

## **GUIDELINES FOR MINISTERING TO ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN**

### **PHILOSOPHY**

The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) states that “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ” (#80). We must provide people with experiences of the sacred and help them to identify the sacred in their own lives. Catechesis is accomplished by varied, interconnected tasks that are inspired by Jesus’ example in forming his disciples. The six tasks of catechesis as outlined in the National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) are:

Catechesis...

1. Promotes knowledge of the faith
2. Promotes knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments
3. Promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ
4. Teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ
5. Prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the church
6. Promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society (pg. 60-62)

These tasks are imparted through individual relationships, the community of faith, liturgy, instruction, experiential learning, ritual, prayer, and outreach to the global community. “Continuing education in the faith is a question which concerns the whole community; catechesis, therefore is an educational activity which arises from the particular responsibilities of every member of the community, in a rich context of relationships” (GDC #220). Nothing can replace the experience of faith taught and practiced in the household. “Parents are catechists precisely because they are parents” (NDC pg, 203). Therefore central to elementary catechesis is the faith development of the entire household.

### **GOALS**

- Through forming a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, children build a strong foundation for lifelong discipleship.
- It is essential that elementary programs create a nurturing community for households to grow in faith providing opportunities for conversion and formation not only for the child but for the entire household.
- Through catechesis, all should be encouraged to know and respect other cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. Catechetical materials should accommodate cultural, racial, and ethnic pluralism, the concerns of particular groups, and persons with special needs.
- “Persons with disabilities should be integrated into ordinary catechetical programs as much as possible” (NDC 207)

- As children mature, ongoing catechesis is needed to help them observe, explore, interpret and judge their experiences, ascribe Christian meaning to their lives, and act according to the norms of faith and love.
- The truths of our faith should be presented at every age to allow for an ever deepening understanding and growth in lived faith.
- A correct understanding of experiential learning includes recognition that the entire faith community is an important part of the experience of the child: households, catechists and faith community all have essential roles in the catechesis of the young.

## PROGRAM MODELS

Preparation is a necessary part of any catechetical model. Models for catechesis should flow directly from the specific catechetical needs of the parish community and aim to achieve the six stated tasks of catechesis. Catechetical preparation should include:

- Examining the social, cultural, ethnic and religious situation of the parish, as these change over time.
- Building awareness that liturgy is the source and summit of parish life
- "... [Methodology seeks] to bring about a conversion to Christ that leads to a profession of faith in a Triune God and a genuine personal surrender to him. It helps believers to become disciples and discern the vocation in which God is calling them" (NDC pg. 94)
- A focus on the formation of the entire household

In designing a program based on the catechetical needs of a parish and the joint leadership and vision of the pastor and catechetical team, some possibilities include:

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|------------------------------|---|
| Weekly formation sessions    | Community service opportunities           |
| Lectionary based catechesis  | Ritual celebrations of liturgical seasons |
| Retreats                     | Prayer services                           |
| Home based catechesis        | Special Mass celebrations                 |
| Intergenerational assemblies | Reconciliation services                   |
| Faith sharing                | Vacation Bible school                     |
| Parent meetings              | Bible study                               |
| Sacramental preparation      | Small Christian communities               |
| Family nights                | Enrichment for catechists                 |

### **Religious Education "In-Home" Settings - Archdiocese of Los Angeles in collaboration with the Dioceses of Monterey, Orange, San Bernardino and San Diego**

The religious education/faith formation of children and youth is the responsibility of parents, pastors and the local parish community. The Code of Canon Law supports this direction:

**Can. 773** Pastors of souls especially have the proper and serious duty of seeing to the catechesis of the Christian people, so that, through doctrinal formation and

experience of the Christian life, the faith of the people may be living, manifest and active.

**Can. 774 §1** The care for catechesis, under the direction of lawful ecclesiastical authority, extends to all members of the Church, to each according to his or her role.

