

## Understanding the OCIA Process with Children and Youth

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### ***What Is the OCIA Process?***

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, is the normative process for initiating adults in the Roman Catholic Church. The Code of Canon Law states: “*What is prescribed in the canons on the baptism of an adult is applicable to all who are no longer infants but have attained the use of reason.*” Thus we find in the ritual text for the OCIA, Part II, Chapter One: “Order of Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age.”

### ***So what does this mean?***

First and foremost, it means that children who have reached catechetical age are no longer baptized using the *Rite of Infant Baptism*. Such children are to be treated as adults using the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults as it has been adapted for them (see OCIA 252–330).

Children of catechetical age are described in OCIA 252 as those children “who grasp and nourish their own faith and are moved by their own conscience.” Thus they are able to develop and grow in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (faith) and to know right from wrong.

Second, such children are to celebrate all of the rites belonging to the initiation process for adults: Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate, Election, three Scrutinies, Minor Blessings, Exorcisms, Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens, Rite of Sending, Presentation of the Creed and the Our Father, and the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist (all three) at the Easter Vigil (see OCIA 253, 256, 258, and 304 and National Statutes 18 and 19).

Therefore these children, who are of the age of reason, are treated differently than children who were baptized as infants and, at the age of five or six, enter Catholic school or the parish religious education programs. The OCIA adapted for children of catechetical age presents a way to walk with these children (and their parents) that is aimed at training them in the Christian way of life (see OCIA 75). It may be a process for two or more years that prepares them for their full initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) at the Easter Vigil. After their full initiation, they continue their mystagogical process by joining their peers at the appropriate grade or age level.

Anyone directing the OCIA process adapted for children of catechetical age needs to have a working knowledge of the adult rite (see OCIA 1–251).

### ***What are some challenges to working with the OCIA adapted for children of catechetical age?***

1. Parish ministers, catechists, and parents need to recognize that there are two pastoral practices for initiation in the parish.

#### Practice A

- Baptism for infants
- First Eucharist around age seven
- Confirmation after Eucharist

#### Practice B

- Full initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, in that order, for children at or above the age of reason.

# Young Apprentices

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According to the OCIA ritual text and the National Statutes, a pastor must confirm children of catechetical age before Eucharist (see National Statutes 11 and 13, and Code of Canon Law §866, 883, 884, and 885).

2. The OCIA adapted for children of catechetical age envisions a process integrated with the adult order. The various orders might be celebrated with the adults who are also preparing for full initiation. The order presumes that the parents and the whole community are involved in the process for the children.
3. In many parishes there are adults who were baptized Catholic and are preparing to complete their initiation with Confirmation and Eucharist, or adults who were baptized in a separate ecclesial community and are now preparing to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

So, too, there are children who were baptized as infants and are now of catechetical age and their parents are asking for First Eucharist for them, or children who were baptized in a separate ecclesial community and they are now asking to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

These children, according to the Code of Canon Law §252, are to be treated as adults—that is, prepared using Part II, Chapter 5 of the OCIA, but adapted for their age. These children should not be placed in a “catch-up” group or in the grade level with their peers. They are to be initiated following the process, rites, and National Statutes found the OCIA ritual text.

4. The parents of children of catechetical age might be in need of some formation to understand the process through which their children will be initiated. The parents might also desire to understand the proper sequence of the initiation Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.
5. The children will also have parish sponsors who will accompany them (the family) as they journey to the sacraments. Finding sponsors is often a challenge for the parish.

Even in the midst of these challenges, the OCIA adapted for children of catechetical age provides the framework, support, and encouragement to walk with children, their families, and peers as they experience conversion and come to initial faith.