

Reimagining the Ministry of Christian Initiation

Come and See [Jn 1:39]



Pope Francis reflections on the story of Anna and Simeon's encounter with Mary, Joseph and Jesus holds much wisdom for those engaged in the ministry of Christian Initiation

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2 February. Luke 2:22-40

What do our eyes see? Simeon, moved by the Spirit, sees and recognizes Christ. And he prays, saying: “My eyes have seen your salvation” (v. 30). This is the great miracle of faith: it opens eyes, transforms gazes, changes perspectives. As we know from Jesus’ many encounters in the Gospel, **faith is born of the compassionate gaze with which God looks upon us, softening the hardness of our hearts, healing our wounds and giving us new eyes to look at ourselves and at our world.** New ways to see ourselves, others and all the situations that we experience, even those that are most painful. This gaze is not naïve but sapiential. A naïve gaze flees reality and refuses to see problems. A sapiential gaze, however, can “look within” and “see beyond”. It is a gaze that does not stop at appearances but can enter into the very cracks of our weaknesses and failures, in order to discern God’s presence even there.

[\[Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis, 2 February 2022\]](#)



Come and See

*is an invitation to the whole Catholic community
to engage in pastoral re-imagining
of the ministry of Christian Initiation of adults and children.*

For those who wish to engage, this is an invitation into:
conversation, discernment, and action
learning, unlearning and re-learning.

It is an invitation supported by the Diocesan Liturgy Council and the Christian Initiation Forum.

Our reimagining is grounded in the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* (RCIA) and more deeply in an appreciation of our Catholic understanding of revelation and faith which is itself the ground of the RCIA.¹

We cannot imagine or reimagine the ministry of Christian Initiation without considering the ministry of evangelisation. Both ministries are the core business of parishes, standing at the heart of parish life and mission. Indeed, the Church exists for nothing other than this. Bishop Michael Kennedy is echoing this truth as he begins to articulate his vision for the Church of Maitland-Newcastle to be a church focused on mission and evangelisation.

There is a growing sense of readiness across our diocesan Church to embark on a well-grounded journey of reimagining the ministry of Christian Initiation. Such reimagining seeks an integrated approach to all Sacraments of Initiation across all ages.

To some degree this readiness is sparked and shaped by our growing awareness of the challenges and questions we face regarding the ministries of evangelisation and initiation. Across the rich diversity of our parishes, some have a strong and long story of the ministry of Christian Initiation, some struggle to get and retain ministers, some rarely have enquirers and many no longer familiar with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* with its vision, its prayers and liturgies, its processes. Our strength lies in working together, aware of our context, to grow a culture of initiation and evangelisation across the diocese.

We have learnt from the recent experience of parishes who have stepped up to have a go at reimagining, that the journey is more challenging than first thought. We have learnt that we needed to find a different starting place and to work more slowly and be more focused on intentional pastoral practice shaped by the vision and processes of the RCIA.

The need and desire of the City Region to form a RCIA Team has provided a new opportunity for us to reflect and learn together. Bishop Michael has affirmed the City region's initiative and encouraged their work of reimagining accompanied by the Diocesan Liturgy Council's Christian Initiation Forum, and the Office of Worship and Prayer.

Come and See has been developed by the Christian Initiation Forum to support parishes in this work of reimagining. In accord with the wisdom of the church, it seeks to encourage

¹ [*Dei Verbum*](#), the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, promulgated on November 8, 1965

us in implementing the Vatican Council II's vision for the RCIA to be the lens through which to we reimagine all Christian Initiation as one integrated ministry accompanying all who seek Christ and belonging to the Catholic community.

Our reimagining is, in the first instance, an invitation to 'come and see' the RCIA with fresh eyes and open hearts. It is an invitation to inhabit the rite; to stay there, listening for the wisdom God reveals about this ministry of Christian Initiation and evangelisation.

Our journey of reimagining will be like the journey of Jesus and the disciples recorded in the Gospel. It will be a journey of conversion where we engage in learning, unlearning, and relearning, our ears open to the voice of Jesus reminding us, '... but I say this to you.' It will be a communal journey where we accompany each other, sharing what we discover with our companions, and ultimately with the whole diocesan community. This is the blessing of belonging to a local church, to a community that is bigger than the individual and their local community.

We are all invited to *Come and See*.

Diocesan Christian Initiation Forum
September 2024

Purpose and outline of this document ...

The call to change is in the DNA of Christian disciples and church communities. However, as human beings, we all find change challenging, even as some of us might find it exciting and liberating.

Reimagining our well-formed ways of engaging in the ministry of Christian initiation is at once always necessary, challenging and uncomfortable.

For those parishes who desire to begin a journey of reimagining the ministry of Christian Initiation and evangelisation, this document provides a framework that grounds us in the vision of the RCIA and accommodates the uniqueness of each parish community.

Come and See offers:

1. An invitation to reflect on the mystery of Christian Initiation according to the RCIA.
2. Resources for planning the parish journey: principles and practical steps.
3. Reimagining pastoral practice for the Christian Initiation of adults.
4. Resources specific to reimagining the Sacraments of Initiation of Children
5. An outline of *Go Make Disciples* – a comprehensive formation journey exploring the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.
6. A series of reflections that may assist in engaging members of the parish community.
7. Some resources including videos and terminology.

Come and See is a living document that will be constantly revised in the light of parish experience.

Additional diocesan resources to support parishes engaging in the journey of reimagining outlined in *Come and See* include:

Encountering the Mystery of God – Introducing Mystagogical Reflection

Practising Mystagogy

Come and See – Ministry Descriptions

Come and See is an invitation.

Abbreviations used throughout this document include:

[RCIA] *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

[RBC] *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, 8 September 1969.

[CIGI] *Christian Initiation, General Introduction*, Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, 8 September 1969, amended 23 September 1974.

NB: *This document appears in both the Rite of Baptism for Children and the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.*

[BB] *The Book of Blessings*, Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, 1984. References in this document are to the edition published in 1989 by Catholic Book Publishing Co.

All Rites and documents listed above are available on LiturgyHelp.

Pondering the mystery of Christian Initiation

Reimagining is first an invitation to reflect deeply on the nature and meaning of Christian Initiation within our Catholic tradition. This will ensure we are ministering from the best of our Catholic wisdom.

