

RCIA Network of England & Wales

NEWSLETTER
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The Heart of the Community ~ The Heart of the Catechumenate

Since catechumens belong to the church and are being apprenticed into a way of living, they need to experience what is at the heart of the life of the community. Perhaps if communities and their initiation ministers pay attention to what the church never stops being we may find the heart of the community; and thus the heart of the catechumenate. We may also discover that there are many Christian people who can mentor the catechumens into a way of living.

Central Activities in the Church's Way of Living

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* clearly points to a way of living as the essential focus of initiation. This clarity is observed throughout the *Rite* and especially in the various liturgies. Let us look at the two liturgies which frame the period of the *Catechumenate*.

In the *Rite of Election* (RCIA #118) the bishop asks three questions:

- Have they faithfully listened to God's word proclaimed by the Church?
- Have they responded to that word and begun to walk in God's presence?
- Have they shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined with them in prayer?

In the *Rite of Acceptance Into The Order of Catechumens* (RCIA #52) the presider addresses the candidates

- You have followed God's light and the way of the Gospel now lies open before you. Set your feet firmly on that path and acknowledge the living God, who truly speaks to everyone. Walk in the light of Christ and learn to trust in his wisdom. Commit your lives daily to his care, so that you may come to believe in him with all your heart.

Thus, living the Christian life implies faithfully listening to God's Word proclaimed by the Church, responding to that Word in daily living, joining the Christian community in prayer, following that Word at all times, and doing apostolic activity. These activities,

which are the central activities of the Christian community, lead people to "an intimate knowledge of Christ and his Church" (RCIA #129). The Christian community ceaselessly proclaims the Word, responds to the Word, prays, and witnesses the Gospel. Through these continuous and inter-related activities newcomers are initiated into a way of living.

By their formation in the entire Christian life and a sufficiently prolonged probation, the catechumens are properly initiated into the mysteries of salvation and the practice of an evangelical way of life. By means of sacred rites celebrated at successive times they are led into the life of faith, worship, and charity belonging to the people of God. (RCIA #76)

One is best formed in the entire Christian life by living that life with other members of the Christian community.

Proclaiming the Word and Prayer

But where exactly does the community live this life? The primary place for listening to the Word is the *Liturgy of the Word* at the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

In the celebration of the *Liturgy of the Word* within the seasons and feasts of the full liturgical year, the community and its catechumens experience the unfolding of the full mystery of Christ.

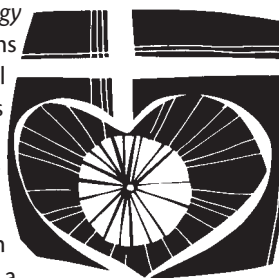
But, do we believe this? When initiation leaders say they take a break for the summer, are they saying that they and their communities take a break from the liturgy - that their communities do not celebrate the liturgy all year round? Or, are they referring to "extended sessions" or "classes" or "catechumenal gatherings?" These latter activities are the extras - not the core activities; not our way of living. The initial core activity of the catechumenate is the celebration of the *Liturgy of the Word* with the community every Sunday of the liturgical year. This is what the church never stops doing; this is the life into which cat-

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echumens are mentored. Perhaps our very need for a "break" could suggest to us that our focus has been on the "extras" rather than on the central activities.

And what if catechumens go on vacation, or visit friends, or move to another place? There is one Order of Catechumens just as there is one Order of the Faithful. Catechumens do not belong exclusively to one parish's initiation group - they belong to, are members of, the whole church. Therefore, wherever they go, they celebrate the *Liturgy of the Word* and are dismissed to continue the celebration of the *Liturgy of the Word*. They are being apprenticed into a way of life - and that way of life does not stop for summer vacation!



Communities may need to work toward having more of its members formed to lead catechumens in their continuation of the *Liturgy of the Word* when they are dismissed. Communities may need to learn to

ask if there are any visiting catechumens, and then be prepared to dismiss them to continue the Word. A challenge for initiation ministers is to recognize that the extras are just that - extras; and that their task is to form enough ministers to lead the dismissal at every Sunday Liturgy.

Responding to and Living the Word
As catechumens respond to the proclaimed Word of God they learn gradually "to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural

inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbour." (RCIA #75. 2) This learning brings about a change in outlook and conduct, and is manifested by its social consequences. This way of living which the catechumens are learning is the way of living of the Christian community. The church never takes a break from this way of living!

Members of the Christian community live this life daily - winter and summer - major seasons and Ordinary Time. Catechumens learn from them - at home, at work, in the marketplace, at sporting matches, in hospitals and shelters - where ever there are Christians living the Christian way of life. None of us, including catechumens, can listen faithfully to God's Word and ignore the conversion of life that Word always calls us to. We do not stop responding to God's Word simply because it is vacation time. Responding to the Word is a central activity of the church and of the church's catechumens.

