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SAMPLE

Foreword

This revised edition of the FDLC commentary on the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* appears at a critical and promising juncture in the Church's life. We have just undergone a kind of "first generation," post-Council experience of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The first English edition of the rite was issued in 1974. This was followed in 1988 by the present edition in use in the United States.

Some parishes and dioceses have been working with the rite since the mid-1970s, others for a dozen years or so. There is then a wealth of pastoral experience to draw upon as we look to the next generation of implementation. This revised commentary helps to bridge the wisdom contained in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and the experience we now have of putting that wisdom into practice.

Readers will discover that this commentary invites us to look again and more attentively to the rite itself for our orientation and direction. This ritual book, as much as the present Order of Mass and perhaps more than any of the other revised rituals resulting from the Second Vatican Council, brings forward the ancient and lived wisdom of our ancestors in faith. The rite offers a vision and structured means of forming newcomers to Christian faith in the ways of living that faith. Not coincidentally, this vision also prepares the way for the transformation of communities of faith as they seek out and embrace these newcomers to Christ.

From the beginnings of the implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, visionary Church leaders have seen the possibility of this rite renewing the Catholic way of life in our dioceses and parishes. Rooted in the vision of an evangelizing community of faith, the rite embodies a way of being Church that focuses on building up the Body of Christ for Christ's mission in the world. This is a vision of evangelization leading to initiation leading to mission.

Further, something is being learned here that is critical for the initial and ongoing formation of all members of the household of Christ. The experience of the catechumenate brings a recovery of the ancient and perennial sources and means of Christian formation: the Word of God, liturgical celebration, the full life of the community of faith, and apostolic mission and service by that community (see RCIA, no. 75). In sum, it is about a way of being in the world and for its salvation in Christ, a world so beloved of God.

As this revised commentary attests, adaptation has been and will continue to be a large part of the implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The rite invites adaptation for the very reason that such an extended process of formation and integration must reflect the realities of the Spirit working in the flesh and blood lives of those coming to faith and of the community that is forming them in its way of life. The commentary invites us to look again at the rite's openings and orientations to adaptation. With these once again in mind, we will be better equipped to consider afresh how we are adapting the rite in order to continue to keep faith with the rite's vision.

The insights of this commentary help prepare pastoral ministers for the second generation of work implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The wisdom found in these pages reflects a sure grasp of many of the strengths and weaknesses of the first generation of implementation, a glimpse of which can be found in a recently completed national study. Conducted throughout the United States between 1997 and 2000, this study of the implementation of the rite was sponsored by the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops with the assistance of The North American Forum on the Catechumenate. A report is available under the title *Journey to the Fullness of Life*. This report offers a very positive view of the success of the recovery of the catechumenate. Dioceses and most parishes have implemented the rite, many enthusiastically, and have found it a source of new life.

A few areas for ongoing development that emerged from the national study can be highlighted.

Evangelization

Of those coming through the catechumenal process, nearly 80 percent become interested because they are married to a Catholic spouse. This is good, but we are beginning to learn to reach beyond those already in touch with us through marriage, to realize that our neighborhoods and workplaces are peopled with those hungering for the Lord, sometimes unknowingly.

Liturgy

Many of those who knock on our door do so because of an experience of Catholic liturgical life. They tasted something of God and God's people in the experience. As "source and summit" of the Christian life, liturgy is clearly central to the whole process of the rite. Continuing and strong effort needs to be put into our liturgies, the Sunday liturgical celebration in particular.

Christian Teaching

Three-quarters of our parishes still have a process of less than a year, often following the school calendar. The rite assumes no less than a full liturgical year for the period of the catechumenate alone. At stake is formation in the full paschal mystery of Christ, which is unfolded through the Church's cycle of liturgical celebrations over the course of a whole liturgical year. From this unfolding the life-giving teachings of Christ and the Church emerge.

Community

Because initiation ministers realize that initiation is the work of the whole community, they often wonder how to get more people involved. The community regularly exercises its formative role in the Sunday liturgy, where newcomers are formed at the community's celebration of the liturgy of the word. Good proclamation and preaching are critical. In addition to this regular liturgical experience, these apprentice members of the household of faith should be immersed in the other aspects of the life of the community, e.g., outreach and service. In this way the community exercises its essential formative role in the Christian way of life.

Ecumenism

Local statistics vary, but nationally for every catechumen (unbaptized) going through the initiation process, there are two candidates (already baptized). There is need to do better distinguishing candidates who are catechized from those who are uncatechized. Already catechized candidates, for example, fully practicing Christians seeking full communion, come to the eucharistic table as soon as they receive whatever formation is needed. Only uncatechized candidates belong in a catechumenate-like process adapted to their needs, with suitable formation and liturgical celebration. The ecumenical teaching of the Church is at stake in this.