From a deep listening to the RCIA, the **Christian Initiation Forum** offers the following reflection on the nature, meaning and process of this ministry in the life of the church community:

Christian Initiation

*is a journey into the mystery of God's love within the Church's tender care (RCIA a.95).
It begins in response to God's presence and prompting in the life of a person.
and takes place within the parish community, understood as 100% of Catholics.*

*The journey takes time and varies
according to personal circumstance,
the grace of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit.*

*The community of faith meets people where they are
and accompanies them through opportunities to encounter the mystery of Christ
in life, prayer, scripture, liturgy, and the life and mission of the parish community.*

*Encounters with Christ are the focus of reflection
in search of what God is revealing
and to discern its meaning for discipleship lived within the Catholic Tradition.*

*Christian Initiation is a journey marked by conversion,
and discerning readiness
to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation.*

*Those initiated continue to hold a place of honour in the community
with accompaniment to continue in the first year after Initiation.*

Reflect

Take time to sit with this reflection on the ministry of Christian Initiation.

What do you notice?

What are you invited to ponder more deeply?


What is Christian Initiation about? What does it mean?

What are you being invited to learn – unlearn – relearn? To what change are you/we being invited, for both adults and children?

Team RCIA identifies six key principles articulated in the RCIA, which are meant to ground our pastoral practice of the ministry of Christian Initiation.

Six Keys to Making Lifelong Disciples



	Key principle of the RCIA (4-5)	How to put this into practice
1	"The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process..."	Believe that we are initiating every day of the year. Start by making every day a day for evangelization.
2	that takes place within the community of the faithful....	Use the activities of your parish as primary ways you form catechumens and candidates. Make your RCIA gatherings secondary to what your parish is already doing.
3	By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery ...	Share your personal experience of the paschal mystery. Tell stories of your own dying and rising.
4	and by renewing their own conversion , the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously....	Move from imparting knowledge to entering into intimacy with Jesus. Pay attention to what you see the Spirit doing in the lives of each catechumen and candidate.
5	The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults ...	Practice adult learning principles . With children, help their families teach them adult faith behaviors adapted for their maturity level. Don't short-change child catechumens with "RCIC."
6	that varies according to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the many forms of God's grace, • the free cooperation of the individuals, • the action of the Church, • and the circumstances of time and place." 	Attend to the specific needs of each person . Account for differences between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unbaptized • baptized uncatechized • and baptized catechized. Don't put people in the RCIA who don't belong in the RCIA.

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Reflect

Take time to reflect on the principles that guide the ministry of Christian Initiation.

What do you notice?

What are you invited to ponder more deeply?

What are you being invited to learn – unlearn – relearn? To what change are you/we being invited, for both adults and children.

Planning the journey ...

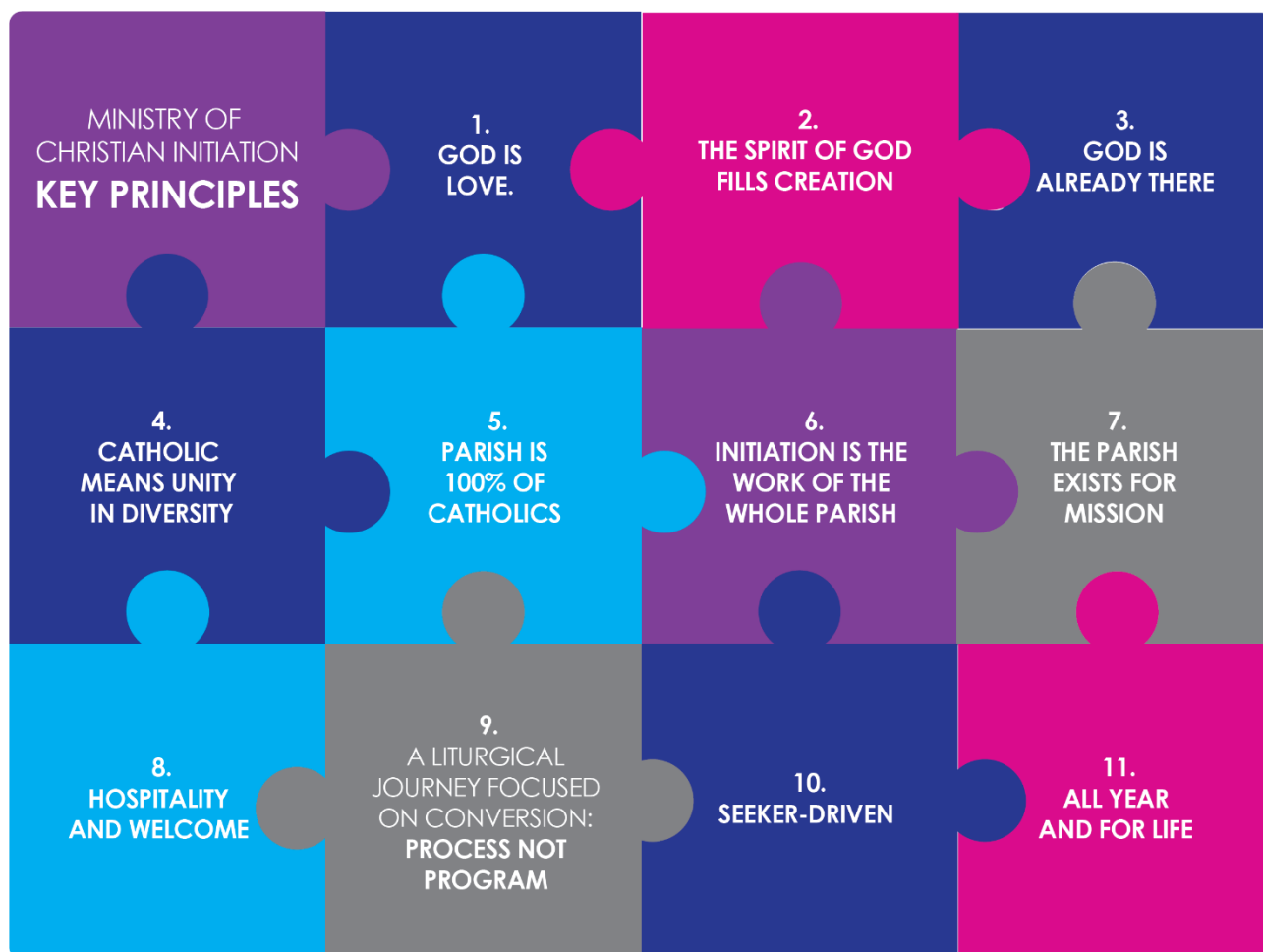
Having begun to reflect deeply on the nature and meaning of Christian Initiation in our Catholic tradition, communities are ready to start planning their particular journey of reimagining.

In reality we are engaging in a process of deep cultural change which can at times feel overwhelming and that may be 5 – 10 years in the making.

The journey is as important as the destination and is made by taking one step at a time.

Each parish community is different and so the journey will differ for each parish. We are therefore guided by principles that unite us and shape the ministry of Christian Initiation as parish communities discern the steps involved in their unique journey.

