



Training for Sponsors and Shepherds

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In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*



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Taking Stock

- 5 minutes
- List things you bring to the process of guiding someone into the Catholic faith.
 - As you understand that process now
 - Things you feel the Holy Spirit has prepared you to do
 - Things that are a part of your personality, your background
- Share (10 minutes)



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What is the OCIA?



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The initiation of catechumens is a *gradual process* that takes place *within the community* of the faithful. By joining catechumens in reflecting on *the value of the paschal mystery* and by renewing their own *conversion*, the faithful provide an *example* that will help the catechumens to *obey the Holy Spirit* more generously.

The rite of initiation is suited to a *spiritual journey* of adults that *varies* according to the *many forms of God's grace*, the *free cooperation of the individuals*, the *action of the Church*, and the *circumstances of time and place*.

RCIA 4 and 5



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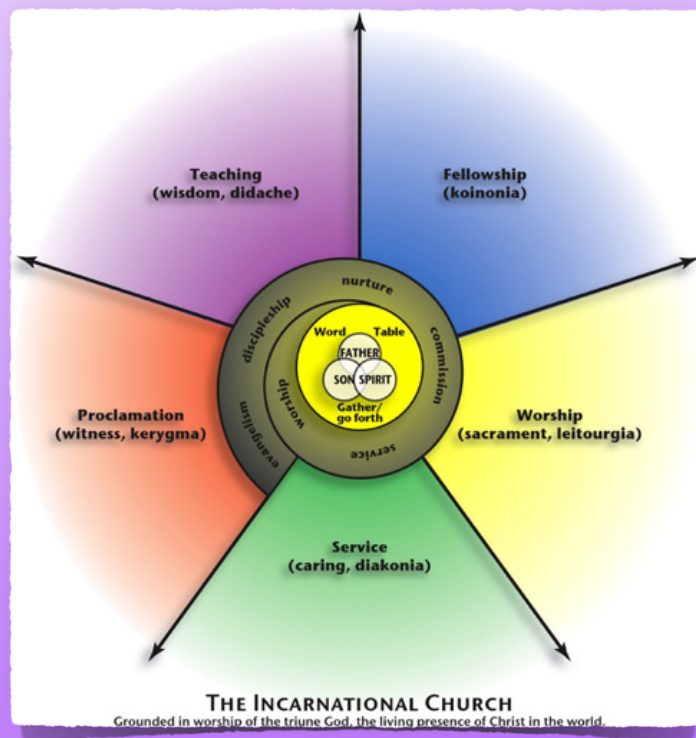
What does that look like?

- Individual, driven by the work of the Spirit
 - Any time, any pace
- Flexible
 - Discernment, not schedule
- Conversion/discipleship-focused
 - The "content" of catechesis is encounter with Christ himself, not dogma
- Rooted in the community
 - The parish is our curriculum



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OCIA process

- Inquiry
 - Evangelization and initial contact
 - Individual formation plan
- Purification and enlightenment
 - More intense preparation
 - Sacraments at Easter Vigil
- Catechumenate/ candidate formation
 - Catechesis in community
 - Self-directed study
- Mystagogy
 - Reflection on experience
 - Shift to mission



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Sponsor

- Journey with the seeker
 - Spiritual friend
 - Get to know seeker and their family
 - Encourager
 - Pray, listen
 - Accountability partner
 - Ask about progress through studies
 - Ask about life with Christ
 - Guide to living the Christian life
 - Not perfect, but demonstrating growth and maturity



Sponsor

- Help seeker to integrate into the community
 - Invite seeker and family to parish activities and events
 - Worship and other special liturgical events
 - Small groups or other studies
 - Fellowship and other social events
 - Service ministry projects
 - Attend with seeker when possible
 - Introduce to other members of the Church community
 - Dinner, coffee, or other opportunities
- Job description



Shepherd

- Develop individual faith formation plan
- Guide and support the sponsor in helping the seeker through that plan
- Direct the process of discernment and notify OCIA Director when seeker is ready for next steps
- Catechist for some monthly sessions and weekly sessions for Purification and Enlightenment/Mystagogy
- Job description



Got some skills?



Faith formation is not a classroom activity. It is a *relationship experience*. "The definitive aim of catechesis," wrote Pope Saint John Paul II, "is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.... This teaching is not a body of abstract truths. *It is the communication of the living mystery of God*" (On Catechesis, 6, 7).

