

Children of the Light

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To Directors of Faith Formation and Catechists

This manual is written for you—directors of faith formation and catechists—as you serve those children in the RCIA process who express a desire to enter the catechumenate period. A parent orientation session is included; this session is designed for you to offer your support to the parents and to seek their support as formation partners with you. The orientation helps them understand the catechumenate period and honors the guidance they will give to their children.

Two approaches to preparing the children for the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens are offered. The first includes three consecutive sessions, each focused on a different aspect of the rite. The second is a day-long retreat. This preparation helps the children assess their readiness to move into the period of the catechumenate. You, as a catechist, need to discern the children’s readiness as well. If you determine that some children are not yet ready for this next step, welcome them to continue in the precatechumenate period.

Those children who do celebrate the Rite of Acceptance continue along their journey of faith and conversion as you offer the sessions in this manual. The Church observes three liturgical years—Years A, B, and C—over a three-year cycle of scripture readings. During the catechumenate period, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (as adapted for children of catechetical age) summons us to accommodate our formation and catechesis to the unfolding of the liturgical year.

This period gives each child time to come to know more deeply who they are in Christ’s image. This is accomplished slowly as they pay attention to their own life experiences, as they share God’s word at the liturgy, as they participate in prayer, and as they become ever more faithful and committed members of the community. During the Liturgy of the Word, the catechumens hear the word proclaimed and preached and are then dismissed before the Profession of Faith. They go forth, supported by the prayers of the community, to more deeply understand and live out the word of God in their lives. As the catechumens grow in their faith they become more interested in being part of the community and in serving others. When the initiation process is concluded, they will become part of the people of God on a mission to help build God’s reign.

You are invited to use what best fits the needs of the children with whom you are ministering. You may think of something that will work better than the ideas that are offered here. You may also find something in one session that will work several times with the children. Be creative and draw upon your own faith experiences as well.

As you read through the following questions and answers, we hope you find the help and encouragement you need to serve the children in this process.

Introduction

As a catechist for this process, what do I need to know first?

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Part II, Section 1, “Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age”) gives us the vision for our ministry as catechists in the RCIA. It is important to read that section of the rite, as well as Part I. We, the Church, are to welcome and invite those children who have not yet been baptized, have come to an age of understanding, and are of catechetical age to be a part of the process of faith formation. The Rite reminds us that children can and do search for a sense of belonging to a body, whether at their parents’, guardians’, or their own initiative.

We can feel confident that children are able to receive and nurture a personal faith and recognize their responsibility to be aware of right and wrong. We know that children still need and are dependent upon adults to give direction and guidance in their lives. We catechists are part of that very action in each child’s life. Children, parents, catechists, leaders, and the entire community all working together will lead these children to know Christ and one day to celebrate their inclusion as members of Christ’s Body.

What should be the attitude or perspective of a catechist?

A catechist serving in faith formation must see each child as a full and unique person. Within their short lifetime, children already have many experiences of Christ being active in their lives in some way. If we do not recognize all that they are and bring with them, we fail to serve them in the best way possible.

In the RCIA, the Church asks for a personal and developed conversion according to the level of maturity of the child. When we recognize each child as a full person, we and they are opened to their potential to develop a relationship with Christ and to express their need for others. We recognize that they want to be accepted and welcomed, that they want to belong to something greater than themselves and feel valued as they participate in the life of the community.

The Church summons us to form children in the fullness of the faith to the best of our abilities. In the RCIA process, this means that we guide them along the journey of conversion. We do not lock them into a program, entering in September and ending in May or at the Easter Vigil. We give them the time they need for the journey they must walk. This differs from a school model; it is a conversion model, a journey of the heart.

Why a process rather than a program?

This form of catechesis invites us to receive children into the process all year long; this results in an ongoing, year-round formation process. It does become messy and busy. You do need to know your children and their

families. Your faith formation office must keep up with the paperwork. You as the catechist need to begin with the family. Meet them where they are and invite the children forward slowly as they are ready.

In order to enter the period of the catechumenate the children must exhibit an initial conversion. The children are given the guidance to reflect upon and acknowledge signs of readiness in their faith to move ahead in the process. Readiness can be assessed over time through the Reflective Response section found in each session. This provides opportunities to become aware of certain changes that may be taking place in the children's lives. Other changes might also be seen in their efforts and attitudes. As the children bond during the sessions they will begin to share as a community. The children's prayer lives will be stronger than when they began, and their interest in participating at Mass will have increased. They may speak of their desire for the sacraments, no longer depending on their parents' desire alone. These are signs of spiritual readiness. A process offers the time needed by each child.

What happens during summer months?

A process implies that something continues and does not stop. During the summer months, offer an invitation to continue meeting. You may choose to meet less often, but the children should still gather for catechesis. Families and catechists all deserve time away. This means that the catechists share the responsibility to lead a session or field trip. It can be challenging, since not everyone may be present. In this situation you might consider the following experiences:

- Field trips to religious sites near you
- Caring for your parish grounds (with a pizza lunch!)
- Arranging for a family picnic with scripture and games
- Meeting with families for some swim time and scripture sharing
- Collecting basic material needs for needy children and families in your area
- Donating time to help at a community center for families
- Taking a tour of your diocesan cathedral

How much parent or guardian involvement is necessary?

Involvement of parents and guardians is crucial to the journey of the children as they move toward reception of the sacraments of the Church. This involvement will help in the children's awareness and understanding of the faith. Attending Mass, taking part in parish events, celebrating the holy days, and participating in these sessions will strengthen both the relationship between the children and Christ and the children's desire for the sacraments of the Church.

Parents and guardians often have the expectation that the catechumenate period is the final class for their children, culminating in reception of the sacraments. Catechists need to be aware of this expectation and acknowledge it by establishing that, although they are guided by their parents and catechists, the children will make their own decisions about readiness to celebrate the sacraments.

Each session includes a letter to the parents, which can be e-mailed to them before the session or given to them at the end of the session. The letters are designed to give information about what their children have discussed during a session, and contains faith formation for the parents as well. Interaction between parents and children is of great value and we need to encourage it. These letters can help parents to share their faith with their children.

Included in this manual is the parent orientation, which can be held on an afternoon or evening. This meeting is a time for parents to look at what the period of the catechumenate entails. One other person of faith must be included: the child's sponsor or godparent. If the child has someone in mind as a godparent or sponsor, and they fulfill the necessary requirements, they too should attend the sessions as much as possible.

Do we offer an age-level or multi-age process?

Your parish may already have children seeking the rites of Christian initiation who are part of the precatechumenate period. It is the catechist's duty to know the children who may be expressing their desire to move ahead in the process. When children show signs of readiness to take this next step at the same time, we offer them the proper preparation. The challenge occurs when only a few of the children, of like or varied ages, decide that they are ready. This creates a need for more catechists and another time and space to meet.

When children of different ages are meeting together, catechists must recognize the needs of each child in an age-appropriate way. Although the sessions offer experiences for multi-age use, you will want to provide what is best for the children. For example, sometimes it may be necessary to divide the children into two groups and use two activities at a session.

How do we prepare the children for the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens?

To enter the period of the catechumenate the children celebrate the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. Three sessions prepare the children to enter the catechumenate period. You can use all three sessions, or offer a retreat experience using the content of the three sessions. You should be familiar with the rite and meet with the other catechists, the director of faith formation, and the priest; work together to prepare the children for the rite.

Preparation with the children facilitates an encounter with Christ and offers them a way to express their faith. We can do this best through a medium that connects to the children's spiritual needs. The three sessions present ways for the children to recognize their faith and to discern whether or not they are ready to celebrate the rite.

Because this is a conversion journey for the participants, the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens can be offered more than once during the year. Making the rite available when the children—as well as any adult catechumens—are ready allows a flexibility of movement within the process.

After the celebration of the rite of acceptance the parish registers the names of all new catechumens, their sponsors, the celebrant, the parish, and the date. The book in which this information is recorded should be kept in a safe place with the parish's baptismal records.

What if some children decide they are not ready for the rite?

During a session or retreat, some children may indicate that they are not ready to celebrate the rite. If this happens, do not panic. This means that the process is working for the child, who recognizes the need for continued formation. Ask the parents and child to meet with you. Make time to speak with the child to be certain you understand what they meant. Then, if the child is sure of the decision, meet with the parents and child together outside the session time. The parents will want to understand their child's decision and perhaps ask questions.