**Can. 774 § 2** Before all others, parents are bound to form their children, by word and example, in faith and in Christian living. The same obligation binds sponsors and those who take the place of parents. Therefore, it is the obligation of the parish leadership to provide religious education programming for children/young people. There are situations where some families choose to “home school” their children/young people. It must be understood that these efforts cannot be done independently of the parish setting. The following guidelines give direction to such efforts.

- The primary responsibility of parents for the education and formation of their children in the Faith cannot be interpreted in an isolated way, since the family is an integral part of the larger ecclesial community. All religious education must be carried out in a way that builds unity within the Church. No home schooling can be tolerated which does not promote the understanding that being a Christian is not a private matter of individual choice but rather of a personal vocation within the context of the Church lived out in the experience of the parish community.
- Since the pastor has the obligation to know of the parents’ intention to home school their children/young people, parents must notify the pastor early in the process. Parents are required to follow the guidelines set by the pastor and must register their child/young person with the parish Director/Coordinator of Religious Education.
- Home schooling parents are responsible for the participation of their child/young person in the immediate sacramental preparation as required or approved by the parish, through interviews for sacramental readiness, practice for sacramental celebrations, appropriate initiation rites and retreats. Home schooling parents must participate in parish parent meetings and parent preparation programs for the sacraments.
- Parents have the responsibility to participate in catechetical formation so that they will be able to prepare their child/young person for the sacraments, in collaboration with the parish community.

This is supported by:

**Can. 780** Local Ordinaries are to ensure that catechists are duly trained to carry out their office properly, namely, that continuing formation is available to them, that they have an appropriate knowledge of the teaching of the Church, and that they learn both the theory and the practice of the principles of pedagogy.

- With regard to the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation parents must ensure that their children/young people are correctly prepared and connected to the local parish.

- The pastor and Director/Coordinator of Religious Education will require a periodic progress report to be made by the home schooling parents. A form should be developed by the parish to assist in this reporting. Children/young people must be interviewed by the Pastor, Director of Religious Education or designated representative to determine their understanding of and readiness for the reception of the Sacraments.
- Since the passing on of the faith tradition is the responsibility of the whole parish community; Pastors, parents, and Directors of Religious Education must collaborate to insure that the children/young people are appropriately catechized and prepared for the reception of the sacraments. As parishioners, families are expected to participate in the parish Sunday liturgy.
- The rights of children and young people to catechetical formation can best be served when pastors, parents and catechists offer formation appropriate to the level, development and disposition of the young person.
- The parish Director/Coordinator should serve as a resource to the parents. Approved textbooks and other appropriate materials must be used in all sessions. The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the General Directory of Catechesis are excellent resources for parents and catechists.

## **CATECHETICAL MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**

Catechetical materials are adapted to the stages of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical development. Properly sequenced programs present the Christian message, and the history of the Church's response to it, in a manner appropriate to each age level. Using appropriate media and methodology, these programs should give satisfactory emphasis to:

1. Doctrine
2. Moral content
3. Efforts to develop community
4. Worship
5. Service of the faith community and society at large.

The Vatican and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approve textbooks for appropriate use of the catechism. Since the Catechism of the Catholic Church was published in 1992, many publishers are submitting their materials for review by the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism within the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. If submitted for review, their materials published since 1995 will contain a statement such as the following:

*“The Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found this catechetical text to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”*

The Los Angeles Archdiocesan Elementary Advisory Board Commission reviews textbooks based on four categories: content, process/activities, catechist formation/resources, and layout/look of the book. For more information visit the [Helpful Hints When Choosing a](#)

Textbook Series and Recommended Text List in the website of the ORE: <http://www.la-archdiocese.org/org/ore/elementary/Pages/Textbook-Evaluation.aspx>.

If you have any further questions regarding Elementary materials please contact the Elementary Division of the Office of Religious Education at (213) 637-7410.

