

The Community's Role in the RCIA Process

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* makes clear in nearly 20 different paragraphs that the process of initiation takes place within the larger community of the faithful. The Rite calls the community of the faithful to be engaged and involved in this process. It also places the celebrations of the rituals in the context of Sunday Mass—unless there are pastoral reasons not to do so—in order to assure that the entire community participates (see *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 31).

By offering prayer, support, and example for those who are seeking Christ, the community of the faithful becomes an active, engaged, and important part of the RCIA process.

Prayer

The community's first responsibility to the catechumens and candidates involved in the initiation process is to be present, especially on Sundays. Each person's presence during liturgy is essential to the community and acts as a witness, example, and support for those journeying through the initiation process. As part of the Sunday Liturgy, the Prayer of the Faithful may also regularly include a prayer for those who are in the initiation process.

Whenever the Rite of Acceptance, Parish Rite of Sending, the Rite of Dismissal, the Rite of Scrutiny, and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation are celebrated, it is important that the community is present and participates in the celebration through word, song, acclamation, and gesture. Make sure to provide the community with clear worship aids as well as catechetical information so that they are fully aware of what is being celebrated in each ritual.

The faithful—either individually or as households—can also be encouraged to pray daily for a particular catechumen or candidate. The names of individual

catechumens and candidates can be made available or people can be encouraged to pray for all who are in the initiation process. Children in Catholic schools or parish religious education programs can also pray for a particular catechumen or candidate or for all of those involved in the initiation process. This is a special way to involve the community and raise awareness of the journey that they are undertaking.

Support

The catechumen or candidate is initiated into the Christian way of life and becomes a member of the community of the faithful. Therefore, the community needs to be available to support those seeking to be fully initiated. Support and encouragement can come in the form of letter or card writing, phone calls, or simple kind words of support offered whenever a catechumen or candidate is present. The role of sponsor is also extremely important during this process and mirrors the support from the parish community. The sponsor is present from the Rite of Acceptance throughout the process until the anniversary of initiation.

Example

The initiation process is training in the Christian way of life. The community perhaps has no more important involvement in the process of initiation than that of being an example of what it means to live this way of life. Catechumens and candidates are constantly observing the community to better understand what it means to live the Gospel in all aspects of life—worship, service to each other and to the wider world, work, prayer, and even leisure. The community of the faithful, therefore, has great responsibility to strive to live the Gospel so as to provide an example for all to see and learn from.