The way of life of the Christian community is a Paschal way of life - brokenness and hope, dying and rising. The Body of Christ goes into our world to proclaim healing, reconciliation, new hope. The Body of Christ, doing the work of Christ, continues to build the reign of God in our midst; in the ordinary events of everyday living. By the way we live our daily lives "faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all." (RCIA #36) We deepen our grasp of the paschal mystery and make it part of our lives. (RCIA #234) This is made concrete in our "works of charity" which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy (CCC #2447) Pope John Paul II calls for our works of charity to be made further concrete by our promotion of justice (*Centesimus Annus* #58)

The church never stops this way of living, never takes a break from witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ and the catechumens are mentored into this way of life by the daily living of the community.

Conclusion

The heart of the catechumenate is found in the life of the community as it goes about being what a Christian community never stops being. It is a community which never stops the continuous and inter-related activities of faithfully listening to God's Word proclaimed by the Church, responding to that Word in daily living, praying, following that Word at all times, and doing apostolic activity. Through this way of being, the community with its catechumens continues to grow in an "intimate knowledge of Christ and his Church." (RCIA #129)

Singing the Rite music:

In the first two articles in this series I looked how we use music in liturgy and prayer and then how music is integral to our prayer. Having laid these two foundations I would like to turn to rites themselves. Before considering the Rite of Acceptance it may be first useful to mention some specific music resources for the Rite:

- *Who calls you by name* (I & II) by David Haas, published by GIA Publications.
- *Music for the Christian Initiation of Adults* by John McCann, published by Kevin Mayhew.
- *Christ we proclaim: Resource Book*, 3 music volumes, edited by Christopher Walker published by OCP.

All 3 have recordings which demonstrate how the pieces sound. The first two are collections by a single person. Though this gives some consistency of style for me, personally I would want more variety. They are probably for someone who likes a wide choice of resources. *Christ we proclaim* is different though edited by Christopher Walker it offers a wide range of music and composers in the 3 music volumes (they follow the path of the Rite). In the Resource Book there is a melody line of all the music together with lists of further ideas and resources. The book is structured around the Rite and includes the (US) text of the Rite together with introductory material, advice of celebrating the liturgy and checklists for preparation and evaluation.

Rite of Acceptance

When choosing music for a rite it is important to have some sense of the shape: what are the high points, how does it flow? Like many rites there are quite a number of opportunities for singing:

- opening psalm or song (48)
- song after greeting (49)
- affirmation by assembly (53)
- acclamation during signing (55)
- procession (60)
- followed by the Liturgy of the Word with its usual priorities.

With the exception of the first a suggested text is given for each. I would suggest that the high point of the rite is not in this list. It is the opening dialogue between priest and candidates. I think it difficult, if you want the rite to work, not to include nearly all of these opportunities out. The first principle for music in RCIA might be to take opportunities given in the rite and make the most of them. This would be closely followed by

Music & RCIA 3

second: respect the form of what is proposed in the rite — if the rite suggests a single line acclamation don't sing a 5 verse hymn.

It is worth considering other factors which will influence the choice of music. The first is geographical: where and how will the rite be celebrated. The musicians will need to work with both the priest and catechist so that each will have the confidence to guide people on the day. The second is seasonal —how might the season or the particular Sunday affect what is sung. Unlike the Rite of Election there is no specific day for the Rite of Acceptance — it is celebrated when people are ready. To reinforce that point RCIA recommends that it is celebrated a number of times each year.

The song following the greeting may be most appropriate when there is a large number of candidates. It could be possible to repeat or continue the opening song. It would be important to look at the suggested words from Psalm 62 *O God, you are my God, for you I long*. The opening song should be different from the procession to hear the

Take the opportunities given in the Rite and make the most of them

word: something has changed and the music should reflect this. At the heart of the rite are the two acclamations.

Looking at the text shows that they are different: the affirmation is addressed to the Father; the signing to Christ. A short acclamation of blessing to the Father is an essential item in a parish's repertoire; it can be sung at the baptism of infants, for example. The texts is similar to the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with children which might be the source of a setting; the resources above have a number of settings or perhaps a joyful Taizé chant like *Laudate Dominum*. The signing of the senses is different, the acclamation is sung a number of times. The text in the rite suggests that a Lenten Gospel Acclamation would be appropriate but settings such as Marty Haugen's (*Laudate* 391) which mention the cross maybe more effective. I am not sure why the suggestion of the need to rehearse something like this with the various ministers should seem such a strange idea. It comes down to the value we give to those who come to our door.