If the child and parents agree that the child needs to remain in the precatechumenate period, then the child continues in that period. Should the child and parents agree to go ahead, then the child continues toward the rite of acceptance.

When some children are not ready for movement in the process, it becomes necessary to separate the groups for catechesis. Each group needs different catechesis with respect to their journeys in faith and the action of the Holy Spirit working in them.

How often should a retreat or reflection time be scheduled?

You will find daytime retreats and in-session experiences in this manual. Their purpose is to aid in preparing the children for the specific rite to be celebrated. These experiences help the children articulate their encounter with Christ and support them in their own desire for Christ in their lives. The children grow in faith through prayer, silence, meditation, communal activities, and activities that help bond the children to each other and to the community.

Plan carefully for the number of children in your group and involve enough adults and catechists. Retreats can be held in a place away from the parish grounds, or you can hold a day retreat at the parish using different rooms.

There are many opportunities for retreats and times for reflection. Find the time, plan well, and offer the one that best nurtures the spiritual life of the children. You will be surprised at how the children will remember these experiences for many years to come.

How can the community be involved in the children's process?

Place an invitation in your parish bulletin to those interested in receiving the sacraments of initiation. As members of the community read this, they may pass on the information to someone who may have expressed an interest. The parishioner who offers this information could be a possible sponsor or godparent for a future catechumen.

As parents, godparents, and sponsors become involved, more people will be interested in helping and taking part in the process. Other members of the community can be indirectly involved in the process as well. Included in this manual after the preparation retreat is an invitation to a parish group to take part in writing letters of welcome to the children. These can be given to each catechumen after the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. Children in other faith formation programs of the parish can be invited to write letters or to draw pictures of encouragement and prayer. As the children continue their formation, different individuals and groups can be invited to take part as well. A parish can welcome the families of the catechumens to a Sunday morning coffee-and-doughnut hour.

This process belongs to the entire community, not just a few people. Be creative. Think of ways to spark the interest of those sitting in the pews and already engaged in their faith. Those members who enjoy ministering with children could potentially become part of your team.

10 The Sacrament of Baptism

For the Catechist

Purpose of the Session

This session examines the meaning and significance of the sacrament of baptism.

Catechist Formation

In baptism, we die with Christ and rise with him to newness of life. We are named, we reject sin, profess faith, enter the baptismal waters, are anointed, then given the light of Christ and a white garment.

It is easy to get caught up with the new life the sacrament offers and neglect the dying aspect. However, we know that without the dying there can be no new life. We need to recognize and be willing to remove, renounce, or die to the old and sinful ways of life.

As individuals, or in a group, consider your own baptism. If you have a memory of that day, reflect on that memory. If you were baptized as an infant, you can still consider many of these questions. Write your reflections in your journal.

Where was the ceremony held? Who baptized you? How old were you? Besides your parents, who else was there? What happened before and after the baptism? What words or actions do you recall? How did the water feel? By what name were you called? What special memories still linger? If meeting in a group, share some of the memories.

Once we are baptized, we are given our first “faith jobs.” The baptized are a priestly people, a prophetic people, a royal people. It is important to know what this means. If we were baptized as infants, our parents and godparents accepted the commitment to help form us in our love of God. The children in your sessions are old enough to learn about service to God, and to recognize whether they accept Christ’s mission in their lives. As you bring this challenge to the children, consider first your acceptance of it in your own life. How have you fulfilled your priestly role of leadership and care? How have you proclaimed and offered hope and justice in your role as prophet? As royalty, have you exercised service rather than power?

Setting the Environment

See page 13 for suggestions for setting up the prayer center. The Question Box and the Prayer Box are placed in the prayer center, with pencils and small pieces of paper beside each box.

A bowl of water, a baptismal candle, a container of oil, or a white garment could be placed on the prayer center. Be sure to refer to them in some way during the session. If you choose to present the demonstration described on page 184, add the glass of water and spoon to the prayer table.

For the Session



Gathering Prayer

1 Dear God:

We thank you for the love you have shown us. You have given us the gifts of the sacraments to help us know your presence with us always. Teach us what it means to be baptized into the community of faith. Amen.

2 Dear Jesus:

We gather to learn about being baptized into new life with you. Give us courage as we look into our hearts to find ways that we can follow you more closely. We want to do our best to show our love for you. Amen.