Our Theological Foundation: Some guiding principles and reflections



Reflect

Take time to sit with this image and the list of principles on the opposite page.

What do you notice?

What are you invited to ponder more deeply?

What is Christian Initiation about? What does it mean?

What are you being invited to learn – unlearn – relearn? To what change are you/we being invited, for both adults and children?

1. God is love.
2. The Spirit of God fills all of creation, moving as she wills.
3. All persons are made in the image of God and filled with the breath of divine life. God is already there before we encounter people in ministry.
Consequently, the Ministry of Christian Initiation is about helping people become attentive to God's presence and to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit within them and beyond them. (See quote of Pope Francis on p.2)
4. By nature, Catholic is characterised by a 'both/and' rather than an 'either/or' approach and is marked by a rich diversity that strengthens unity.
5. The parish is all the baptised, this is 100% of Catholics. The worshipping community is in reality, a small part of the parish community.
6. The parish community is the context and primary agent of the ministry of Christian Initiation. Any parish team facilitates the ministry of the whole community. (See Appendix for reflection resource)
7. The parish exists for mission. Mission is an essential dimension in the life of individual disciples AND the parish community as a whole.
The Ministry of Christian Initiation stands on the effectiveness of the mission to evangelise by proclaiming the love of God where we are. What are the needs in your town/neighbourhood? Would the town/neighbourhood miss the Catholic parish if it closed?
8. The ministry of hospitality and welcome is vital to every gathering of an initiating community, especially when it gathers for liturgy.
9. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) is one of the Church's liturgical rites. It is not a program, but a liturgical journey focused on conversion. The Liturgical Year is the 'text', and Mystagogical Reflection is the primary methodology.
We don't 'do' RCIA, we celebrate it!
10. The journey of Christian initiation is always seeker-driven rather than parish-driven.
11. The Ministry of Christian Initiation:
 - is open all year
 - is focused on forming lifelong disciples
 - opens seekers to the Catholic Faith in response to their questions and the revelation of God across the liturgical year
 - prioritises sending seekers out to experience the life of the parish and get to know the community, in preference to the more common practice of inviting people to come and speak to them.

Some steps to consider

These steps are in no particular order. They offer ideas to help parishes identify the steps they need to take and in what order.



1. Embark on the journey of reimagining the Ministry of Christian Initiation deliberately and openly, bringing the parish community with you.

2. Consider how best to capture the imagination of the **whole parish community** and lead it to become an initiating community grounded in a rich and deep appreciation of the nature and meaning of Christian Initiation.

Pragmatically this would include communicating about the reimagining journey you are embarking on. Communication might include:

- Preaching
- Formation
- Invitation to all parish groups, teams and ministers to be part of the journey, hosting all seekers – catechumens and candidates for full communion – as they experience the life of the Catholic community. Ultimately there might be a need for some 'pastoral guide' for groups when a seeker visits.



3. Sharpen the parish community's **focus on mission:**

- strengthen what exists.
- discern needs within the town/neighbourhood that the parish may be able to respond to
- actively support existing responses to community needs by other churches and agencies.
- ensure the celebration of liturgy and preaching shape the worshipping community for mission, waking people up to know that they are the primary agents of the Church's mission.
- invite 100% of Catholics to be part of that mission. Get to know the gifts, capacities, and skills available across the **whole** Catholic community and invite people into mission.
- communicate all the wonderful ways individuals and communities are engaged in Christ's mission. Always ask for more helpers.



4. Review the **liturgical life of the parish**. If the liturgical year is the primary 'text' for the ministry of Christian Initiation, the liturgy must be celebrated well so that people constantly rehearse the life of Christian discipleship in the liturgy.

Lex orandi, Lex credendi, Lex vivendi.

[As we worship, so we believe, so we live]



5. Introduce the community to the process of **Mystagogical Reflection** and develop people's comfort and competence in guiding the process. This may be an easy starting place that helps ready the community for other steps.

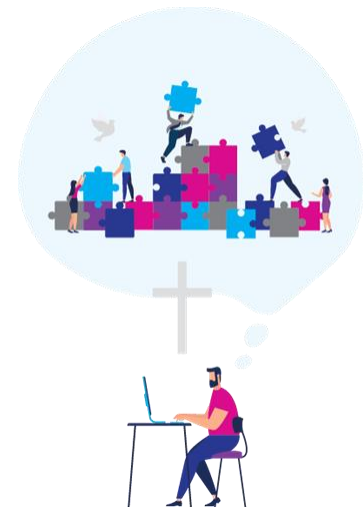
Members of the **Christian Initiation Forum** are available to accompany a group as they immerse themselves in the process.



6. Review and update the **parish bulletin and all means of communication**:

- Is the bulletin attractive, easy to read and inviting?
- Does it reference all the groups, activities and ministries in the parish and beyond?
- What does it say about the parish? Is its focus mission or maintenance?
- Review its circulation to ensure it reaches as many of the 100% of Catholics as possible.

The parish bulletin is an important reference point and source of information for the ministry of Christian Initiation.



7. Identify and grow communities of
- potential sponsors. This includes families who can 'sponsor/accompany' other families. (see para. 11)
 - people who are happy to have seekers come to their homes for a meal.
 - potential godparents
 - storytellers – members of the faithful who are comfortable sharing their faith.
 - parishioners who would come to Baptisms Outside Mass

8. Form a new parish team: A Christian Initiation Team that will facilitate the parish ministry for all initiation. What gifts, skills and capacities best serve such a team?

- Draft a mandate for the team.
- Seek expressions of interest for members rather than ask for volunteers.
- Form and commission the team
- Thank the previous teams celebrating them and their ministry.



The Office of Worship and Prayer can assist with templates for such documents.



9. Review the understanding of 'sacrament' that is shaping the parish experience of Christian initiation.

The ministry of Christian Initiation stands on the foundation of a rich and deep appreciation of sacramentality that connects the everyday sacraments of seekers with the ecclesial Sacraments. Refer to '[Sacraments of initiation: A fallow year reflection resource](#)', pp. 14-18.

10. What are the steps you have identified for your parish?



Reflect

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What are you being invited to learn – unlearn – relearn? To what change are you/we being invited, for both adults and children?

Reimagining pastoral practice for the Christian Initiation of Adults ...

A number of parishes have been hosting RCIA for many years, experiencing the ebb and flow of this ministry within the parish community. As we continue to grow and reimagine the ministry of Christian Initiation with adults, you are invited to consider the following aspects of the Rite that over recent years have been the focus of questions from some parishes.

Seekers who are already baptised begin their journey to either complete their Initiation or to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church from a very different starting place to the unbaptised. Their journey unfolds according to their particular circumstance. [Refer RCIA Part II Chapters 4 and 5] Baptised seekers are not automatically joined to a group of catechumens, though there may be some experiences that the two share. Our pastoral practice needs to respect their dignity as members of the baptised.