Martin Foster

Walking the Rite way

Since the last Newsletter the Network's blog [www.rcia.org.uk/blog] is up and running. We have managed a posting nearly every week since the beginning of Advent and it is beginning to develop into a useful place for ideas and reflection. Thanks to the team of authors who have met the deadlines. A 'meet the authors' page is in preparation when I persuaded all concerned to have sent me verifiable likeness of themselves. If you would like to contribute contact Martin Foster - details below. The blog is proving popular with about 200 hits each week including interest from around the world; however, not every Network has access to the internet so the following is a number of short extracts to give a flavour of Walking the Rite way.

Stepping into a new place, meeting a new community can be very intimidating. Parish communities are no longer as stable and established as they once were - people move for work and a whole variety of reasons. Perhaps in larger parishes, new faces are lost in the crowd. So how do we welcome new people into our communities?

All are welcome in this place
Paula Bailey 29/11/07

All these people have knocked at our door at odd intervals since last January, and we have trained ourselves (!) to say 'Come in' rather than 'Come back in September'. We are muddling our way towards an all-year round 'Come and See' enquiry. By about Advent most people have been with us for several months, and we offer the first opportunity for the Rite of Welcome (or Acceptance). In looking at the Rite together, seeing what is required, it has been discerned (by us and them) that 3 of our 7 enquirers are ready for this step. And that hasn't been difficult - people know when they are ready, and we can see the change in them over the months - there is an infectious enthusiasm, an openness to the Gospel, eagerness to learn to pray, to be part of community life. Others are still a little cautious about what this commitment might mean, and want to carry on asking questions.

Catechesis in Advent:
Christ present, past and future
Caroline Dollard 10/12/07

Those we accompany of their journey come with their own dreams - those glimpses that draw them to God - to enquire 'what does this mean?' - to question 'is it real?' Perhaps our role as catechists is to act as angels - as messengers of God. We listen to their stories - to their dreams - and we say "don't be afraid.

God is with you." And we share from our experience of living out our part in the Dream. We speak of other players in the Dream - the great and the small - the ones who sought to interpret and the ones who simply gazed in rapt awe upon the mysteries within it. We tell of those who also staked their lives on the Dream - who gave and give their lives for love of it. We lead them into rites which earth the Dream in sight and sound and touch and taste and smell - for it is the Dream of the Word Incarnate - en-fleshed - a Dream to be lived out in human bodies. We feed the mind - the imagination - for it is here that the Dream takes root and heart.

In your dreams
Kathryn Turner 24/12/07

RCIA 75 also requires that part of the work of the one charged with enabling the formation of catechumens is to help them to share in our life in common. If that is not being achieved in the catechumenal group - not just in terms of warm fuzziness, but in terms of careful attentiveness, and readiness to serve actual need then the effectiveness of other dimensions of the formation we offer is going to be compromised. Faith is also about relationship. Relationship with God and relationship in the Church.

So, over time, I've moved from process which is mostly about input, to process to which is more about engaged and mutual reflection. How are we finding God? How are we finding each other? This reflection is not empty of belief about this or that, or God or the Church. But it is about much more than that belief alone. It's about how these things matter to us, and why. Not just why they could or should matter to 'them', but why they matter to me, and maybe will matter to 'us'.

Throwing Fish to Penguins
Allen Morris 28/1/08

A wonderful morning to look to what will be next Sunday's First Reading (Acts 6:1-7) and which begins with the words:

"About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing ..."

It's a familiar story: the good news of increasing numbers, tempered by struggle and tension; we're not being fairly treated! And with it comes the requirement for the early church to listen to the complaints and adapt to meet the needs of the current situation. It's certainly a relevant text for our own times, but what about the neophytes and their continuing reflection on their new status as full members of the Body of Christ? As the apostles considered ways of delegating and involving more people in the tasks

News

Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age – Working Party Update

The work to develop guidelines for the Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (CICCA) continues at a steady pace. The working party have studied the paragraphs in the Rites (RCIA) which refer to children of catechetical age and have reflected upon them in the light of the current life of the Church in England & Wales and of personal experience. From this consideration the necessary points for the guidelines have emerged and can be related to each of the four stages of the initiation process and to the rites which celebrate each step taken. It is envisaged that the group will have reached a draft version of the guidelines by late autumn.

If anyone has any useful information or resources for CICCA please contact Linda Pennington at linda.pennington@diocese-of-leeds.org.uk

Forming Threshold Companions Conference 2008

- *Wednesday 2 – Friday 4 July 2008*
at Sedgeley Park, Manchester
facilitated by Sheila O'Dea

There are still a few places left. If you are hoping to attend contact Martin Foster: 020 7901 4851 Martin.Foster@cbcew.org.uk

- *For a booking form and more details check the website — www.rcia.org.uk/Events*

of ministry, perhaps it's a good time to consider ways in which the neophytes' particular gifts and talents can be welcomed and put to good use within the particular parish community to which they belong

Everything is waiting for you
Veronica Murphy 21/4/08

Pentecost is a great feast of the outpouring of the Spirit of God. It warns against the tendency to uniformity and conformity while celebrating the rich diversity of God's creation. It is an invitation for us to share in that lavish generosity, to let go for the good of others, to be big of heart and to give freely of our gifts and talents. A launch pad for a life of discipleship:- walking confidently and courageously with the One who is with us to the end of time.

