

A Partial Glossary of RCIA Terms

Advent

The beginning season of the new Liturgical Year. Four weeks before Christmas that focuses on a twofold theme: preparing for the Second Coming of Christ and preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Book of the Elect

A special book into which the names of those catechumens who have been chosen, or elected, for initiation at the next Easter Vigil are inscribed before the Rite of Election

Candidate

- 1) Any person in the period pre-catechumenate (RCIA 38).
- 2) One who is baptized as a Catholic “but did not receive further catechetical formation, nor the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. (RCIA 400-410)
- 3) One who is already baptized in another Christian faith and has not received a suitable catechesis and who now is preparing to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. At the time of full reception, he or she will make a profession of faith, be confirmed, and receive Eucharist. (RCIA 409).



Canon Law

The body of law that governs Church practice and protects the rights and privileges of individuals and the community.

Catechesis

The instruction and spiritual formation of catechumens, candidates, and neophytes after the period of evangelization and inquiry.

Catechumen

An unbaptized adult or child of catechetical age who has been accepted in to the Order of Catechumens through the Rite of Acceptance (RCIA 41-47) Catechetical age is defined as “in or around 7 years of age” (Canon 97:2)

Catechumenate

- 1) The entire initiation practice is sometimes called the Catechumenal Process, in reference to “one in instruction” Galatians 6.
- 2) The second period of the Catechumenal Process in which, after the Rite of Acceptance, catechumens enter into “an extended period of time” and are “given a suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life (RCIA 75)

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

The Third step in the Catechumenal process is the celebration the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist). “Through this final step the elect, receiving pardon for their sins, are admitted into the people of God...lead by the Holy Spirit...and share in the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal” (RCIA 206). This most normally coincides, by ancient tradition, to the Easter Vigil (RCIA 207).

Children

The Rites provide a format of RCIA which is adapted for children. That is, those “children not baptized as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age” (RCIA 252). The age of reason is defined by Canon Law as in or around the age of 7 (CIC 97:2). Cf. RCIA 252-259. Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age is discussed in RCIA 252 – 330.

Cycle A, B, C

The three year cycle of liturgical readings: A Cycle – Gospel of Matthew; B Cycle - Gospel of Mark; C Cycle - Gospel of Luke. All three cycles incorporate the Gospel of John.

Dismissal

At the celebration of Mass, catechumens are to “be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the Eucharist begins.” This not because they are somehow not worthy to remain with the faithful. They are dismissed to “reflect more deeply upon the word of God” which they have just heard. Formularies for Dismissals are found in RCIA 67.

Easter Season

A period of seven weeks beginning with Easter Sunday and ending with the feast of Pentecost. “An expected time of Post-Baptismal Catechesis/Mystagogy” (RCIA 247)

Elect

The name given to catechumens who have celebrated the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent, signifying their being chosen for the initiation that upcoming Easter (RCIA 124)

Evangelization

- 1) “The carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race” (EN 18)
- 2) The life long process of conversion to Jesus Christ (GDC 47)
- 3) The first period of Evangelization and Pre Catechumenate, which seeks to introduce candidates to Christ, by: a) “faithfully and constantly” proclaiming the “living God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all” (RCIA 36), b) “a suitable explanation of the Gospel” (RCIA 38), c) an opportunity for the beginnings of faith (RCIA 37).

Godparents

Those who are selected by the Catechumen to “accompany them on the day of election, at the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, and during the period of mystagogy” (RCIA 11). They must be fully initiated members of the Catholic faith, and should be able to perform the responsibilities as outlined in RCIA 11, 123.

Inquirers

Those who participate in the pre-catechumenate period in the RCIA. They are “inquiring” into Christianity in the Catholic Tradition. (RCIA 7.1)

Lectionary

The book used in liturgical celebrations that contains all the scripture readings of the liturgical year.

Lent

A six week period extending from Ash Wednesday to sundown on Holy Thursday. It is a retreat time in preparation for the Easter Triduum. For the “elect” who are preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter Vigil,

and the Candidates who are preparing to receive full initiation during the Easter Season, this season correlates with the period of Purification & Enlightenment (RCIA 138)

Liturgical Year

The seasons and cycles of the Christian year that follow the life of Christ. It is the instrument and means for leading God's people along the way to the Lord. The readings introduce and invite us into the Paschal Mystery.