The **optional rites for catechumens** beginning on p. 32 of the RCIA are an underutilised resource that greatly enriches the celebration of the journey of Christian Initiation.



All catechumens – adults and children of a catechetical age – who discern their readiness for initiation at the Easter Vigil must participate in the Rite of Election with the Bishop in the Cathedral on the First Sunday of Lent. This is not optional. If circumstances prevent a catechumen from participating in the Rite of Election with the Bishop the parish leader is required to follow the procedure outlined on the [diocesan website](#)

The Easter Vigil is for baptism, ideally of adults, not the reception of baptised Christians or the completion of initiation for baptised and uncatechised adults.

The completion of Initiation of baptised and uncatechised Catholics is found in Part II Chapter 4 of the RCIA. Their initiation is completed when the person is ready, which may be during the Easter Season or indeed at any time during the year. The outline of the liturgical celebration is found in RCIA a 385. The faculty to confirm these Catholics during the Easter Season is given to priests in the [Faculties Handbook for Priests 2017](#). Outside of the Easter Season, a delegation from the Bishop is required to administer Confirmation.

The reception of baptised Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church is found in Part II Chapter 5 of the RCIA. Reception into full communion happens when the person is ready. It is not appropriate to celebrate the reception of baptised Christians during the Easter Vigil.

When baptised Christians are received into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church, it is usual for them to be confirmed and admitted to communion during the same liturgy. However, since Confirmation, like Baptism, cannot be validly repeated, care needs to be taken to ensure that only those baptised Christians who need to be confirmed are confirmed, e.g., a baptised Christian from an Orthodox Church would not need to be confirmed, but a baptised Christian from the Anglican Church would (predominantly because of the Catholic Church's position on Holy Orders in other churches).

While the RCIA indicates that the reception of baptised Christians into Full Communion properly belongs to the bishop (see n.394), in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, all priests, particularly parish priests, have a delegation to receive Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church. From this delegation, the priest has the faculty to confirm from the law itself when receiving a baptised Christian into Full Communion. (see n.34 of [Faculties Handbook for Priests 2017](#))

The Sacrament of Penance is not celebrated with the Elect prior to their initiation. Neither is it celebrated with those baptised Christians who will be received into the Full Communion of the Church, as they are not yet bound by the discipline of the Church.

It may be advantageous for those baptised yet uncatechised Catholics to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before they complete their sacramental initiation, but like any celebration of Penance this cannot be made mandatory.

The initiation of all adult seekers is not attached to the preparation for and celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation of Children. While sometimes the initiation of their children awakes a desire in parents, the parents are to be accompanied and initiated according to the RCIA.

The RCIA outlines the journey of **Christian Initiation for Children who have reached Catechetical Age in Part II Chapter 1**, beginning on p 149. The first thing to note is that there is no such thing as a separate 'Rite of Christian Initiation of Children' sometimes referred to as RCIC. The RCIA includes children who have reached catechetical age.

Pastoral challenges for parishes include:

- Determining the meaning of 'catechetical age', a term which is intended to be not specific, thus leaving the community free to respond according to the spirit and principles of the RCIA which recognises the uniqueness of every seeker.
- In light of a.242 of the RCIA which says, '[children of a catechetical age] seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, or on their own initiative ...' Determining when a young person may undertake such a journey even without the permission of a parent requires well informed pastoral sensitivity. There have been several instances across our diocese where teenagers have done just that and been supported by the parish community.



Reimagining pastoral practice for the Christian Initiation of Children

It is very challenging to reimagine in this space. For a long time, it has been a difficult space pastorally. The following are thoughts and ideas offered to assist parishes to move from principle to reimagining their pastoral practice for the Ministry of Christian Initiation.

If ...

- Parents are the first educators in the faith of their children
- We capture the imagination of the parish community and lead it to become an initiating community ...
- Sacraments of Initiation for children are for those of a 'pre-catechetical age', and we, therefore, focus more on parents/carers and families, endeavouring to capture their imagination rather than complete a program ...
- The life and mission of the parish community and the liturgical year are the 'program'
- Preparation is, in the first instance, about
 - growing in love with Jesus ...
 - getting to know the Catholic community – its way of life, prayer and mission ...
 - becoming a lifelong disciple who tries to live as Jesus ...
 - rather than learning stuff ...
- We eliminate 'the cohort' system and move away from a 'one size fits all' approach.
- We appreciate that children of families who are active in the parish community are already on the path to lifelong discipleship and ought to be initiated without further ado when the parents and the parish priest/leader or her/his delegate discern they are ready – whatever the age ...
- We appreciate that 'knowing' follows 'loving' and that both are a lifetime journey ...
- As an initiating community, the parish prioritises staying in touch with families for the twelve months following the completion of their children's initiation journey ...



Reflect together and chat ...

If we follow through with these ideas ...

What might preparation look like?

What would the schedule for celebrating the sacraments look like?

How could the parish community take up and live its responsibility for initiation?

What small steps might you take pursuant of your larger vision?

Regarding Baptism of Infants

The Sacrament of Baptism begins the journey of Christian Initiation. Baptism is a life-changing event for the child and her/his family **and** the parish community.

A key focus of reimagining our pastoral practice regarding the baptism of infants is to consider how the essential ministry of the parish community might be enhanced.

How might the community support and accompany individual families in very human ways that help them deepen their awareness of the magnitude and implications of baptism for life?

What might this look like for baptisms outside Mass?

What would need to happen for the worshipping community to become more welcoming of families at baptisms during Sunday Mass?

The following thoughts are offered to assist parish communities to reimagine pastoral practice for the preparation and celebration of the baptism of infants:

- All families are welcome.

This is a big statement. What does it mean for you? For the community?

- The requirement for baptism is faith in Jesus Christ.

A pastoral approach that respects the diversity of family life requires a deep knowledge and understanding of the *Rite of Baptism*, of the custom of this local Church of Maitland-Newcastle, and of Australian law. For example:

It is not the custom of this diocese that parents be asked to produce their own baptismal certificate, or any other documentation, as 'proof' of their suitability to present the infant for baptism. The focus is on the infant.

In terms of Australian law, it is important in some circumstances that the parish leader ensure that the person presenting the infant does, in fact, have legal custody of the child.



- The *Rite of Baptism* identifies three important phases of baptism:
 - i) Preparation [CIGI, n.3, 7, 13; RBC, n.5, 8; CIC, c.867§1)
 - ii) Celebration
 - iii) Ongoing formation/mystagogy. The Catechism refers to a 'post-baptismal catechumenate' regarding infant baptism. [cf. RBC, n.3, 5; CCC, n.1231] Today we might consider this more simply as 'ongoing accompaniment.'

How might these three stages be reimagined and strengthened in parish ministry?

Reflection on reimagining each stage might consider, amongst other things:

1. Preparation

1.1. The long journey

The first encounter parents have with the parish community when asking for their child to be baptised is critical. The *Rite of Baptism* promotes encouragement and respect for all families and parents.

- Consider possibilities for engaging with families and prospective parents before they come to the parish seeking the baptism of their child. Such an approach is a simple inversion of what the Rite already suggests in a. 8.2 and is more appropriate for our social and ecclesial context.

How might the parish establish such contact? What small steps might begin that journey? How can the whole parish community engage in establishing such contact?

- This might be one way to reimagine engagement with the local Catholic schools.
- Who do parishioners know in their neighbourhoods who are pregnant?
- Start by being a good neighbour and respond to the human need. For example
 - prepare 'baby baskets' that can be given to families when a child is born. No strings attached, and perhaps with a contact card included.
 - Have a parishioner drop off a meal when the baby comes home. Again, no strings attached. Some parishes have a freezer with meals ready for all pastoral circumstances.
- The Book of Blessings provides resources that might prove helpful in supporting families as they prepare for the birth of their child. These might become significant steps in the journey parents make in discerning whether or not they will seek baptism for their child. For example:
 - The Order of Blessing of Parents before Childbirth [BB, nn.215-235]
 - Orders for the Blessing of a Mother Before and After Childbirth [BB, nn.236-278]
 - Order of Blessing for the Parents of an Adopted Child [BB, nn.302-321]

As well as celebrating such blessings on request, depending on the size and location of your parish community, any of the above blessings could be

scheduled as a regular occurrence, once or twice a year. Might the local Catholic school community be one place to hold such a blessing?

- If the community is journeying with families in the lead-up to the birth of a child, then the Book of Blessings also provides resources for occasions when that journey may come to a tragic end. It also contains a blessing for parents after a miscarriage. [BB, nn.279-301].

These are all invaluable resources for the ministry of Christian Initiation.

1.2. The immediate journey

- How do we respond when a family is ready and asks to have their child baptised? The response will vary according to the circumstances of individual families.
- Is it possible to form a community of young families who would accompany families new to the parish who are asking for baptism? (See references below to 'accompanying' in regard to confirmation and first communion)
- Depending on the size of the parish and the frequency of requests for the baptism of children:
 - Some parishes have a host couple invite a small number of families to a meal where the conversation eventually focuses on baptism.
 - Some parishes invite the family to an already scheduled baptism, after which someone sits with them and engages in a simple process of 'mystagogical reflection' on their experience of that baptism.
- How might preparation for the baptism of an infant be imagined as a journey involving opportunities for prayer?
- In circumstances when a family's journey to the baptism of their child may take some time, and the community seeks to sustain and support families, *the Book of Blessings* has a blessing that may be helpful.
 - *Blessing for a child not yet baptised* (p. 80)

2. Celebration

The *Rite of Baptism for Children* provides options for celebrating the Rite. While all options are always available, a community endeavouring to reimagine the baptism of infants as a ministry of the whole community of the faithful will be alert to ways of growing both the community's and families' openness to celebrating baptism in Mass. As with all our rites, baptism needs to be celebrated well, so the power of the symbols engages the community as well as the family. This might include consideration of:

- Ensuring either the family or the parish organises a substantial and beautiful baptism candle that will ideally last through life. Parishes can reimagine how baptismal candles can be integrated into the celebration of the other Sacraments of Initiation as well as marriage and other significant rites, and finally be brought by the family to a person's funeral.

Families and adults could be encouraged to keep their baptismal candle in a significant place in their home.

- Encouraging families to bring the child to the baptism dressed in normal clothes (not white) and have a simple white outfit that the child can be changed into after baptism.

Presiders need clarity on how baptism is integrated into mass without duplicating elements. For a clear outline of the flow of elements in baptism within mass, see [DOMN Sacraments of Initiation: A Fallow Year Resource](#) (p, 33) The Canadian Rite of Baptism also sets this out well.

Preparing the worshipping community for such a celebration is a journey. Ideally an initiating parish community would over time encourage members of the faithful to be present and participate in baptisms outside mass. This would be a great support to families who are unfamiliar with the liturgy and its responses. It may be necessary to help the community develop their appreciation that all liturgy is the public worship of the church, and there is no such thing as a 'private' baptism.



3. **Post baptismal accompaniment and mystagogy**

The Book of Blessings also has an 'Order for the Blessing of a Baptised Child' (BB p. 73). How could such a blessing be used with families post-baptism, though not as an alternative to baptism? For example, this blessing might form the basis of an invitation to celebrate the first anniversary of the child's baptism.

How could an experience of Mystagogical Reflection on the experience of baptism be incorporated into the journey? Depending on the parish, such an experience could involve the family who has celebrated baptism and some who are preparing.

Some resources that will assist the community in this aspect of the ministry of Christian initiation include:

- *Christian Initiation, General Introduction*, which is found at the beginning of both the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and the *Rite of Baptism for Children*.

- The diocesan [Pastoral Guidance Document for the Sacrament of Baptism](#), which gathers into one place all the information you ever need to know about the complexities surrounding baptism!
- *The Book of Blessings* as noted above.
- [DoMN Sacraments of Initiation: A Fallow Year Resource](#) p. 26 – 34

Regarding Confirmation

Reimagining confirmation is more complex than baptism and first communion. Some of the challenges and opportunities include:

- The need to schedule confirmation because there is a special presider and the fact that scheduling reinforces the notion of a cohort rather than personal and family readiness.
- The move of almost all parishes to celebrate confirmation outside Mass has highlighted the absence of the parish community from these celebrations.

The following thoughts are offered to assist parish communities to reimagine pastoral practice for the preparation and celebration of confirmation:

- Preparation
 - Candidates for confirmation already belong to the parish and the worshipping assembly. There is therefore no need for any form of welcoming ritual.
 - Rites from the RCIA that are for the unbaptised should be avoided.
 - Each year, from amongst those families whose children complete their Christian Initiation, try and identify some who are more active members of the parish community and could be supported to become a 'sponsor/companion' for a family who is not so familiar with the life of the parish community.

What might some form of **'family accompaniment'** look like? Might it start with friendship and hospitality, and introducing the family presenting their child to the life and worship of the parish? Could this be considered appropriate preparation? What else might be included? If we consider this through the lens of the RCIA, such accompaniment could be supplemented by experiences of prayer/liturgy and faith sharing.

- How might the use of 'programs' – online or books – be reimaged in a pastoral model grounded more in accompaniment and the parish community?