An outpouring of generosity
Ken O'Riordan 12/5/08

Mystagogy

'You have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ' (Rite of Baptism)

Post-baptismal catechesis which the Rite of Christian Initiation refers to as the period of mystagogy, is a time for newly received members or neophytes *'to grow in deepening their grasp of the Pastoral Mystery' through their sharing of the mysteries celebrated and experienced at the Easter Vigil.* (RCIA 234)

In *Christ we Proclaim* we read *'As new born Christians, neophytes have a heightened sensitivity to all that is happening to them in the church. In a way, they are like new-born babies who need extra loving attention'. There is much concern today about how easily both newly baptised and newly received members of communities lose heart and drift away. Is this because 'once the waters of baptism have dried, the community assumes its work is over and leaves them to fend for themselves?' (Christ we Proclaim page 308)*

It is hoped that parishes continue meeting with the neophytes at least until Pentecost. Inviting and encouraging the newly received members to reflect on their experience of the Easter Sacraments, allowing the richness of symbol, word and actions to draw them more deeply into the Paschal mystery is at the very heart of this stage of the process. By reflecting on their sacramental experience with sponsors, godparents, catechists and priests, should lead to a stronger and more vibrant faith and a deeper understanding of the mystery of salvation.

Another desired outcome of this stage is emphasised in (RCIA 246) when it states – *'the neophytes... should experience a full and joyful welcome into the community and enter into closer ties with the other faithful.' Becoming more aware of their need to belong to a faith-filled community and to discern their gifts which will assist in building up the community, is a vital aspect of post-baptismal catechesis. The new members are gradually led to understand that membership is only the beginning and that what really matters is lifelong discipleship.*

The fifty days between Easter and Pentecost provide an opportunity for the whole community to grow in a deeper understanding of its baptismal identity. The more we become aware that we are Spirit-led and Spirit-filled communities, the more we will witness to truth, justice and love.

How can we best achieve this in our parishes?

Firstly, I suggest that breaking open the Word of God and prayer, leading to service

can happen when we encourage people to ask such questions as -What does the Word of God say to me in my present situation and how am I living it?

The Gospel for the Sundays of the Easter season should be central to this time as the neophytes *'derive a new perception of the faith of the church and of the world'* (RCIA 235)

A frequently asked question is – when should the period of mystagogy finish? The Rite suggests Pentecost and recommends a way of marking the end of this stage – *'To close this period of postbaptismal catechesis, some sort of celebration should be held at the end of the Easter season near Pentecost Sunday; festivities in keeping with local customs may accompany the occasion'* (RCIA 239) I would go as far as to say that for all of us, *mystagogy* continues as long as life's journey lasts! The great mystery of salvation never ceases to unfold, as long as we have eyes that see, ears that hear and hearts that are attentive to the presence of the Risen Lord. If the desire to journey together and a yearning for intimacy with the Lord has taken root in the lives of all the new members of our communities, they will be agents for transforming all the baptised. Can we give them permission to take ownership of their own gathering to share, reflect, and pray based on their experience of Word and Sacrament? To what extent do we encourage and empower them to do this? How can we support them? Do we offer them any resources?

An introduction to and experience of *Lectio Divina* as a method of praying with a Gospel text may be helpful for some members.

- *Offer a termly morning or afternoon of prayer/reflection as a means of deepening a desire for silence and contemplation.*
- *Arrange a pilgrimage to a local shrine and encourage them to join parish groups for such events.*
- *When and how is the sacrament of Reconciliation celebrated with the newly baptised?*

The Rite also suggests that on the anniversary of their baptism the newly initiated should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences and to renew their commitment. (RCIA 240) To show his pastoral concern for the new members of the Church, the Rite recommends a celebration of the Eucharist at which the Bishop presides, and for this to take place at Pentecost or at least once in the year.

Questions to ponder:

- *What difference do the newly initiated make in your community?*



- *What difference do members of the community make to them?*
- *Who takes responsibility for ensuring that the relationship between the newly initiated and the wider community is nurtured and enriches the mission of the Church?*
- *Do we invite the newly initiated to speak at the Sunday Eucharist about their journey and what has led them to their new-found faith?*
- *What about children? How is their experience heard and shared within the community?*

Resource

(Example: *'Foundations of Christianity'* – a video series with Fr Michael Himes based on the following topics: Mystery, Conversion, Faith, Hope and Love, each lasting approximately 25 minutes. Similar themes will have been part of the Catechumenate and this can be a good time to re-visit them. Each theme links with the Gospel of the Sundays of the Easter season.)

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