3 Dear God:

We ask that you guide us as we prepare to reflect on how we live out your love and forgiveness. We want to be truthful to ourselves and to you. Help us to face the things we do wrong and to set them right. Amen.



Question Box

Check the Question Box for any written questions. Choose an appropriate number to answer. If you are unable to answer a question immediately, let the participants know you will provide the answer at the next session.



Icebreaker

Family Celebration

Ask the children to form pairs. Give everyone a sheet with the interview questions. Each person takes a turn interviewing while the other answers the questions.



Scripture Reading

If meeting on Sunday, use the Gospel proclaimed at Mass that day. If meeting during the week, use the previous Sunday's Gospel reading.

Many resources are available with good questions for discussions with children, whatever their age. The first one to ask is, "What did you hear?" This can help the children identify some of their own questions following the reading. You also can do some research on the meaning of some of the scripture's less familiar words in case they need definition or clarification.

Topic

Baptism—the first sacrament the Church celebrates in a person's life and the one that opens the sacramental way of life for us. Baptism involves two key signs: the sign of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and water. The person being baptized is immersed in the water of the baptismal font, or water is poured over the person's head.

Ask what the water of baptism symbolizes. (*Water is the symbol of cleansing and of dying with Christ in order to be raised to new life in him.*)

As Catholic Christians, we believe humans are born with original sin. Original sin is what we call our tendency to prefer following our own will to following God's will. God created us perfectly, but if we are honest, we acknowledge that we often want more than what we have. We know the difference between right and wrong, but sometimes we still choose to do the wrong thing. This can be our desire for power, our greed, or our failure to care for one another. We commit a sin when we disobey God's will. In baptism, this sin is washed away.

We are called to be happy as the person God made us to be. Our job is to become the best we can with God's love. Because of our faith, we are made new, born again into a new life.

Ask the children to tell you again the symbols of baptism. (*Name, water, light, oil, white garment, sign of the cross*)

It might be enlightening for the children to see a visual representation of the effect of the sacrament of baptism on a person. This demonstration is an option that can be used during your topic presentation.

You will need a clear drinking glass and a spoon. Place a small spot of food coloring (red is good) on the back of the spoon and let it dry overnight. Fill the glass halfway with water, and place it and the spoon on the prayer table.

Explain that the glass represents a person, someone like you and me, who is full of life (water) and ready to grow. Then begin to stir the water slowly with the spoon.

One day the Holy Spirit begins to stir up the way the person thinks and behaves. Even though nothing can be seen on the outside, the Holy Spirit is moving on the inside, inviting the person to recognize the gifts and talents given by God.

Notice the red spot on the spoon now. It seems to be gone, washed away in the water. But is it really gone? No, it still exists, dissolved and diffused in the water. So it is when the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts, infusing us with grace, revealing and releasing our God-given gifts and talents—gifts and talents perhaps unrealized until now.

The Holy Spirit does this for us now and throughout our lives. We are stirred long before we give our commitment to God. Then one day we give our hearts to God willingly, and we begin our life of service.

Jesus began his life of service after his baptism. We are called to do the same.



Activities

1. *The Power of Water*

Ask the children to think about the many ways that water is powerful. In small groups, have them fill in the proper columns in the handout with what they see as the life-giving, cleansing, and destructive forces of water. Set a timer for two to three minutes. When all are done, ask for a leader from each group to share what they have written.

2. *Am I a Follower?*

Give a sheet to each child. Allow five to eight minutes for them to fill it in. This activity can be done in small groups, then the large group reconvened for discussion.

3. *Family Circle*

Give each child a sheet with the instructions and pattern, as well as a sheet of construction paper. Following the printed instructions, the children will create and decorate a circle of people holding hands. Each figure in the circle can represent one person in their family. Tape or staple together the people at each end to form the circle. The children can take the circles home and place them on the table where the family gathers. A candle, a small bowl of water, or flowers can be placed in the center for decoration.



Reflective Response

1. *The Power of Water*

When the small groups have completed their work, allow time for large-group discussion. After each group has presented, discuss the meaning of water in the sacrament of baptism. Impress upon the children that God can only work within them if they are willing and open. This means that even after we are baptized we still have the free will to close off our hearts. When something bad or sad happens, our faith and our commitment to God's love need to be strong. This is not easy, but we are never alone.

