


**Scrap 'Program' from your  
Vocabulary:  
Introducing and Implementing an  
Ongoing Catechumenate**

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**Liturgy – Ministry – Mission**


**Townsville 7 - 10 August 2014**



The aim of this workshop is to assist participants to identify and explore the gifts their parish community offers for implementing an ongoing catechumenate.

Using the four pillars of the RCIA – Word, Worship, Community and Mission – who else within the parish community can be invited to be co-responsible in journeying with catechumens and candidates other than the RCIA Team, catechists, sponsors and priests?

Participants will gain some stimulus to think outside the square in implementing the catechumenate in their parish/diocese.



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.

# Past Experience

An experience of  
a multiple parish collaboration  
and implementation of  
an ongoing catechumenate

# In the beginning...

**Post Easter:** Review. Tired Team. Decreasing parish interest.

**May:** Invited neighbouring RCIA Teams, shared stories & identified commonalities & differences.

**June:** Created plan.

**July:** Informed communities.

**August:** Launched plan.

# 1<sup>st</sup> Year

- 5 parishes involved, which soon became 4.
- 9 month model with 4 periods of time and 3 steps.
- Clear differentiation of catechumens and candidates.
- Celebrated rites within own parish communities.
- Sponsors from own parishes.
- 2 discussion groups with participants from all parishes.
- Celebrated retreats & archdiocesan celebrations together.
- Used a variety of resources to stimulate discussion.
- One combined RCIA Team which met monthly throughout the 5 years to review, oversee, adapt the plan.

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

- Expanded to 10 months.
- Formed three different groups which facilitated:
  - Inquiry.
  - Catechumenate.
  - Mystagogia.
- Inquiry: 6 sessions followed by a formal discernment session.
- Catechumenate included Advent & Palm Sunday retreats. Each retreat included an informal discernment process.
- Mystagogia: 6 weekly sessions followed by a formal discernment session.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Year

- Expanded to 12 months.
- This 'year' began with the first Inquirer in January, overlapping 2<sup>nd</sup> Year.
- Catechised candidates needs were addressed and they were received into the Church after discernment. This occurred numerous times during the year.
- Not baptised and baptised, not catechised, Inquirers immediately 'buddied' and accompanied at Sunday Mass no matter what time of year they made initial contact.
- Period of Inquiry 'lengthened'.
- Nebulous group of inquirers met informally for a number of months before...
- Formal discernment process to move into catechumenate.

# 4<sup>th</sup> Year

- Catechised candidates received into the Church when ready.
- People moved in and out of inquiry according to their commitment and life circumstance.
- Ongoing informal discernment.
- Formal discernment as necessary.
- Fortnightly catechumenate meetings which also tapped into deanery/parish events e.g.. Exploring Liturgy workshops, Anniversary Mass, guest speakers, etc.
- Purification and Enlightenment filled with spiritual preparation tapping into all parishes e.g. Lenten Program, Evening Prayer, Prayer around the Cross, Tenebrae, etc.
- Mystagogia = 'breaking open the mysteries' and discernment and commitment to call to Mission.

# 5<sup>th</sup> Year

Handed over to individual parishes:

- Parishes had a clearer understanding of and differentiation between baptised and not, catechised and not.
- Baptised catechised received when ready at any appropriate time of year.
- Vigil has focus on baptism and full initiation.
- Inquiry a flexible time of 'seeking'.
- Participants on the whole are more fully formed members of the community prior to initiation/reception into the Church.
- Mystagoga has become a time of reflection, continuing discernment and consolidation.

# What worked

- Having a plan,
- Ongoing formation.
- Clear differentiation.
- Appropriate rituals.
- Sacramental/liturgical catechesis.
- Tapping into parish /deanery/archdiocesan groups, celebrations and faith formation opportunities.

# What didn't work

- Assuming that those involved in RCIA ministries would be open to honest review and adaptation.
- Assuming that people were patient enough to implement a long term plan.
- Catechists and coordinators who were unable to delete the word 'program' from their RCIA language.

# Challenges

- Implementing a long term plan.
- Deconstructing a culture of ‘do the book, jump the hoop, get the prize’.
- Multi-parish calendar
- People with long term experience working in catechumenal ministries were frequently unaware of the content and dynamics of the Rite.
- Smudged lenses – looking at new situations with preconceived ideas.
- Not losing the vision.

# Gains

- RCIA Team members and parish leadership gained a richer understanding of the flexibility and options contained within the Rite.
- Richer communal experiences.
- Neophytes and newly received were formed members of the worshipping community at the time of their initiation/entrance into the Church.
- The benefits of laying solid foundations through long term planning.
- Adults were proactively discerning God's invitational call.
- Better understanding of local Church.

# Introducing an Ongoing Catechumenate

What's your current implementation?

1. Model One – instruction.
2. Model Two – nine month model.
3. Model Three – year-round/ongoing.
4. None of these.
5. Combination.

# Introducing an Ongoing Catechumenate

Be familiar with the content of the Rite.

Review the current practise honestly and objectively.

Commit to exploring and improving on what is already happening.

Let go of 'We always do/We've always done...'

No need to re-invent the wheel.

Do the best you can with what you already have.

Know your parish:

- Story (Word)
- Celebrations (Worship)
- Culture (Community)
- Groups (Mission)

# Review current practise

- What works and why?
- What doesn't work and why?
- Can you approach what doesn't work in a different way?
- How many of the rites and rituals of RCIA do you celebrate?
- Is there clear differentiation of catechumens and candidates?
- Candidates #387 – no greater burden than is necessary.
- Ask the parishioners. What has been their experience of RCIA? Are they involved? Why not?
- What's the percentage of neophytes and newly received still involved after 12 months/2 years/5 years?
- Affirm what works.
- Be honest & objective – is everything going swimmingly well?