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

“Organization for catechesis is person centered” (NDC pg. 246). It is critical that learning environments are provided to help children think, question and explore new ways of understanding their faith and building a relationship with God. This requires us to be aware of the many different way in which our children learn. As human beings we are continuously growing and developing. Some of these ways include “how we build knowledge and construct meaning, how we grow psychologically and in our ability to relate to others, and how we grow in our ability to think and act morally... Understanding the cognitive ability of our learners will help us to respond to their developmental needs in appropriate ways that can nourish their growth in faith” (Echoes of Faith: Introduction to the Learner).

A well planned and executed lesson includes a clear objective, knowledge of your learners and their age appropriate abilities, a variety of activities that meet the needs of different learning styles, well timed activities, and new ways of approaching and relating faith concepts to your learners lived realities. The use of audio and visual aids such as art, music, movement, storytelling and spontaneous prayer are encouraged.

## **FORMATION OF CATECHISTS**

The formation of catechists is the responsibility of the parish catechetical leadership and the whole community. Catechist formation should develop the human, spiritual and apostolic qualities of the catechist. “Parish-centered programs for catechists remind them as catechists that their calling as catechists come from the Church, that they are sent by the Church, and that they hand on the faith of the Church” (NDC pg. 241-242). Catechists are encouraged to complete Basic Certification to become a Certified Catechist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and maintain their certification through ongoing formation. Basic Certification includes *Theological Phase* – participation in a ministry formation center; *Applications Phase* – Specialization in Elementary; *Practicum Phase* – observations, evaluations and a final interview.

To renew certification catechists must continue to attend formation opportunities. See Formation guidelines for more information.

## **SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION FOR RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST**

Sacramental preparation for baptized children assumes that the child has begun a journey of discipleship: coming to know, believe and become the person of Jesus in the world. This relationship is strengthened by celebrating God’s mercy, forgiveness and the gift of Jesus in the form of bread and wine.

With a strong belief in lifelong faith formation, a minimum of two consecutive years of catechetical formation is required for the reception of the sacraments. Readiness, not chronological age or school grade will determine a child's preparedness to encounter Christ in a sacramental celebration. This decision of readiness rests with the parents and the child in dialogue with the catechist, the parish priest and the catechetical leadership of the parish. This process affirms the fact that the child celebrating the sacraments is involved communally as well as individually.

Parents/guardians have a right and duty to be intimately involved in the preparation of their children for the sacraments. It is the role of the parish to help parents/guardians to grow in their understanding and appreciation of the sacraments in order to be able to participate readily in catechizing their children.

We must affirm the role of parents as primary religious educators and include the whole parish community in the initiation of members into the fullness of the Catholic tradition. We must meet people where they are providing opportunities for conversation and conversion where they can make connections between life and faith. All sacraments are parish centered celebrations of God's presence among us.

### **Preparation Specific to the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Christ's healing and reconciling ministry is carried on in the church. God's unconditional love and mercy is offered through the sacrament of reconciliation. By the sacrament of reconciliation we express the desire to be at peace with God and with our brothers and sisters. "Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation" (NCD no. 126). Catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation should help children to:

- Acknowledge God's unconditional love and mercy for us
- That they can turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation at any time on their faith journey
- Through conscious formation, recognize the presence of good and evil in the world, their personal capacity for both, and develop skill for the discernment of good moral choices.
- Recognize that sin creates a disconnect in their relationship with God and others.
- The sacrament strengthens them to face the consequences of their sin.
- Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and other close to them, but from God
- Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation
- Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation

"Parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness and conversion" (NDC page 135).

“...Parents should be invited in the preparation of their children for this sacrament for they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continued growth in the understanding of God’s mercy and love. (NDC 135)”

“Conversion is a life-long process, catechesis for the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year (NDC pg. 136).”

### **Preparation Specific to the Sacrament of Eucharist**

“Since the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, catechesis for the Eucharist recognizes it as the heart of Christian life for the whole church (NDC pg. 124)”.

