

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

A Model Process for the Inclusion of Teens  
In the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

A TREATISE

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
School of Theology and Religious Studies  
Of The Catholic University of America  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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By

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Washington, D.C.

2012

A Model Process for the Inclusion of Teens  
in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

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The formation and initiation rites for adults ages eighteen and older have been in practice in parishes throughout the United States in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. Yet a report titled the *Journey to the Fullness of Life*, issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, indicated that only approximately one-third of parishes have adopted the *Rite of Christian Initiation* for adolescents. Due to various economic, social, cultural, and family issues, there is an increasing need for catechetical formation and ritual celebrations for those teens aged fourteen to eighteen who are unbaptized or baptized but uncatechized. Increasing numbers of uncatechized teens, especially those attending public high schools, have come to parishes seeking full initiation.

This project offers a model for parishes that do not have an RCIA process for teenagers. It provides a compassionate environment in which uncatechized teens in a peer-group setting can be catechized and formed in the Catholic Christian faith and can grow spiritually through prayer, liturgy, and a community of faith. The catechetical sessions culminate in the initiation sacraments, either at the Easter Vigil or during a teen Confirmation Mass with the Bishop.

This Treatise by Joy Jones fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in ministry approved by Donald Heet, D.Min., as Director of the project, and Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti, PhD., D.Min., as Director of the D. Min program.

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To Margaret, Bruce, Emma, and Doc  
with great love and appreciation

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## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **TOWARD AN INCLUSION OF UNBAPTIZED AND UNCATECHIZED TEENS IN THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The formation and initiation rites for uncatechized adults, ages eighteen and older, who seek to be fully initiated into the Catholic faith have been in practice in most parishes throughout the United States in the decades following Vatican II. However, according to a report titled *Journey to the Fullness of Life*<sup>1</sup> a survey published in 2000 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), only about one-third of parishes have adopted the *Rite of Christian Initiation* for adolescents. Some parishes that do have an initiation process still mistakenly place those between the ages of fourteen and eighteen either with children too young for discussions pertinent to the needs of teens or with mature adults, whose life experiences may overwhelm teens to the extent that they shut down in discussions. Most parishes that have not started a process for teens either include the uncatechized with the catechized in confirmation programs or do not accept them into any sacramental preparation process at all.<sup>2</sup> Placing uncatechized teens in a regular confirmation process with catechized teens may succeed in combining similar age groups together, yet this process fails to meet the catechetical needs of those who are unbaptized or who were baptized as infants and never catechized. Most parish

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<sup>1</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), under "Appendix E."

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix IX.

confirmation programs concentrate on helping the candidates complete the initiation sacrament of confirmation from a baptized, catechized perspective, as well as on the development of discipleship through service to those in need. Such programs also focus on the development of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, this model is based on the assumption that candidates have had a certain amount of catechesis, at least between the time of their First Holy Communion and the beginning of the confirmation process.

Because of this approach to confirmation, there are some parishes in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles that simply tell parents of prospective uncatechized candidates that they need to wait until their children are older and have them join an adult RCIA class, since there is no process available for uncatechized teens. This may be a concern, especially in dioceses outside of Los Angeles, when the Bishop decides to allow the Sacrament of Confirmation to elementary-school children. Many adolescents and their parents may seek to complete any of the initiation sacraments only to find out that they have missed the opportunity.

Increasing numbers of unbaptized and baptized yet uncatechized teens, especially those attending public high schools, have come to parishes seeking full initiation. Some parents, even fully initiated Catholics, might not have had their infants baptized due to various economic, social, cultural, and family issues. There is therefore an increasing need for catechetical formation and liturgical celebrations for unbaptized and uncatechized teens, ages fourteen through eighteen, at the parish level. The unbaptized and uncatechized teens need, in addition to what is taught in the confirmation programs, a process in parishes that will begin with the fundamentals of the faith and continue by

evangelizing and catechizing the candidates in the Catholic faith founded on Jesus Christ. Those with little or no religious education need the development of a strong Catholic Christian identity, and they also need discussions on Catholic moral teaching and the seven sacraments, introductions to and the development of a prayer and liturgical life, and introductions to the Bible and the traditions of Catholic faith.

Everybody needs to be catechized, as John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, (On Catechesis in Our Time): “A catechesis capable of leading the adolescent to reexamine his or her life and to engage in dialogue ... discovering the revelation of Jesus Christ as a friend, guide and model, capable of being admired but also imitated.”<sup>3</sup> Such a catechesis can be accomplished in an RCIA process centering on the needs of unchurched high school youth. This project offers such a model for parishes that are in search of a holistic catechesis that will serve the needs of unchurched teens inquiring into the Catholic faith and hoping to receive the initiation sacraments.

The RCIA can provide a compassionate environment in which the spiritual needs of inquirers, catechumens, and candidates can be met by fostering their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Christian faith. The Bishops of the United States wrote a statement of support to catechists involved in such an endeavor, acknowledging the problem:

Catechists today face the difficult task of proclaiming the good news of Christ Jesus in such a way that it will be heard, accepted, and authentically understood in this culture. They must reach out to those who are unevangelized and

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<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, in AAS 71 (October 16, 1979): 1278-1340 (hereafter cited as *CT*).

uncatechized, as well as work with the large numbers of people in the parish community who have not been fully catechized.”<sup>4</sup>

The RCIA can be the means by which unevangelized teens, who otherwise might not be accepted into a sacramental preparation process at all or might be misplaced into a general confirmation process with catechized teens, may become evangelized, spiritually formed, and fully initiated into the Roman Catholic Church.

## TWO APPROACHES TO INITIATION INTO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

### *Infant Baptism Model: A Continuous Nurturing of Faith vs. A Discontinuous Attendance Only to Receive the Sacraments*

The vast majority of Catholic Christians baptize their children as infants. *The Official Catholic Directory* lists 77,205 infant baptisms in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 2008.<sup>5</sup> In a parish setting, it is wonderful to see parents eagerly requesting baptism for their infant, toddler, or young child. In pre-baptismal preparation classes, parents often seem excited about sharing their faith with their children, and godparents frequently seem eager to become involved in the spiritual lives of their godchildren. In fact, parents sometimes return to catechesis for the first time as adults when they take preparation classes with the godparents before their child receives baptism. They learn that:

baptism is the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation by actual reception or at least by desire, and is validly conferred only by a washing of true water with the proper form of words [the Trinitarian formula]. Through baptism

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<sup>4</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *In Support of Catechetical Ministry* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *The Official Catholic Directory 2009* (New Providence, NJ: National Register Publishing, 2009) 706.

men and women are freed from sin, are reborn as children of God and configured to Christ by an indelible character, and are incorporated into the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

Infant baptism demonstrates, very clearly, that salvation is an unmerited favor from God, not the fruit of human effort (Eph 2:8-10): "The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant baptism."<sup>7</sup> Parents want the best for their children and know that many obstacles await a child in life, such as the death of grandparents or other close relatives, possible unforeseen illnesses, or family issues that might cause a child to lose hope. Relying on God through prayer and being a part of a church community can restore the hope the child has for the future.

The success of raising a child in the faith after infant baptism is evident at the parish level, especially when the parents and godparents are active in their faith. A child's faith can begin to grow when parents and godparents accept their responsibilities to live out the faith that they desire for their children at home as well as at church, at work and in the community. Parents who attend Mass and are involved in a ministry in the parish, school, or community can help their children realize that they too can grow in faith and become actively part of the Body of Christ. Children imitate their parents when they begin prayer with the sign of the cross, sing and participate at Mass, and help others at home or in school. Parents are usually the first to awaken the faith of their children by bringing them to Mass, teaching them prayers, and educating them in faith matters that are appropriate to their age. Truly, parents have the primary responsibility of beginning the religious education of their children. Parents and godparents can teach a child to love

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<sup>6</sup> *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999). 849.

<sup>7</sup> CCC, 1250.

Christ and develop a good conscience only if they are keeping their own faith alive by their own love of God and neighbor. In addition, there is no better example of God's role as father and mother, than the loving parent's holistic care in guiding the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects of a child towards faith in Jesus Christ. Ideally, catechesis should begin and continue at home and be supplemented whenever possible by parish programs, such as early childhood education for three- to five-year-olds. Parents who enroll their children in such classes can expect them to experience some of the following:

- Develop a sense of wonder at the world around them.
- Become sensitive to the spiritual.
- Come to know that God is loving and caring.
- Develop an awareness of the presence of God in themselves, in others, and in all things.
- Appreciate themselves as gifts of God.
- Have a sense of belonging to the Christian community.
- Experience joy and ease in spontaneous prayer.
- Become aware of the attitudes and elements of celebration and worship.
- Develop their meditative and contemplative capacities through sensitive use of silence.
- Develop an awareness of the community of church as an important and continual support mechanism in their faith formation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Los Angeles Archdiocese website Goals/Objectives for Early Childhood Faith Formation <http://www.la-archdiocese.org/org/ore/ec/Pages/>

Together, these are an essential start to a journey of faith that can begin at a very young age.

Generally, preparation for First Holy Communion begins during first grade and continues for two years until the reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist. Even though some parents do not enroll their child in early childhood education (ages three through five), nonetheless 93 percent of children across the United States who received baptism as infants later received the sacrament of Holy Communion, according to statistics from *The Official Catholic Directory* of 2009.<sup>9</sup> After preparation classes for Eucharist, a child's faith formation continues in one of two ways. Either a parent enrolls the child in Catholic parochial school, where religious preparation is included during the school week, or a parent enrolls the child in public school and the child attends weekly religious education classes at the parish during the school year.

A problem seems to arise at this point: some parishes experience a severe drop in attendance in religious education classes between second and third grade, after the children have received their First Holy Communion. In one of the highest-enrolled parishes in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, only 18 percent of Catholic public schoolchildren attend religious education classes continuously from third through fifth grade. But an average of 29 percent of public schoolchildren return to religious education classes at the junior high level (grades six through eight), because of a mandatory parish requirement to attend at least two years of junior high religion classes in order to enroll in ninth-grade confirmation class.

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<sup>9</sup>*The Official Catholic Directory* 2009. 2071

However, what happens when parents and godparents are unable to follow through with the religious education of their children? In my experience as a Pastoral Associate, I find that the main reasons include economic factors, such as numerous relocations to find work for the family. Some social reasons include divorce and remarriage outside the church; substance abuse; a mixed religious marriage and other serious reasons including parents who do not promote or practice the faith themselves. Some parents bring children to religious education classes only at specific times of sacramental preparation. These reasons include the following:

- Parents might have limited religious experiences at a Catholic community or a lack of religious education that, in many cases, passes from generation to generation. Examples include a family belief that the reception of the initiation sacraments alone is what is needed to enter heaven, instead of having faith in God and living that faith out in daily life. A recent Pew study indicates that five percent of U.S. Catholics are not certain there is a God.<sup>10</sup> This number may seem small; however, the poll was taken of Catholics ages eighteen and older and the percentage amounts to approximately 3.5 million adult Catholics. Such Catholics may want to baptize their infants or children because they themselves received infant baptism and because it is a family tradition. In addition, many parents have a personal belief that one does not need to practice or articulate faith within a community of believers. Some parents do practice an active faith through acts of kindness and charity, and attend Mass and receive the other sacraments such as

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<sup>10</sup> Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, US Landscape Survey, June 23, 2008.

reconciliation and marriage. In these cases, the efficacy of the initiation sacraments might be acknowledged by the parents.

- Parents and godparents might have a simple faith, believing in the Holy Trinity but putting a low priority on participating in religious practices and living out their faith. The pleasures and activities of the family, such as vacations, sports, and personal plans, take priority over any religious practice, such as attending Mass or participating in ongoing catechesis for themselves or for their children. The parents and children are just too busy for the church community.

- The family may be experiencing a breakdown due to addictive behaviors, abuse, divorce, multiple civil marriages, and so on. Some families may not bring their children to parish religious education classes because of unresolved issues within the family structure.

If a parent is active in the faith and attends Mass regularly, this can have a major effect on whether family members remain with the faith throughout life. As stated in a 2009 Pew research survey:

Religious commitment as a child and teenager may be related to the propensity to change religion. The survey finds key differences, for example, in the levels of teenage (ages 13-18) religious commitment between former Catholics who have become unaffiliated and those who have kept their childhood faith. Former Catholics who are now unaffiliated are much less likely than lifelong Catholics to have attended Mass regularly or to have had very strong faith as teenagers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pew Research Center Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the US," April 27, 2009. Executive summary, 4. [http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious\\_Affiliation/faithinflux%20exec.pdf](http://pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/faithinflux%20exec.pdf) (access January 15, 2011)

*Rite of Christian Initiation Model: A Continuous Formation and Nurturing of the Faith Leading to Completion of the Needed Sacraments of Initiation and Full Reception into the Catholic Christian Faith*

In addition to the infant baptism model, a second model of initiation sacraments since 1972 is the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The RCIA restored the unity of the initiation sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, so that the Elect receive all three sacraments during the Easter Vigil Mass. The liturgical initiation rites and scrutinies are very successful in parishes across the United States, since all who participate—the elect, candidates, sponsors, team, deacons, priests, and the assembly—reflect on the spiritual richness of the liturgical celebrations in a personal way. Through reflection on liturgical rites, the lectionary, and teachings of the church, the RCIA and specifically the catechumenate rely heavily on catechesis:

Each of the four periods includes catechesis on the symbols, scriptures and prayer texts. Catechesis on moral issues, doctrine, justice, prayer, community and their relationship to daily living are woven into all four periods. The rite points out that this catechesis for catechumens should be gradual and complete, “accommodated to the liturgical year and solidly supported by celebrations of the word.” The catechesis not only instructs candidates and catechumens about dogmas and precepts but ought to lead them “to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.”<sup>12</sup>

The RCIA process in totality offers the possibility for entire parishes to catechize, form community, celebrate, and serve. As *The General Directory for Catechesis* states:

Those who are moved by grace to decide to follow Jesus are “introduced into the life of faith, of the liturgy and of the charity of the People of God”.<sup>13</sup> The Church achieves this function fundamentally by catechesis, in close relation with the

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<sup>12</sup> A. M. Mongoven, *Overview of the RCIA in the Catechetical Documents: A Parish Resource* (Chicago: LTP: 1996), 419

<sup>13</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on Missionary Activity in the Church, *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965), 14.

sacraments of initiation, whether these are about to be received or have already been received. Important forms include: the catechesis of non-baptized adults in the catechumenate, the catechesis of baptized adults who wish to return to the faith, or of those who need to complete their initiation; the catechesis of children and of the young, which of itself has the character of initiation. Christian education in families and religious instruction in schools also have an initiatory function.<sup>14</sup>

RCIA consists of four continuous periods of spiritual formation, the period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate, the Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and the fourth period of post-baptismal/sacramental catechesis or mystagogy that will last a person's lifetime. It is a time of deepening one's Christian experience and spirituality and a time to reflect on the deeper experience of God and of all God has revealed during the catechumen's journey of faith thus far. It is also a time to discern where God is calling the neophyte to serve and to experience full unity with the community and the continuing love of God and neighbor. It is a time the entire community can continue in close relationship with the neophytes to grow spiritually themselves.

When Pope John Paul II wrote his exhortation, *Catechesis in Our Time*, he included a section that discusses quasi-catechumens, the baptized yet uncatechized. He states that he is writing, among others, to "those who in childhood received a catechesis suited to their age but who later drifted away from all religious practice and as adults find themselves with religious knowledge of a rather childish kind." He continues:

It is likewise directed to those who feel the effects of a catechesis received early in life but badly imparted or badly assimilated. It is directed to those who, although they were born in a Christian country or in sociologically Christian

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<sup>14</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997) n.51. Hereafter cited as *GD*.

surroundings, have never been educated in their faith and as adults, are really catechumens.<sup>15</sup>

Many teens that return to the church to complete their initiation sacraments fall into one of the following categories: They may have received baptism as infants and First Holy Communion at seven or eight years of age but did not receive or comprehend an adequate catechesis. They may not attend Mass on Sundays due to various family reasons. Many teens have received infant baptism yet have not received the Eucharist. All of these candidates can be considered, as John Paul II put it, quasi-catechumens. They need all the catechesis that an unbaptized, uncatechized teen would normally receive. If both the unbaptized and uncatechized are catechized together, catechists can honor the baptized along with those who are not. The baptized can learn about and appreciate their state of belonging to a Catholic Christian community, the body of Christ; the unbaptized can learn to anticipate baptism. Both have similar catechetical needs and can learn together to believe and form a faith for a lifetime in community.

If we look at some statistics for 2008, we can see the necessity for teens who have missed religious education classes to be evangelized using a substantial catechesis that assists them in strengthening their faith in order to maintain a relationship with God throughout their lives. In the United States in 2008, there were approximately 887,000 infant baptisms, 822,000 first communions, and 622,000 confirmations.<sup>16</sup> Since there were 65,000 more infant baptisms than first communions, there is a possibility of catechizing about 65,000 youths in the United States for both first communion and

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<sup>15</sup> *CT*, 44

<sup>16</sup> All statistics are from the *Official Catholic Directory 2009*. 2071.

confirmation. Again assuming consistent numbers, another 200,000 teens are possible candidates for confirmation. All of these candidates would have received the sacrament of baptism, yet for some reason they did not receive the other sacraments, at least not at the time when their parishes offered sacramental preparation classes for their particular age group. Generally, if the practice of infant baptism is followed, children under the age of six receive baptism, while preparation for first communion begins at age six and lasts for two years. Some parishes have additional religious-education prerequisites for children entering preparation classes for confirmation. These requirements attempt, in all sincerity, to familiarize the candidates with an overview of the Catholic faith in order to incorporate them with other candidates who may be well versed in the faith after years of catechesis and a nurturing home environment. Students who attended Catholic parochial schools may have an advantage in knowing their faith when compared with public school candidates who only attended the minimum required classes in religious education.

What happens then to the candidates who do not follow the standard infant baptism process and who miss the opportunity to receive the sacraments when most of their peers do? Many parishes struggle with finding what is best for evangelizing candidates who come to parishes seeking full Christian initiation as teens or who want to complete Eucharist and Confirmation together or only Confirmation. Sometimes parishes do not have trained catechists or cannot afford to hire personnel to catechize these candidates.

This project will attempt to discover whether unbaptized and baptized yet uncatechized teens, who will receive their sacraments of initiation liturgically at the

Easter Vigil or with the Bishop at a teen Confirmation Mass, can be catechized together. The uncatechized, whether baptized or not, can attend a process to be catechized and formed in the faith using an RCIA model for teens. Most teens who have received infant baptism but not the Eucharist or confirmation have no formal catechesis at all. They may fit well with the unbaptized, since both need evangelization and both are unchurched.

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS OF THE UNCATECHIZED TEEN

The right time to catechize a person is when he or she is searching and eager to know God, even if this is not apparent to the candidate. Many adults who register in RCIA classes are asked why they came to the initiation process, and many respond with statements like, “I don’t know why I’m here; I just know I am supposed to be.” This initial call from God begins to change a person towards living a Christian life. This call also happens to the teens who register for confirmation without any, or with only very little, religious education. As Pope John Paul stated, “Catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”<sup>17</sup> If a candidate’s faith did not begin in infancy or did not continuously grow in childhood, in elementary school or even junior high school, then the right time for evangelization and catechesis is when the teen wants to become a fully initiated Catholic and learn about faith in God and

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<sup>17</sup> *CT*, 18.

everlasting life. Every effort must be made to ensure that the candidate has an opportunity for catechesis and the completion of the initiation sacraments.

Although many candidates come from homes broken by death or divorce or from single-parent families, and though many have been raised by relatives or stepparents, the need to belong to an extended family is felt by everyone. Teens can bond with each other at a youth Mass and share their life stories in group sessions. There is an inner need to know God among teens. Paragraph 42 of *On Catechesis in Our Times* states:

There is the ever-increasing number of children and young people born and brought up in a non-Christian, or at least non-practicing home but who wish to know the Christian faith. They must be ensured a catechesis attuned to them, so that they will be able to grow in faith and live by it more and more, in spite of the lack of support or even the opposition they meet in their surroundings.<sup>18</sup>

The uncatechized need to start their evangelization from the very basic foundations of the Catholic Christian faith, beginning with attendance at Mass, a catechesis on the parts of the Mass, and a reverence for the holy. They need to learn prayer forms and practice group prayer, journaling, and quiet prayer. Group sessions need to provide a place to talk about hurts and abandonment and to share faith, hope, and love of God in their lives.

Both inquirers and candidates need an understanding of Scripture and a breaking open of the Word, especially the Sunday readings, and a discussion of the homily from each week's Mass. When teens are gathering together to celebrate Mass and are learning about Jesus and how to live the Christian life, through broad flexible catechesis including discussions on morality and sacraments, an RCIA model for teens can provide a safe,

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<sup>18</sup> CT, 42.

nurturing environment to grow in faith and bond socially with other teens. The process can be fostered by group service to others whenever possible.

## THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION

“Many young people today lack hope,” Pope Benedict XVI said at World Youth Day 2008. He continued, “They are perplexed by the questions that present themselves ever more urgently in a confusing world, and they are often uncertain which way to turn for answers.”<sup>19</sup> Many teens come to parishes for this reason, to receive certainty, as much as possible, in a faith to assist them in this new perplexing world. Parishes must provide room for everyone, and there must be a secure place to discuss answers to the candidate’s questions about faith and life from a Catholic Christian perspective. If the parish cannot provide a home to those who wish to become fully initiated, then where will a teen go?

Every group of candidates differs in the experiences of faith, family, and the church community that are shared by its members. This applies not only to teens but also to young and even mature adults. However, a proven model of initiation that is successful for adults can be adapted to youth by a change in language, activities, and methods used for the young candidates. Knowing one’s audience is essential to any successful educational process, and catechists can meet the needs of the uncatechized by being flexible enough to adjust their planning to meet the needs of the group coming for

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Beloved People of Australia and to the Young Pilgrims Taking Part in World Youth Day 2008,” Vatican, under Paragraph Four, [http://vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20080704\\_australia\\_en.html](http://vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20080704_australia_en.html) (accessed February 7, 2011).

initiation. Some parishes do not have human or financial resources for such a process. Can surrounding parishes that do have the means, take teens in from other parishes?

*The Code of Canon Law*<sup>20</sup> reads, “Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority”. To receive a sacrament one needs the right intention and proper instruction, and it is the duty of the Bishop to provide training, in his diocese, for catechists and to provide guidance for the process. Every diocese is led by its Bishop in determining the proper time to receive the sacraments—for example, the length of the confirmation program and the minimum age for confirmation. These decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the Bishop.

It was also decreed during Vatican II that “Bishops should take pains that catechetical instruction, which is intended to make the faith a vital, explicit and effective force in the lives of men, be given with sedulous care to both children and adolescents, youths and adults.”<sup>21</sup> Vatican II was pivotal in the rebirth of the RCIA process, which became appreciated due to the success of many missionaries using a catechumenate format. Since the time of Vatican II, the RCIA has continued to grow and adjust itself to the many needs of people preparing for the initiation sacraments.

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<sup>20</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, 843.2.

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Christus Dominus: The Decree of the Pastoral Office of the Bishops of the Church* (October 28, 1965), 14.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_christus-dominus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html), (accessed December 28, 2010).

*Gravissimum educationis: The Declaration on Christian Education*, also from Vatican II, stresses the need for catechesis especially of the baptized yet uncatechized, who will be included in this project along with the unbaptized:

Feeling very keenly the weighty responsibility of diligently caring for the moral and religious education of all her children, the Church must be present with her own special affection and help for the great number who are being trained in schools that are not Catholic. This is possible by the witness of the lives of those who teach and direct them, by the apostolic action of their fellow-students, but especially by the ministry of priests and laymen who give them the doctrine of salvation in a way suited to their age and circumstances and provide spiritual aid in every way the times and conditions allow.<sup>22</sup>

Although this is written for those who are baptized and whom the Church calls her own, it also applies to older children who are inquiring into being baptized or desire to be baptized. The Church and the parishes have a critical responsibility to evangelize and catechize those who knock on her door.

Christian Smith, author of *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* draws on the findings in *The National Study on Youth and Religion* to show that young people are inarticulate about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and the meaning or place of religion in their lives.<sup>23</sup> He asserts that this is true even for teenagers who regularly attend church. Religion appears to be in the background of their lives, unfocused and implicit, important but not a priority, valued but not invested in, and praised but not describable.

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<sup>22</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum educationis: The Declaration on Christian Education* (October 28, 1965), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

If our young people are inarticulate, who contributes to this? Do Catholic parents model their faith by attending Mass? Do teens attend Mass with their parents and attend Religious Education classes? Does the Church provide the right process for teens to discuss and articulate their faith with their peers? Has the Church taught Catholic public school children how to discuss their religion or provided opportunities to practice talking about religion and faith? There may be a weakness in methodology yet also an opportunity to begin to solve this issue by balancing the religious information and spiritual formation of teens. In adult RCIA, many of the baptized cannot articulate their faith either. It does not mean that they do not have faith; however, most indicate that they do not talk about faith with their families, at work or with friends. Once they begin to discuss the Sunday readings in small groups, they often begin to open up and discuss at length how God has worked in their lives. Also, many uncatechized candidates, including teens, need to learn the terminology of the Catholic faith. Sometimes catechists forget that not everyone has grown up in the faith or has read enough to know the things that cradle Catholics take for granted.

Christian Smith summarizes his research on the religious and spiritual lives of American teens by saying that the majority of teens, Christian, Mormon, Jewish, and non-religious, are forming a faith of their own, one that he calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

Only a minority of U.S. teenagers are naturally absorbing by osmosis the traditional substantive content and character of the religious traditions to which they claim to belong (the faith of their parents). For it appears to us, another popular religious faith, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, is colonizing many historical religious traditions and, almost without anyone noticing, converting

believers in the old faiths to its alternative religious vision of divinely underwritten personal happiness and interpersonal niceness.”

He states that the majority of teens believe basically the following: (1) A creator God exists who orders the world and watches over human life on earth, (2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions, (3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself, (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem, and (5) Good people go to heaven when they die. One reason for such a superficial faith is that more attention is devoted among teens to sports and academics than to religious faith. The language and experience of the Trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, and heaven and hell appear, among most Christian teenagers in the United States at least, to be supplanted by the language of happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward.<sup>24</sup>

Smith proposes the following reasons to explain U.S. Roman Catholic teens’ weak responses to religious faith, belief, experience, and practice: (1) Catholic upward mobility and mainstream acculturation, (2) the low institutional priority for youth evangelization, formation and ministry at the parish and diocesan levels, (3) The fact that most American teens turn out to resemble their parents in terms of religion. In other words, the religious laxity of most U.S. Catholic teenagers significantly reflects the relative religious laxity of their parents.

I suggest that an RCIA for teens would focus on the priority of faith in Jesus Christ through scripture and tradition; it would also provide evangelization, catechesis,

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<sup>24</sup> Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 171.

spiritual formation, and service at the parish level for unbaptized and uncatechized teens (even at parishes that do not have a process for these teens, where invitations could be issued to neighboring parishes); provide requirements and information to parents and offer adult formation and retreats for parents, grandparents and sponsors; and provide catechist training with retreats and updating.

RCIA for teens is a process that may be necessary. It may provide the flexibility in the process of initiation that is needed by the uncatechized. RCIA for teens will include prayer, catechesis, socialization, service, Mass, retreats, rites, and scrutinies, and it will be implemented to meet the needs of teens, who do not fit into the standard mold for any of the initiation sacraments. In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, there is a two-year requirement for teens receiving Confirmation. The regular Confirmation process is based on the sacrament of Confirmation and service. Greater than fifty percent of candidates are parochial students who receive daily religious study. Public school students must be well catechized in junior high to be admitted into the parish Confirmation process. Regular Confirmation meets once a month. In teen RCIA, I give uncatechized public school students, who only need Confirmation, weekly instruction similar to those teens who are baptized yet uncatechized. The catechesis is the same however, if a student is only receiving Confirmation then he or she will follow the Rites for the regular teen Confirmation.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **A MODEL PROCESS FOR THE INCLUSION OF TEENS IN THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**

It was the goal of this project to have Teen candidates recognize the presence of Christ in the Mass, community, scriptures, celebrant, rites, sacraments and in their everyday life and with whom they come in contact with throughout their life. The primary model that I envisioned to assist uncatechized teens form their faith was a weekly RCIA liturgical/catechetical model.

A liturgical model must introduce candidates to the celebration of the Mass. Many teens, especially the uncatechized, suffer a lack of understanding of communal worship and the reasons for attending weekly Mass. In addition, many candidates do not have a practice of attending Mass, so weekly attendance may encourage them to form both a spiritual and mental appreciation for worship as they find Christ in the elements of the Mass. The primary RCIA model also includes a lectionary-based catechesis based on the Sunday readings. Discussing questions from the Sunday readings and homily heard at Mass, in a small-group setting, the candidates are assisted in understanding scripture and discussions are instrumental in connecting faith to everyday life experiences.

A catechetical model in collaboration with a liturgical / RCIA model should offer candidates additional knowledge and understanding about the Catholic faith as well as implementing service to others to foster faith in action. The hope is that this inclusive

and collaborative model also fosters relationships among candidates within the process and with the larger church community.

The following is the catechetical structure and themes for sessions for a one-year RCIA process with uncatechized teens ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years old. Note that these sessions can be expanded to a two-year process if it is required by the Bishop. The basic structure for all catechetical meetings is the same each week, with class time divided in segments of fifteen to twenty minutes.

*1. Attendance at Mass* – Group I thirty minutes; Group II one hour

Group I consisted of teens who are unbaptized, and baptized in another Christian denomination, and baptized as infants in the Catholic Church. All are uncatechized and have little to no prior Mass attendance. Group I will be formally dismissed to the Parish Center after the homily to discuss the Sunday readings. They meet with three trained catechists in a two-hour process.

Group II consists of baptized Catholic teens who have received First Communion in the second grade but are uncatechized and have very little or no prior Mass attendance. They are not dismissed from Mass. They are considered uncatechized since many did not remember receiving their First Communion nor had they nurtured their faith by attending Mass, praying, or participating in religious education classes after preparing for and receiving their First Communion.

*2. Communal prayer* – fifteen minutes:

The teens begin with prayer to refocus themselves after traveling from church to the meeting room. When asked on the initial survey, “Do you pray?” most of the respondents answered no, primarily because they thought they did not know how to pray. Some understood prayer only in terms of formal prayer, for example, the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Discussions centered on prayer and different prayer forms occur frequently to allow one to feel comfortable and relaxed about prayer. Prayer journals are used and conversations on the importance of daily prayer occur at this time. Spontaneous prayer from catechists, along with asking the candidates to pray for family and friends who needed help, occurs during this period.

### 3. *Icebreakers* – fifteen minutes:

As in any group, it is important for the candidates to get to know one another to establish trust within the group. To help with this aim, icebreakers are used. Books about icebreakers are available for purchase, and icebreakers can easily be revised and used to fit into any lesson. Some icebreakers can also be found online. Icebreakers are optional and can be continued throughout the year as needed.

Sources for icebreakers include:

- Various Internet sites: Search “Icebreakers for teens”. Consider websites including [www.holyspiritinteractive.net/youthministry/default.asp](http://www.holyspiritinteractive.net/youthministry/default.asp) and [www.scribd.com/doc/10545/Ice-Breakers-Activities](http://www.scribd.com/doc/10545/Ice-Breakers-Activities)

- Books such as *Ice Breakers for Teen Groups*<sup>25</sup> or *Gospel Alive!*<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. *Scripture* and small group sharing - thirty to forty minutes

The Sunday readings are introduced by using the resource for Sunday scriptures, *At Home with the Word*, for the first five sessions; after the Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming, the Sunday scripture readings are looked up in the *Catholic Youth Bible*. Candidates can discuss the scripture readings in a small-group setting. The main emphasis is placed on what these readings mean to the teens and how they can start applying the essence of the readings to daily life. It is important for uncatechized teens to know that scripture readings were written thousands of years ago, but relate to the present time, and the lives of the Teens and all people today.

The church, indeed, does not regard the Bible simply as a collection of historical documents dealing with its own origins; it receives the Bible as word of God, addressed both to itself and to the entire world at the present time. This conviction, stemming from the faith, leads in turn to the work of actualizing and inculcating the biblical message. . . . Actualization is necessary because, although their message is of lasting value, the biblical texts have been composed with respect to circumstances of the past and in language conditioned by a variety of times and seasons. To reveal their significance for men and women of today, it is necessary to apply their message to contemporary circumstances and to express it in language adapted to the present time. This presupposes a hermeneutical endeavor, the aim of which is to go beyond the historical conditioning so as to determine the essential points of the message.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Chris Tures and Therese Sherlock, *Icebreakers for Teen Groups* (St. Paul: Good Ground Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Kathryn Cohen, *Gospel Alive! Prayers, Activities and Icebreakers on Gospel Themes* (St. Paul: Good Ground Press, 2005)

<sup>27</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, part IV (as published in *Origins*, January 6, 1994).

An article by Judith Hooper states: Usually the more teens have a chance to talk about their personal ideas and listen to those of other teens, the sooner they arrive at a mature level of thinking. Adolescents:

- have a longer attention span (30 to 40 minutes) than younger children
- are more willing to try new things
- are beginning to think in the abstract.<sup>28</sup>

In small groups, it will be helpful to have a candidate volunteer to be the scribe and write down answers to the questions, while another candidate from each group can volunteer to read the answers during the large-group sharing.

5. *Weekly faith lesson* – an example, signs and symbols of our faith: twenty minutes

One candidate volunteer writes, on a white board, a list of answers from each small group about the physical signs and symbols of the faith that they saw around them. The meanings of the signs and symbols of the faith are discussed in the large group.

6. *Short break*: ten minutes

Everyone can volunteer to take turns bringing refreshments each week and can be adjusted for the Lenten season. Music and camaraderie can take place during this time.

7. *Project or activity*: twenty minutes

Hands-on projects can be valuable for physical learners and for those who do not recognize many symbols of the Catholic Christian faith. For example, after discussing

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<sup>28</sup> Judith O. Hooper, "Understanding Changes in Thinking," *Living with Your Teenager* 3 (July 1995). Adapted by Donna Rae Jacobson. Newsletter is provided through a collaborative effort of the NDSU Extension Service and North Dakota Department of Human Services.

why Jesus needed to die on a cross, we taught why we make the sign of the cross before prayer.

8. *Review of session* and a brief closing reciting the Lord's Prayer – ten minutes

Topics to be covered in 26 sessions are:

1. Introduction to the Christian initiation process RCIA
2. Forming your Catholic Christian Faith through signs and symbols
3. What is divine revelation and learning to go deeper in prayer
4. Who is God the father and who am I
5. Who is God the son and how do we love
6. Recognizing God the Holy Spirit in ourselves and everyday life
7. The mission of the Church and a church tour
8. Preparing for the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming
9. The liturgical year, advent and introduction to sacred scripture
10. Our option for the poor, a call to serve
11. Introduction to the liturgy, and why we worship
12. Living a sacramental life, the initiation sacraments
13. Sacraments of healing and service
14. What is a moral life and loving God
15. Loving our neighbor, the love of family, friends and respecting life
16. Weekend retreat with Youth Ministry
17. Respecting sexuality

18. Respecting truth and the use of material goods
19. Preparing for the Rites of Sending and Election
20. The Creed of faith and the Lord's prayer
21. Preparing for the first scrutiny, what am I really thirsting for
22. The second scrutiny, discovering my blindness
23. The third scrutiny, what is holding me back
24. Preparing for holy week and the Easter Triduum
25. Preparing for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults with a morning retreat with reconciliation for those who can participate
26. What is mystagogy, how to keep my faith alive and well, and Youth Ministry

#### FORMING A TEAM OF TEEN CATECHISTS

*"The catechist is a lay person specially appointed by the Church, in accordance with local needs, to make Christ known, loved and followed by those who do not yet know Him and by the faithful themselves" <sup>29</sup>*

Being a catechist to teens requires a special calling by the Holy Spirit to minister to those who are at an important transitional stage in their lives. Teens are at an important point of development, not only physically, mentally, and emotionally, but also spiritually, a much-overlooked essential by understaffed parishes and overextended families.

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<sup>29</sup> Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Guide for Catechists* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1993), part I, sec. 3.

Catechists can help teens discover what they really desire in life by exposing them to the following:

- The Gospel truths
- Ways of knowing God through scripture
- Ways to live out their faith in daily life
- Different prayer forms
- Small-group discussions with peers
- Knowledge of the sacraments and their meaning
- The liturgy and its purpose
- Essentials of the faith through the creed
- Morality in the Catholic Christian faith

Catechists need to be compassionate, understanding, and responsible, yet flexible enough to allow candidates to express themselves freely. They must create and sustain an environment of mutual trust and openness where candidates feel safe enough to openly discuss what is on their minds and feel included by having the opportunity to fully participate. Catechists must also be open to dialogue and to the creativity unique to teens. A catechist with lived experience of the Catholic Christian way of life will not only share with candidates how disciples of Christ should live, but will be an actual model of faith in action, something that might be missing from the candidate's family or from his or her daily life. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, catechists powerfully influence those being catechized by

their faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the transparent example of their Christian lives.”<sup>30</sup> This responsibility is one of the main reasons catechists are open to their own spiritual growth and development, and why “Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church, and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training.”<sup>31</sup>

Archdiocesan newspapers and parish websites and bulletins may offer valuable advertising for catechetical continuing education opportunities. Some important opportunities for the spiritual growth and development of the catechist in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are the following:

- Regional Religious Education Congress day workshops
- National Religious Education Congress weekend at Anaheim, California
- Catechist certification training sponsored by the archdiocese and taking place at local parishes
- RCIA certification training at Loyola Marymount University Spirituality Center
- Ongoing yearly retreats at one of six retreat centers in the archdiocese or at various local parishes
- Ongoing formation days throughout the year sponsored by the archdiocese or local parishes
- Parish prayer groups, scripture study groups, Small Church Communities

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<sup>30</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Elements of Human Methodology,” in *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005), 101.

<sup>31</sup> USCCB, *Elements*, 228.

- Parish mission speakers

In ministering at a parish and attending Sunday liturgies, catechetical leaders such as the pastor, associate priests, pastoral associate and the Director of Religious Education, have the opportunity to invite parishioners who possess the gifts needed to be a catechist to an information meeting. Those who are invited may be:

- People who have had previous experience in catechesis, such as a former RCIA team member for adults or younger children, Religious Education and high school confirmation catechists
- New members of the parish community who have experience in catechesis from other parishes
- People with no previous experience in catechesis but possess many qualities necessary for a participating team member, such as the ability to interact with teens, compassion, patience, understanding, and commitment
- People involved in youth ministry: leaders, facilitators, or previous team members

According to the guidelines listed on the Los Angeles archdiocesan website, the requirements for a catechist are the following:

- Has a strong awareness of God's grace in his/her own life
- Realizes the importance of building Christian community
- Participates regularly in the liturgy
- Desires to deepen her/his own prayer life
- Respects individual growth, differences and cultures
- Is open to change, yet is deeply rooted in Christian convictions
- Communicates effectively with others
- Is committed to ongoing personal religious education and formation

- Has a dedication to service and commitment to teaching within the Roman Catholic tradition<sup>32</sup>

The Bishop shares his ministry with those whom he formally commissions as catechists, calling them to service of the word as proclaimers of the message of Jesus Christ through his Church.

Some behaviors of Jesus that are modeled by people who would like to participate on a catechetical team are the following:

- Be affirming
- Share themselves
- Be open to people different from themselves
- Gently challenge people
- Forgive people
- Defend the rejected
- Teach; Pray ; Listen

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<sup>32</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles, “Catechist Formation,” under “What is a Catechist?” [www.archdiocese.la/learning/ore/formation/basic.html](http://www.archdiocese.la/learning/ore/formation/basic.html) (accessed \_November 23, 2010).

### **CHAPTER THREE:**

#### **THE EXPERIENCE OF CATECHESIS FOR TEENS IN THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**

Using the guidelines in chapter three, volunteer catechists were established and trained. Two teams of four catechists are formed three months before the start of the sessions. Each team of four members is responsible for a group of ten teens. My involvement was as a facilitator, and I had the following responsibilities: developing class content, encouraging critical thinking, supporting self-directed learning, monitoring group process and progress, creating and maintaining an educational environment that stimulates all participants, generating a deeper understanding of the initiation process, and promoting teamwork.<sup>33</sup>

Team One was made up of the following people:

- The secretary from the Religious Education department, who has catechetical experience with older children;
- Three former adult RCIA candidates who are now fully initiated

Team Two consisted of the following:

- One previous adult RCIA sponsor
- One occupational high school teacher in the Culinary Arts department
- Two former adult RCIA candidates

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<sup>33</sup> Ingrid Bens, *Facilitating with Ease* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications, 2000), 7-8.

Before the catechetical sessions started, the catechists agreed to attend a yearly retreat, parish mission, Virtus training, and work towards obtaining catechetical certification by the Office of Religious Education in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Every catechist volunteered to attend the Regional Religious Education workshop relevant to teens and to take catechetical training in the summer. All were very excited to begin.

#### PREPARATION AND PLANNING

I planned weekly meetings with the team, starting in August, to bring together many resources that can be chosen for basic texts to use for catechesis. The teams decided to use the *Catholic Youth Bible* version of the *New American Bible* for Biblical references and to teach the inquirers and candidates how to read and study the scriptures. The teams also decided to distribute a book of Sunday readings called *At Home with the Word*. Candidates were to keep this book at home to prepare the Sunday readings for the following week. In further discussion, it was determined that reflection on the Sunday readings in terms of each teen's own life would be a primary part of each class. The candidates would also become familiar with the Bible by looking up the particular book, chapter, and verse of each Sunday reading. This would be a primary part of each class.

The team of RCIA catechists also decided to use the *Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*<sup>34</sup> as a resource for teaching the creed, the sacraments, morality, and prayer. The

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<sup>34</sup> *Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2004).

*Teaching Activities Manual for the Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*<sup>35</sup>, which gives permission to educators to reproduce its handouts for candidates and students, was also given to the catechists as a resource for class planning.

During weekly planning sessions in the summer, the RCIA team was able to plan the orientation meeting that included the teens, their parents, and their sponsors (if available), and planning was done as well for four October classes. After classes began, both teams had monthly meetings to plan classes for the following month. It was also agreed at the original planning meeting that class structure was imperative, yet flexibility within each class was to be maintained to accommodate the specific needs of the teens. During the year, one example of meeting these specific needs was on the occasion of the death of the father of one of the young women. Teens in her class signed a sympathy card and included a small, embroidered cross that was donated by one of the candidates. Several teens personally brought the card to her after class, along with a meal for her family, donated by the family of two other teens in the class. Class reflection on death had been planned for All Soul's Day, but the death of the teen's father took place weeks before All Souls Day. The class discussion, earlier than planned, centered around the loss of loved ones, what we remember about them, how they influenced our lives in a positive way, and how they showed us the love of Jesus. The discussion posed a wonderful opportunity to see how our faith begins at baptism, and ends on earth with a sending off to God by loved ones: "At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was

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<sup>35</sup> *Teaching Activities Manual for the Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2004).

begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church (the body of Christ) intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life.”<sup>36</sup> The discussions on faith, the sacraments, and how one cares and ministers to those who are sick or grieving all came from the *Order of Christian Funerals*, and included explanations of the use of symbols, such as the pall representing the baptismal garment, at Christian funerals. This enlightened those who would be participating in the Easter Vigil and would be wearing the white baptismal garment. Other symbols discussed were incense, holy water, the Paschal candle, the cross, flowers, donations to charitable organizations, and eulogies. Another part of the discussion focused on the time needed to grieve over the death of a loved one; how the death of a loved one may change one’s role and responsibilities in the family; the need to share one’s feelings after losing a loved one; and whom to contact in order to talk with someone about the loss, perhaps a priest, a deacon, the RCIA director, a spiritual director, a bereavement minister, a counselor, or a family therapist. (Many parishes have bereavement ministries that are now sensitive to the needs of children and teens when there is a death in the family.) We included a reading on the death and resurrection of Jesus during the time of prayer, since there was a need to bring the hope of eternal life to the forefront of the discussion:

“When a member of Christ’s body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. Christian consolation is rooted in that hope that comes from faith in the saving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian hope faces the reality of death and

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<sup>36</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing, 1998).

the anguish of grief but trusts confidently that the power of sin and death has been vanquished by the risen Lord.”<sup>37</sup>

A total of twenty-six sessions were planned and developed, and they include catechetical sessions, the Rites of Initiation, retreats, and service days. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is used as a resource for rites and preparation for rites. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* along with the *Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* was used as an additional resource for subjects that covered in the following sessions: Introduction to Christian Initiation; Catholic Christian Faith and Signs and Symbols of Faith; Divine Revelation and Prayer; the Trinity; the Church; Rites of Initiation; the Liturgical Year and Sacred Scripture; Service to the Poor; Liturgy; Sacraments; Morality; Retreats; the Creed; Scrutiny Preparation; Practice for First Reconciliation, the Lord’s Prayer and the Easter Triduum; and Easter Vigil and Mystagogy.

#### COMPONENTS OF FORMATION

There is a need for uncatechized teens to develop a Catholic identity using a holistic approach. Included in the twenty-six sessions discussed above are four areas that illustrate this approach. Christian initiation is best served if the process includes the following four elements, the first being:

##### *Catechesis*

Most uncatechized teens have had very little exposure to any form of religious education. At most, there is a sense of faith in God and a desire to go to heaven (see Appendix I). Therefore, it is very important to start from the beginning with the basics of

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<sup>37</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 3.

the faith to inspire a desire to learn to live the Christian way of life. Most candidates, for example, were found unable to demonstrate the use of the sign of the cross before prayer, so it was important to start with a brief story about the cross and why we sign ourselves. An example of such a story follows:

“Some of you today will attend Mass for the first time, and others have been attending Mass. Mass is called a liturgy, which is the church’s public worship. To call a Mass public is to say that it is an assembly of believers, and to call it worship means it is the church’s prayer to God. At Mass, we will always have the consecration of the Eucharist, which is when the Holy Spirit comes upon the gifts of bread and wine and makes them holy. If we do not have the Eucharist at a liturgy, it is called a service and not a Mass. Now, think of all the people who come to Mass. They are all part of the body of Christ. Some are young, old, rich, poor, happy, or sad. Someone’s parent may have just died, someone may have just broken up with his girlfriend, someone may have just gotten a new job, someone may have just found out she has cancer, someone may have just been accepted into college. Think of all these needs: all the pain and all the joy. Sometimes we describe liturgy as the two beams of the cross: the vertical beam representing our relationship with God and the horizontal beam representing our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.”<sup>38</sup> As we gather in prayer together or when we gather at Mass, we can think of all our brothers and sisters in Christ as our family, and as we make the sign of the cross, we can ask God in our minds to bless us,

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<sup>38</sup> Adapted from the *Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2004), 138.

and all our family here today. The sign of the cross begins, as we always pray, in the name of the Father (as we touch our forehead with the fingers of our right hand), and of the Son (as we touch our heart), and of the Holy Spirit (as we cross over to our left shoulder and then the right shoulder), Amen. Catechists can easily demonstrate this flow of action. The cross is a sign of suffering. Jesus suffered on the cross because he loves us so much. We will learn about this more during our classes. However, the cross is also a sign of hope, hope in the promises of Christ.

The source of catechesis is found in the word of God revealed by Jesus Christ: “Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for ‘sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church.’”<sup>39</sup> The Sunday readings will not only be heard at Mass but will also be discussed in small groups. Most discussion questions shared in small groups should be developed in such a way as to relate scripture, written over 2,000 years ago, to everyday life in this twenty-first century. That is the beauty and essence of the living Word of God.

It is also valuable, especially for visual learners, to teach the traditions of the faith by developing Power Point presentations whenever possible, using the *Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* as a reference. Visuals reinforce what is said and can be used for a quick review of the session before the meeting ends.

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<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *On Catechesis in Our Time: “Catechesi Tradendae”* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1979), 27.

Teen faith formation should be an all-inclusive process, in that it should cover everything that elementary religious education offers, yet expand and challenge the teen's knowledge and understanding of the faith and of his or her personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that will grow and mature throughout life. Faith involves a change of life, a *metanoia*, that is a profound transformation of mind and heart; it causes the believer to live that conversion.<sup>40</sup> Every session should give candidates an opportunity to learn more about the Catholic Christian faith and an opportunity to begin to develop this relationship with Jesus Christ in their daily lives.

It is very important in catechesis to know the audience and to develop a teaching method that best communicates with those being catechized. For teens who are uncatechized, even if they are baptized, the faith must be communicated simply, within the candidates' own ability to understand and interpret. For example, the *National Directory for Catechesis* suggests the following: "Since adolescence is the age of hero worship, it is helpful to present the words and example of Jesus as well as the lives and deeds of the saints in ways that appeal to young people. Such catechesis should present Christ as the Son of God, friend, guide, and model who can be not only admired but also imitated."<sup>41</sup>

To summarize, using the *National Directory* as a guide, catechesis:

- Promotes knowledge of the faith that is centered on Jesus Christ

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<sup>40</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 1997). 55. Hereafter cited as GDC.

<sup>41</sup> *National Directory for Catechesis*, (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2005). 199. Hereafter cited as NDC.

- Promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments
- Promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ
- Teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ
- Prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church
- Promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to act as Christians in society

### *Community*

It is extremely important for inquirers, catechumens, and candidates to spend time together at Mass with the larger worshipping community. It is this worshipping community that will accept, welcome, and send them to the Bishop for election. Catechumens and candidates will be greeted, hear the word of God, and listen to the homily together as a family. They will see the reverence of the community that consists of people of all different ages, backgrounds, and talents and learn from them, and one day be in unity with them. They will be blessed by the community for dismissal, and the community will in turn be blessed by them. The community will witness the rites and scrutinies of the Elect and hold these candidates in their prayers. Both the community and candidates look forward to baptism: “they are graced with adoption as children of God and are led by the Holy Spirit into the promised fullness of time begun in Christ and, as they share in the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal, even to a foretaste of the kingdom of God”<sup>42</sup>. It is in the

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<sup>42</sup> See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, no. 48; also Eph 1:10.

Eucharist that the candidates become what they have received, the Body of Christ. They will receive the sacrament of confirmation and may realize for the first time that they are the temples of Holy Spirit.

The times for the sessions were planned around the Mass. Group one met at the 5:30 pm Mass and were dismissed after the homily. They continued their catechesis until 7:30 p.m. Group two began their catechesis before Mass, starting at 4 pm and attended the Teen Mass together at 5:30 p.m. with group one in order to enable the teens to form a community with their peers. At the parish Mass, candidates have a chance to meet other teens, who attend either parochial or public schools. In addition, there were periodic optional youth group meetings after Mass for the teens in group two Confirmation process. The candidates were invited to youth group outings, such as a weekend retreat or a day at a local amusement park, with other teens who are not in the RCIA process. Other opportunities for parish community involvement are the teen penance services during Advent and Lent and the Passion Play put on by the youth group. In class, most sessions include ice-breakers to build community and was an aid in establishing open sharing, especially during the first few months. There is a short break halfway through each session for refreshments, sharing, and building relationships of the nascent community.

### *Spiritual Formation*

Many teens come into RCIA with little prayer experience. Attending Sunday Mass regularly and praying at every session develops greater communication with God for the candidates. They learn how to pray and become comfortable praying and

conversing with God. Different prayer forms are taught and practiced so as to instill in the candidates a method of prayer that they relate to, and so that they may choose for themselves to pray outside class. The following prayer forms were easily taught to teens:

- Formal vocal prayers: the Rosary: The Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be; the Stations of the Cross; the Creed, and grace before meals. Short prayers from the heart are used at the end of sessions for the closing prayer, and they sometimes include prayers of petition, thanksgiving, and gratitude.

- Quiet prayer: Resting in God and being still (which is an accomplishment for teens) can be taught to give teens an awareness of just being in the presence of God.

- Prayer journals: most teens like to write to God. Some express their feelings better this way and the prayer becomes deeper.

- Meditative *Lectio Divina*, praying the scriptures, helps teens realize that God can communicate to them with a word or phrase of scripture. This prayer also helps the teens become familiar with the words of scripture. Commitment to prayer outside of Mass and class is essential and can be developed throughout a person's life.

Retreats are an important way to form a person spiritually. Teen retreats provide a chance to talk and pray together. Retreats also provide an opportunity for the introduction of prayer forms such as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Taize prayer.

### *Service*

Teens love to serve. They are full of energy and willingness to be of assistance to others. In planning service activities, it is important to communicate with the established

service ministries of the parish, other churches, and local community organizations that help and assist the poor, the homeless, and the sick. People benefit from the service of caring teens, and the young people learn and experience the call to serve and to develop a missionary spirit doing the work of the church. Some suggestions for service in the Los Angeles area are the following:

- Helping the Missionary Sisters of Charity at their home for the aging poor;
- Visiting the aged, as well as sick children and teens, in hospitals and care facilities. If these facilities are run by a religious order, teens will have an opportunity to learn about the group. Perhaps there may also be opportunities to pray with the religious.
- Cooking meals under supervision at the parish with the Catholic worker ministry.
- Serving meals to the poor: many opportunities are available through parish outreach and missions. Some teens are unaware of the actual poverty of some people.
- Packing or helping deliver food baskets to the needy, especially around Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter.
- Helping the Christian service ministry: stocking food donated by parishioners, assembling food baskets, wrapping Christmas presents to be delivered with food baskets.
- Contributing to and packing shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child through Samaritan's Purse which is a nondenominational Christian organization providing spiritual and physical assistance to poor and suffering people around the world. These

boxes are full of Christmas toys and items that very young children through teens will receive from the candidates.

- Joining youth ministry in ‘Build a house’ projects through Corazon, a nonprofit Catholic organization that supervises the building of homes for the needy. Teens help with the construction of local houses.

There are many opportunities for teens to practice putting their faith into action. Service is an excellent way for them to form community and learn to love as Jesus loved, by giving of themselves. It is a concrete way to learn and live some of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

### *Faith*

When asked on the survey (Appendix I) given at the initial interview, all teens answered yes to Question four: “Do you believe in God?” They have come to believe in God from many different sources, such as stories from family members, the faith of friends, being invited to Mass, and even being baptized in the faith by inactive parents. Baptism gives some a Catholic identity that causes them to investigate the faith. Although their faith seems tentative, most desire to know God in a deeper way and to be able to talk about God with others and to pray. (See Appendix I).

Teens have many questions about the Catholic faith. For example: How can I go to heaven? If I am a bad person, will I go to hell? Does God love everyone? Will God forgive you for anything? When can I take the Bread? The period of evangelization and precatechumenate was ideal for answering these types of questions: “The goal of this

period of formation is to help the inquirers come to an initial awareness of God's saving presence in their lives and to help them discern their initial readiness to embrace the way of life of Jesus Christ."<sup>43</sup> It is important to explain to teens, with as many practical everyday examples as possible, that God has always been in their lives, that God loves them and wants them to love back, both God and neighbor. The period of evangelization and precatechumenate offers the opportunity to gather uncatechized teens into a community that will begin to explain some of the images they have of God. This period also allots inquirers and candidates, the time to make a decision to stay and learn more about the way of Jesus Christ and how God wants us to live, love, and serve.

Some teens who initially registered were pressured to receive their sacraments by a parent or grandparent. If a teen is being forced into a process in which they are not ready to participate, it may be wise to invite them to come back at a later time, and to offer to speak to an adult in their life about this choice. However, if the teen cooperates and openly listens and participates in the process even when there are doubts about committing to the Christian life, he or she can be asked during the second discernment meeting, before the Rite of Sending, if they still desire to leave and possibly return at a later date or stay and receive their sacraments. Ultimately, the choice must be their own. This may be the first autonomous decision the teen makes.

After six sessions, it was determined with the initiation team's input after review of the discernment questionnaires (see Appendix II) that both groups had developed an initial understanding of the gospel values, including faith, hope, and love of God and

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 55.

neighbor. Also, they had more respect for the life and dignity of each individual; trust in God; honesty; compassion; forgiveness; mercy; community; equality; and service therefore they could participate in the Rite of Acceptance (for those who have not been baptized) and the Rite of Welcoming (for those who are baptized but need Confirmation and Eucharist).

Anyone who has inquired into receiving any of the initiation sacraments was invited to the first inquiry informational meeting. This meeting included pre-registered inquirers and candidates for baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, along with their parents, grandparents, godparents, sponsors, siblings, friends, and other family members or neighbors. Many times a family member who is learning more about the faith influences others to want to grow in understanding. For example, a young man who has not attended classes since his First Communion continued religious education classes when his older brother signed up to finish his own initiation sacraments. In our sessions, one of the female candidates invited her boyfriend to inquire, and both received their initiation sacraments and now volunteer as catechists for the new group of inquirers. Also as a result of teen candidates attending RCIA, some parents, grandparents, and sponsors started to attend Mass again after many years of absence, and a teen from another Christian denomination who attended youth ministry nights with his fully initiated friend decided to become a Catholic. In the latter case, the teen was a baptized Presbyterian, but his parents were inactive in their faith. After asking his parents if he could start RCIA for teens, both parents agreed in writing that, if their seventeen year old son wanted to

become Catholic, it was his decision. The parish bulletin, which is accessible from the internet, was one of the primary sources of information for the new teen initiation process.

The announcement read:

All New Teen Christian Initiation Process (RCIA) Starts in September

Discover the Catholic Christian faith, have fun and meet new friends!  
If you, a family member or friend would like to know more about becoming Catholic, please contact [the parish initiation director] at [phone] for more details about registering and to answer any question's you may have. Classes are open to teens who wish to be baptized as well as baptized teens desiring to receive Eucharist and Confirmation.  
Don't delay, join today.

It is valuable to use as many means of invitation as are available in our area, such as notices in the local newspapers, announcements at the end of Mass inviting people to attend the first informational meeting, use of local cable TV announcements, posters and flyers around the parish, and flyers faxed to known parishes that do not have an initiation process for teens. We also found that word of mouth brought teens into the process. After one teen registers, he or she may encourage a friend or family member to join the process.

Once uncatechized teens learn they can attend classes that will serve their needs, they are eager to register for the RCIA process that leads to full initiation into the Catholic faith. Many parishes noted on the Archdiocesan parish survey (see Appendix IX) that they do not have any teens who want to receive only baptism, nor did they have

any baptized yet uncatechized teen. It is possible that someone would not inquire at such parishes, since a process inviting teens to be baptized, and receive all of their initiation sacraments, is not made.

## CATECHETICAL PERIODS

### *Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate*

#### *SESSION 1: Introduction to the teen Christian initiation process*

Session 1 took place in the parish center auditorium, and the main objectives were to set up a welcoming environment by: greeting everyone as they enter; arranging sign-up tables for people needing to register; having a sign-in sheet so those who miss the first session can be identified and contacted; having name tags for everyone; have refreshments; play lively music; having the catechist team available during the gathering to greet visitors and answer any brief informational questions they may have; having a central table displaying symbols of the faith, such as an open Bible, a cross, a candle, and a picture of Jesus; having a (wireless) microphone available so people can be heard during the question-and-answer part of the meeting. Introducing the team, praying, and giving a brief history of the RCIA process helped to welcome formally everyone and can make families feel comfortable.

I gave an explanation of the general structure of the process for each week, including attendance at Mass and dismissal of the candidates from Mass after the homily to reflect on the Sunday readings. Examples of ways to incorporate the scripture into our

daily lives were shared by the team of catechists to the candidates and their families. Families were encouraged to attend Mass together with their teens and Group announcements are given to the candidates. Other issues that were discussed are the requirements for being a godparent or sponsor.

*At Home with the Word*<sup>44</sup> books were distributed to each inquirer and candidate. Candidates were asked to read the Sunday readings at home for the following Sunday. Family and friends in attendance were asked to discuss the Sunday readings with the candidates, with emphasis on the meaning and application to daily life. Candidates were reminded to answer the questions in the book. This was to prepare the participants for class discussions and to foster family and friend involvement in the readings.

A yearly schedule of activities was handed out and explained so parents and sponsors could calendar important dates. Included were announcements for drop-off and pick-up times and locations; going through the first month's schedule; parents/guardians were sent monthly schedules through the mail or e-mail as a reminder of upcoming events and any revisions to the calendar. Adequate time was given for any questions to be asked.

The meeting ends with a prayer that included petitions from the assembly, and then we attended the Teen Mass together. An invitation for the adults, in the family who never received their own initiation sacraments, to inquire about the adult RCIA was provided. Information and forms were handed out for adult initiation at that time.

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<sup>44</sup> *At Home with the Word* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2008).

SESSION 2: The Catholic Christian faith and the signs and symbols of our faith

Session 2 was actually the first meeting with inquirers and candidates only. Sponsors were always invited to attend any of the catechetical sessions but were required to attend retreats and rites with their candidates. It is good for teens to discuss questions about their faith with other teens in their same age bracket. When parents and older sponsors are present at meetings, teens tend to be very quiet, so when parents and sponsors were invited they formed a group of their own for discussions. It is very inspiring to the teens to see parents and sponsors learning and developing their faith as well.

The goal of this meeting was for candidates to:

- Begin to pray as a group and share petitions
- Learn to recite the Lord's Prayer
- Begin to learn something about each candidate: name, high school, favorite sport or hobby, favorite music, favorite food
- Begin to share openly with confidence
- Use some of the signs and symbols, such as the sign of the cross, holy water, candles, the altar, and the Bible to explain the basic essentials of the Catholic Christian faith
- Interact in groups by vocally sharing and writing down as many signs and symbols of the faith as are known to the group

- Discuss and share in a large group how there are many meanings of the signs and symbols of our faith, depending on our current experiences of life
- Actively participate in a project and help others who need assistance
- Begin to pray at home on a daily basis if not already doing so

### SESSION 3: Divine revelation and prayer

The goal of this session was to be introduced to different prayer forms and to encourage candidates to pray daily. Every session began with communal prayer either before or after Mass depending on the candidate's group. The meeting room was set up with a circle of chairs and a centering prayer table so that everyone could see each other and the table. The Bible, representing the word of God, a cross representing the self-giving love of Jesus, and a candle representing the light of Christ and God's presence among us was placed on the prayer table. A catechist offered an opening prayer, and the class shared petitions for their family and friends.

Prayer journaling was introduced and discussed. The teens made their own journals by decorating a folder and attaching notebook paper inside it. They could write a letter to God or their thoughts about the day or week, and they could write how the Sunday's readings or music from Mass moved them. Journals helped the candidates express any needs they have and personally pray to God for themselves, their friends, or their family. They wrote about fears and concerns that they are unable to express openly at this point in their spiritual process. Their prayer journals were confidential.

Discussions on the need to pray were shared and it was disclosed that though some teens are trying to pray every day, and more than half the teens did not know how to pray. Those who pray every day said they had conversations with God as though God was their constant companion. Those who did not know how to pray thought that they needed to learn formal prayers and recite them. They learned from their peers that they could actually just talk to God as you would your best friend. Prayer journaling provided an opportunity for teens to place their thoughts in writing, which, to some, is an easier way to start praying than having a mental conversation with God.

Praying the Sunday scripture was introduced and practiced. Usually a section of the Sunday gospel, using *At Home with the Word* as the source, was used to introduce the teens to this prayer form. The outline that was given was based on *Lectio Divina*:

- Reading deeply: devoting all your focus and attention to what you are reading, let the words wash over you. Read the passage slowly, at least three times.
- Thinking deeply: what is God saying to me in this passage?
- Speaking: mentally talk to God; what have the words prompted you to pray?
- Rest quietly in God: let the prayer experience settle within you, close your eyes and sit without words, surrounded by God's love.

Discussion on divine revelation was instigated by a catechist, who talked about believing and experiencing God, as well as how the church hands on the faith through sacred tradition and sacred scripture. Candidates were asked questions about the ways of

knowing, experiencing, and having faith in God and were then divided into three small groups to discuss the following questions:

- Who first taught you about God? What did you learn about God from them?
- How do you now experience God in your life?
- What are some reasons you might tell a friend that there is a God?
- How does reading and listening to the scriptures help you know God?
- What is your favorite tradition of the Catholic Christian faith?

The Rosary was a way for teens to learn the three most popular communal prayers of the church: the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. The history of the Rosary was discussed, and candidates were given a Rosary card with instructions on how to recite the Rosary. All the mysteries of the rosary were discussed, and the group selected one mystery to meditate on while reciting the beginning and one decade of the Rosary. A homework assignment was given: to recite the Rosary at home and to write a short reflection on one of the mysteries in their prayer journals.

A review of why we pray was shared and the different prayer forms such as communal prayer, petitions, journaling, praying the scriptures, and the rosary was reviewed. The catechist had the freedom to reinforce each of the prayer forms taught at this session by using a different prayer form as the opening prayer for the remaining sessions.

SESSION 4: God our Father

Goals of this session were to listen to the readings and homily at Mass and relate them to one's own life, to pray as a group, and also privately, to realize that we are made in the image of God, and to begin to develop an awareness of the different ways God is present to us in our daily life. Catechists introduced prayer journaling as candidates relate to God the Father:

- *Prayer journaling*: After a brief opening prayer that proclaims that we are made in the image and likeness of God, candidates reflected on what attributes of God they possessed, such as the ability to be loving, caring, compassionate, and creative. Then the candidates were asked to write a letter thanking God for their gifts and talents (naming those they possess) and asking God to help them develop a greater faith and capacity to love and care for the people (again naming them) in their lives.

- *Scripture*: catechists used *At Home with the Word* and developed questions relating to the Sunday readings. The class was divided into small groups. Each of the Sunday readings were followed by related questions. Questions were composed from a historical perspective and addressed the relevance of the reading to life today. Questions were answered in writing and then discussed in small groups. Everyone was reminded to respect the confidentiality associated with the discussion questions and personal faith sharing.

• *Weekly faith lesson:* catechists had the opportunity to speak about God the Father in the following ways:

- As an image of the Trinity
- As creator
- As present in all
- As present among us in many different ways: in nature, in people, in scripture, in Jesus the son of God, and as truth and love

In the large group, teens had two questions to think about:

- 1) How do you experience God in your life?
- 2) Think about a person in your life who represents a model of God

Teens shared the first question with the person on their right and the second question with the person to their left.

• *Project or activity:* Each person paired up with someone and looked up one the following scripture verses:

- 2 Samuel 22:1-4—The Lord is my protector, my salvation
- Isaiah 49:13-16—A loving mother
- Isaiah 61:10—The bride and bridegroom
- Hosea 11:1-7—A parent's love
- 1 John 4:7- 12—God is love

One person from the group shared how God is portrayed in the scripture verse they read.

*Review of session:* The group discussed how God is all around us and is revealed in many different ways. The closing prayer was a brief prayer that includes the Lord's Prayer.

SESSION 5: God the Son

The goals of this session were:

- To discover different ways Jesus reveals himself through nature and people
- To understand why Jesus has many titles
- To realize that if we choose to be disciples of Jesus, we need to show our love to God and others everyday

*Communal prayer:* catechists selected a scripture reading about Jesus from the gospels and pray the *Lectio Divina*. Suggestions for readings included:

- John 6:35—The bread of life
- Jn 8:12—The light of the world
- Jn 10:7—The sheepgate
- Jn 10:11—The good shepherd
- Jn 11:25—The resurrection and the life
- Jn 14:6—The way, the truth, and the life
- Jn 15:5—The vine

Catechists read Exodus 3:14 to the class so the candidates can understand where the name of God, “I am” or “Yahweh,” is written. They related the scripture readings to this name

when each reading begins with “I am.” Candidates also journaled what they heard about Jesus at Mass.

Candidates were divided into groups to add to the list the titles for Jesus they have heard throughout their lives, in addition to the ones they heard at Mass. Titles were written down on display sheets of paper and hung on the walls for further discussion.

*Scripture:* it was very important for catechists to ask the candidates frequently whether they understood the meaning of certain words that we, who were raised in the faith, take for granted. Candidates were introduced to looking up chapters and verses in the Bible by themselves. Each candidate looked up one scripture verse about Jesus, privately read it, and prepared to tell the class what the reading means.

Suggestions of verses for candidates to look up:

- John 1: 1-18—Word of God
- Luke 1:31—Announcement to Mary of the incarnation
- Luke 2:41-52—Jesus in his Father’s house
- Matthew 3:17—This is my Son, the beloved
- John 1:35-51 —Jesus the Messiah and Son of God
- Luke 4:16-22—Jesus the Anointed One and his mission
- Luke 7:36-50—Jesus equal to God, and Jesus’s power to forgive sins
- Matthew 25:31-46—You did it for me
- 1 John 4:13-18—Savior of the world
- Philippians 2:9-11—Every knee will bend

*Weekly faith lesson:*

1) Jesus is the foundation of our faith, from the time of his incarnation through his life of teaching, healing, and loving, and into his passion, death, and resurrection. Catechists taught about the overall life of Jesus from his conception through his resurrection.

2) Living the kingdom of God as Jesus's disciples.

Project or activity: a handout, "Examining Your Belief About Jesus" (Appendix XV), was given out at the last session and used as an evaluation tool to determine whether there had been a change in the candidates' beliefs about Jesus.

*Review of session and closing prayer:*

1) Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God.

2) Jesus has many names and titles, and he is "all in all"

3) The purpose of God coming in the flesh

Candidates were at a point that they took turns praying, each week, a short closing prayer along with the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, or the Glory Be.

*SESSION 6: God the Holy Spirit*

The goal of this session was to see how God reveals himself within us through the Holy Spirit, and through our lives, and how God's Holy Spirit inspires us to love.

*Communal prayer:* Catechists listed the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the blackboard, or included them as part of a Power Point presentation: Wisdom, Understanding, Right Judgment, Knowledge, Courage, Reverence, and Wonder and Awe.

Catechists explained the gifts of the Holy Spirit and asked the candidates to write in their prayer journals which of these gifts they would like God the Holy Spirit to give them and why.

Candidates wrote on the board, the symbols that might represent the Holy Spirit in the church. Catechists pointed out the correct ones, such as a dove, water, fire above a saint's head, or the laying on of hands. Catechists asked why these particular symbols are good representatives of the Holy Spirit.

*Scripture:* the Sunday readings were looked up by chapter and verse in the Bible, and three candidates were chosen to read each reading. A sheet with two or three questions about the readings in the Bibles were passed out and discussed in small groups. Discussion included how the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, can help one be more aware of how God communicates to us through the scriptures and how we can apply these readings to our daily lives. Weekly faith lesson: candidates were encouraged to recognize the different ways God the Holy Spirit is manifested in daily life, such as through nature, people, scriptures, the Mass, the Eucharist, the sacraments, music, prayer, and in every way possible.

Catechists explained the following fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Questions were asked in the large group:

- In what ways do you experience the Holy Spirit in your life?
- Which of the fruits of the Holy Spirit do you now have, and which do you need in order to live a more holy life?

Project or activity: in groups of two, the candidates looked up the following images of the Holy Spirit in scripture:

Water: Ezekiel 36:24-27

John 4:7-15

Fire: Luke 24:32

Acts 2:1-4

Wind or breath: Genesis 1:1-2

John 3:5-8

Dove: Matthew 3:16

John 1:29-34

Oil and anointing: Matthew 25:1-13

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

*Review of session:* catechists encouraged the candidates to be more aware of God's presence in their lives and to pray for the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit that they need.

*Closing prayer:* The prayer from St. Augustine is read aloud by all:

*Breathe into me, Spirit of God,  
 That I may think what is holy.  
 Drive me, Spirit of God,  
 That I may do what is holy.  
 Draw me, Spirit of God,  
 That I may love what is holy.  
 Strengthen me, Spirit of God,  
 That I may preserve what is holy.  
 Guide me, Spirit of God,  
 That I may never lose what is holy.*

*SESSION 7: The mission of the Church and the church tour*

The goal of the session was to discuss and realize the mission and purpose of the church and to take a church tour.

*Communal prayer:* after Mass and before dividing into three groups, catechists and candidates said a brief prayer for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of God's ways so that they could know, love, and serve God more deeply. Petitions were always included for the needs of the candidates and catechists, their families, their friends, and other intentions.

*Scripture:* catechists had candidate volunteers look up different scripture verses to share with the class regarding the Church as:

The People of God:	2 Corinthians 6:16 1 Peter 2:9-10
The Body of Christ:	1 Corinthians 12:12-13 1 Corinthians 12:20, 26-27
The Temple of the Holy Spirit:	2 Corinthians 6:16 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Ephesians 2:19-22

*Weekly faith lesson:* catechists shared their own experiences as part of the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

*Project or activity:* a tour of the inside of the church. (See Appendix X).

*SESSION 8: The Combined Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming*

The goal of this session was to discern, prepare and practice for the Rite of Acceptance for the unbaptized and the Rite of Welcoming for the baptized in group I. The Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming was combined together as outlined in *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.<sup>45</sup> It was important to distinguish the baptized from the unbaptized in this combined Rite.

Group I consisted of three unbaptized inquirers, one candidate for reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, and six baptized but previously uncatechized Catholics preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist. Candidates in Group II, who only needed the initiation sacrament of Confirmation, were invited to witness the rite, but they joined the regular Confirmation group for their rites, including the Rite of Confirmation with the auxiliary Bishop. Group I received their Christian initiation sacraments at the Easter Vigil.

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<sup>45</sup> *RCIA*, 289. This rite is for use in communities where catechumens are preparing for initiation and where baptized but previously uncatechized candidates are beginning catechetical formation either prior to completing their Christian initiation in the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist or prior to being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

### Discernment for the Rite

Discernment meetings were scheduled during the week, preferably after school, so that candidates met individually with the director of initiation. As stated in paragraph 42 of the *RCIA*, the prerequisite for making this first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidate.<sup>46</sup> There must be some evidence of:

- Faith and an initial conversion
- Intention to change one's life
- Desire to enter into a relationship with God in Christ
- First stirrings of repentance
- Practice of calling upon God in prayer
- A sense of the Church

In order to get a sense of where the candidates stood, with regards to the above prerequisites, as well as to investigate their motives and dispositions,<sup>47</sup> a discernment interview form was used (see Appendix II). This gave both the catechist and the pastor a sense of the inquirers' and candidates' desire to become a fully initiated Catholic Christian.

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<sup>46</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 14 (hereafter cited as *AG*).

<sup>47</sup> *AG*, 13.

### Preparation for the Rite

During the discernment meeting, but after the catechist has reviewed the answers to the questions on the discernment form, the two questions that the candidate was asked during the rite are explained and given to the candidate on an index card:

- What do you ask of God?
- What do you ask of this Christian community?

Candidates took these questions home and seriously contemplate the answers for themselves, write down their answers on the index card, and bring the card with them to the practice.

If an inquirer or candidate decided to wait before receiving the rite, or if the catechist or pastor suggested waiting, the candidate would continue with the Teen Mass and class until an appropriate time to receive the rite. The fact that a person stayed in the process through the precatechumenate period indicated a serious desire to complete the process; however, the inquirers and candidates were given the freedom to choose when the time was right for them to complete the rite. The Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming can be repeated several times during the year if pastorally needed.<sup>48</sup>

### Practice for the Rite

The Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming for teens can be either slightly modified from or identical to the usual RCIA Rites for adult members of the parish; if pastorally needed, a teen can receive any of the rites with adult members.

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<sup>48</sup> See *RCIA*, 289.

The outline for the Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming is as follows:

#### Receiving the Candidates

- Greeting
- Calling of candidates / opening dialogue with questions
- Candidates' acceptance of the Gospel
- Affirmation by the sponsors and the assembly
- Signing of the candidates with the cross
- Signing of the forehead and the senses
- Presentation of a cross and concluding prayer
- Invitation to the celebration of the Word of God

#### Liturgy of the Word

- Readings and homily
- Presentation of a teen Bible
- Intercessions for the catechumens and candidates
- Prayer over and dismissal of the catechumens and candidates

After the dismissal, the catechumens and candidates discuss the rite they just experienced and share the following:

- What does participating in this Rite mean to them?
- What was special about this Rite?

Sponsors are also dismissed with the catechumens and candidates to share their experience of the rite.

*Period of the Catechumenate*

This is the time, in duration corresponding to the progress of the individual, for the nurturing and growth of the catechumens' faith and conversion to God.<sup>49</sup> The teen catechumenate and catechetical instruction for candidates is a prolonged period that is vital to their spiritual formation. This period follows the evangelization period of the precatechumenate, and now the inquirers, the unbaptized, are called catechumens and have indicated at least an initial faith. Some candidates, especially those who were baptized as infants and did not receive any religious education in their elementary or junior high school years, also have an initial faith. There is more commitment to learn and understand the faith and a desire to live out this faith. During this time the candidates not only receive a more advanced religious education, but, being more mature, they are able to develop a deeper prayer life and maintain a commitment to celebrate the liturgy as they learn why we worship and the different parts of the Mass. Mass is attended on a regular basis, and candidates further develop their ability to follow the way of God through Jesus, by moral decision making, service, and learning and understanding why the church celebrates the sacraments.

In order to acquire an enlightened faith and a conversion in mind and in action, both of which are necessary before the candidates can celebrate the Rite of Election or Continuing Conversion, the following areas need to be realized in the lives of catechumens and candidates:

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<sup>49</sup> *RCIA*, 14.

- A suitable catechesis
- Prayer and a spiritual journey
- Celebrations of the Word of God and the Eucharist
- Apostolic work of the church, service, and working actively with others<sup>50</sup>

SESSION 9: The liturgical year, Advent, and the sacred scriptures

The goals of this session were to learn about the different seasons of the church's liturgical year and to be introduced to the overview of the Bible.

*Communal prayer* was conducted after dismissal from Mass, and as we gathered at our meeting room candidates were encouraged to pray as a way to stay united with the larger church. Music relating to the Gospel message, the season of the liturgical year or on the lesson for the day was used to start or end the prayer, and sometimes was the prayer. Music was purchased from i-Tunes or the *Spirit and Song* collection<sup>51</sup>; buying and collecting specific songs that were stored in a computer library helped to reinforce the session during retreats and break time in class as well as during prayer time. Parish music departments usually have a large assortment of songs to use. An Advent candle was used during this first Sunday of Advent, and specific Advent prayers were used while lighting the candle, along with songs anticipating the coming of Jesus.

One question that the candidates prayed about and wrote in their prayer journals was:

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<sup>50</sup> RCIA, par.75.

<sup>51</sup> *Spirit and Song* collection at [spiritandsong.com](http://spiritandsong.com).

- How can Jesus be born in your heart more deeply this Christmas?

Group I was asked this question toward the end of the Advent season; however, Group II was asked earlier in the season, and the candidates had more time throughout the season to contemplate the answer.

*Scripture:* the readings on the birth of Jesus in Chapters one and two of the gospels of Matthew and Luke were discussed. The following questions were handed out; candidates were to answer them and write their answers on a large sheet for sharing in the larger group:

- How are the stories of Jesus's birth in the two gospels similar and different?
- How does each gospel stress Jesus's humanity?
- How does each gospel stress Jesus's divinity?
- Do you have any questions about the two gospels? Did anything surprise you about the birth of Christ?

*Project or activity:* each team taped their answer sheets to the wall, and one person from the team read their responses. During this time, candidates also discussed Mary, the mother of God, and how she is the model disciple.

*Weekly faith lesson:* Candidates discussed *The Bible and You*,<sup>52</sup> a good pamphlet that contains a clear and concise outline of the entire Bible with a timeline, as well as a short explanation of each book of the Catholic Bible and the difference between Catholic

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<sup>52</sup> *The Bible and You* (South Deerfield, MA: Channing L. Bete Co.1971). This pamphlet helps candidates who have never been exposed to the Bible understand the structure, books, and timeline of both the New and Old Testaments.

and Protestant Bibles. It is short enough to take turns reading and small enough for candidates to keep in their teen Bibles for reference.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* In this section, candidates reviewed the important reasons why we celebrate Advent, and they discussed Mary as a faith model, mother, and disciple. A handout of the cycle of the liturgical year was taken home.

*SESSION 10: Our fundamental option for the poor: a call to serve*

The goal of this session was to instill a love for the poor by visiting establishments that care for the poor. It is good to invite family members and sponsors on these service outings to support the teens and for the continued spiritual growth of everyone involved.

*Communal prayer:* a vocal prayer was shared before the service project at the parish before leaving to where that candidate's are serving.

*Scripture:* passages that were used as a handout to take home to read and reflect on are the following:

Mt 25:31-46—I was hungry and you gave me food

Rom 15:26—Some contribution for the poor

Gal 2:10—To be mindful of the poor

Gal 5:13-14—Serve one another through love

Jas 2:2—A poor person in shabby clothes

Jas 2:14-17—A brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food

*Weekly faith lesson:* a handout on the fundamental option for the poor was given to each candidate to take home, read and be prepared to discuss both the handout and the experience for the following week.

The teens used the parish center kitchen to prepare a warm meal for about seventy-five needy people in the community. Working with a parishioner who serves meals to the poor every week, and a catechist who is a chef, candidates assisted in preparing the entire meal and then set-up and served the meal at the location where the needy come to eat. Candidates had the opportunity to intermingle and converse with the people. Community prayer at the service location included grace before meals. At the closing, each candidate and volunteer shared a prayer petition.

*SESSION 11: Introduction to the liturgy and why we worship*

The goal of this session was to learn more about the Mass and the reasons why we worship. The candidates had the experience of attending Mass and became familiar with the parts of the Mass for discussions.

*Communal Prayer:* *Lectio Divina* was used with sections of the Sunday Gospel read by three different teens. Candidates reflected aloud.

*Scripture:* catechizing on the Liturgy of the Word was valuable at this time, including discussion of the introductory rite, the first reading (from the Old Testament), the psalm, the second reading (from the New Testament), the Gospel, the homily, the

creed, the prayers of the faithful, and the concluding rite. Candidates and catechists discuss the three-year reading cycle and when the Gospel of John is read.

*Weekly faith lesson:* candidates discussed the liturgy as the work of the Holy Trinity, including questions about why we worship. Using the Sunday missalette, the Mass was reviewed thoroughly including the Introduction Rites, Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist and Concluding Rites. Teens took turns reading different sections, one teen represented the priest, two teens represented lectors, and the rest of the teens represented the assembly while reading through the missalette. Catechists commented on each section.

*Project or activity:* Catechists read from different parts of the Mass from the missalette and had the teens identify the parts. This was a fun way to help them remember each part. In addition, teen participation in the Mass was discussed, and the use of the music issue for Mass is demonstrated.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* the closing prayer was sung from the music issue, and a concluding prayer from Mass was recited.

### SESSION 12: Initiation sacraments

The goal of this session was to begin to learn about the sacrament beginning with the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

*Communal prayer:* this week, prayer consisted of *Lectio Divina* on the Sunday gospel reading and reflections in prayer journals.

Each baptized candidate was given a copy of his or her baptismal certificate. One week prior to this lesson, parents were mailed a letter asking that their candidate to bring any pictures of their baptism to the next class. In addition, any baptismal garments, candles, and cards, as well as pictures of their godparents, if any of this is available. The parents and guardians were also asked to talk with the candidates about their baptismal day: What relatives and friends attended? How did the family celebrate the baptism?

At the session, teens were asked to notice, on their baptismal certificate, the date of their baptism, the church where they were baptized, their godparents' names, and the name of the priest or deacon who baptized them. It was beneficial for candidates to look back on their baptisms and remember that people in their lives wanted to pass on the Catholic Christian faith to them: "You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life."<sup>53</sup> Even if a candidate had no pictures or baptismal remembrances, the certificate itself contains enough information for discussions. For catechumens, those who were never baptized, to hear the stories of their baptized peers fostered excitement and anticipation about their own baptisms.

*Scripture:* each candidate picked one of the following scripture passages, read it, and shared what the passage is saying:

Mt 28:19—Go make disciples and baptize them

Acts 2:38—Be baptized in the name of Jesus

Gal 3:27—You have clothed yourself with Christ

Mt 3:16—The Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism

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<sup>53</sup>CCC, no. 166.

Lk 3:16—You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-13—The Apostles receive the Holy Spirit

John 6:35—I am the bread of life

John 6:51—Whoever eats this bread will live forever

Luke 22:14-20—This cup is the new covenant in my blood

1 Cor. 11:17-29—As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

*Weekly faith lesson:* catechists gave a Power Point presentation and initiate discussion of the initiation sacraments, including the following topics:

- Baptism: grace and the effects of baptism, symbols of baptism, becoming the body of Christ as part of the Christian community, being born into a new life, forgiveness of sins, original sin and baptism, profession of faith, dying and rising, baptism of desire and blood, and the rites of baptism
- Confirmation: awareness of the Spirit of God, gifts of the Holy Spirit, effects of confirmation, totally belonging to Christ, fruits of the Holy Spirit, four graces of confirmation (it perfects, deepens, strengthens, and missions us), and symbols and rites of confirmation

*Review of session and closing prayer:* catechists reviewed the following topics with candidates: the liturgy of the Eucharist, the preparation of the altar and gifts, the Eucharistic prayer and communion rite; the Eucharist as thanksgiving and praise, and as

the body of Christ; the memorial of Christ's Passover; the presence of Christ at Mass, and receiving the Eucharist. The session closed with a prayer.

*SESSION 13: Sacraments of healing and service*

The goal of this session was to continue learning about the sacramental life of the church with the sacraments of healing and service.

*Communal prayer:* catechists read the story of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32, and asked candidates: Who are you at this time in your life?

- The forgiving father: are you generous in forgiving when someone apologizes for an action?
- The rebellious son: do you think about how your actions can hurt or harm others?
- The unforgiving son: do you judge people and withhold your friendship?

Catechists gave enough silent time for reflection. The candidates then wrote in their prayer journals the answers to the following questions:

- Who do you need to forgive in your life, who has hurt you?
- Whom do you need to say, "I'm sorry" to, whom do you need to ask for forgiveness and why?
- Are you holding a grudge towards someone? Are you treating someone with disrespect because of how you feel towards them?

The prayer session ended with the song, “Be merciful, oh Lord” by Steve Angrisano, and a closing prayer.

*Scripture:*

In groups of two, candidates looked up each scripture passage. One read the passage and the other explained what the passage meant.

Luke 5:27-32—Jesus came for sinners

Luke 5:17-26—Jesus forgives

Matthew 18:21-35—Jesus says to forgive

Luke 7:1-10—Jesus heals the sick

Acts 5:12-16—The church heals the sick

*Weekly faith lesson:* discussion of the purpose and effects of the sacraments of healing and service

- Sacrament of Reconciliation: conversion—turning away from sin and turning to God’s ways; confession—admitting your faults; forgiveness—telling God you’re sorry; act of contrition; penance—taking responsibility for your actions; reconciliation—peace with God and the community.
- Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick: to prepare a person for an operation; to give comfort in old age; to restore a sick person to physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual health if that is God’s will; confession; Eucharist; anointing with oil.

- Sacrament of Marriage: mutual love, giving of life, a sign of Christ's love for the church, how to resolve conflicts, a covenant of unconditional love, service and self-giving, vows.
- Sacrament of Holy Orders: Call to service, love for God, ordination, Bishops, priests, deacons, self-sacrifice, vows.

*Project or activity:* practice mock confessions, anointing of the sick, marriages, holy orders. Catechists gave handouts to help candidates practice each sacrament, with one person acting as the priest and the other as a parishioner. Catechists used the rites book for the Anointing of the Sick and marriage.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* there must be a commitment that extends beyond receiving the sacraments themselves. There must be a preparation that forms a lifelong commitment to live out the Christian way of life so that each person can to be Jesus, as much and often as possible, to others throughout life. There must be a commitment to receive the sacraments for the effects they have on a person growing in the faith.

#### SESSION 14: Morality: the love of God

The goal of this session was to be introduced to Morality by using the first three of the Ten Commandments as a guide. How these commandments relate to modern times was discussed.

*Communal Prayer* – Catechists played a song with the theme of worshipping God. They also read the Sunday gospel that referred to God’s love for us. Candidates wrote in their prayer journals all the blessings God has given them throughout their life. Candidates also wrote a prayer of thanksgiving.

*Scripture:* candidates were placed into four groups to look up the following four passages. One was chosen to be the scribe and wrote down the meaning of each passage shared by the group, and another candidate was the orator who shared the written work with the larger group.

Deuteronomy 5: 6-21—the Ten Commandments

Exodus 20: 2-3—do not have false gods before God

Exodus 20: 7—the Lord’s name

Exodus 20: 8-11—keep holy the Sabbath

*Weekly faith lesson:* candidates and catechists discussed God’s importance in our lives; who we are in relationship to God; how God is a blessing in our lives; idolatry, superstition, sacrilege, and atheism; taking the Lord’s name in vain; being a known Christian; blasphemy; perjury; the Sabbath, the Lord’s day; and holiness.

*Project or activity:* on a sheet of paper, candidates wrote out their daily schedules (when they wake up, eat, and go to school; what sports, hobbies, and activities they engage in, whether and when they pray, etc.). They included everything they did from waking up until sleeping, as well as a timeline. Candidates shared their answers with those next to them. Catechists asked: Do your priorities list what is really important to

you? Are there any surprises? Do you have spare time? Is there something you need to stop doing or reduce spending time at? Is there something you need to add to the schedule?

*Review of session:* the first three commandments: respecting God, using God's name properly, and keeping the Lord's Day holy. Catechists had one candidate volunteer to lead the closing prayer.

### SESSION 15: Morality: the love of family and respecting life

The goal of this session was to continue to learn about morality through the fourth and fifth commandments. How these commandments relate to our present time was discussed.

*Communal prayer:* The Candidates continued to use *Lectio Divina* to pray the Sunday Gospel. This prayer form continued to be a very powerful way of bringing the Gospel to life for the candidates. Adding a song that related to the Gospel, at the start of the prayer added even more clarity to the readings. At this point in the process, most teens are very reverent and spent time in quiet prayer. Prayer journaling was used as a closing prayer.

*Scripture:* candidates offered to read each of the following scripture passages related to the fourth and fifth commandments. Discussions occurred in the large group about the meaning of each passage, and how it relates to daily life.

Isaiah 46: 3-4—I will bear and carry you to safety

Acts 17:28—We are God’s offspring

Ephesians 6: 1-3—Obey your parents

Matthew 5:9—Blessed are the peacemakers

Psalms 139: 13-16—You knit me in my mother’s womb

Matthew 5:38-40—Do not return evil for evil

*Weekly faith lesson:* morality as it applies to commandments four and five (“honor your father and mother” and “you shall not kill”). Discussion questions were developed from the following subjects: Obeying parents, natural law, civil law, the family, forgiveness, letting your family know you love them, capital punishment, abortion, right to defend oneself, just war, euthanasia, suicide, right to die naturally, health, drugs, alcohol, smoking, gangs, murder, helping the poor, accepting people different than yourself, respecting all life, being a good friend and neighbor.

*Project or activity:* handout on respecting life (see Appendix XII).

Review of session and closing prayer: Catechists asked whether there are any additional questions concerning honoring one’s parents and family and respecting life. Closing prayer incorporated the scripture reading John 15: 9-12 (about loving one another as Jesus loves us).

### *SESSION 16: Weekend retreat with youth ministry*

The goal of this session was to experience a weekend retreat away from the parish with teens who were preparing for Confirmation from other schools.

*Communal prayer:* teens experienced different prayer forms at the retreat, such as Taizé prayer and music with Eucharistic adoration, quiet prayer, meditation, and a reconciliation prayer service with prayers of contrition, prayers of petition (supplication), and prayers of thanksgiving.

A variety of games, sports, and activities took place over the weekend. Taking a break from the stresses of school, competition in sports, peer pressure, and family struggles in a peaceful setting surrounded by nature allowed many teens to let go of anxieties and anger that interfere with healthy growth and development, especially in the emotional and spiritual areas of one's life.

*Scripture:* teens can: volunteer to be lectors at Mass and prayer services. Also, scripture passages were handed out for reflection as part of personal nightly prayer.

*Weekend faith lesson:* the theme of our retreat was "Give your heart to God," and all songs, homilies, prayer services, banners, tee-shirts and materials reflected the theme of turning one's body, mind, and soul over to God: a surrendering to God's will and ways.

*Project or activity:* the retreat was full of nature walks, hiking, outdoor games, and activities to help teens to enjoy their new experiences. Prayer was always included before meals.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* teens being catechized for any of the initiation sacraments discussed the retreat during their next session.

SESSION 17: Morality: respecting sexuality

The study of morality in the Catholic Church continued with the sixth and ninth commandments and related these commandments to present times.

*Communal prayer:* a sign-up sheet was now is used for teens to volunteer to lead the prayer using a prayer form of their choice and a song relating to the prayer. Catechists had back-up prayers and music for use when needed.

*Scripture:* John 8: 1-11 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 were read and discussed.

*Weekly faith lesson:* commandment six, “Do not commit adultery” and nine “Do not covet someone’s wife [or husband]”. Topics that were discussed included the nature of the human being as made in the image of God, respecting the dignity of the person, lust, fornication, feelings versus love, chastity, homosexuality, casual sex, sexually transmitted diseases, commitment, self-giving, marriage, divorce and annulment, in-vitro fertilization, pornography, and rape.

Candidates formed small groups with a catechist leader to discuss any questions.

Review of session and closing prayer: teens voiced what they have learned about the Church’s teaching that follows the way of Jesus. A candidate said the closing prayer from the heart and ended with the Lord’s prayer.

SESSION 18: Morality: respecting truth and material goods

The goal of this session was to complete the study of morality with commandments seven, eight and ten.

*Communal prayer:* Candidates took turns leading prayer.

Scripture: Ezekiel 13:7-16—Lying

Amos 8:4-10—Against greed and cheating

Exodus 22:1-14—Stealing and making restitution

Luke 3:10-14—What should we do?

*Weekly faith lesson:* commandments seven, eight, and ten are discussed, covering the following topics: envy, jealousy, embezzlement, plagiarism, pirating, confession, reparation, restitution, proper use of wealth, almsgiving, common good, stewardship, preferential option, slander, heresy, confidentiality, living the truth, impact of lying, gossip, and detraction.

*Project or activity:* teens were divided into three groups and were asked to defend the following arguments: Group I argued that copying music and DVDs to sell to others is not stealing and not wrong. Group II argued that it is stealing but justifiable since everyone else is doing it. Group III argued that it is stealing and morally wrong.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* highlights of discussions and prayer by a candidate.

### *Period of Purification and Enlightenment*

This is the time immediately preceding the elect's initiation, usually the Lenten season preceding the celebration of initiation at the Easter Vigil; it is a time of reflection, intensely centered on conversion, marked by celebration of the scrutinies and presentations and preparation for initiation rites on Holy Saturday: "This period is

intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior.”<sup>54</sup>

*SESSION 19: The Rites of Sending and Election for the catechumens; the Call to Continuing Conversion for candidates*

The goal of this session was to have candidates discern whether they were ready to move out of the period of the catechumenate and into the period of Purification and Enlightenment. If so, they would prepare themselves for and practice the Rite of Sending, Election or Call to Continuing Conversion.

The Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion take place at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, celebrated by the Archbishop; it is proper to celebrate the Rite of Sending at the parish.<sup>55</sup> Since Group I consisted of both catechumens and candidates, combining the rites was possible, but care was given to call the catechumens first for their rite of sending before calling the candidates. This eliminated any confusion between the baptized candidates and the unbaptized catechumens.

#### Discernment for the Rite

Discernment meetings were scheduled several weeks prior to the rite, preferably after school, for catechumens and candidates to meet individually with the director of initiation. See Appendix III for oral discernment questions. In addition, it is within the parish community that the catechumens and candidates are discerned for the initiation

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<sup>54</sup> *RCIA*. 77.

<sup>55</sup> See *RCIA*, par. 106

sacraments by their presence at Sunday Mass and volunteering in established ministries. Those present at Mass include the pastor, the director of initiation, the team of catechists, the sponsors, and the affirming assembly. After progressing through the period of the catechumenate, candidates who have heard the Word of God, received catechesis, participated in community service, shared a sense of belonging to a parish community of believers, and been formed spiritually develop and grow in their faith. They seek to live out their faith and receive their sacraments of initiation. See Appendix III.

#### Preparation for the Rite

Sponsors were contacted and asked to affirm their candidates by writing on an index card, and sharing with the assembly at the rite, why they believed their candidates were ready to receive their initiation sacraments. The following questions helped the sponsors and godparents write the affirming words:

- How have they taken the Gospel and the Catholic way of life seriously?
- Are they living out their faith?
- Are they ready to be presented to the cardinal for the Rite of Election?

Sponsors and godparents were asked to complete the majority of their writing before the actual practice for the rite, so they were able to ask any questions they had at the practice.

### Practice for the Rite

Practice for the Rite of Sending catechumens for the Rite of Election and candidates for the Call of Continuing Conversion took place prior to the Sunday Mass when the rite occurred. Sponsors and godparents attended the practice, not only for support and guidance, but to verbally affirm their candidates at this rite. Sponsors and godparents told the assembly why their candidate was ready to receive the initiation sacraments and were given support, if needed, in writing their affirmations. Sponsors lead candidates, during the rite, to the podium for signing the Book of the Elect.

It was also necessary to inform members of the community before Mass as to their involvement in listening to the sponsors testimony and to affirm the candidates, and to explain why we were celebrating the rite for these teens. Teens discussed the rite after dismissal from Mass.

### SESSION 20: The Apostles' Creed

The goal of this session was to become familiar with the meaning of both the Apostles' and the Nicene creeds.

*Communal prayer:* Prepared and lead by candidates.

*Scripture:* Hosea 11:1-4—A loving father

John 8:1-11—A forgiving Jesus

1 John 4:13-18—The savior of the world

Mark 15:1-47—Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and rose

### Romans 8:1-17—Life in the Spirit

*Weekly faith lesson:* each line of the Apostles' Creed was read and discussed.

Also, during the session, the teens started to discuss choosing their baptismal or confirmation names. Resources for baptismal names are *Books of the Saints*, *Who's Who in the Bible*, and internet searches.

*Project or activity:* three catechists were each given a sheet of paper containing the eleven sections of the Apostles' Creed. They then cut out each sentence or section of the creed. The eleven separate sections or sentences were mixed up so that each team of candidates received the creed out of order. Their project was to work together to put it back in its original order to show candidates the Trinitarian sequence of our faith.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* candidates reviewed the highlights of the day's discussions, and a candidate was responsible for the closing prayer.

#### *SESSION 21: First scrutiny: what am I really thirsting for?*

The goal of this session was to prepare the candidates for the first scrutiny. Teens prepared for each of the three scrutinies prior to Mass. The commentator defined scrutinies for the assembly and asked them to reflect on the question "What do you thirst for in your life?" to enrich their own Lenten journeys. The elect and candidates were seated in the pews next to the aisle, and the celebrant traveled to them, and asked each candidate the question. The assembly prayed over them that they would be free from whatever hinders them from receiving what they desired.

During this scrutiny, a scroll of the creed was given to the candidates before they were dismissed to discuss the scrutiny.

*Communal prayer:* this entire session was a form of reflective prayer, self-examination, and repentance in preparation for the first scrutiny. The opening prayer began the session and was followed by the music “My Soul Is Thirsting for You, Oh Lord” and ended with the song “Healing Waters”.

*Scripture:* The week’s Gospel is John 4: 1-42, the story of the women at the well. The Gospel during the session was read in three parts: Jesus, the woman, and a narrator.

*Weekly faith lesson:* After the Gospel reading, there was a set of questions the candidates needed to reflect on regarding priorities in their life and their relationship with God. Discussion involved water as necessary for life and what it means to thirst. Each candidate was asked, “What are your gifts, talents, and positive attributes that need to be strengthened? What hinders you from using your gifts? What stops you from living a fuller life in the freedom of God?” These three questions lead up to the final question: “What do you thirst for?” This question was asked of the elect, those who celebrated the Rite of Election. Elect and candidates shared their discussion questions with each other in groups of two.

*Closing prayer:* catechists prayed that the elect may have strength and courage to live their lives in freedom.

SESSION 22: Second scrutiny: discovering my blindness

The goal of this session was to prepare the elect and candidates for the second scrutiny and to discover the blindness in their life.

During this scrutiny, the candidates receive the candle they will bring to the Easter Vigil as a sign of their baptism. The Elect will light this candle after being baptized. The candle is large enough for sponsors or godparents to take home and decorate.

*Communal prayer:* this session was a reflective self-examination in preparation for the second scrutiny. Opening prayer was followed by the music “Open My Eyes” “Amazing Grace,” and closed with “Christ Be Our Light”. The Scripture is John 9:1-41, the story of the man born blind. Teens again read the Gospel in three parts: Jesus, the blind man, and the narrator. Blindfolds were used to cover the eyes of the candidates to enhance their feeling of being blind and help them answer the second scrutiny questions. In addition, in pairs teens carefully took turns leading each other around a flat surface to enhance the feeling of trust, need, lack of freedom, lack of direction, and the limitations that come from being blind.

The Meditative prayer and faith lesson: a guided meditative prayer experience on the blind man.<sup>56</sup> One catechist read the meditation so the elect and candidates put themselves in the place of the blind man. The remaining catechists acted out some parts that were read. The ability to see ourselves within the reality of what is going on around

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<sup>56</sup> Morris, *The RCIA*, 113. Although the author of the meditation is unknown and there are many variations, this resource works well with teens.

us comes with much responsibility. Many times, people do not want to see, because then they must deal with the situation. Being afraid, feeling that one does not have a voice that anyone will listen to, ignorance, and feelings of rejection may be reasons to remain in the dark about someone or a situation in one's life. The question that will be asked during the second scrutiny is, "What is the blindness in my life?" When the candidates desired to let go of their blindness, they took off the blindfolds.

A handout with the following questions was distributed: Do I ignore anyone or anything in my life that needs my attention? What are some examples of not seeing things honestly? Where do I experience darkness in my life? What obstacles block the light? Teens used their prayer journals to answer the lead-up questions. Teens also discussed the questions with another teen or with the catechist. They then wrote their answers on an index card to take with them to Mass, and also on their blindfolds. They left the blindfolds at the foot of the cross as part of the closing prayer.

*Closing prayer:* catechists prayed that the teens will receive true understanding and take on the responsibility, within their power, to overcome any darkness in their lives with the help of Christ.

### *SESSION 23: Third scrutiny: what is holding me back?*

The goal of this session was to prepare the elect and candidates for the third scrutiny, the raising of Lazarus.

Before Mass began, a catechist informed the assembly that the catechumens will be asked: “What binds you?” The catechist explained what spiritual bondage is and asks the assembly to consider answering the question themselves, for their own benefit. Before dismissal, candidates received a scroll of the Lord’s Prayer, and after dismissal, they were dismissed to discuss what participating in the scrutiny meant to them.

*Communal prayer:* this session was a reflective self-examination in preparation for the third scrutiny. Opening prayer began the session, followed by the music “You Raise Me Up” and ending with “The Lord Upholds My Life”. The Scripture: John 11:1-44, the story of the raising of Lazarus was read. Teens again read this Gospel in three parts: Jesus, Martha and Mary, and the narrator. Teens tied their feet together with cloth strips to convey the lack of freedom one has when bound by something; this helped them answer the third scrutiny questions.

*Weekly faith lesson:* question sheets and prayer journals were handed out by the catechist and included lead-up questions, “What disappointments, rejections, and broken dreams do I still think about?” (These can be experiences of dying.) Other questions might include, “What do I need to be free from so I can experience new life?” and “What stops me from living life to the fullest?”

*Closing prayer:* as one of the catechists prayed that the candidates experience God’s true freedom from whatever is holding them back from being their true selves, the other catechists untied the candidates feet, and the candidates wrote on the cloths the

things that bind them and left the cloths at the foot of the cross. Scrutinies were always discussed during dismissals.

*SESSION 24: Holy Week and the Easter Triduum*

The goal of this session was to prepare for holy week and the Easter triduum and Easter Vigil.

At Palm Sunday Mass, six teens were chosen by catechists to carry large palms into the church during the procession. This was the last Mass at which the candidates were dismissed before communion.

*Communal prayer:* The catechists lead prayer in church before discussions of Holy Week and practice for the Easter Vigil begin. Prayer included the Scripture readings from Matthew 21: 1-11 Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, and Matthew 26 and 27, the Passion and Death of Jesus, and was followed by prayerful discussions.

*Weekly faith lessons:* Holy Week and the Triduum were discussed. The schedule for retreats and rites was reviewed. Our parish had a showing of the *Passion of the Christ* on the Tuesday of Holy Week, and teen RCIA members were invited to attend. Teens also participated at Holy Thursday Mass and the foot washing ritual. Stations of the Cross on Good Friday and Eucharistic prayer services were attended as well preferably with their family and friends.

*Project or activity:* the elect, candidates, sponsors, godparents, and team together practiced for the Easter Vigil.

*Review of session and closing prayer:* candidates received a handout with information about and a timeline for the Easter Vigil. The elect and candidates were fitted for their robes.

SESSION 25: Holy Saturday morning retreat

*“The Elect are to be advised that on Holy Saturday they should refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast. When it is possible to bring the Elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer, some or all of the following rites may be celebrated as an immediate preparation for the sacraments: the presentation of the Lord’s Prayer, the recitation of the Creed, the Ephphetha Rite and the choosing of a baptismal name.”<sup>57</sup>*

A Holy Saturday morning retreat was planned by the team to focus the teens, in a spiritual way, on what they are about to do at the Easter Vigil. Candidates who were confirmed by the Bishop at a later date were invited to the retreat. They were also having a day of prayer before confirmation.

Since the pastor attended the retreat, the Sacrament of Reconciliation was offered for team members, sponsors, godparents, and candidates, both those who were to receive their Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time and those who already received it at least once.

The retreat finished with a lunch that was shared with the adults in RCIA and a prayer service that included the Lord’s Prayer, the recitation of the creed, and the Ephphetha Rite.

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<sup>57</sup> RCIA, 115.

### *Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation*

This is the liturgical rite, usually integrated into the Easter Vigil, by which the elect are initiated through baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist.<sup>58</sup> The Mass includes both adults and teens in RCIA, with the elect receiving all three initiation sacraments (baptism, confirmation and Eucharist). Candidates from other Christian denominations celebrate the Rite of Reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church, confirmation, and Eucharist; and baptized Catholics who previously were uncatechized will receive confirmation and Eucharist.

Team and family members of candidates volunteered to lector at the Easter Vigil.

Reception: a large reception took place after Mass for everyone who attended the Easter Vigil. At our reception, previous adult RCIA candidates supplied an assortment of foods, as did family members of the teens. A parish hospitality ministry planned this with as much parish support as possible.

### *Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy*

#### *SESSION 26: The fusion of mystagogy with youth ministry: youth ministry, evaluations, and celebrations*

The purpose of this session was to merge the teens in RCIA with youth ministry so they continued their spiritual formation by attending youth nights. Fully initiated teens were now invited to attend the Teen Mass every Sunday, but they celebrated and attended

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<sup>58</sup> RCIA, 14.

any Mass. They were encouraged to attend the Teen Mass since youth ministry gatherings were scheduled after this Mass.

*Communal prayer:* at this last meeting of RCIA for Teens, neophytes lead the prayers and took home their prayer journals and copies of the *Catholic Youth Bible*. They were asked to take time to read and pray the scriptures as often as possible. They were told that one way to remain open to God's communication with them is to pray verbally every day and read the scriptures.

Sharing of Easter Triduum Vigil: Teens shared their experiences of Holy Week and discussed the ways it affected them. Each of the special days of Holy Week was discussed and shared.

*Weekly faith lesson: Keeping Your Faith Alive!* A handout of ways to keep faith alive, was given to the teens. The handout includes a list of ministries that teens can become actively involved in. The youth minister can also visit the neophytes at the parish to talk about joining youth ministry.

*Activity:* the teens who received their sacraments at the Easter Vigil were called forward by name at Mass to receive their sacramental certificates.

*Closing prayer:* offered by everyone in the room, and refreshments were served prior to Mass.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **PROJECT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS**

#### **METHOD FOR EVALUATION**

During the last thirty years, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults has grown into a process that forms adults spiritually and gives neophytes and candidates the knowledge and experience to understand what it means to be a fully initiated Catholic Christian. Firmly grounded in history and theology and decreed to return to the universal church by the Second Vatican Council, RCIA is a vital and energizing model, not only to candidates involved in the process, but also to the entire community of many parishes throughout the United States and the world.

This project's goal is to determine whether the successful model used by an adult RCIA program can be adapted for uncatechized teens, who are coming to parishes in increasing numbers to complete all or some of their initiation sacraments. The project seeks to promote a more holistic approach to teen formation, so that teens who have very little experience with a church community can be nurtured and formed to know, love, and serve Christ in their daily lives.

The following are methods for evaluating the growth of each candidate towards faith, reason, and spirituality from the time of signing up for the inquiry process through the mystagogy period. The formation and spiritual growth of catechumens will be measured by observing their attendance and behavior at Mass, formation sessions, prayer services, retreats, and service projects, as well as their free commitment to a ministry at

the parish or in the community. The spiritual growth of neophytes and fully received teens will be evaluated by considering their attendance at “Teen Nights” through the Youth Ministry of the parish. These sessions will become part of their post-baptismal catechesis, along with Mass attendance. Also, the quality, value, and effectiveness of the process will be determined by the following:

- Did the teen stay and complete the process?
- Did the teen trust the catechists and the community?
- Did the teen share his or her thoughts and feelings freely?
- Did the teen ask questions and participate in activities?
- Did the teen’s knowledge of the faith increase?
- Did the teen deepen his or her spiritual life by prayer and by attending Mass and retreats?
- Did the teen desire to learn more and serve others?

The success of any educational and ministerial endeavor is not limited solely to the implementation of a “perfect” process. Therefore, this project remains open to continuing feedback and adjustments. This project does meet the goal of producing data and verified results of an effective, successful, and sustainable catechetical process that can be used by other parishes facing the same or similar circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Wendy L. Combs, *The Targeted Evaluation Process*, 111-130.

## EVALUATION TOOLS

Information is gathered from periodic surveys and attendance records and by observing participation at Mass, sessions, retreats, service days, rites, and optional activities such as parish missions, youth congress, and volunteer ministries. The evaluation instruments used in the project require that inquirers and candidates:

- Complete a pre-formation questionnaire to assess their existing knowledge and understanding of the faith and their expectations of the process (Appendix I).
- Complete an oral discernment interview before the Rite of Acceptance to determine their readiness to continue the process (Appendix II).
- Attend an oral discernment interview before the Rite of Sending to discern their readiness for the initiation sacraments (see Appendix III).
- Complete a self-evaluative survey on the beliefs of the Catholic Christian faith to discern their knowledge of the faith (see Appendix IV).
- Share their feelings after all rites to help catechists determine their spiritual growth.
- Complete a post-formation survey for evaluation of the process (see Appendix V).

The pastor also should complete an evaluative questionnaire to help catechists determine the value of the process in preparing candidates for the initiation sacraments (see Appendix VI).

## ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

A simple, informal, informational survey was conducted in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, by e-mail and postal mail, to determine whether parishes have an RCIA initiation process for teens and, if they do not, to determine what process they use for unbaptized or uncatechized teens (see Appendix IX). One hundred parishes responded.

The survey questions and results are as follows:

1. Do you ever have teens inquire into the Catholic faith to be baptized?  
88 percent of parishes responded yes.
2. Do you see an increase in teens needing baptism and/or Eucharist as they apply for confirmation classes? 51 percent of parishes responded yes, 21 percent responded that they had seen a decrease, and 28 percent responded that the numbers remain the same each year.
3. Do you have teens inquiring into the Catholic faith from other Christian denominations? 35 percent responded yes.
4. Fifty-four percent of parishes place uncatechized and unbaptized teens in a regular confirmation process with baptized and catechized teens. 24 percent of parishes place uncatechized and unbaptized teens with younger children in religious education classes. Thirteen percent of parishes place uncatechized and unbaptized teens in a teen RCIA, and 9 percent of parishes do not accept uncatechized teens into any process, instead they are told to return when they are eighteen years old to join adult RCIA.

5. Forty-five percent of parishes have an active youth ministry, 45 percent do not have a youth ministry, and 10 percent are planning a youth ministry.
6. Seventy-two percent of parishes responding to the survey would like to have a model process for teen RCIA.

Please see Appendix IX for the survey questions.

### *Analysis of the Pre-Formation Questionnaire*<sup>60</sup>

It is always of interest to a catechetical or initiation leader to find out how candidates learn about the teen RCIA process; this information can help catechists with future outreach and invitations. Most teens in our Teen RCIA process are well aware that some friends and family members received their sacraments through the infant baptism process. Although all possible means of promotion are needed to reach families in and around the parish for sacramental preparation, the following information indicates which means are the most effective. Teens found out they could receive their initiation sacraments at the parish by these means:

- Question 1: How did you hear about the RCIA for Teens?

Through a parent, overwhelmingly the mother, who might have suggested and encouraged the teen to attend the process. Through another family member (e.g., aunt, grandmother, or father) relatives might encourage a teen to sign up when cousins or younger siblings sign up for religious education classes in grades one to eight. Through

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<sup>60</sup> See Appendix I.

friends, including those signed up for either the regular confirmation process or Teen RCIA.

Through a letter from the parish: information from the parish database is gathered about baptized infants and children who never enrolled in religious education programs at the parish. Letters of invitation for Teen RCIA were sent to those families. (Letters of invitation for the regular confirmation process were not sent to these families, since the candidates could not qualify: two years of religious education classes at the junior high level are required to qualify for confirmation classes.) Letters were also sent to families who registered in the parish and marked on the registration form that teens in the family had not received any or all of their initiation sacraments.

Through the Sunday bulletin, parish website, or Mass announcements: notices advertising Teen RCIA were placed in the Sunday bulletin towards the end of summer and through September. An ongoing article about the process for teens and adults appeared on the parish website.

By calling the parish office for information on Teen RCIA, inquirers frequently call parishes that they have visited or that are suggested by family or friends.

The following questions are included to help catechists better know their audience before the initiation process begins.

- Question 2: Is your family Catholic?

This question is asked primarily for those who are not baptized and who may not have been exposed to any knowledge or understanding of the Christian faith. In addition,

baptized Christians from other denominations may not have any family members who are Catholic; more catechesis may be needed on Catholic tradition in these cases. Out of twenty who completed the questionnaire, the responses were as follows:

One young man came from a Methodist tradition, but his family was no longer practicing any faith. He was baptized, had attended Catholic youth ministry with a friend, and wanted to become Catholic. His parents said that if that is what he wanted to do, it was all right with them.

One young man came from a home where the father was a non-practicing Catholic and the mother had no faith tradition. His parents were married in the Catholic Church, and his mother enrolled in adult RCIA to inquire into the faith. He was not baptized.

One young woman came from a single-parent home, where she lived with her dad, who is returning to the Catholic faith. She was not baptized.

One young woman came from a two-parent home with no faith tradition. She was not baptized. She said she regularly stays at a friend's house on weekends and attends Mass on Sundays with the friend.

- Question 3: What do you expect from the RCIA?

This question can aid catechists at the start of the process, allowing them to use these expectations to get the candidates excited about growing in the faith. Many candidate responses are similar:

To learn about God; To get closer to God; For guidance in living the faith; To enlighten my faith; To teach me about the Catholic religion; To receive the sacraments; To help me become a better person; I do not know; I do not expect anything.

- Question 4: Do you believe in God?

All teens surveyed, including the unbaptized, stated that they believed in God, except for two baptized candidates. When the unbaptized were questioned about their belief in God, they responded that their faith was due mainly to a friend or relative whom they admire and who inspired them to believe.

- Question 5: Do you pray? And if so, how often?

The majority of applicants responded yes, they did pray, with only three candidates responding that they did not pray. It is interesting to note that of the two who indicated they did not believe in God, all said they prayed.

In response to the second half of the question, candidates gave a variety of responses, including: everyday; at night; whenever I feel the need; when in church on Sunday; every other day; three times a day; a lot.

These responses can indicate a relationship with God, depending on whether the teens are praying because they are required to by a parent or because of a need or desire. Many believe prayers are all formal and memorized, like the Lord's Prayer. There is a need to develop the candidates' prayer lives and use of different prayer forms.

- Question 6: Who is Jesus Christ to you? The following answers were given: God's son; A person who saved people from their sins or the savior; A person to talk to;

My creator and the Lord; Our Father; Someone who is always watching; A famous person; A regular person I can talk to about my problems; A person who will come and take our soul; Someone I read about; A myth.

- Question 7: Did you ever attend religious education classes or Sunday School?

All but four candidates responded yes, they had attended some kind of religious education process or Sunday School prior to attending RCIA. These classes might include either early childhood classes or sacramental preparation for those who have received their First Holy Communion, yet never returned to religious education classes after the second grade.

- Question 8: What sacraments have you received?

Candidates ranged from needing all three initiation sacraments (baptism, confirmation and Eucharist) to needing confirmation and Eucharist only, to needing only confirmation. But the latter candidates in our group were not qualified to attend regular confirmation classes due to a lack of religious education since early elementary school.

The breakdown of the two classes was as follows: Group one consisted of three inquirers for baptism and seven candidates for confirmation and Eucharist. All participants in this class were uncatechized and had no formal religious education. Group two consisted of ten candidates for confirmation. None of the candidates returned to religious education classes after receiving their First Communion in the second grade. One candidate stated that he did not remember being in classes but remembered receiving his First Communion. Five out of the ten candidates stated that they had never received

communion or the Sacrament of Reconciliation again after receiving their First Communion.

- Question 9: Why do you want to complete your initiation sacraments?

The answers to this question showed that most needed a clear understanding of the sacraments: I do not really know the purpose; To have a better life; So I can be married in the Catholic Church; To be closer to the church; To be a true Catholic; To further myself in the faith; To have more and better faith in God; To increase my relationship with God; So I can get into heaven; To confirm my religion; Because Jesus wants me to; Mom says so and I have the time; Because I want to; I just do; and two blank answers.

- Question 10: Do you attend Mass? If yes, how often?

Most teens had started attending Mass after signing up for the process, but their answers to the question varied:

- Attending every Sunday: three candidates
- Once or twice a month: four candidates
- Only since registering for RCIA: eight candidates
- Never: five candidates

In RCIA, the candidates would learn about different parts of the Mass and how they can participate each time they attend. They would also attend Mass every Sunday throughout the process.

*Analysis of the Discernment Interview Before the Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming*<sup>61</sup>

The prerequisite for participating in the Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming is evidence of first faith developed during the period of inquiry through evangelization and catechesis. In addition, an initial conversion and intention to change one's life and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ must be discerned and observed. There must also be the first stirrings of repentance and the beginnings of a habit of calling upon God in prayer, as well as a sense of Church and some experience of members of the community.<sup>62</sup>

- Question 1 asks whether the candidate thinks that his or her faith in God has grown since committing to attending RCIA and Mass. The overwhelming majority responded yes, their faith had grown; some stated that their faith was the same as when they started, and some said that their faith had grown a little. All recognized that they have faith in God.

- Question 2 also relates to the growth of faith: Since attending RCIA, how are you different in your thoughts or actions because of your faith? The following replies were noted: I attend Mass more often; Before attending RCIA I had little faith, I now have a little more; I am starting to wonder how I can help people; I am more patient and understanding; I try not to use God's name in vain; My faith influences my morals, which influence my actions and thoughts; I am more responsible; I pray a lot more; I try to be

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<sup>61</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>62</sup> See Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*, no. 14.

reasonable and listen; I am more open and I am not embarrassed to pray; I think before I act; I realize much faster my wrongdoings; and There is no difference.

- Question 3: Do you want to become a fully initiated Catholic Christian and continue with the RCIA process? Most candidates responded that they wanted to become fully initiated Catholic Christians and continue with the RCIA process. Some stated that they wanted to continue with the process, and they are still deciding if they want to be fully initiated.

- Question 4: Is anyone forcing you to become a Catholic Christian? Everyone responded no except for three. Their responses were: Kind of, the family; I used to think so but no; and Yes.

One person stated that she still felt forced by her parents, though she enjoys Mass, prays, and participates. She may need autonomy in faith, so that she does not feel pressured to do something when she desires to accept the faith on her own.

- Question 5: Who is Jesus Christ to you now? The following answers were noted: He is God, before I just thought he was just his son and not both; He is our Father and creator; A very special person, someone who loves me; A friend, someone you can talk to; The Savior, God's son, God; My creator; He is a leader, a positive figure; A person who I pray to; A person who loves us all in our own way.

These responses show that there has been some development in knowledge and understanding of Jesus by the candidates. The topic of the Trinity was introduced before

the Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming, and a beginning knowledge and understanding that Jesus is God, and more than just a nice person, has been established.

- Question 6: How do you feel about attending weekly Mass?

Since the majority of the class did not previously attend Mass on a regular basis, it was important to know what they thought of Mass after attending consistently for more than two months. The following answers were noted: I feel good when I attend Mass; It's OK, not bad; I love it; To me it seems like a different perspective on life; I feel great; An hour well spent; I feel that it's necessary, that I should go; It depends on my mood; I now feel okay with going weekly; It's fun; I feel pleasure and it makes me feel gentle.

- Question 7: What do you like most about Mass? The following answers were noted: Seeing everyone attend; I like the band, especially the drums; The Eucharist; I like that everyone is involved; Listening to the music after communion; It helps me to become closer to God; Dismissal; The music and the environment; I like when the priest explains everything about the Gospel; I like all the songs; Singing; I find it a little boring; It's okay; I love it; Venerating the body of Christ; Praying together; When we pray for forgiveness; That we hear the Word of the Lord; How enthusiastic all the people are; Learning about God; It helps clear my mind.

After reviewing the list above, it is clear that most are having a very good experience of Mass.

• Question 8: Do you pray, and if so, how often? (These questions are repeated to see if there is any growth in prayer habits from the start of the process.) Eighteen of the teens responded yes, with the following answers to the second part of the question:

- Every night or every day: ten
- A few times during the week: four
- Sometimes, or starting to pray more: four
- Do not pray: two

Those who said that they did not pray were verbally asked if they ever prayed in church. Both responded no. Then they were asked, “Do you listen to the priest recite his prayers, and do you say ‘Amen’ to the responses?” Both responded yes. In addition, both said they participated in praying for friends and family during prayers of petition in class. It seems clear from this that more knowledge about prayer is needed, beginning with the Liturgy of the Word, the Mass responses, petitions, praying the scriptures, and talking to God, especially for those who are not in the habit of prayer.

- Question 9: What is the best way for you to pray?

The following responses were given by the eighteen candidates who said they prayed: Before I go to sleep: five; Whenever I need to: one; At church: three; Alone: six; On my knees: one; Through conversation: one; While holding a cross: one. These are personal ways of praying. Most stated that they needed to be alone with God to pray, and most said they prayed before going to sleep. Praying together in class was slowly developing.

• Question 10: Do you live your faith out in your home, at school, at work, playing sports, while driving, and at parties, to name a few? The candidates were starting to realize that one lives out faith in all aspects of life, not only at Mass or during class time or when alone praying.

- Fifteen candidates said yes, they live out their faith outside of church.
- Four stated that they were slowly, sometimes, or a little learning to live out their faith outside of church.
- One candidate did not really live out the faith outside of church.

*Analysis of Oral Discernment Questions Before the Rites of Sending and Election or the Rite of Sending and Call to Continuing Conversion*<sup>63</sup>

These questions are important to answer before election, since some candidates may need to take another year of classes if they are uncertain of their faith and commitment to the Catholic Christian faith.

• Everyone answered that they believed in God and that God was important to them.

To the question, “Who is Jesus Christ to you?” the following answers were given:

• The savior; Protector; Someone I can turn to when I need to talk; My best friend; Someone to look to for guidance and support through prayer; A person who cares about me; The Son of God; A role model; Someone you can follow for right living; Sacrificed for us on the cross; Someone who forgives our sins; Someone who wants to be

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<sup>63</sup> See Appendix III.

with us here on Earth and in Heaven; Like a Father; Jesus is God in the flesh both human and divine; Saves you from being lost; Someone who helps us have a good life.

These answers are more developed than those the candidates gave when they first entered the process.

The next question related to the Holy Spirit, who is not easy to describe. Most everyone has a father figure, so candidates can relate to God the father. Jesus is God in the flesh, a human being, so it is easier for people to relate to a human person on earth and so to relate to Jesus. To understand God the Holy Spirit takes time and patience in recognizing how God acts and communicates in one's life. After going to Mass and praying for many months, the candidates made the following remarks in answer to the question "Have you ever felt God's presence in the Holy Spirit?"

- The Holy Spirit is like feeling God's presence all around you; A feeling that everything was going to be all right; A feeling that you are protected no matter what happens; Feeling that God is inside you; Getting goose bumps when you hear the words of the music at Mass; When I feel one with God and one with people I am close to; I have not felt the Holy Spirit as yet but I am open to whatever God wants to give me; I felt the good inside me; I had a overwhelming feeling that God would heal my uncle and God did; I felt the strength of God playing baseball; A great, happy feeling inside; I feel God powerfully when I pray; I feel the Spirit of God when I am with my grandmother, and during Mass.

It is notable that four candidates had not experienced God the Holy Spirit in their lives, but all were open to God and open to being led by God.

The next question, “Why do you want to be a Catholic Christian and receive your sacraments?” was asked to help catechists determine whether the candidates were receiving their initiation sacraments because it was an autonomous decision or because it was the choice of their parents or grandparents. The following answers were noted:

I always wanted to receive my sacraments; I always asked my dad to take me to church and he finally signed me up; I want to get closer to God and I am now closer than I ever have been; I want the experience of the ritual and God’s grace to help me stay connected to God and everyone; So I can complete my initiation sacraments and increase my faith; To be closer to God my entire life and to be married in the church; To be part of the church and to go to heaven; I think God likes what I’m doing now; I want to make God, myself and my parents proud; Because God wants me to; To be a part of the church family here on Earth and one day in heaven; I want to receive Eucharist with my mom; Because I believe in God; I believe it is important for my lifestyle; Jesus did so much for us and I want to thank God in this way; So God can be more a part of me; So God can keep teaching me the rest of my life.

I did not discern that anyone was receiving the initiation sacraments for the wrong reasons or being forced into receiving them. I also noticed that where there had been reluctance in the beginning to attend Mass every Sunday, at this point everyone stated that they enjoyed Mass and planned to attend for the rest of their lives.

There was a steady progression in the prayer lives of the candidates. Everyone developed a habit of praying every night, usually before falling asleep, and some prayed throughout the day. The most common prayer form was conversations with God or Jesus about what was going on in candidates' lives, as well as petitions and prayers of thanksgiving for family, friends, or acquaintances.

In the RCIA process, the scriptures were used often for knowledge and understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Candidates became very familiar with scripture stories and related them to their own faith journeys. The candidates were all open to reading the Bible at home. All but one said they had never read the Bible before coming to RCIA. All said they would continue reading scripture, especially during summer break.

The candidates went on service outings during RCIA, and everyone enjoyed helping other people. The question "How do you help others in your life?" was asked to see whether candidates had the opportunity to keep helping others, especially after receiving their initiation sacraments. The following remarks were noted:

- I help my neighbor who had surgery; I help little kids in sports; I give good advice to my friends and help my family whenever they need anything; I like feeding the poor on Mondays and will keep that up; I give money sometimes to people that ask; I help others by just listening to them; I like cooking for the poor; I help others with their homework, I tutor them, I coach a summer camp in baseball; I volunteer at Catholic Worker; I babysit and make donations of clothes and money to the poor; When people

seem down I like to go over and talk to them and make them feel better; I ask my parents if they need any help, I help my friends with their chores as well as doing mine; I watch and protect my little brothers and sisters; Just being there for people and helping my mom with anything she needs; Simple things like holding the door for someone, smiling at someone, saving money to donate to the church; I try just doing acts of kindness every day. Everyone liked to help cook for the poor and serve the food to the poor. I think the candidates will always remember those experiences.

All candidates said they planned on going to college, whether a two-year or four-year university or a technical school, except two, who wanted to join the military. Candidates were encouraged to continue to take religion or spirituality courses in college.

Everyone said they believed in what the Catholic Church teaches. Some had questions about the following issues: abortion in the case of rape, evolution, the crusades, and cloning. There were opportunities for discussions on these topics at neophyte meetings.

There was full family support for the candidates receiving their initiation sacraments, and many candidates brought family members back to the church because of the candidate's excitement and involvement in the process. All the candidates said they would continue to attend Mass, pray, and keep their faith growing by helping others.

*Analysis of the Questions on the Belief in the Creed of the Catholic Christian Faith*<sup>64</sup>

The entire class of twenty was given a questionnaire on elements of the creed after the second class to determine their knowledge of and faith in God. They were to rate their belief in the order of firm belief, good belief, some belief, and not sure. The same questionnaire was given to the candidates before the first scrutiny. The results were as follows:

- For those four candidates who started the process with a strong faith in the Trinity based on the initial survey, the comparison is now the same. They believe firmly or have a good belief in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- For those sixteen who came in with a weak faith or who were not certain of the Trinity, there was a large difference in belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All sixteen candidates grew in their faith, according to the questionnaire. Some did not remember taking the questionnaire the first time. All gained a stronger belief in Jesus, and who Jesus is in their lives. In addition, all gained a stronger belief in God the Father, the Holy Spirit, the Ten Commandments, and the power of prayer.

Some struggled with the following concerns:

- Belief that I must love everyone, especially “the least of my brothers and sisters” in my life. This particular issue was a challenge to six of the candidates. When questioned about it, they all gave similar reasons for their lack of belief. Most felt that they were being asked to love those who acted morally wrong and especially those who had personally hurt them. They had little belief that they could love someone like that.

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<sup>64</sup> See Appendix IV.

They all knew that Jesus loves everyone and forgives everyone; however, the six who found this belief challenging were still struggling with forgiving people who had hurt them. They seemed to be open to thinking about forgiving these people, but not ever trusting them. Some candidates used the discussion of these questions as answers to their scrutiny questions, especially the third one: “What binds you in your life?”

- Also related to the question above, the same six candidates struggled with the question “I believe that each person is God’s child and my brother or sister” for the same reasons.

- The entire class had at least a good to firm belief in the teachings of the Catholic church which was a significant difference for five candidates who did not know if they even wanted to become Catholic. They mainly stated that they had heard negative comments about the Catholic Church from friends and even family. All five stated that they enjoyed Mass and learning about God and look forward to receiving their initiation sacraments. They also agreed that they were glad they signed up, because their ideas about the Catholic Church were negative and very different from reality. They found the church to be welcoming and fun to attend, both the classes and Mass.

- The candidates showing the most improvement were the two who did not believe in God upon entering the process. At this point they are very open to learning about God, and the reason they gave for not believing was that they did not know about God at all and had not realized any personal experiences with God until attending Teen RCIA.

• The one baptized candidate who had thought Jesus was a myth showed excellent improvement. Before participating in the process, she had a slight belief in a higher being and believed strongly that she should love her family. This candidate initially had little knowledge of Jesus as a man, had never heard of the Ten Commandments, and did not like the Catholic Church. When the first questionnaire was taken, the candidate answered that she was not sure or had little belief throughout the questionnaire. However, when the candidate took the questionnaire the second time, she responded with “firm” and “good” beliefs throughout the survey. Many times uncatechized candidates need to be evangelized, and their questions need to be addressed so they can process the answers and begin to have an experience of God. This can be accomplished through having a prayer life, going to Mass, having knowledge and understanding of the materials discussed in class, listening to the faith journeys of other teens in class, experiencing the reverence, love and spirituality of people in the community, and serving the poor—just to mention a few. When this candidate, initially an unbeliever, received the initiation sacraments, she was extremely happy and grateful to be accepted into the church community and to have faith, hope, and love in God. This experience might have been missed if she had not been accepted into a sacramental process at a parish.

*Analysis of Post-Formation/Mystagogy Questionnaire*<sup>65</sup>

A final questionnaire is given for the benefit of neophytes and for the improvement of future classes. Comments are as follows:

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<sup>65</sup> See Appendix V.

- Regarding the overall experience of the Teen RCIA, teens described the process in the following ways: Enjoyable; Nice; Glad I did it; It really opened my eyes to the problems I have and the mistakes I made. I also know that I am not alone in this world; I loved RCIA, it was a rewarding experience; It was very good; I had a 100% fun time; It was really great; It freed me to get closer to God.

- In response to the question “What was most enjoyable?” teens listed the following things: Learning more about God with everyone close to my own age; Retreats and being with the whole class; Receiving my sacraments; Becoming closer to God; Having fun with everyone; Going to church with my classmates; Everything; The prayer services, scrutinies and the Confirmation; Learning from our catechists; Going into detail with the Bible; The people in class and in the church; Being with my friends.

- In response to the question “What was most challenging?” teens said: Not being able to do the rebelling I did before this journey; Having to make all the meetings; Nothing was challenging; Answering questions and sharing out loud; Going to Mass every Sunday but now I like it.

- In response to the question “What does being fully initiated into the Catholic Church mean to you?” the teens said: That I am closer to God; That I am part of God; I feel committed to God’s will; I want to follow Jesus; Feeling the good Spirit and feeling good about myself; I am accepted into God’s community; It means to feel one with God; It means the most to me; It means to be more open to everyone; That I am part of something bigger than myself; Having the power to heal people through your prayers and

living as Jesus wants you to live, like him; I have a stronger belief and faith and I am not afraid anymore.

- The next question, “How do you feel about attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist?” earned the following responses: I want to go to Mass every Sunday and I feel forgiven when I receive the Eucharist; I know that God is part of all life and will be part of my life forever. I love the Eucharist because it makes me feel a part of God and a part of the larger family; I will continue to go to Mass forever and receiving Eucharist gives me strength; It all feels good and warm; Going to Mass is okay except during playoffs and every time I go to Mass I will receive communion, I don’t feel left out any more; Mass gives me peace and Eucharist feels rewarding and it fills me up spiritually; I did not like to go to Mass before coming to RCIA but now it feels right and I feel one with all the people. We all take the same body and blood and we are all like Jesus; It feels necessary to fulfill God’s will and give God thanksgiving. Receiving Eucharist feels like Jesus really did give it up for me; I feel complete when I go to Mass and receive Eucharist; It refreshes me; I feel like a good person when I go and not a bad person; It feels good that I now want to go and I am not made to go; I feel holy when I go to Mass and receive Eucharist.

- Regarding how the neophytes will continue to grow in their faith, they responded: I will go to church on Sundays and on special occasions; I will invite my family and friends to go with me to Mass; I will pray more; I will help and support others more; I will be open to where God leads me; I will walk in God’s way; I will live a

Christ-like life; I will try to obey the commandments; I will pray and care for others; Attend morning Mass and help my family in their path to faith.

- Regarding the catechists, the neophytes thought: They were knowledgeable about the faith; Enthusiastic; Organized; Prepared meetings well; Gave candidates enough time to express themselves; Were available outside of class; Were patient and understanding; Ran a fun meeting.

- In response to a question about the meeting time, everyone agreed that the meeting time was good. The meetings were on Sundays before Mass and ended with attending the evening Teen Mass with Christian rock music.

- In response to a question about what neophytes would add to the meetings, most said the meetings were great and they would not add anything else; a few had ideas, such as: More activities would be fun; More food and more group discussions.