2. *Am I a Follower?*

When participants have had enough time to complete the reflection individually or in small groups, gather the large group again. Write their definitions of a follower and a leader on the board. The point you are conveying is that Jesus himself was both a follower and a leader. He followed the will of God in his obedience to his Father, and he leads us along that same way. We in turn follow where Jesus leads. Ask the children if they understand leading others in the faith and following Jesus at the same time. Our priests, for example, lead us in our schools and parishes, and at the same time are obedient to their bishop. We are challenged to recognize whom to follow and whom we can lead.

3. *Family Circle*

When the children are finished decorating their family circle, ask them to write a prayer to take home with it. They can say this prayer as they gather with their families.

Closing Prayer Ritual

1. Cut out palm-sized paper flowers and give one to each child. Have them write the word *God* in the center of the flower, and on each petal, a prayer for one other person they know. Then fold the petals inward toward God, with the petals resting on top of each other.

Place a large bowl half full of water in the center of the circle.

Ask everyone to bring their folded flowers to the prayer circle.

Dear God:

We bring you our prayers.

(One at a time, children place their flower on the water, petals up.)



Lord, receive our prayers. We trust in you to hear us, even the prayers deep within our hearts. We ask you to bless us on our way. Amen.

(During the prayer, the flowers will open up—symbolic of how we are opened to God in our prayers, and that God has heard them.)

Dear God:

We thank you for water. Water is life itself; we cannot live without it. Help us to remember those who do not have clean water to drink, as we do. Help us to be thankful for clean water to wash and refresh our bodies. Help us to enjoy water as we relax. Help us to respect the power of water. Amen.



Dear God:

You gave us water as a reminder of your love. In the beginning, you breathed upon the waters, making all water holy. At the beginning of the Exodus, you parted the waters of the sea and saved the Israelites. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, you called him your Beloved. Bless us as we go out to share your love with others. Amen.



Activity #1

The Power of Water

In these three columns, write down as many ways you can think of that water is powerful or can be used.

Life-giving

Cleansing

Destructive

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Activity #2

Am I a Follower?

Following means

I have been a follower when

A leader is

Can a person lead and follow at the same time? How?

Activity #3

Family Circle

Instructions:

1. Cut out the pattern from construction paper or other colored paper.
2. Fold a separate 8½ x 11-inch piece of paper in half width-wise three times.
3. Place the pattern on the outside fold, trace around it, and cut out the outline.
4. Unfold the paper and discover that you have created four outlines of people.
5. If more people are needed to represent members of your family, use another sheet of paper, and fold and cut as before.
6. Decorate the people to represent members of your family.
7. Fasten the hands together with tape or staples to form a circle.
8. Place the family circle on your table at home.

10 Letter Home

Dear Parents:

During this session, we focused on the sacrament of baptism. Baptism initiates us into the community of believers we call the Church and washes away our sins. As members of the Church—Christ’s body—we are called to be aware of God’s love and to manifest that love in the way we live.

We, the Church, share a great family story that began with the story of creation. The early Christians worked hard to help believers reject sin, commit themselves to living as Jesus did, and continue his ministry of love. They saw baptism as a means to build the kingdom of God and build the family in faith.

Families need more time to spend together these days, but we can’t seem to find quite enough of it. We have to be intentional in creating time to spend with our family and faith, making it a priority. Please know that we recognize all that you already do for your children’s growth in faith. Working together, we can offer you faith-building ideas to share at home. All the moments you spend with your children—answering faith questions and having discussions—nourish your children and strengthen your family’s relationship.

To continue this effort of strengthening your family in faith, take some time this week to sit and share family stories together. Usually we tell these stories when we celebrate a birthday or holiday when all the relatives are around. Make some time for family stories outside of those events. You can share stories of relatives from your past—where they lived, what they did for a living, whom they married, what happened to them. This is the family story that one day your children will tell their children.

At our baptism, we are called by name. Are there stories associated with any of the names in your family? Passing on these stories is a good way to build strong identities and relationships.

Thank you for sharing stories with your children. As they create and share their own stories, may they offer you wonderful surprises.

Your Catechists