Catechesis in preparation for the first reception of the Eucharist should:

- Teach that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.
- Teach not only the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on...they can as full members of Christ’s Body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord’s table and the community of their brothers and sisters.
- Ensure that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity for the Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion.
- Develops in children an understanding of the Father’s love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- That the bread and wine become the body of blood of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and the priest’s words of consecration, spoken first by Jesus during the last supper.
- Teaches that the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ and that what appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body.
- Teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread
- Teaches the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine
- Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass
- Helps children to receive Christ’s Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner

As with Reconciliation, parents and parish catechetical leader together with the pastor are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. “Parents have the right and duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion. The catechesis offered should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.” (NDC pg. 127)

Children need to be prepared for First Eucharist with an understanding that they will eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. Pastors are encouraged to take seriously the directives of the Bishops of the United States as well as our own Cardinal and offer the cup regularly on Sundays. Thus, all reception of communion under both species will be normative for all.

The Cardinal states in his document on liturgy, *Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass* (Sept. 1997) that "...receiving both the Body and the Blood of Christ is to be the practice of every parish at every Sunday liturgy. Homilists should occasionally make reference to the fullness of the symbol that is extended to every communicant. The words of Jesus are spoken in every Eucharistic Prayer: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it."

## **INITIATION OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE REACHED CATECHETICAL AGE**

"The sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist – lay the *foundations* of every Christian life." (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1212)

The norms established for the Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age are outlined in Part II, Chapter 1 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA #252-330). The rite states:

"This form of the rite of Christian initiation is intended for children not baptized as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age. They seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative. Such children are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation of conscience." (RCIA #252)

The initiation of children of catechetical age is a process based on their personal conversion. It is adapted to their spiritual progress and growth of faith rather than on cognitive knowledge. Because the criteria for initiation are based on assessing conversion of heart and action (RCIA #42 and 75), there is no time-line for initiating these children. It could take several years, if necessary. "The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances..." (RCIA #76)

"The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. The process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children's growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive. Accordingly, as with adults, their initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments." (RCIA, #253)

### **Goals**

1. Children of catechetical age and adults will be brought to the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist through the development, promotion, and implementation of the initiation process presented in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. This liturgical rite of the church is the official norm to be followed in the initiation of adults and children who have reached catechetical age.
  - a. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* includes "not simply the celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, but also all the rites belonging to the catechumenate." (RCIA Introduction, #1) When the sacraments of initiation are celebrated for children who have reached catechetical age, it is

assumed that they will also celebrate all of the rites belonging to the catechumenate. The Code of Canon Law states, in Can. 852, that “The provisions of the canons on adult baptism apply to all those who, being no longer infants, have reached the use of reason.” Thus, children from approximately the age of seven years to around fourteen to eighteen years are to be considered of “catechetical age.”

Children, like adults, travel a journey of faith based on their spiritual progress. Various rites mark their growth in faith and culminate with the celebration of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. In general, children follow the same path towards initiation as adults. There is one initiation process for both adults and children.

- b. As with adults, initiation of children is marked by several stages: Pre-catechumenate, Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy. These stages in the initiation of children are marked by liturgical rites: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (*RCIA #260-276*), the optional Rite of Election (*RCIA #277-290*), penitential rites or scrutinizes (*RCIA # 291-303*), and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation (*RCIA # 304-329*). “Corresponding to the periods of adult initiation are the periods of the children’s catechetical formation that lead up to and follow the steps of their initiation.” (*RCIA #253*)
  - c. While children follow the same journey of faith as adults, there are distinctions and differences based on their age and developmental stages. In many ways, then, the rite cautions that “...they cannot yet be treated as adults because, at this stage of their lives, they are dependent on their parents or guardians and are still strongly influenced by their companions and their social surroundings.” (*RCIA #252*).
2. Parents, guardians, and families of children preparing for initiation will be fully involved in the process. Their care, support, and example are necessary for the faith life of the children to grow and flourish.
    - a. It is vital that parents, guardians, or other family members be included in the full process of initiation of children. Without the cooperation and support of parents, guardians, or family, initiation of children through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist cannot achieve its full potential for a life-long growth in faith.
    - b. Strong and active participation of parents and families in the initiation process of their children will be encouraged by offering them guidance, support, and adequate adult formation opportunities.
    - c. Likewise, the community of faith into which the children are being initiated has a responsibility to support, sustain, and encourage the children and their families. “Initiation...is the responsibility of all the baptized...Hence, the entire community