There is much to converse about in this reimagining space.

- Scheduling
 - Depending on the size of your parish, schedule 'confirmation' across the year rather than across a couple of weeks or a month. Smaller parishes may schedule two. Larger parishes may schedule three or four. This would enable more flexibility for families to celebrate the sacraments when they have time and are ready.
 - For our smaller parishes, e.g. Dungog or Gloucester, confirmation with the bishop presiding might only occur during his visitation rather than every year.

When a candidate or several candidates are ready, the Parish Priest can seek a delegation from the bishop. It is likely that in these circumstances, the celebration of confirmation would normally take place during the parish Sunday Mass.

- Celebration

A less 'cohort' focused approach can potentially change the makeup of the liturgical assembly for the celebration of confirmation making more room for parishioners. The voice of the faithful would be heard praying responses and singing hymns. Such a change in the experience of the liturgy has the potential to impact positively the families of those being initiated.

- Post confirmation accompaniment and mystagogy

Confirmation lends itself naturally to some experience of mystagogical reflection as the journey of initiation continues towards its completion with first communion. What might such an experience look like?

What might an accompaniment 'bridge' between the two sacraments take shape?

For further resources see also: [DoMN Sacraments of Initiation: A Fallow Year Resource](#) p. 35 – 45.



Regarding First Communion

When reimagining first communion, the context is Sunday Mass. The completion of Christian Initiation takes place in the presence of the parish community.

Language is important. Children are making their first communion, not their first eucharist. Neither do we speak about the 'sacrament of first communion' or the 'sacrament of first eucharist.'

The following thoughts are offered to assist parish communities to reimagine pastoral practice for the preparation and celebration of first communion:

- Preparation

If parishes chose to try a **'family accompaniment'** process, this could continue after confirmation and through to first communion.

How might the use of 'programs' – online or books – be reimaged in a pastoral model grounded more in accompaniment and the parish community?

- Scheduling

- Rather than schedule a series of 'first communions', an initiating parish could make 'first communion' a regular occurrence at any Sunday Mass throughout the year. This would place the emphasis on the readiness of the child and family and help the parish become an initiating community.

- When a family feels their child is ready for first communion, they could approach a designated community member – a Christian Initiation Team member or the Parish Leader – to finalise this discernment. Ideally, this process would include their accompanying family.

- Numbers of first communicants at any mass could be limited according to the size of the Church and in consideration of the size of the regular Sunday Assembly.

- Post celebration

If 'companion families' understood their 'companioning ministry' to include the year beyond the completion of initiation, families of the newly initiated may be more likely to stay in touch with the wider parish community. Surely that would be worth a try.

How could Mystagogical Reflection on the experience of first communion be incorporated into the journey?



For further resources see also: [DoMN Sacraments of Initiation: A Fallow Year Resource](#) p. 46 – 56.

A Formation Opportunity – Go Make Disciples

Go Make Disciples was originally prepared by Fr Andrew Doohan and Louise Gannon rsj to form the members of the then new Christian Initiation Forum in the Church's rich understanding of the ministry of Christian initiation as embodied in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

Since then it has been offered several times in response to requests from various groups. Over this time it has been constantly revised in light of experience.

It sits now as one of the formation opportunities hosted by the Christian Initiation Forum.

Go Make Disciples, invites participants into a deep and thorough exploration of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). It takes seriously the call for all parishes to be evangelising and initiating communities. Experience has shown that this comprehensive exploration of and reflection on the rite is necessary if we are to successfully reimagine the ministry of Christian Initiation for both adults and children.

Go Make Disciples is for all the faithful including new and experienced Christian Initiation Ministers and all interested parishioners.

Go Make Disciples is a six-session journey facilitated by Fr Andrew Doohan and Louise Gannon rsj. It provides participants with an opportunity to:

- encounter Christ through listening and dialogue
- be changed through, with and in the movement of the Holy Spirit (conversion)
- grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as a model for all Christian initiation
- grow in appreciation of our local church as an evangelising and initiating community
- begin to reimagine and discern the ministry of Christian Initiation in their parish and as a parish ministry
- begin to reimagine the ministry of a Team where people 'lean into' each other's gifts and skills
- rest in a 'safe' place where all questions and insights are welcome
- deepen faith, hope and love
- enjoy good company

Go Make Disciples can run in any community wishing to inform their reimaging of the ministry of Christian initiation with a thorough understanding of the RCIA. It is most fruitful when run regionally, as it was in Newcastle towards the end of 2022. The gathering of several parishes enriches the wisdom and sharing of experience.

For further information or to organise to host *Go Make Disciples* in your area, please contact Louise.

Reflection One: The Church is missionary ...

Listen to the Scriptures ...

Jesus says to us, in the Church of Maitland-Newcastle in 2023

‘Go, therefore,
make disciples of all the nations;
baptise ... and teach ...
And know that I am with you always ... ‘

[Mt 9, 20b]

‘Go out to the whole world;
proclaim the Good news to all creation.’

[Mk 16: 16a]

Reflection

The church exists for mission ... nothing else.

The mission is God's not ours.

*The point of all prayer and liturgy is to shape and empower us for mission. ... to go out and
proclaim the good news of God's love by our lives.*

*Every disciple and every Catholic community – school and parish - is called to the dual
ministry of evangelisation and initiation.*

*People must first encounter Christ, hear and experience the love of God, feel the pull of
wanting to share in that love*

BEFORE

*They can feel the call to discipleship and ask one of us can they 'come and see' where
we live.*

Share

Are you and is your community alive to your existence as missionary disciples?

How do you carry out God's mission? What do you love? What is challenging?

How is your parish engaging in God's mission? What would people in your neighbourhood and town say about the Catholic parish's engagement in mission?

How does the way your parish community live, lead people to ask to 'come and see' where and how you live; to seek the living God ?

Pray

*Christ has no body but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this
world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks
to do good.
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

-St Teresa of Avila



Footprints in sand: Image by Ulrike Mai from Pixabay.

Reflection two: The Ministry of Christian Initiation ...

Listen

As John stood with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.' Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, 'What do you want?' They answered, 'Rabbi,' – which means Teacher – 'where do you live?' 'Come and see' he replied; so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him the rest of that day. It was about the tenth hour. [Jn 1: 35-39]

Reflect Mystagogically

Listen to Jesus speak to you/us in this passage?

What do you notice?

What is Christ saying to you/us?

To what change are you/we being invited?

Reflection

The ministry of Christian Initiation belongs to all the baptised.

It belongs to all the baptised

*to recognise Jesus,
to 'look hard' at him
to point him out to others.*

It belongs to all the baptised who today are the face of Christ

*to ask seekers what they want
to invite them to 'come and see' where and how we live as a community
in a way that enables them to come and hang out with us ...*

This is the beginning of the long journey of accompaniment that we see Jesus live in the gospels ...