# Suggested Model

## 4 Pillars of the Catechumenate:

**Word**

**Worship**

**Community**

**Mission**



RCIA 75

Sheila O'Dea, National RCIA Conference 2006

# Suggested Model

In planning and preparation, ask the questions:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- How?
- Why?

# Ongoing Catechumenate

1. Meet with clergy, RCIA Team to review current process.
2. Invite 'fresh eyes'.
3. Create a timeline:
  - Year I
    - Communication.
    - Formation.
    - Implementation.
    - Review.
  - Year 2 - Adapt & Review.
  - Year 3 – Adapt & Review.
  - Year 4 – Adapt & Review.
  - Year 5 – Adapt & Review.



# Communication

Inform the community.

# Formation

Formation sessions for those involved in catechumenal ministries:

- Use the Rite.
- Refer to the Rite.
- Explore the Rite.
- Invite Diocesan Coordinator to facilitate formation.
- Attend Diocesan RCIA workshops.

# Formation

## Ministries and Offices of Initiation

RCIA	Baptism of Children	Sacramental Preparation
Community	Community	Community
Sponsor	Parents	Parents*
Godparent	Godparent/s	Godparent (or if unavailable sponsor)
Bishop	Bishop, priest, deacon	Pastor (i.e. PP)
Priest		Bishop
Deacon		
Catechist		*With the support of catechetical institutions.

# Formation

## Formation of the Parish:

- Invite:
  - Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Council.
  - Stewardship Group.
  - Liturgy Team.
  - Bap Prep Team.
  - Sacramental Team.
  - Principals and APREs of Parish Schools.
  - RESS catechists.
  - Interested staff of Parish Schools.
  - Parishioners.
- Parish/Deanery/Archdiocesan workshops.
- Parish newsletter.
- Parish website – add a link to ACN website.
- Use the Rite.

# Implementation

- Be familiar with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- Have a plan.
- Follow the plan.
- If in doubt refer to the Rite.
- Regular Team meetings.
- Invite.
- Review.
- Adapt.
- Be patient.

# Review

Every 12 months:

- What worked?
- What was positive?
- What didn't work?

Ask for feedback from:

- Participants.
- Parishioners.
- Others involved e.g. 'guest' speakers.

# Adapt

- Build on what worked.
- Adapt/change/discard what didn't work.
- Contact neighbouring parishes.
- Can you share resources:
  - Catechists.
  - Discussion groups.
  - Guest speakers e.g. there may be someone in a neighbouring parish who is involved in prison ministry.

# Sacramental/Liturgical Catechesis

- Eucharist – source and summit.
- Rites contained within RCIA - break open the rites & rituals of RCIA as discernment for next step and entry into next period of time.
- Have discussion sessions around Sacraments of Commitment - Marriage and Holy Orders - and attend Weddings, Anniversary Masses and Ordinations.
- Attend Sunday infant baptisms and have discussion around the ritual of baptism.
- Attend Sacramental Preparation – Confirmation/ 1<sup>st</sup> Eucharist and discuss full membership of community.
- Prepare for the Scrutinies and Sacrament of Penance by:
  - Looking at Sacraments of Healing: Rite of Penance & Anointing of the Sick.
  - Looking at 3 Scrutinies.

# Exercise

Name your parish groups:

Which parish groups can you tap into:

- Consider the life stages of catechumens.
- Identify their areas of interest.

What do the catechumens/candidates need to explore further?

# Planning

**Word** – scripture, story, person of Jesus, self.

**Worship** – rites, rituals, praise God.

**Community** – living the life, who is our family, who are we?

**Mission** – identifying the gifts God has given us. Stewardship  
spirituality – giving gratefully back to God with increase.

Who, what, when, where, how, why.



# **Inquiry**

**Word**

**Worship**

**Community**

**Mission**

Who, what, when, where, how, why.

# Rite of Acceptance

Who

What

Where

When

How

Why

# Period of Catechumenate

**Word**

**Worship**

**Community**

**Mission**

Who, what, where, when, how, why.

Explore the *Rites Belonging to the Period of the Catechumenate*.

# Election or Enrolment of Names

Who

What

Where

When

How

Why



# Period of Purification and Enlightenment

**Word**

**Worship**

**Community**

**Mission**

Who, what, where, when, how, why.

Tap into what's already planned in your parish for Lent.



# Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

Who

What

Where

When

How

Why

# **Mystagogia**

**Word**

**Worship**

**Community**

**Mission**

Who, what, where, when, how, why.

# Recommended resources...

*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Study Edition. Strathfield: St Pauls Publications 2003.

Morris, Thomas H. *The RCIA: Transforming the Church: A Resource for Pastoral Implementation*. Revised and Updated Edition. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997.


Birmingham, Mary. *Year-Round Catechumenate*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2003.

Gagan, Peter; Harrington, Elizabeth. *RCIA Team Book*. Archdiocese of Brisbane.

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



**Questions**  
**Comments**



Here is born in Spirit-soaked fertility  
a brood destined for another city,  
begotten by God's blowing and  
borne upon this torrent  
by the Church their virgin mother.  
Reborn in these depths,  
they reach for heaven's realm,  
the born-but-once unknown by felicity.  
This spring is life that floods the world,  
the wounds of Christ  
its awesome source.

Sinners sink beneath the sacred surf  
that swallows age and spits up youth.

Sinners here scour sin away  
down to innocence,

for they know no enmity who are  
by one font, one Spirit,  
one faith made one.

Sinners shudder not  
at sins kind and number,  
for those born here are holy.

*Inscribed on the fifth century baptismal font of church of St John Lateran.*

*Translation by Aidan Kavanagh.*

*Mary Birmingham, Year-Round Catechumenate, p 137*