Nick Wagner, TeamRCIA



Relationship

- 10 minutes
 - What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus?
 - Describe your relationship with Jesus in one or two sentences (write it down).
 - What does it mean to share that relationship with someone else?
- Share (10 minutes)
 - One testimony from your group
 - Your list of ways to share your relationship



Relationship unpacked

- Model a genuine relationship with Christ
- Seek to build a genuine relationship with your seeker
- Help the seeker build genuine relationships with other members of the body of Christ
- Help the seeker build and strengthen a genuine relationship with Jesus



Sensitivity/Listening

- 10 minutes
- Choose one person from your group to share his/her short testimony
 - Ask follow-up questions
 - Avoid leading questions
 - Practice open-ended questions designed to help person open up and share more
 - Listen
 - Listen for clues to relationship and preparedness
 - Listen "between the lines"



Sensitivity/Listening unpacked

- More listening, less talking
- Communicate regularly with your seeker
 - Ask good questions about their lives and experiences
 - Ask good questions about their OCIA progress
 - Ask if they have questions or concerns
- Don't feel like you must have all the answers!



Discernment

- 5 minutes
 - Make a list of things that demonstrate a good relationship with Christ in the life of any Christian
- 5 minutes
 - Make a list of things that demonstrate the stirrings of response to the Spirit of God in someone who is not yet a Christian
- Share (10 minutes)
 - Discuss how those lists are different



Discernment unpacked

- To become a catechumen
 - The *beginnings* of a spiritual life
 - Evidence of *first* responses of faith and of an *initial* conversion and *intention* to change one's life and enter into a relationship with God
 - *First stirrings* of repentance
 - *Start* to calling on God in prayer
 - *A sense* of the Church
 - *Some experience* of the company and spirit of Christians
- Notice that this is not meant to be more than a period of *initial* response to the call of God to conversion



Discernment unpacked

- To become the elect or for a candidate to enter into final preparation for Confirmation
 - *Evidence* of a conversion in mind and action
 - *Sufficient* acquaintance with Christian teaching
 - *Spirit* of faith and charity
 - *Deliberate* will and *enlightened* faith with intention to receive the sacraments of the Church
- Note the stronger language looking for clear evidence of conversion and intention as a Christian



Finding/Creating Opportunities

- 5 minutes
 - Write down as many events as you can in which you could help a seeker participate (anything ranging from Mass to social events)—one event per card
- 2 minutes
 - Stick cards to category sheets according to efforts of the Church in which each event fits—worship, discipleship, fellowship, evangelism, service
- 10 minutes
 - Choose one event from each category and describe how that event serves as catechesis for the seeker



Dealing with Questions

- Encourage seekers to ask questions
- Don't expect to be able to answer all of their questions
- Okay to say, "I don't know."
 - Make sure you also say "...but I will find out!"
- Ask for help with their questions from
 - Your shepherd
 - OCIA Director
 - One of our deacons
 - Our pastor



Dealing with Issues

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moral problems<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cohabitation• Vices incompatible with the Christian life• Sterilization and its reversal• A previous marriage determined to be valid• Doctrinal issues<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I don't believe it."• Struggle with necessity of Christ for salvation• Social issues<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spouse, other family, or friends who don't understand | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reactions or attitudes<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scandals within the church• Problems with attendance• Interpersonal relationship problems (with other participants or with leaders, staff, or even clergy)• Psychological or emotional problems<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health or emotional issues• Scrupulosity (unable to accept God's mercy or a sense that every little indiscretion or temptation is a serious sin)• Past abortion or inability to conceive a child• Depression or addiction |
|--|---|



Dealing with Issues

- Listen carefully as seeker expresses concerns and questions
 - Avoid attempt to solve the problem
 - Avoid judgment or condemnation
- Suggest that seeker may want to speak with someone who can offer additional help
 - Make shepherd aware (who will in turn inform OCIA Director)
 - Let them put seeker in touch with our pastor



Be encouraged!



...we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

2 Corinthians 4.7



The Joy of Serving

- The journey is simple, natural friendship
- You share what you can
 - Offer support and counsel as you are able, to the extent it is needed or desired
- You have support and resources just a phone call or email away!
 - You do not have to be the perfect Catholic, the ideal Christian, or the most knowledgeable catechist or theologian
- The journey is meant to be full of joy—relax, enjoy!



God of all ages, you send out your Spirit to touch the hearts of people so they may believe in you and in Jesus, whom you sent.

Look kindly on all catechumens and candidates, as they listen to your voice.

Open their hearts to your Spirit and bring to fulfillment the good work you have begun in them.

As I reach out to welcome new members into the church, make me an instrument of your love.

Teach me to reverence what is holy in others, and to be patient with what I do not understand.

Deepen my faith in the gospel, and help me to pass it on by good example.

With those who are hesitant or afraid, let me be a source of encouragement.

And with those who are weak, let me be a pillar of strength.

I humbly accept the ministry of sponsor and pray that you will continue to guide me and sustain me in welcoming new members into your household.

I praise you through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer for Sponsors of the OCIA