Minor Rites

Rites during the Period of the Catechumenate which include exorcisms, blessings, and anointings (RCIA 79, 185)

Mystagogy/Postbaptismal Catechesis

The final period of the Catechumenal process which, the newly Baptized, "neophytes", and the newly initiated grow "in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives" through "meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing works of Charity" (RCIA 244) The immediate period of mystagogy is from Easter to Pentecost, however the National Statutes for implementation in the USA also recommend and extended mystagogy for one year (RCIA 247, 251).

National Statutes

Particular law for the implementation of the order of Christian initiation of adults in the United States presented by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB).

Neophyte

One who is initiated at the Easter Vigil. The term comes from the Greek word meaning new plant, as in a new sprout on a limb/branch. (RCIA 245)

Ninety Days

Occasionally used to mean the combination of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, and the Period of Mystagogy which corresponds with Lent (40 days) and the Easter Season (50 days).

Ordinary Time

The cycle within the liturgical year that is outside the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, Easter). The readings during this time follow the ministry of Jesus; His teachings and miracles. This time provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of God's gift to us in Christ, our attitudes, our prayer life, and our service to others.

Pre-Catechumenate & Evangelization

The first period of the Catechumenal process is evangelization, which seeks to introduce candidates to Christ, by: a) "faithfully and constantly" proclaiming the "living God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all" (RCIA 36), b) "a suitable explanation of the Gospel" (RCIA 38), c) an opportunity for the beginnings of faith (RCIA 37).

Presentation of Creed / Presentation of Our Father

During the period of purification and enlightenment, the elect are presented with the Creed and the Lord's Prayer through special rites that usually coincide with the Scrutinies. (RCIA 147).

Purification and Enlightenment

The third period of the Catechumenal process, normally coinciding with Lent, followed by the Rite of Election, which seeks to introduce the Elect, and Candidates to “a period of intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction” (RCIA 139). It is the final period of preparation before reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

RCIA

Acronym for Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

The First Step in the Catechumenal process, in which the unbaptized are officially accepted into the Order of Catechumens. It is of “the utmost importance. Assembling publicly for the first time, the candidates who have completed the period of the pre-catechumenate declare their intention to the Church and the Church in turn” accepts them (RCIA 41).

Rite of Welcome

Optional rite welcoming those Candidates who were previously baptized but uncatechized to begin their preparation. The church “acknowledges that such candidates are already part of the community” by baptism, and now “surrounds them with special care and support.” (RCIA 411-412). A combined Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming Baptized put Previously Uncatechized Adults is provided for in the RCIA, (RCIA 507) however “care must be taken to maintain distinction between the catechumens and the baptized candidates” (RCIA 506).

Rite of Sending

An optional rite by which the parish community sends the Catechumens to the Rite of Election (RCIA 106), or candidates for Recognition by the Bishop, and Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA 434). A combined rite of Sending for Diocese who celebrate a Combined Rite of Election is also provided for (RCIA 530).

Rite of Election

The Second Step in the Catechumenal process. Presided over by the Bishop, the rite inaugurates the completion of the Period of the Catechumenate and the final period of preparation before initiation at the next Easter Vigil.

Rite of Call to Continuing Conversion

An optional rite for Candidates who have completed an extended period of preparation and now seek to be received into, or fully initiated into the Church at Easter. (RCIA 446). Can be combined with the Rite of Recognition by the Bishop if celebrated by local diocese.

Rite, Penitential

Celebration for candidates, similar to the scrutinies (RCIA 459)

Scrutinies

Three special rites for the Elect during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sunday's of Lent. “Solemnly celebrated on Sundays and are reinforced by an exorcism, are rites for self-searching and repentance and above all have a spiritual purpose” (RCIA 141).

Sponsor

The term used to refer to the person who “accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen” (RCIA 10). They assist the candidates, stand as witness to their moral character and present them to the Rite of Acceptance. They may also be chosen as a Godparent by the Catechumen (RCIA 10, 80) The term for a fully initiated catholic who will journey with a Candidate (baptized but previously uncatechized adult) through their preparation and be present at their full initiation, or full communion into the church.

Sunday

The first day in the Christian liturgical week, the day of Christ’ resurrection, the original feast day, the heart of the calendar, the basis and nucleus of the liturgical year.

Triduum

The three days of the celebration of Easter which begins with sundown on Holy Thursday evening and ends with evening prayer on Easter Sunday evening. It includes the liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday.