



Canon Law and RCIA Issues

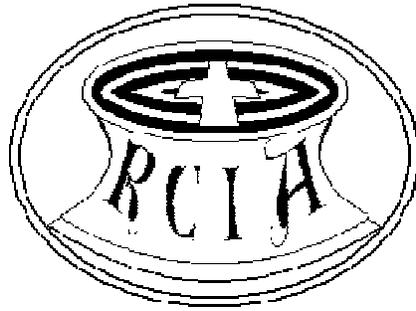
Part I

Introduction

The following series on RCIA issues, divided in four parts, intends to outline the possible scenarios in which candidates and catechumens may be involved and the canonical solutions offer to them through the observance of the norms of the Code of Canon Law. As we all know, the current Code of Canon Law, The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, and The “*National Statutes for the Catechumenate* are the juridical sources that legislate regarding the admission of converts into the Catholic Church. In this Part I we will outline the canonical and liturgical principles used in the RCIA program. In Part II we will study the possible scenarios of life of unbaptized persons seeking Christian initiation in the Roman Catholic Church. In Part III we will explore the possible situation of baptized but uncatechized Catholic adults seeking to be re-incorporated into the Church. And finally, Part IV we will describe the possible scenario of baptized Christians seeking full communion in the Catholic Church and also this part will outline some conclusions.

Let us continue by affirming that, indeed, the Roman Catholic Church, through the current Code of Canon Law open its doors to the admission of new members through the proper liturgical procedure as stated in Lumen Gentium 14: “*With love and solicitude Mother Church already embraces them as her own.*”. Canon 851, §1, identifies the RCIA as the preferred form of preparation for adults seeking baptism:

“An adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and, to the extent possible, be led through the several stages to sacramental initiation, in accord with the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms published by it.”



Canonical Principles

1. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, promulgated in 1974 and revised in 1988, is a ritual process, not an automatic process, through which unbaptized persons are formed as disciples of Jesus Christ through evangelization, catechesis, and the sacraments of initiation. Furthermore, the normative *ordo* for the Christian initiation of adults is the celebration of the rites of the catechumenate in successive stages (various *gradus* or periods of formation and many kinds of liturgical celebrations).
2. Sometimes persons come to the Church for Christian initiation (or to complete initiation) who are in irregular marriages, that is, marriages not valid according to Church law. Perhaps the person has been previously married and is now in a civil union; or it might be that the person seeking initiation is civilly married to someone who has been previously married. In either case, the person wishing to enter the Church is not free to validate his or her current marriage. Because a person cannot fully participate in the sacraments while in an invalid union, it is required that persons in irregular marriages be free to marry prior to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.
3. As a matter of justice and pastoral care, it is important that persons coming for initiation who find themselves in irregular marriages have these situations surfaced and addressed during the initial interviews. The Initial Interview and Discernment forms provided by the various parishes can be used for this purpose. Since the type and complexity of these marriage situations differs with each case, it is essential that the assistance of the pastor, parochial vicar, RCIA director or a tribunal officer aide be sought as early as possible to resolve any previous marriages so that the person is declared free to marry in the Church. The Judicial Vicar at the diocesan Tribunal stands ready to provide guidance to parish personnel and canonical advocates in this process.
4. The fact of ignoring the situation of persons in irregular marriages without the proper legal or canonical solution, only confuse the faithful member of the Church and also creates problems for the newly baptized. The Application of an *internal forum* solution without trying the proper canonical solutions are not responsible answers to this problem.

This article will be divided in the following sections:

1. Unbaptized persons seeking Christian Initiation;
2. Baptized but uncatechized adults;
3. Baptized Christians seeking full communion in the Catholic Church.

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Canon Law and RCIA Issues

Part II

Introduction

The following series on RCIA issues, divided in four parts, intends to outline the possible scenarios in which candidates and catechumens may be involved and the canonical solutions offer to them through the observance of the norms of the Code of Canon Law. Part I have outlined the canonical and liturgical principles used in the RCIA program. This Part II will carefully study the possible scenarios of life of unbaptized persons seeking Christian initiation in the Roman Catholic Church.