Obstacles

The national study revealed that the two most common obstacles to people completing initiation are irregular marriage situations and inflexible scheduling. We are working to do better in our pastoral practice by these people. Canonists and other ministers need to coordinate their handling of marriage cases and look to early, faithful, and pastoral solutions. As for scheduling, we do well to recall the direction given in the rite (see RCIA, no. 5), that is, that initiation is a work of the Spirit—and the Spirit works on the Spirit's time schedule within the flesh and blood realities of individual lives. We need to stretch and be as responsive as possible to individual needs, for example, work schedules, multiple job situations, and family circumstances.

Congratulations and gratitude are owed to the FDLC for the excellent timing of this revised commentary and to Dr. J. Michael McMahon, its author. If the challenge of the next generation of work with the rite is to make a good thing happening in our midst even better, the insights in these pages will go a long way toward this goal. They will help us focus our attention once again on the inherent wisdom of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and its great promise for the future of our Catholic community of faith.

James M. Schellman

The North American Forum on the Catechumenate

Introduction

When the first edition of this book appeared in 1986, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* had been published just over ten years. Parishes in English speaking countries at that time were using a provisional translation of the Rite that had been prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) in 1974. In the United States, pastoral ministers had been encouraged by the bishops to experiment with the rite, so that eventually the preparation of a definitive edition of the ritual book for this country might benefit from broad pastoral experience.

In preparing its new translation of the RCIA, ICEL rearranged some of the material in the ritual book to allow for greater ease of use by pastoral ministers. Meanwhile, the U.S. Bishops Committee on the Liturgy established a committee to recommend adaptations to be included in the American edition of the Rite, taking into account the experience of parishes that had been using the provisional text as their guide. After the committee had completed its work, the U.S. edition of the RCIA was approved by the full body of the bishops and confirmed by the Holy See. This new edition was published in 1988, and has gradually been taking root throughout the U.S.

This second edition of the liturgical commentary has been expanded to include the new material that is now part of the U.S. edition of the Rite, and to reflect the pastoral experience of communities where the Rite has been celebrated with care. The historical sections have been revised to take account of more recent scholarship in the field, and the bibliography has been updated to provide readers with access to some fine newer works on initiation.

This edition also takes account of two important pastoral issues that have emerged as major concerns in the implementation of the RCIA in the United States. First, a substantial number of parents have presented for initiation children who have reached the age where they can be catechized and make their own profession of faith. The formation of these children for initiation and the celebration of their faith journey in the midst of the community have become major concerns of pastoral ministers.

Second, in the U.S. there are far more baptized candidates seeking to become Catholics than there are adult catechumens seeking baptism. Early in the process of implementation, many parishes began to use the rites of the catechumenate for these baptized candidates without much attention to the ecclesial, catechetical, liturgical, or pastoral problems that such a practice posed. The U.S. edition of the Rite has sought to address these problems by including norms for the formation of baptized candidates and adapted rites appropriate for them.

As implementation of the RCIA has proceeded, it has become clear that this effort requires attention to every aspect of parish life. The Rite presumes not only a lively liturgical life, but also solid catechetical formation, strong community bonds, thoughtful pastoral care, commitment to evangelization and service, and ecumenical sensitivity. Since the liturgical aspects of the Rite are so strongly related to the other dimensions of the life of the Christian community, I have called this second edition a “pastoral liturgical commentary,” and have attempted throughout the book to point out important connections.

This book is primarily intended for those who prepare the rites of Christian initiation and for other pastoral ministers concerned with the implementation of the RCIA in their communities. The book might also be helpful for students in universities, seminaries, and ministry formation programs who are interested in a general overview of the liturgical and pastoral issues involved in preparing catechumens and candidates for initiation and in celebrating the rites. The study questions at the end of each chapter also are included for liturgy committees or adult study groups that might find this book helpful in increasing their own understanding of the Rite, its background, and the issues involved in its pastoral implementation.

The historical material offered in this book is meant only to give the reader a general background for the RCIA and its various periods and steps. Those who would like to study the rather complex history of Christian initiation would benefit greatly from the excellent books cited in the bibliography, particularly the works of Maxwell Johnson and Paul Turner.

The documentation included in this book is quite complete, but does not include the actual texts of the rites nor every pertinent paragraph from the Church's documents. It will be helpful for readers to have a copy of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* close at hand, especially so that they can refer to the prayers and other texts not found in this book.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, which invited me to undertake this project, and to all who have supported me in it: Lawrence Johnson, who edited the first edition; Michael Spillane and Joseph Skeffington, who suggested this second edition; Hillary Hayden, OSB, and Thomas Morris, who read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions; Glenn Byer, who edited the present edition; Richard Gibala, who offered much needed encouragement; and James Schellman, who provided an illuminating foreword to this edition. My gratitude extends also to the many women and men with whom I have been privileged to serve in the initiation ministry, especially to my colleagues and friends at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Community in Alexandria, Virginia; St. Mark's Parish in Vienna, Virginia; and at the North American Forum on the Catechumenate.

