

RCIA & THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

RCIA is a programme where catechists and enquirers can form a very close bond as they travel through the preparatory journey together. Catechists and the Parish Priest are the main point of contact for enquirers and they come to rely upon you and trust your judgement, especially as they move through the rites and stages of candidate/catechumen.

It is easy for the RCIA team to become the only members of the Catholic community that the candidates/catechumens meet regularly on their journey prior to joining the Church. Yet you are preparing your candidate/catechumen to become a full member of a much larger worshipping community. This part of the workshop aims to consider the question:

How can your candidates/catechumens feel a welcomed and respected member of the community prior to joining your Church at the Easter Vigil?

Sit with two people not in your RCIA team. Discuss the following points:

- How many are in your RCIA team?
- On average how many enquirers do you have every year?
- Is it common for your enquirers to already be attending Mass in your Church?
- Do you find out if they know any others members of your Church?
- Through the RCIA process how often do your candidates meet other members of the Church community outwith the team?
- Do your candidates/catechumens only `meet` the worshipping community through the RCIA rites throughout the year?
- In what ways could you help them to meet more members of the worshipping community other than through the RCIA rites?

Whole group discussion

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- It is important that, as far as possible, new entrants to your Church are meeting and engaging with other members of your Church prior to joining the Church.
- Sometimes the worshipping community only know that there are candidates if they are at a Mass where one of the rites is happening or they attend the Easter Vigil.
- For the candidates/catechumens it can often seem an overwhelming event when their main encounters with the new Church community is when they are at the centre of attention during a rite of at the Vigil.

How can we improve upon this situation?

1. In the first phase the enquirers could be encouraged to attend other church events with yourself to allow you to introduce them to other Church members. Perhaps this could be shared around the team with the involvement of the Parish Priest. This not only allows the enquirer to meet more people but also gives them a good insight into parish life and activities. *Examples:* coffee mornings, liturgical events, social events.
2. As we move through the various rites you could invite members of the Parish to become a prayer partner for your enquirer. If possible, could you have different prayer partners for each of the different stages, so, increasing the number of friendly faces in the Parish. The prayer partners could also stand with the candidates during the different rites.
3. The rites themselves could be varied around the different Masses to allow the candidates to become better known faces. Does it always have to be the 12 o'clock Mass?
4. Try and always have a social event after the rite. Rather than the candidates/catechumens and their sponsor/families leaving the Church with a happy glow to go to their own homes, is it possible to have a cup of tea that everyone is invited to in the Church Hall?
5. For the Rite of Election in the Cathedral could representatives from other Church groups be invited to attend with the RCIA Team and the

candidates/catechumens? This could be done on a rotational programme every year with different Church groups represented every year.

6. If you `send out` the candidates during Mass again, could other members of the community be invited to go out with the catechists and share in the learning process?
7. Even from the earliest stages, candidates can be invited to take part in Church ministries/jobs. This could be achieved with discussion with the Parish Priest to see what he might feel appropriate, eg. the choir, bulletins, etc.

All of this requires a great deal of thought, planning and collaboration. Every Parish is different in terms of its structure and opportunities for allowing some of the above to happen. Equally, your candidates/catechumens are different and you will be able to gauge how much of this could happen realistically with your enquirers as you journey through the process.

We want our new members to feel welcome and valued. They have made an important decision and we are privileged to be part of this process and to know peoples` individual circumstances.

The more well known our candidates/catechumens feel in the early stages of the process, the more easy the adjustment to being a neophyte will be. By this time they are on their own as the RCIA team shifts its focus to new enquirers. If we can continue to lay solid foundations and make our new members feel truly a part of the community, then progression to being a full and active member of the worshipping community will be a much easier and wholesome process.

THE YEAR OF FAMINE!

This happens to every RCIA team. While they might regularly have a steady flow of enquirers on an annual basis, an unusual thing happens. One year there are no enquirers! What does this mean for the RCIA team?

What does your team do?

- Rejoice! A year of rest. Let`s recharge the batteries and resume again next year. Same time, same place!
- Worry! What have we done wrong? Why don`t we have enquirers this year?
- Plan ahead! Well let`s look to the future and use this year as an opportunity for the Team to evaluate our programme, etc. We`ll use this spare time wisely!

All of these three will have some role to play:

- RCIA is a big, demanding commitment. It is nice to know that your Wednesday nights will be a bit more relaxed.
- It could be a concern, especially if you normally have an enquirer.
- It is an opportunity to look again at what you offer prospective Church members.

It is definitely a good time to sit down and look at a number of things:

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| - Your initial welcome to enquirers | - Your meeting place |
| - The topics you cover | - The format of your evening |
| - The materials you use | - Who teaches what? |
| - The way you carry out the rites | - Are candidates prepared? |
| - Holy Week & the Easter Vigil | - Team responsibilities |
| - Are you informed enough? | - Support beyond the Vigil |

This list is not exhaustive, however, in this extra time you have available it is an opportune time for the Team to meet on a regular basis and consider these points. Is there room for slight changes/ improvement to support the candidates? Maybe not, however, it is important to keep the group dynamic going so regular meetings, even just for socialising, are a good idea.