It is a journey of deep conversion that is marked by the cross and resurrection.

It is journey into the paschal mystery and paschal living.

Reflection three: A journey into love ...

The church imagines Christian Initiation as ...

Journeying into the love of God within the Church's tender care

(RCIA a.95)

Fall in love, stay in love, it will decide everything.

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.

It will decide

what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in Love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.

Often attributed to Pedro Arrupe SJ the actual author is Father Geger SJ

Reflect Mystagogically

Ponder the quote from the RCIA and the reflection attributed to Pedro Arrupe:

What do you notice?

What is Christ saying to you/us?

To what change are you/we being invited?

Share

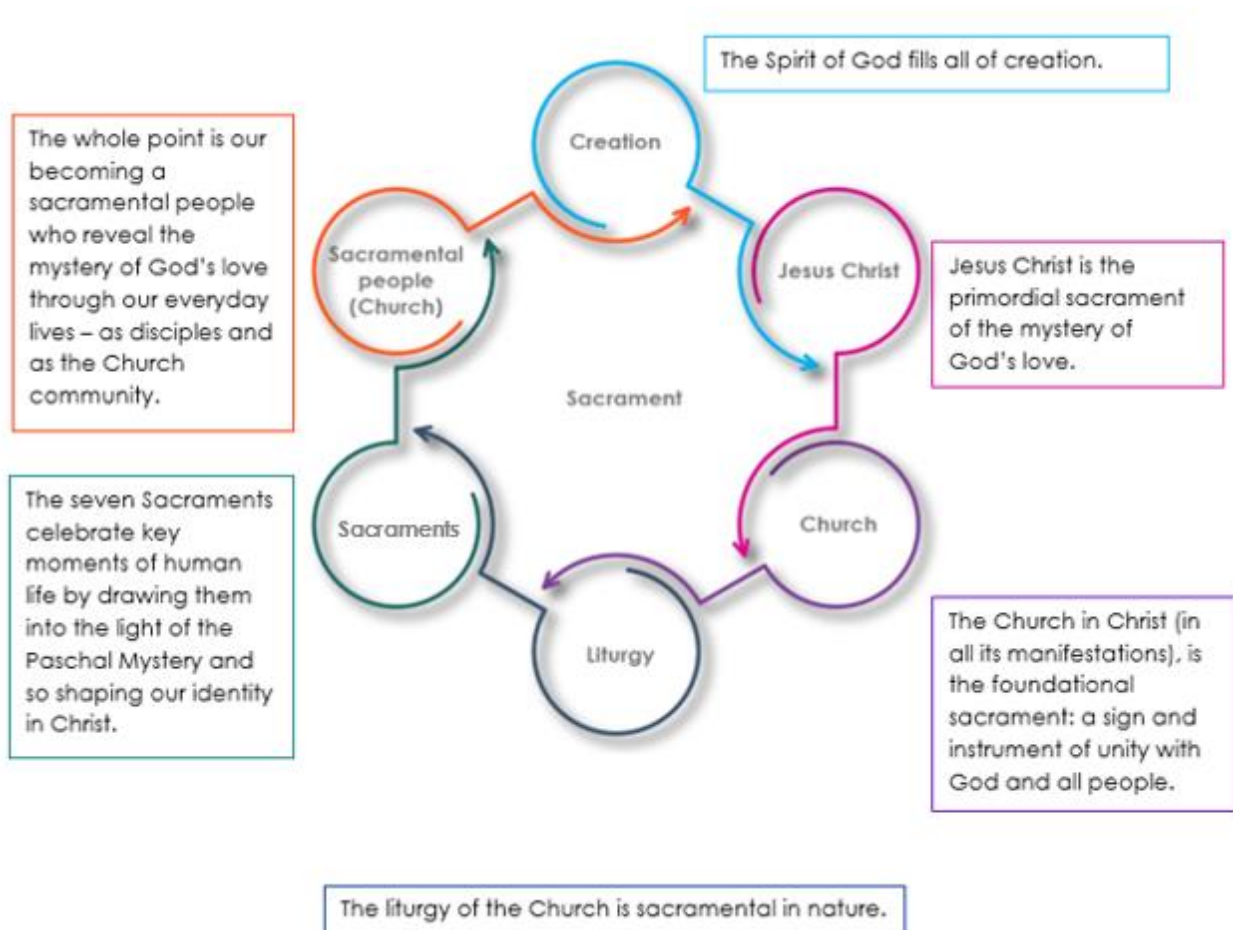
What would the ministry of Christian Initiation look like if the parish approached it as a journey into the love of God within the Church's tender care?

What might stay the same? What might change?

Reflection four: Pondering the mystery of sacrament

Reflecting theologically

A Sacramental Framework that embodies the church's rich, deep and wide understanding of sacrament would look something like this.



Often when people hear the word 'sacrament' they think only about the seven Sacraments. As a community of faith, the church has a rich and deep understanding of 'sacrament' that holds, and is not limited to, the seven Sacraments. In many ways the notion of sacrament defines our Catholic way of life. We are already, and at the same time, constantly becoming a sacramental people whose standing place in the world is, 'There's more to this than meets the eye!' It is a standing place that proclaims the Gospel and has the power to change the world. It is a different standing place to those who proclaim, 'What you see is what you get.'

From DoMN Fallow Year Reflection Resource

The Fallow Year Reflection resource is available in [DoMN Sacraments of Initiation: A Fallow Year Resource](#) p. 14 – 18. It has resources and reflections on each of the Sacraments of Initiation.



Sacrament

... The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all people ...

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG) a. 1

Rightly... the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.

From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL) a. 7

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith." They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs and should frequent with great eagerness those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL) a. 59

Reflect Mystagogically

Ponder the theological framework above and the quote from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

What do you notice?

What is Christ saying to you/us?

To what change are you/we being invited?

Resources

Videos

The following videos are from Team RCIA (Please note that in some of these videos they use the term OCIA as there has been a change in the naming of the rite in the USA)

1. [How do you know if you have enough? - YouTube](#)

A good guide for those starting out in catechumenate ministry or for those who have been doing this a long time, and maybe think that they don't have enough. Enough resources, volunteers, seekers, confidence. It encourages people that they do have enough. It clarifies the tools that teams have, to do this ministry. Because God wouldn't give those this call if they didn't have everything they needed. This video is about unlocking what the Holy Spirit has embedded inside of all those in this ministry. This is best watched before [Purpose and outline of this document...](#) on page 4.