I dedicate this book to my parents, John and Helen McMahon, and to Rev. Thomas A. Casey, who have helped to form me in faith. As they have died with Christ, may they share his resurrection.

SAMPLE

1. The Christian Initiation of Adults: An Historical Sketch

The New Testament

In the New Testament, becoming a Christian meant becoming a member of the Christian community through insertion into the Christ event, which is the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Paul reminded the Romans that:

[we] were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

One becomes a part of the community bearing Christ's name by participating in the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

In the earliest writings of the New Testament, the letters of Paul, baptism is pivotal for an understanding of the Christian life. Baptism into Christ brings about a radical change in a person, and therefore a radical change in one's way of life. Paul is fond of pointing out the contrasts between the old self and the new self that has been baptized into Christ and thus transformed: "For just as through the disobedience of the one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Through our death with Christ in baptism, we have become one with him. Our old sinful self is destroyed, and we who have died with Christ now "believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:8).

Our lives are transformed in baptism, and now as "children of light" we are called to put aside "the fruitless works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:8-14). For Paul, initiation bears strong ethical implications. Once we have shared in Christ's death, there is no turning back to our former way of life. We have put on Christ (cf. Galatians 3:27) and cast off our old selves. Paul concludes,

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. (Colossians 3:12-14)

The New Testament regards water baptism as the only ritual act by which one may become a member of Christ's body, the Church, with the exception of those who were the original witnesses of the Christ event. The apostles and a number of other men and women who followed Jesus had seen the risen Lord and received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. By virtue of their direct experience of the Risen One, they had already been initiated into Christ's death and resurrection. But for those who came to faith through hearing the proclamation of the good news, water baptism was necessary for entry into the Christian community.

The New Testament provides us with no handbook for the liturgical usage of the early Christian communities. We have no detailed accounts of the process by which a person was initiated or of the rites that were celebrated at initiation. This is not to say, however, that the New Testament is completely silent on the pattern of initiation. A careful reading of the evidence suggests the following points.

1. *Adult baptism as normative.* The New Testament reports only the baptism of adults. While there is no prohibition against the baptism of children, all of the baptismal accounts in the Acts of the Apostles concern adults capable of making a response of faith to the word proclaimed. Nonetheless, several New Testament passages speak of a household being baptized, which some assume to include children (see Acts of the Apostles 16:15; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16). Even in

these cases, however, baptism is given based on the mature faith response of the adults who headed the household.

2. *Proclamation.* Baptism is always preceded by the proclamation of the *kerygma*, the good news about Jesus Christ. A classic formulation of the *kerygma*, the kernel of the Christian profession of faith, can be found in Peter's sermon to the crowd on the day of Pentecost:

You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it.... Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts of the Apostles 2:22–24, 36)

All the baptismal stories in Acts include a proclamation of this message: Jesus, the Crucified One, has been raised up by God, and is now exalted as Lord.

3. *Catechesis.* In addition to the proclamation of the *kerygma*, baptismal preparation included catechesis in the mystery of Christ. Peter's sermon on Pentecost, for example, reflected on the connections between the Christ event and the traditions of Israel. The resurrection of Jesus is understood in light of Psalm 16:

Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence. (Acts of the Apostles 2:26–28; see Psalm 16:9–11)

For Luke, the author of Acts, the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection is brought out by searching the writings of the Old Testament. In their preaching, the apostles followed the lead of the Risen One himself, who opened the minds of the disciples on the road to Emmaus by explaining the meaning of the scriptures, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets" (Luke 24:27). Even the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized somewhat abruptly by Philip had already been studying the prophets, and was opened up to their true meaning by Philip's instruction (see Acts of the Apostles 8:26–40).

The Letter to the Hebrews also makes reference to initial catechesis in the Christian life. The author chided his hearers, who needed once again to hear "the basic elements of the utterances of God"; they were in need of "milk, [and] not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12).

4. *Conversion.* Throughout the New Testament, initiation is linked to conversion. Those who hear the proclamation of the good news make a response of faith in the risen and exalted Lord, a response which includes a thorough change in their way of life. Since believers are baptized into the death of Christ, they put to death the old sinful self and put on the new person, recreated in Christ (see Galatians 3:27).

In the Acts of the Apostles, repentance is regarded as the mark of conversion. After the people had listened to Peter's proclamation on Pentecost, they were "cut to the heart" (Acts of the Apostles 2:37) and asked what they should do. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit" (Acts of the Apostles 2:38). A faith response which includes a reorientation of one's life always precedes water baptism.

5. *Water Baptism.* It has already been noted that the New Testament regards the water bath as the central ritual act for entrance into the Christian community.

The practice of the water bath was by no means unique to Christianity: it was practiced in other cultures in which Christianity developed and into which it spread. The New Testament itself recounts the baptismal practices of John the Baptist and describes the baptism of Jesus in the