1. UNBAPTIZED PERSONS SEEKING CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Unbaptized persons coming to the Church for discernment normally enter a period of inquiry and evangelization prior to acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. Having manifested “first faith . . . and an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ” (*RCIA*, n. 42), persons--even those in irregular marriages--can be accepted into the Order of Catechumens. Indeed, because unbaptized persons are joined to the Church in a special way as Catechumens, those in irregular marriage should not be denied this means of sanctification and solicitude:

“c. 206, §1. Catechumens are in union with the Church in a special manner, that is, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they ask to be incorporated into the Church by explicit choice and are therefore united with the Church by that choice

just as by a life of faith, hope and charity which they lead; the Church already cherishes them as its own.

§2. The church has special care for catechumens; the Church invites them to lead the evangelical life and introduces them to the celebration of sacred rites, and grants them various prerogatives which are proper to Christians.”

The “National Statutes for the Catechumenate,” promulgated as particular law for the Dioceses of the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, states that the period of the catechumenate

“should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation. Ordinarily, this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year (n. 6).”

It is during these periods of evangelization and the catechumenate that persons in irregular marriages can grow in their faith and discipleship under the pastoral guidance of the Church at the same time that their previous marriages are working their way through the Tribunal process. Persons in irregular marriages must understand at the outset, however, that they will remain in the Order of Catechumens until their previous marriage situations have been satisfactorily resolved. In some cases, this may mean a person spends several years as a Catechumen.

Since the Rite of Election signifies the start of the final preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, it would be unjust to call to the Rite of Election one who cannot properly celebrate the sacraments. The 1983 CIC speaks of this reality as follows:

“c. 788, §1. After a period of pre-catechumenate has elapsed, persons who have manifested a willingness to embrace faith in Christ are to be admitted to the catechumenate in liturgical ceremonies and their names are to be registered in a book destined for this purpose.

§2. Through instruction and an apprenticeship in the Christian life catechumens are suitably to be initiated into the mystery of salvation and introduced to the life of faith, liturgy, charity of the people of God and the apostolate.

It is the responsibility of the conference of bishops to issue statutes by which the catechumenate is regulated; these statutes are to determine what things are to be catechumens and define what prerogatives are recognized as theirs.”

In addition, c. 789 of the Code of Canon Law states:

“Neophytes are to be formed through suitable instruction to understand the gospel truth more deeply and to fulfill the duties assumed through baptism; they are to be imbued with a sincere love for Christ and his Church.”.

Therefore, while persons in irregular marriages can be admitted to the Order of Catechumens, it is the policy of the Diocese of Salt Lake City that Catechumens will not be permitted to celebrate the Rite of Election until any and all marriage cases have been completed. The Local Ordinary can make exceptions to this policy, after consultation with the Judicial Vicar, when their tribunal cases are sufficiently advanced for a final decision in 2nd instance (Cfr. Salt Lake City, *Tribunal Policy* and *Policy Statement* for formal cases of nullity).

Part III of this series will study the situations of baptized but uncatechized Catholic adults seeking to be re-incorporated into the Catholic Church.





Canon Law and RCIA Issues

Part III

Introduction

The following series on RCIA issues, divided in four parts, intends to outline the possible scenarios in which candidates and catechumens may be involved and the canonical solutions offer to them through the observance of the norms of the Code of Canon Law. In Part I we have outlined the canonical and liturgical principles used in the RCIA program. In Part II we have studied the possible scenarios of life of unbaptized persons seeking Christian initiation in the Roman Catholic Church. In this Part III, we will explore the possible situation of baptized but uncatechized Catholic adults seeking to be re-incorporated into the Church.

2. BAPTIZED BUT UNCATECHIZED CATHOLIC ADULTS

Adults previously baptized as Catholics in infancy but never subsequently catechized come to the Church to complete their Christian initiation with the celebration of the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. Baptized but uncatechized adults who are in irregular marriages may celebrate the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates (*RCIA*, nn. 411-433), but they are not to celebrate the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion (*RCIA*, nn. 446-458) until any and all marriage cases have been processed and completed by the Diocesan Tribunal.