- Everyone said they would recommend RCIA to a family member or friend  
They found RCIA to be most helpful in the following ways: In answering my questions; In learning about God; In learning how to make good decisions; It put the pieces together for me instead of having a whole lot of different thoughts about Jesus; Made me realize how much Jesus loves me and everyone; Opened my eyes to believe in God for the rest of my life; Helped my faith grow; It was a place I needed to be at to gain strength and courage; In helping me understand my faith and who I am; I made friends that are now close and we see each other at school and it feels like family.

*Analysis of Pastor's Evaluation*<sup>66</sup>

The pastor of the parish was in full support of a Teen RCIA. He commented, after the Easter Vigil, that, “the greatest strength of this process is helping adolescents to be capable of and comfortable with expressing the deepest spiritual longings of their young hearts.” He felt that the most challenging aspect of the process was the breaking down of preconceived notions so that candidates realize that they are coming to a program of real, profound faith formation and not just sacramental, “let’s get this over with” preparation. He commented that there has been much spiritual growth in the candidates, especially evidenced by their own comments during the rites and scrutinies during Mass. He thought that the teens would fit in well in feeding the homeless through Catholic Worker and also in doing peer ministry in the “Edge,” a junior high sacramental preparation program. There is also an active youth ministry program at the parish. The pastor also commented that he thought the catechists were accessible and managed to maintain a mentoring relationship with the youth.

Recommendations from the pastor were to continue updating the process to match the teens’ culture and social climate. His overall impression was that the process is long overdue, that it has been necessary for some time to give these teens something more than a perfunctory preparation program and to offer them some solid faith formation. He thought that it was necessary to separate the catechized from the uncatechized and that this “customized” process honored and respected the needs of uncatechized teens.

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<sup>66</sup> See Appendix VI.

## ONGOING CONSIDERATIONS

If a parish offers, a teen RCIA process for the uncatechized, parents will register and the teens will come. Teens who may have never considered the Catholic Christian faith and those who feel rejected by a process that has not met their needs can now come and feel welcomed by a community that will love them into the faith. As a result of designing and implementing such a process, our one parish attracted teens from five different cities and from over six different parishes. It would be advisable to offer this process for a cluster of parishes and have representatives from each parish assist as best they can. This would help smaller parishes that may have only a few candidates.

In addition, each group of candidates will be different as far as their level of faith, their knowledge of the faith and whether they are living out their faith. Catechists need to be flexible enough with the process to adjust to the people they are catechizing. Also, in each diocese, the Bishop may have regulations on the amount of time a candidate must spend in the process before receiving the sacraments. These regulations would determine whether a parish would have a one-year or a two-year process.

Keeping catechists trained and up to date on the latest media and technology requires a minimum of yearly training and continuing education classes, and parishes should also provide for the catechists' own spiritual growth by offering them retreats, spiritual direction, and catechetical workshops in their area

## CONCLUSION

Many centuries ago when Mary gave birth to Jesus, both poor Hebrew shepherds and rich gentile wise men greeted him. Anyone who would be receptive to listening to the inner stirrings of the heart and follow a call from God could find Jesus. As Jesus walked the earth, he began his ministry by discernment of God's will and received baptism. He called common fishermen, craftsmen, women, and a despised tax collector as his disciples. He went about proclaiming the reign of God by word and deed. Those words and deeds were healing, comforting, compassionate, forgiving and loving to everyone who would accept them, trusting in the truth of God.

Over two thousand years later people from all occupations, all ages, and all nationalities continue to feel the inner stirrings of a call to follow God. Divinely loved and chosen by God, ordinary men and women follow this call to do extraordinary service for God and each other. By our own baptism, we share an awesome responsibility for continuing the mission of Jesus Christ to everyone, everywhere. United in the love of Christ, our baptism incorporates us into the body of Christ. Faith communities around the world nourish God's people in Word and Sacrament and they are sent from Mass into daily life to be an image of Christ to others. The people of God live out this mission of Christ at home, at work, in the community, and wherever they feel called by God. Members of parishes learn to enable and support the gifts given to each person by the Holy Spirit. Evangelizing the unchurched, unbaptized, and uncatechized is one mission that every parish community encounters. Since the second Vatican council, the Rite of

Christian Initiation for Adults has thrived in parishes across the United States. Yet according to information obtained from a poll conducted in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 2008, there is still a need for an establishment of the RCIA for adolescents. Teens are coming to parishes in increased numbers to receive the initiation sacraments. A parish can use the human resources already established in other ministries to form a Teen RCIA. Catechists experienced with adult RCIA as team members or sponsors coupled with catechists experienced in youth ministry or confirmation can join on teams together to develop the religious education and spiritual formation for a teen RCIA.

This project's goal is to determine whether the successful model used by an adult RCIA program can be adapted for uncatechized teens. From this teen process the answer is yes. Teens who did not know anything about the Catholic faith and those who knew little can now articulate a faith that grew from attending Mass, learning to pray to God who loves, forgives and heals. Teens learned from each other in class and were formed by the larger celebrating community. Many families were brought back into the church because of the excitement of the teen receiving their sacraments.

It is a personal belief and now a demonstrated knowledge of this author of the project that if more parishes would establish this kind of RCIA and not place uncatechized teens in Confirmation programs with the catechized, then more teens might stay with the faith of their family. More teens will be able to articulate the faith they practice and more teens will grow into adulthood with the benefits of a faith that can carry them through rough times and circumstances.

I feel that if it is the mission of the church to bring Jesus Christ to light in people of all ages, races, and nationalities then through a process as describe in this project, parishes would be assisted in completing their mission.

**APPENDIX I**

**PRE-SESSION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions:

1. How did you hear about the RCIA for Teens? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Is your family Catholic? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, who introduced you to the Catholic faith? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What do you expect from the RCIA? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you believe in God? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you pray? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Who is Jesus to you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Did you ever attend Religious Education classes or Sunday school? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What Sacraments have you received:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation-confession, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage)

9. Why do you want to complete your initiation sacraments? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you attend Mass? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

\* If you need additional space for any of your answers, please write on the reverse side.

**APPENDIX II**

**RITE OF ACCEPTANCE OR RITE OF WELCOMING DISCERNMENT INTERVIEW**

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Has your faith in God grown since you started the RCIA? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Give some examples of how you are different in your thoughts or actions because of your faith? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you want to become a fully initiated Catholic Christian and continue with the RCIA process? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is anyone forcing you to become a Catholic Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who is Jesus Christ to you now? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. How do you feel about attending weekly Mass? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What do you like most about the Mass? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you pray? \_\_\_\_\_ How often? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is the best way for you to pray to God? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Are you starting to realize that being a Catholic Christian means you live your faith every day at school, work, home, playing sports, driving, at parties?  
\_\_\_\_\_

\* If you need additional space for any of your answers, please write on the reverse side.

### APPENDIX III

#### ORAL DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS BEFORE THE RITES OF SENDING AND ELECTION OR THE RITE OF SENDING AND CALL TO CONTINUING CONVERSION

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is God important to you in your daily life?
2. Who is Jesus Christ to you?
3. How do you experience the presence of God's Holy Spirit in your life?
4. What is the main reason you want to become a fully initiated Catholic Christian and receive your sacraments?
5. What do you enjoy most about Mass?
6. What is your favorite way to pray?                      How often do you pray?
7. Do you ever read the Bible at home?
8. In what ways are you available to help others in your life?
9. Is there a ministry your thinking about joining at this time?
10. As far as your current knowledge of the Catholic Church do you have any questions about any of the beliefs of the church?
11. How does your family feel about you becoming fully initiated into the Catholic Church?
12. How will you continue growing in your faith after you receive your sacraments?
13. If you ask someone to marry you someday, will you get married in the Catholic faith?
14. Have you ever thought about becoming a priest or a religious sister or brother?
15. Do you have any questions you would like to ask at this time?

## APPENDIX IV

### BELIEF IN THE CREED OF THE CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN FAITH

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Review the statements below and rate yourself on the major beliefs of Christian teaching. There are no right or wrong answers. This will let me know what you believe at this time in your life. Use the scale below:

1 – firm belief 2 - good belief 3 – some belief 4 – not sure

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in God the Father, Creator of all that is seen and unseen.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that Jesus Christ is God and human.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that Jesus died and rose again.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe Jesus is my friend.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in the power of the Holy Spirit.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in the Ten Commandments.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that each person is God's child and my brother or sister.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that I must love everyone, especially "the least of my brothers and sisters" in my life.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in the power of the initiation sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in the Trinity, three persons in one God.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in the power of prayer.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that the Lord will judge me at the end of time.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that I should love God and love my neighbor as myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe in the Catholic Church.

\_\_\_\_\_ I believe that I am destined for an eternal life of glory with Jesus the Lord.

## APPENDIX V

### POST-FORMATION / EASTER VIGIL QUESTIONNAIRE

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions

\* If you need additional space for any of your answers, please write on the reverse side.

1. How did you enjoy your overall experience of the Teen RCIA?
2. What did you enjoy best about the RCIA?
3. What was challenging about the RCIA?
4. What does being a fully initiated Catholic Christian mean to you?
5. How do you feel about attending Mass on Sundays?
6. How do you feel about receiving Eucharist at Mass now?
7. Do you feel closer to God now, compared to when you began the process?
8. How will you continue your life-long journey of faith after our meetings end?

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1 - 5,

5 – the best, 4 – almost always, 3 – mostly, 2 – somewhat, 1 – needs improvement

**Your Catechist...**

1. is knowledgeable about the Catholic Christian faith? \_\_\_\_\_
2. is enthusiastic about our faith? \_\_\_\_\_
3. prepares meetings well and is organized \_\_\_\_\_
4. explains new information well? \_\_\_\_\_
5. encourages you to share and express your feelings at meetings? \_\_\_\_\_
6. gives you enough time to express yourself at your meetings? \_\_\_\_\_
7. is available to give you extra help or advise when needed? \_\_\_\_\_
8. is patient and understanding? \_\_\_\_\_
9. prepares you well for every Rite? \_\_\_\_\_
10. runs a fun meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

**Share your thoughts on the Teen RCIA process**

1. Was the meeting day and time good for you?
2. What would you like to add to the meetings?
3. What would you like to change about the meetings?
4. Would you recommend the Teen RCIA to your friends and relatives?
5. How was the RCIA most helpful to you?

## APPENDIX VI

### PASTOR EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Pastor's Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_ Years at current parish: \_\_\_\_\_

Archdiocese/diocese: \_\_\_\_\_

Relative to your general observations, please answer the following questions:

1. What do you perceive as the greatest strengths of a Teen RCIA at your parish?
  2. What do you perceive as most challenging for Teen RCIA formation?
  3. Did you sense spiritual growth of the candidates?
  4. What areas of ministry do you feel Neophyte Teens can become most involved?
  5. Did you perceive that catechists had the correct attitude towards the teens?
  6. Do you have any recommendations for the Teen RCIA catechists?
  7. What is your overall impression of the Teen RCIA?
  8. Do you perceive that the Teen RCIA prepares unbaptized and uncatechized Teens in a way that better meets their needs instead of placing them in a Confirmation process with catechized Teens?
  9. Do you have any recommendations for this formation process?
- \* If you need additional space for any of your answers, please write on the reverse side.

## APPENDIX VII

### CHRISTIAN CHURCHES WITH VALID BAPTISMS CHURCHES WITH CONDITIONAL BAPTISMS

For valid non-Catholic baptisms in other Christian churches baptism is conferred with water and with a Trinitarian formula: in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Non-Catholic Christian churches with valid baptisms are:

All Eastern Churches  
Adventist  
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)  
Amish  
Anglican  
Assembly of God,  
Baptist  
Christian and Missionary Alliance  
Church of the Brethren  
Church of God  
Congregational Church  
Disciples of Christ  
Episcopalian  
Evangelical Churches  
Evangelical United Brethren  
Liberal Catholic Church  
Lutheran  
Methodist  
Church of the Nazarene  
Old Catholic  
Old Roman Catholic  
Polish National Church  
Presbyterian Church  
Reformed Churches  
United Church of Christ

Information in this appendix is from John Huels' *The Pastoral Companion* (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1995), 342.

## APPENDIX VIII

### SOME CHURCHES WITHOUT VALID BAPTISMS

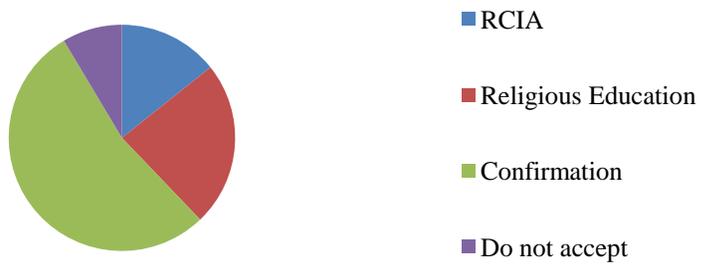
Apostolic Church  
Bohemian Free Thinkers  
Christadelphians  
Christian Community (Rudolf Steiner)  
Christian Scientists  
Church of Divine Science  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)  
Jehovah's Witnesses  
Masons (no baptism at all)  
Mormon, Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints  
New Church of Mr. Emmanuel Swedenborg (Church of the New Jerusalem)  
Pentecostal churches  
Peoples Church of Chicago  
Quakers  
Salvation Army  
Unitarian

Information in this appendix is from John Huels' *The Pastoral Companion* (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1995), 342.

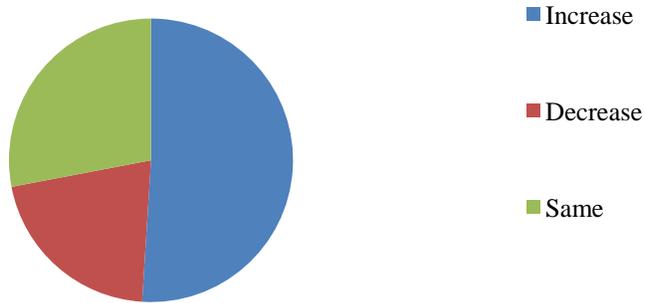
APPENDIX IX

LOS ANGELES ARCHDIOCESAN INITIATION SURVEY

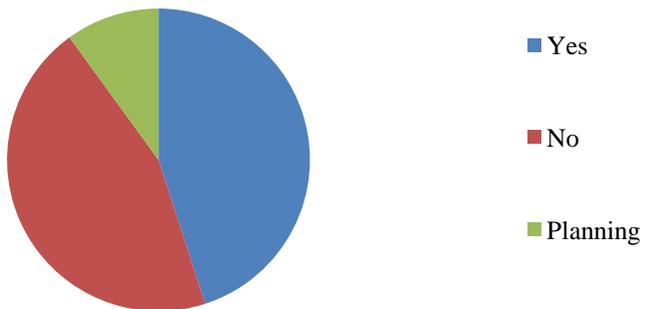
**Placement of uncatechized teens**



**Number of uncatechized teens applying to receive initiation sacraments**



**Parishes with Youth Ministry**



## APPENDIX X

### TOUR OF THE CHURCH: Catechesis on Our Worship Space

**Part 1: Sacristy entrance** – incensor, lost & found

**Altar server / Sacristan Room** – sacred vessels, prep room

**Priest's Room** – vestments, lectionary, holy books

**Part 2:**

**A/V library** – Borrow videos, CDs and DVDs for free for one week

**Community / Bride's Room** – Meeting room for rites and children's dismissals

**Confessional** – Enter the room and kneel behind the screen or sit face to face

**Baptismal Font – small holy water fonts**– Explain to teens the dying to your old self (sin) and rising to a new person (new birth) in baptism and why we bless ourselves at the entrance using the **Sign of the Cross** - Sign when entering the church as a reminder of our baptism or anticipation of baptism through Jesus

**Paschal Candle** – New at the Easter Vigil through Pentecost Sunday, lighted to remind us of the presence of the risen Christ among us. Also used at baptisms and funerals as a reminder of the constant presence of Christ in our lives.

**Bowing** - Before the altar out of respect for the sacrifice Jesus made for us to put an end to sin and death and allows us to have eternal life with God.

**Processional Cross (crucifix)** - Used for altar servers and ministers to lead processions at the start of Mass and during the presentation of the gifts.

**Altar** – Symbolizes Christ and the banquet table. A Jewish altar was the place where sacrifices were made to God. Our altar symbolizes Christ as that sacrifice made present when ordinary bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ. As at the last supper, we will share a meal with God to participate in the new and everlasting covenant.

**Relic** – Embedded under the altar, St. Candidus, Egyptian martyr

**Presider's Chair** – The main presider at Mass or at a prayer service sits there.

**Ambo** – Where the scripture readings and Gospel are read.

**Altar Candles** – Symbolize the flesh, soul, and divinity of Christ.

**Credence Table** – Holds the sacred vessels used for Mass

**Icon of the Holy Trinity** – Angels coming to Abraham, Father left, Christ center, Holy Spirit right.

**Choir area** – Where musicians and choir members sit and sing.

**Pews** – Where the people of God sit.

**Part 3:**

**Blessed Sacrament Room**

**Blessed Sacrament Candle**

**Tabernacle**

**Genuflection**

**Prayer book**

**Large Cross on North side**

**Stations of the Cross**

**Stained glass**

**Prayer Candles**

**Church Dedication Candle**

**Statues**

## APPENDIX XI

### **Examination of Conscience and Guide to Making a Good Confession**

Internet sites providing guides to making a good confession and Teen Examinations of Conscience are the following:

[www.catholiceducation.org/articles/education](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/education)

[www.bereconciledtoGod.com/pdfs/teensexaminationofconscience.pdf](http://www.bereconciledtoGod.com/pdfs/teensexaminationofconscience.pdf)

[www.catholicyouthministry.com/examinationofconscience](http://www.catholicyouthministry.com/examinationofconscience)

## APPENDIX XII

### Respecting and Supporting Life

Place a check mark in the column that best describes each of the following items.

	Promotes Life	Promotes Death
1. Telling jokes that ridicule people	_____	_____
2. Viewing an X-rated Web site	_____	_____
3. Helping people who are poor and homeless	_____	_____
4. Participating in activities that damage or destroy property	_____	_____
5. Using foul language	_____	_____
6. Visiting nursing homes	_____	_____
7. Volunteering at an after-school program	_____	_____
8. Making fun of immigrants with limited English skills	_____	_____
9. Being a good friend	_____	_____
10. Spending time in prayer	_____	_____
11. Telling your family you love them	_____	_____
12. Accepting cultural differences in others	_____	_____
13. Telling a lie	_____	_____
14. Being happy when someone aces an exam	_____	_____
15. Cheating on an exam	_____	_____
16. Going to church	_____	_____

## Appendix XIII

### Examining Your Beliefs about Jesus

As you begin your study of Jesus, evaluate your own personal beliefs about him. Check the appropriate abbreviation.

**SA**=strongly agree    **A**=agree    **NS**=not sure    **D**=disagree    **SD**=strongly disagree

	SA	A	NS	NS	SD
1. Jesus is my Lord and my savior.	___	___	___	___	___
2. Jesus was the greatest human who ever lived, but not God.	___	___	___	___	___
3. Jesus is the Christ, son of the living God.	___	___	___	___	___
4. Jesus never claimed to be what Christians now believe about him.	___	___	___	___	___
5. Jesus is my best friend.	___	___	___	___	___
6. Jesus was a good philosopher and moral teacher, but not much different from other good philosophers and teachers.	___	___	___	___	___
7. Jesus died for the sins of mankind and is raised from the dead.	___	___	___	___	___
8. Jesus never existed.	___	___	___	___	___
9. Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega,” the beginning and end of all humanity.	___	___	___	___	___
10. I simply don’t know what to believe about Jesus. Tell me more.	___	___	___	___	___

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