estimated that the survey would take no longer than 30 minutes to complete, assuming that the parish's sacramental registers were accessible and up-to date.

Space does not allow a detailed report on the findings. However, the following summary might provide some insight into the current status of the RCIA process in Australia.

## 1. DISTRIBUTION AND COMPLETION OF THE SURVEY

The survey platform used for this research was Qualtrics, which was approved by the ACU. Surveys were successfully sent to 1,118 parishes out of a possible 1,300 parishes. Of the 1,118 surveys, 64 (5.72%) parishes returned a completed survey.

As participants had been provided with my email address for technical support, 33 (2.95%) emailed me a response rather than participate in the survey. No quantitative data could be captured from these emails. However, some comments have been included in this summary.

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# Are Parishes Ready, Willing And Able To Welcome People Into The Catholic Faith?

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## 2. CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES IN EACH PARISH AND THEIR ONGOING PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The RCIA process usually comprises people who have never been baptised (catechumens) and those who have been baptised, either in the Catholic Church or another Christian tradition (candidates), and who are looking to complete their sacraments of initiation. The following data gives an indication of how many parishes, of the 64, had no catechumens/candidates, and how many of the neophytes were still attending Mass.

### (a) Catechumens

Of the 64 parishes:

- 38% had no catechumens in 2017
- 47% had no catechumens in 2018
- 34% had no catechumens in 2019
- 55% initiated in 2017 were still attending Mass
- 54% initiated in 2018 were still attending Mass
- 54% in 2019 were still attending Mass

### (b) Candidates – previously baptised Catholic

Of the 64 parishes:

- 80% had no candidates in 2017
- 72% had no candidates in 2018
- 69% had no candidates in 2019
- 71% of candidates initiated in 2017 still attending Mass
- 73% of candidates initiated in 2018 still attending Mass
- 68% of candidates initiated in 2019 still attending Mass

### (c) Candidates – previously baptised in another Christian tradition

Of the 64 parishes:

- 67% had no candidates in 2017
- 64% had no candidates in 2018
- 66% had no candidates in 2019
- 51% of candidates initiated in 2017 still attending Mass
- 61% of candidates initiated in 2018 still attending Mass
- 77% of candidates initiated in 2019 still attending Mass

This section of the survey also recorded the parish geographical location. Anecdotally, there is a suggestion that regional areas have a higher “retention” rate than city areas<sup>4</sup>. I suggest that there is insufficient data to confirm this, but certainly there was no large disparity between city and regional areas.

## 3. HOW IS THE RCIA PROCESS CONDUCTED IN PARISHES?

Participants were asked to briefly indicate which components of the Rite they usually use, some broader questions about discerning the readiness of a candidate and the process around keeping connected with the neophytes.

Participants were asked who was usually involved in their parish RCIA process. Almost one half indicated that the parish priest and a team of parishioners accompanied the candidates (28/64). The remainder either did not have an RCIA process in the last three years, or the candidate met only with the priest or a designated person.

Participants were then asked if the parish priest, or someone from the parish team, had advised an enquirer that they should go to another parish for the RCIA process. Of the 64 participants, 12 said they had referred an enquirer on. This was either because the enquirer was not actually in that parish or that the parish did not offer the process every year.

## WHAT CAN WE MAKE OF THIS?

Firstly, the low participation rate was certainly a disappointment. Could there be a correlation between the low response rate and interest in the RCIA process? To a certain extent, I believe there is. However, I do acknowledge

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# Are Parishes Ready, Willing And Able To Welcome People Into The Catholic Faith?

← (Continued from page 9)

the following as being possible reasons for the low engagement:

- COVID-19 restricted some participants from accessing their parish sacramental records.
- Some priests were new, or “taking care” of a parish and were not sure of the status of the RCIA locally.
- Several priests commenced the survey but did not complete it, possibly because they struck technical issues. As I had to comply with strict rules about anonymity of participants, I was unable to reach out to them to assist.
- Had the survey been managed by a church agency or PhD candidate, it might have attracted more interest.

Since the finalisation of the research, I have had a number of informal discussions about the findings. Some people have not been surprised by the low response rate because they believe it does correlate with the general lack of momentum in this ministry. Others have been a little defensive citing a lack of knowledge about the survey and suggesting that just because a parish doesn't offer the RCIA process, it does not mean that they are disinterested in bringing people to the faith. It is difficult to argue with this assertion.