2. [Fostering Conversion in the seekers, according the Rite \(Order\) of Christian Initiation of Adults? - YouTube](#)

How do we foster conversion in the seekers, according to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults? When we are talking about the initial conversion of seekers who have never, ever encountered Jesus in a meaningful way, the rite says that conversion is a step-by-step (gradual) process that takes place in the midst of the Christian community (see RCIA 4). However, most of our catechumenate processes are not set up for that. More often, we find catechumenate processes that are designed to be small group classes that take place somewhere separate from the larger parish community. This is best watched before [Planning the Journey...](#) on page 7.

3. [What is ongoing \(year-round\) RCIA, really? - YouTube](#)

Catechumenate formation is not primarily a religious education course. It is primarily a liturgical encounter with the risen Christ. This video links with the document "Six Amazing Things Every Seeker Must Learn about Jesus," at <https://teamrcia.com/RCIA-0421> This is best watched before **Some steps to consider** on page 8.

4. [Why your RCIA team needs a mystagogue - YouTube](#)

This video explores the question, what does the church look for in an RCIA catechist? It explains the purpose of being a witness, what the characteristics are of a mystagogue, what they do and how they can lead people. This is best watched before **Some steps to consider – step 5** on page 9.

5. [Why the role of sponsor is so important in the RCIA - YouTube](#)

This video explores how people don't need to be a Catholic expert to be a sponsor, but there are three important responsibilities every sponsor has as they accompany their companion in faith. The discussion is framed around para10 of the Rite. It is a role about knowing, assisting, and accompanying the seeker. They have to speak on behalf of the seeker as to their readiness. This is best watched before **Some steps to consider – step 7** on page 9.

6. [Four myths about the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that we all need to let go of. - YouTube](#) (only the first 13 minutes)

This video discusses four myths that surround RCIA. Those being that there is no season for Catechumenates as it is all year round. It is a rite, not a set of guidelines. Any adaptation of the rite needs to adhere to the scope of the rite. RCIA is not a process of joining the Catholic church, it is process to become joined/initiated to Christ. This is best watched after **Some guiding principles and reflections – principle 11** on page 8.

Terminology

acclamation: a short-sung statement

assembly: all who gather for a liturgy.

Book of the Elect: a book that serves as both a record of those elected each year and a symbol of God's chosen people.

candidate: a baptized Christian who is preparing to become a Catholic; in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, the term "candidate" is also used to refer to the subjects of a rite, which includes catechumens and inquirers.

cantor: one who leads the assembly in song.

catechesis: Greek, meaning "sounding down" or "re-echoing down to another"; a way of communicating faith.

catechumen: Greek, meaning "one in whom word echoes"; one who celebrated the Rite of Acceptance; an unbaptized person who is preparing for full initiation at the Easter Vigil

catechumenate: the period of time and the structure within which the catechumens prepare for initiation; "catechumenate" is also used as a synonym for the entire *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

convert: another term for a catechumen; "convert" should never be used to refer to a baptized person who is preparing to become a Catholic.

dismissal: a sending; catechumens are sent after homily to reflect on God's Word; the baptized are sent at Mass to "go, love and serve the Lord;" not meant to separate but to enable one's mission.

elect: name given to catechumens chosen by God and affirmed by the Church as ready to celebrate baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist at the next Easter Vigil; catechumens who have gone through the Rite of Election or Enrolment Rite on the first Sunday of Lent; the elect are those who are involved in immediate preparation for initiation at the upcoming Easter Vigil

election: the formal liturgical act of choosing those who have been called by God to celebrate the initiation sacraments; the election is proclaimed by the Bishop of a diocese

enrolment of names: another name for the Rite of Election; the formal liturgical act of gathering and recording the names of those ready to be initiated at the next Easter Vigil

evangelization: first stage of RCIA, of unfixed duration, also called inquiry or precatechumenate; proclaiming faith in Christ; mission of the baptised.

exegesis: the scholarly, scientific interpretation of the Scriptures

Gathering Rite: the beginning of a liturgy that helps the assembly unite and focus on the liturgy.

godparent: a person chosen by a catechumen to be a lifelong companion and mentor in the Christian faith; someone who makes a life-long commitment to be a spiritual mentor to a catechumen who decides to be baptized; can be the same person as the sponsor.

inquirer: name given to the unbaptized who are drawn to the Christian way of life; a person seeking basic information about Catholicism or Christianity; this person may or may not eventually join the church; also called a 'precatechumen'.

lectionary: the official, liturgical book from which the reader (lector) proclaims the Scripture readings used in the Liturgy of the Word

liturgy: a set structure of prayers, readings, songs, and symbolic actions that is celebrated by a group of people together.

Liturgy of the Eucharist: the prayers and songs around the altar, and the sharing of consecrated bread and wine during the Mass

Liturgy of the Word: the proclamation of Scripture and songs from the Bible followed by a reflection and prayers.

Mass: one of the liturgies of the Church that consists of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist

mystagogy: a process for reflecting on an encounter with God in order to discover the meaning for one's life behind the encounter; means "study of the mysteries;" this reflection process can be used after any liturgical celebration; also, the name of the period following baptism.

neophyte: a newly baptized person; means "new plant".

psalm: a song from the book of Psalms found in the Bible.

RCIA: stands for "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults;" process for becoming Christian.

RCIC: fictional beast; there is only one rite—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; adaptations of this one rite are *made* for children, youth, and previously baptized people; the only appropriate acronym is "RCIA;"

Rite of Acceptance: first public rite for those becoming Catholic; marks transition from inquiry period to catechumenate period

Rite of Election: a liturgical rite that takes place at the beginning of Lent which formally names those who will be baptized at the next Easter Vigil.

scrutinies: the three scrutinies are rituals for the elect that "are meant to uncover, then heal, all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect" (RCIA 141). They are normally celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent.

signing of the senses: ritual act of tracing the sign of the cross on the catechumen's forehead and other parts of the body during the Rite of Acceptance

sponsor: a companion that walks with a catechumen or candidate through the catechumenate process; ideally assigned to a catechumen by the parish, in discussion with the catechumen or candidate.

suffrages: The National Statutes state that the catechumens should be encouraged to seek blessings and "other suffrages" from the church (8). *Suffrages* can be any prayer for the catechumens. Specifically, the RCIA offers the minor exorcisms as examples of suffrages that might be prayed for the catechumens.

Triduum: the "three-days" of Easter; day 1: Holy Thursday evening to Good Friday evening; day 2: Good Friday evening to Holy Saturday evening; day 3: Easter Vigil to Easter Evening Prayer; the normative time when unbaptized persons are baptized into the Church at the Easter Vigil; in addition to Sundays, the most important feast of the year.

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Emerging questions and considerations

People with a disability

Cultural issues and questions

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The place and pastoral practice regarding the Sacrament of Penance

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