must help the catechumens and candidates throughout the process of initiation.”  
(*RCIA* Introduction, #9)

- d. Sponsors are those who accompany “...any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen.” (*RCIA* #10) In initiation of children, parents or guardians usually assume the role of “sponsor”, i.e., the ones who accompany their children and present them at the liturgical rites (Rites of Acceptance or Welcoming, Scrutinies and Penitential Rites, and the Rites of Election or Continuing Conversion). If parents cannot for various reasons do this, sponsors or sponsoring families from the parish may take on this responsibility (*RCIA* #260). Godparents, who may be persons other than the parish sponsor, may be chosen for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.
3. Catechetical principles as presented in the *GDC* (1997) and the *NDC* (2005) will be followed, noting the role of the baptismal catechumenate as inspiration for catechesis (*GDC* #90 – 91 and *NDC*, pp.115 - 118).
    - a. The baptismal catechumenate inspires catechesis in the following ways (from *GCD* #90-91):
      - The recognition that Christian initiation is of fundamental importance in the life of the Church.
      - The baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community.
      - The paschal mystery and the spirituality of Baptism permeates the baptismal catechumenate and inspires all catechesis.
      - The catechumenate is the “initial locus of inculturation” that receives and accepts all people.
      - The process of formation in the catechumenate is characterized by its comprehensiveness and integrity, gradual character expressed in definite stages, connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs, and in its constant references to the Christian community.
    - b. “The baptismal catechumenate is both ‘a process of formation and a true school of the faith.’ (*GCD* #91). It is a fruitful blend of instruction and formation in the faith; it progresses through gradual stages, it unfolds the Church’s rites, symbols, and biblical signs; and it incorporates the catechumens into the Christian community of faith and worship.” (*NCD* pg. 116)
  4. Paragraphs 75 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* will provide the rationale for catechesis of children of a catechetical age who are preparing to celebrate the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.
    - a. “Suitable catechesis...planned to be gradual and complete... [is] accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word.” Catechesis is to lead the children to an “appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts” but also instills a “profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.” (*RCIA* #75.1)

- b. Catechesis that prepares for the sacraments of initiation helps the children “become familiar with the Christian way of life” as they learn from the “example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community.” They learn to pray, to witness to their faith, practice love of neighbor, and “in all things keep their hopes set on Christ.” (*RCIA #75.2*)
  
- 5. Children of catechetical age will participate in all the liturgical rites of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, specifically those found in Part II, Chapter 1, *Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age* (# 252 – 330).
  - a. Liturgical rites support and strengthen the faith of the children. They take part in the liturgy of the Word, and are “kindly dismissed” along with the adults to prayerfully consider the Word that has just been proclaimed to them. (*RCIA 75.3*) Blessings and anointings may also be used if adapted for children (*RCIA #95 – 97*).
  - b. All the sacraments of initiation will be celebrated for children of catechetical age. Their initiation rites will consist of receiving the sacraments “...in a single celebration of the three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.” (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1233*)
  - c. The *Code of Canon Law* states, in regard to the sacrament of Confirmation, “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.” (#852) “The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death...” (#891)
  - d. The National Statutes on the Catechumenate states in #14: “In order to signify clearly the interrelation of the three sacraments, which are required for full Christian initiation (canon 842.2), adult candidates, including children of catechetical age, are to receive baptism, confirmation and Eucharist in a single Eucharistic celebration.” #18 concludes: “Since children who have reached the use of reason are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults (canon 852.1), their formation should follow the general pattern of the ordinary catechumenate as far as possible, with the appropriate adaptations.”
  
