



Office for Worship

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The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

The decree that promulgated the restored catechumenate as part of the liturgical reform mandated by the Second Vatican Council was signed in 1972. Since the availability of the first English translation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in 1974 countless numbers of adult persons have participated in the catechumenate and have been initiated into the Faith (mostly but not exclusively at the Easter Vigil) through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

In the early years of the catechumenate many parishes raised up teams of lay people to assist in the process of leading others to the waters of baptism. Many of these dedicated lay men and women attended courses and engaged in training so that together with their pastors they could accompany those seeking incorporation into the Church and assist them to understand the teachings and practice of the Catholic Church.

As if often the case, many of these people have now passed on the baton to others, but the knowledge base has not necessarily been passed on. As a consequence we now have in the Diocese of Parramatta many people involved in RCIA teams who whilst enthusiastic and willing to give of their time and energy, have had little grounding in the principles that underpin the catechumenate. This has led (understandably) to some misunderstandings about what should be happening in the RCIA and what sort of formation – both doctrinal and spiritual that catechumens should receive.

Last year a decision was made by the Office for Worship that the Rite of Election should be only for those who are seeking baptism. Those familiar with the RCIA will know that this part of the process is significant as the catechumenates are formally elected to receive the Sacraments at Easter and thereafter are known as “the elect.”

In many parishes the custom has arisen (again for good pastoral reasons) to combine the formation of catechumens with those who are seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. These candidates have already been baptised in another Christian denomination. For this reason the Office for Worship arranged for a special celebration with the Bishop to acknowledge their baptism and affirm them in their decision to seek full communion in the Church. This year the Bishop presided at a Penitential Service in the Cathedral calling them to ongoing conversion in their journey.

Whilst it is understandable that many parishes will combine both catechumens and candidates together in their formation and preparation, the fact is they are two very distinct groups of persons and in respecting and honouring the baptism of those who are seeking full communion it is imperative that this is made clear at the very beginning of the process. The status of the already baptised and those seeking baptism is quite different and must be respected.

To that end the Office of Worship will shortly publish a schedule for a series of educational sessions on the RCIA which we hope will be a refresher for those who have been involved over many years, and for new team members, sponsors and RCIA coordinators an opportunity to “skill up.” It is crucial that parish clergy keep informed as to the operations of the RCIA in their parishes. It is without doubt a great gift to the Church and many parishes have been enriched as a result of the restored catechumenate.

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RCIA Team Meetings

During the month of August meetings were held for RCIA teams across the diocese. This gave us the opportunity to meet with those involved with RCIA and to discuss how we, at the Office for Worship can be of assistance. During the meeting we briefly covered the importance of liturgical, catechetical and pastoral elements of RCIA. (I hope to cover this in more detail at another meeting.) Sharing of experiences and networking continued throughout the day and was carried over into the lunch break.

Some of the issues concerning RCIA Teams that were raised include: time needed for preparation, resources and team formation. As a result of these meetings, the Office for Worship will be planning workshops for RCIA team members throughout next year. Some of the topics will include: working with the mystagogia period, understanding / preparing the Rites, candidates / catechumens and the use of resources for catechesis.

Thank you to those who attended the day.

Reminder: You are invited to attend Mass celebrated by Bishop Anthony at St Patrick's Cathedral on Tuesday 18 October. This Mass is for both RCIA Teams and Sacramental Teams. More information will be available soon.

Sr Mary Louise