When the baptized but uncatechized adult (or the person to whom he or she is civilly married) is free to marry, and once the civil marriage is convalidated, then the adult may celebrate the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. It is not necessary to withhold the completion of Christian initiation until the following Easter (see “*National*

Statutes,” n. 26). In addition, priests are reminded to request from the bishop the faculty to confirm if required (c. 883, 2; “*National Statutes,*” n. 28).

Part IV of this series will reflect on the situation of baptized Christians seeking full communion into the Catholic Church. This part will also outline some conclusions.





Canon Law and RCIA Issues

Part IV

Introduction

The following series on RCIA issues, divided in four parts, intends to outline the possible scenarios in which candidates and catechumens may be involved and the canonical solutions offer to them through the observance of the norms of the Code of Canon Law. Part I have outlined the canonical and liturgical principles used in the RCIA program. In Part II we have studied the possible scenarios of life of unbaptized persons seeking Christian initiation in the Roman Catholic Church. Part III has explored the possible situation of baptized but uncatechized Catholic adults seeking to be re-incorporated into the Church. This final Part IV will briefly describe the possible scenario of baptized Christians seeking full communion in the Catholic Church and also this part will outline some conclusions.

3. BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS SEEKING FULL COMMUNION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In some cases, it may benefit baptized Christians seeking full communion to celebrate one or several of the liturgical rites for baptized but uncatechized adults (*RCIA*, nn. 411-472), bearing in mind that “no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity” (*RCIA*, n. 473).

Those who are baptized and catechized have no formal welcome and therefore according to the rite, do not participate in the RCIA. They would have formation in Confirmation and Eucharist and can be received at any time of the year – when they are properly been prepared and discerned their readiness within the faith community – as long as the priests gets permission from the Bishop.

Baptized Christians in irregular marriages may celebrate the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates (*RCIA*, nn. 411-433), but they are not to celebrate the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion (*RCIA*, nn. 446-458_) until any and all marriage cases have been processed and completed by the Diocesan Tribunal. If these optional rites are not celebrated, baptized Christians in irregular marriages cannot be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church (with the celebration of confirmation and Eucharist) until any and all marriage cases have been properly processed and completed by the Diocesan Tribunal.



The Prodigal Son

Conclusions

A careful study of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* makes us aware of the normative character of the catechumenal process. The reception into the Church by being fully initiated or entered in full communion with the Catholic Church certainly requires three different elements:

- 1) that the person must be properly trained (through the RCIA program or the adequate catechetical program),
- 2) that the person is free (that is to say, not having any prior marriage which has not been dissolved by the proper authority of the Church) and,
- 3) that the person is properly disposed to receive the sacraments (that is to say, that the person is seeking to be received into the Church by his/her own will and that he/she is spiritually prepared for it).

Canonical advocates should be ready to help candidates and catechumens to submit the proper cases of annulment to the Diocesan Tribunal; those cases will be presented, according to the circumstances of each applicant, as formal cases, lack of form cases, Pauline Privilege of the Faith cases, Ligamen cases and Privilege of the Faith cases commonly known as Petrine Privilege cases.

The application of a healthy diocesan Policy on the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and Persons in Irregular Marriages and the proper interviews with the directors of the RCIA program in every parish are the keys to have successfully evaluated all candidates and catechumens in order to have their situations properly resolve at the time they are received into the Church.

The bibliographical sources used in this series are presented as follows:

CIC/1983, *Code of Canon Law*.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 1974. The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1990. *Editio typical* promulgated in 1972 and emended in 1974. The US adaptations were done in 1988 and promulgated for use starting July 1, 1988. That is the volume or texts that are use in our parishes.

The “*National Statutes for the Catechumenate*,” promulgated as particular law for the Dioceses of the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Liturgical Documents*, vol 1, fourth ed., Chicago. Liturgy Training Publications, 2004. The Statutes were approved in 1986 by the NCCB and confirmed by the CDW in 1988.

Salt Lake City, *Tribunal Policy*.

Policy Statement, Diocese of Salt Lake City, Formal applications for declaration of nullity of marriage.

Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents.

The abbreviations used throughout the series are listed as follows:

c	Canon
cc	Canons
CIC	1983 <i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> (Code of Canon Law)
LG	Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, <i>Lumen Gentium</i> .
RCIA	<i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i>

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