However, despite the low participation rate, my sense is that the survey does provide a stimulus for further thought and dialogue about how we evangelise and how we accompany people on the journey to full initiation into our Catholic faith, and beyond. Here are a few questions worth considering:

- How are programs, like Alpha, revitalising interest in RCIA? If there is evidence of this, would it encourage other parishes to undertake Alpha, or other similar programs?
- How can the Christian Initiation Adult Network support dioceses/parishes, especially those who do not have the means to financially support the resourcing of this ministry? (Noting that CIAN is self-funded by membership fees.
- Similarly, what support can the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, possibly through the Catholic Enquiry Centre, the National Centre for Evangelisation or the National Liturgical Council, offer in this area of ministry?
- Do parish priests and seminarians require training in this ministry?
- Is there a correlation between the level of adult faith formation being offered in parishes and the offering of the RCIA process in the same parish?
- Could further research be undertaken to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the RCIA process in Australian parishes? This might enable those parishes who are using the RCIA process effectively to share their experiences and learnings.

Finally, if we accept what the Rite advises, that “the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ”<sup>5</sup>, then Australian parishes should be encouraged and assisted in revitalising their efforts towards the RCIA process.

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1 Dantis T, Bowell P, Reid S, Dudfield L. Listen to What the Spirit is Saying. Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue. <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FINAL-BOOK-v7-spreadversion-LISTEN-TO-WHAT-THE-SPIRIT-IS-SAYING.pdf> Accessed May 23, 2020.

2 Gaunt SJ, Thomas. Pastoral Practice in Light of the National Statutes on the Catechumenate. This is an unpublished report and was received via private correspondence with the author, in his role as Director, CARA. Received May 7, 2020.

3 Yamane, David. *Becoming Catholic: Finding Rome in the American Religious Landscape* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2014).

4 The term “retention rate” may not be the most appropriate term, however, it is the phrase commonly used to refer to neophytes who are still practising their faith.

5 ICEL. [Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Study Guide](#). (St Pauls Publications, Sydney: 2018) Introduction, paragraph 9, page 5.



# National Pastoral Ministry Conference

## Alive in the Spirit

### *Being the Community Christ calls us to Be*

### 8-10<sup>th</sup> July 2021

This timely conference invites people to consider the extraordinary events in our world, and within our Church, which present us with an opportunity to open our hearts and minds to act upon what the Holy Spirit is asking of us at this time in our local region.

The Conference encourages faith communities including clergy, staff, leadership teams, council members, ministers and volunteers; for those in pastoral care, for youth, family and education support, to engage in the life of Jesus Christ, and our Church, by exploring ways to:

- ◆ engage the wounded, the disillusioned, the disaffiliated, the discontented and disconnected members of the Body of Christ;
- ◆ heal the divisions that have caused pain in our Church;
- ◆ revitalise those Catholics who are just “hanging in there” so that they may once again share the Good News of Christ;
- ◆ encourage and resource those who have brave and bold evangelisation ideas.

The Conference, postponed in 2020, has been reimagined to offer both a face-to-face and an online dimension, catering for our COVID times. It is supported by a coalition of key networks: coordinated by the Lay Pastoral Ministry Network (formerly known as NAPPA) collaborating with the Christian Initiation Australia Network (CIAN), and the Mission Planners Network Oceania (MPNO)

Richard McMahon, co-chair of the Lay Pastoral Ministry Network is enthusiastic about this national initiative, despite the initial delay due to COVID. “If anything, the committee is more excited to offer a more meaningful and engaging Conference. As a church, we have much wisdom to share with each other. There is so much innovation and new life going on in our region. I am keen to explore with others fresh approaches and inspiration for how we can be the community Christ calls us to be in a post-COVID world.”

Registrations for the Alive in the Spirit Conference will open in March 2021. We'll give you all the booking and registration details in the next issue of *Network News* due in February 2021.

More information contact:

Lisa Bright  
[lisa.bright@parracatholic.org](mailto:lisa.bright@parracatholic.org) or 0448 652 720  
Lay Pastoral Ministry Network





Christian Initiation  
Australia Network

# NETWORK NEWS

*Network News* is the quarterly bulletin of the Christian Initiation Network Australia.

The Christian Initiation Australia Network (CIAN) is a support network of those who share the vision of the catechumenate. Its purpose is to promote the practice of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) through sharing ideas and challenges.

CIAN Membership is open to all who have a commitment to and/or work with the RCIA in Australia.

Thank you to all who contributed to this issue of *Network News*.

To send feedback or get further information about items in *Network News*, contact the editor:

Max Norden  
Editor, CIAN Network News  
PO Box 293, Corrimal NSW 2518

M: 0414 733 823  
E: mnorden@iprimus.com.au

The next issue will be circulated in February 2021.

Please send stories to share, news or events to publicise, articles to contribute or resources to recommend by 22nd January, 2021 to the editor, Max Norden, (contact details above) or to the CIAN chair:

Dr. Christine Wood  
E: christine.wood@aohtas.org.au  
M: 0408 321 002

For more RCIA Resources, go to [cianetwork.net/](http://cianetwork.net/)

Christian Initiation Australia Network seeks to support all those who share the vision of the RCIA