- 6. Archdiocesan programs will be established to train and form catechists, directors of children’s initiation, and parish personnel such as pastors, deacons, liturgists, and pastoral associates who will be engaged in the ministry of initiation of children.
  
- 7. Collaboration between the Archdiocesan Office for Worship and the Office of Religious Education will be welcomed and encouraged.

## Process

Those engaged in the initiation of children of a catechetical age understand that these children are undergoing a conversion of heart, mind, and action. They have been brought by their parents to the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, but because they are capable of participating fully in their own initiation, their consent and willingness to participate in the process is expected and they are indeed "...capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation of conscience." (*RCIA* #252)

Thus, initiation becomes a process that moves at its own pace, geared to the faith life of the children. It is not a program that begins and ends, or that has the expectation of "graduation" or the completion of a course of studies. This process occurs in stages and is marked by liturgical rites that celebrate the movement of faith that is happening in the lives of the children.

The catechetical process that is involved in the initiation of children is derived from the *RCIA*, #75. "Suitable" catechesis is "planned to be gradual and complete." It is "accommodated to the liturgical year" and is "solidly supported by celebrations of the word." This catechesis leads the children not only to "an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate."

To respect the Rite's insistence that catechesis be accommodated to the liturgical year and supported by celebrations of the Word, a form of "lectionary-based catechesis" is used in catechizing these children. The Sunday readings are used during the period of the Catechumenate as a basis for presenting the mystery of salvation as well as an introduction to "dogmas and precepts". Catechists assist the children in a prayerful reflection on the lectionary readings, week by week, and thus lead the children through a "gradual and complete" catechesis of the tradition in which the Christian community is grounded.

Various outcomes can be expected when children become familiar with the Christian way of life and are catechized gradually and by God's Word. They turn to God in prayer. They begin to bear witness to the faith. They "keep their hopes set on Christ" and they "follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds." They practice love of neighbor. The children are on a spiritual journey that is evidenced by a "progressive change of outlook and conduct." In this way, conversion takes place that is personal and somewhat developed.

The process of initiation thus must be "adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children's growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive." The process takes whatever time is necessary for the children to experience and live out their new faith as they move towards the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Children who are in the initiation process can be catechized in groups according to their ages and stages of development. These groups consist of the initiation children alone ("It is advantageous, as circumstances allow, to form a group of several children who are in the same situation, in order that by example they may help one another in their progress as catechumens." (*RCIA* #255). At the same time, a group of initiation children can be included with other children from the parish community who are of similar age but who are already baptized. If these baptized

children are preparing for Eucharist or Confirmation, children preparing for baptism can progress “gradually and within the supportive setting of this group of companions.” (RCIA #254)

Thus, initiation children can be incorporated more fully into the life of the parish if there are opportunities for them to participate in activities with their companions. Any parish gatherings for children, including service projects, music performances, or seasonal workshops or entertainments should always include the initiation children. Baptized parish children can celebrate the Liturgy of the Word with initiation children on occasion.

After initiation and after the period of *Mystagogia*, child neophytes are incorporated into the parish catechetical programs. Attention should be paid to welcoming these children into already-established groups. Catechists need to be ready to receive these neophytes with gentleness and patience, realizing that they may require definitions and explanations with which the other children are already familiar.

Newly initiated children, however, often have much to teach their peers as they speak readily of their spiritual journeys and their conversion of heart. Part of the process of preparing children for Christian initiation is the recognition of their unique and special place in the Church. Those who minister with these children admit that their faith has often been strengthened by the faith of the children. Thus, the Christian initiation of children who have reached catechetical age is a great gift to the Church and to those who engage in this ministry.

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