

FDLC Webinar Series
Order of Christian Initiation of Adults

November 9, 2022

“The Initiating Community: Roles and Proper Ministries”

Donna Eschenauer, PhD
Donna.eschenauer@archny.org

Webinar Outline

- **Welcome and Opening Comments**

- **Introduction to the Topic**
 - **Goal of webinar:** to demonstrate the vital **role of the community** in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.

“The initiation of catechumens takes place step by step in the midst of the community of the faithful, who together with the catechumens reflecting upon the value of the Paschal Mystery and renewing their own conversion, lead them by their own example to obey the Holy Spirit more generously” (OCIA 4).

- **Resources:**
 - Maria Harris. *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*
 - Diana Macalintal. *Your Parish is the Community: RCIA in the Midst of the Community.*

- **The Initiating Community, a Historical Perspective**
 - Why the Role of the community is vital to appropriate implementation of OCIA
 - Ancient Practice – 4th Century: Catechumens learned a new way of life from those who lived the Gospel in their everyday life.
 - Sunday – Have identity to the early Christian community
It was through the gathered assembly that faith was handed on

- **The Initiating Community, an Ecclesial Perspective**
 - The Second Vatican Council

- *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
- *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity)
- **OCIA: Introduction II Ministries and Offices**
 - "... the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should always realize and show that the Initiation of adults **is its own concern** and a matter for all the baptized ...” (OCIA 9).
- **The Initiating Community, a Liturgical Perspective**
 - *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)
“Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, active, and conscious participation in liturgical celebration which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, ... (SC 14).
 - The rites are performed *by* and *with* the community, not *for* them.
 - The gathered assembly is vital to the liturgical formation of the catechumen.
 - The assembly is never a passive audience.
 - The ritual steps are an expression of a praying Church, an initiating community.
- **OCIA: Periods and Steps**
 - Evangelization and pre-catechumenate
 - "... a suitable explanation of the Gospel should be given to the inquirers by catechists, Deacons, and Priests, and indeed lay people. ... (OCIA 38).
 - Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate
 - "... coming together in public for the first time, those entering the catechumenate manifest their will to the Church, ... (OCIA 41).
 - Affirmation by the sponsor and the assembly (OCIA 53).
 - Dismissal of the Catechumens
 - **OCIA 67,**
“If the Eucharist is to be celebrated, the catechumens are normally dismissed

- “My dear friends, this community now sends you forth to reflect more deeply upon the word of God which you have shared with **us** today. Be assured of **our** loving support and prayers for you. **We** look forward to the day when you will share fully in the Lord’s table.”
- Period of the Catechumenate

“The catechumenate is a **lengthy** period during which the catechumens receive pastoral instruction and practice appropriate disciplines; by the help of these their spiritual frame of mind, already manifested by their entrance, is brought to maturity. There are four ways by which this is achieved:

 - Liturgical Year
 - Prayer/ Community
 - Liturgy
 - Apostolic Works
- **Sending the Catechumens for Election (Optional)**
 - **OCIA 106**, “At the conclusion of the Period of the Catechumenate, a Rite of Sending Catechumens for Election by the Bishop may be celebrated **in parishes** ...
 - **OCIA 107**, “As the focal point of the Church’s concern for the catechumens, admission to Election belongs to the Bishop ... It is within the **parish community**, however, that the preliminary judgement is made concerning the catechumens’ state of formation and progress.
- **The Period of Purification and Enlightenment**
 - **OCIA 138**, “The Period of Purification and Enlightenment of the elect normally coincides with Lent and begins with ‘Election.’ Both in the liturgy and in liturgical catechesis, through remembrance of Baptism or preparation for it, and by penitence, Lent renews **the community of the faithful together with the elect** and disposes them to recall the Paschal Mystery, which the Sacraments of Initiation apply to individuals. In this period, **the elect together with the local community** give themselves to spiritual recollection, so that they may prepare themselves for the Paschal Feasts and for Initiation by the Sacraments. To this end the Scrutinies, the Rites of Handing On, and the Rites of Immediate Preparation are provided for them.”

- **Rites of Handing On**
 - (OCIA 157; 178) “... takes place in the presence of the community of the faithful after the Liturgy of the Word at a weekday Mass ...”
 - **OCIA 147**, “... the Church lovingly entrusts to them the texts regarded from antiquity as a summary of its faith and prayer. ...”
- **Scrutinies**
 - Prayer in Silence
 - OCIA 152, “After the homily the elect and their godparents come forward...
 - Looking at the faithful, he invites them to pray in silence for the elect and ask that they be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God.”
- **Preparation rites**
 - OCIA 185
- **Renewal of baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil**
 - OCIA 237, on slide
- **Period of Mystagogy**
 - **OCIA 244**, “After this last step is complete, the community together with the neophytes, by mediation on the Gospel, by participation in the Eucharist, and by the exercise of charity, makes progress in understanding the Paschal Mystery more deeply and carrying it over more and more into the practice of daily life. ...”
 - **OCIA 246**, “This new participation in the Sacraments, ... at the same time so increases a person’s knowledge of others and enriches the experience of the community that the relationship between the neophytes and the rest of the faithful becomes easier and more practical. ... Mystagogy is of great importance in enabling the neophytes, ... to form closer relationships with the faithful and to communicate to them a new view of things as well as a new enthusiasm. ...
 - **OCIA 247**, “Since the character and value of this period should arise from this new personal experience both of the Sacraments and of the community, the principal place

for ‘Mystagogy’ is the so-called ‘Masses for neophytes’ or Masses of the Sundays of Easter Time ...”

- **Pastoral Implications**

- It is imperative that the parish at large also develops an understanding of their role and responsibility to the catechumenate.
- Community needs to understand its role in the liturgy in general.
- The Pastoral Staff needs to enthusiastically understand and express genuine interest in a broader vision for the initiation of new members.

- **Affirmation:** The nature of the Church is to be missionary, and, as Avery Cardinal Dulles,

In *Models of the Church*, states:

- “The external mission of the Church can never be separated from its inner life. In the early centuries, the Church expanded not so much because of concerted missionary efforts as through its power of attraction as a contrast society. Seeing the mutual love and support of the Christians, and the high moral standards they observed, the pagans sought entrance into the Church. If the same is not happening today, this is largely because the Church no longer appears conspicuously as the community of disciples, transformed by its participation in the new creation” (213).

- **Practical Steps**

- Sunday Mass; introductory comments and homily
- Dismissal of the catechumens
- Recurring bulletin/website articles
- Prepare the parish for the Rites
- Invite catechumens to parish event and involve them

Other Helpful Resources

Eschenauer, Donna. "The People of God and the Role of Christian Initiation of Adults: Forming and Re-forming the Life of the Church." *Catechumenate A Journal of Christian Initiation* Volume 35, no. 5 (September 2013): 28-37.

_____. *The Role of the Coordinator in Christian Initiation*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2017.

_____. *Recruiting and Forming Your Parish Initiation Team*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2021.

Gensler, OSF, Gael, Timothy A. Johnston, Corina Laughlin, Kyle Lechtenberg. *Disciples Making Disciples: Print and Digital Resources for Forming the Assembly*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2017.

Mick, Lawrence E. *Forming the Assembly to Celebrate Sacraments*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2020.

_____. *RCIA Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989.