



**RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION
OF ADULTS, PART II
CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN
OF CATECHETICAL AGE
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings**

I. General Background

Time for full initiation of children of catechetical age is set in dialogue with the parents, catechist and pastor. The age of discretion is given in Canon Law at around seven; however, this may vary from child to child depending on their personal situation. It is primarily the responsibility of the parent or guardian to present the child for initiation and then discern with the appropriate people the length of preparation for, and time of celebration of, the sacraments. Parish personnel in charge of the process will be helpful in this regard.

For those having reached the use of reason (around seven years or older) and presented for baptism, the proper ritual is: *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), Part II, **not** *The Rite of Infant Baptism*. Long before the need for the ritual, pastors and catechists should be familiar with Part II, chapter 1 of the RCIA entitled "Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age". The preparation of the parents and child that is required is lengthy. In accordance with the RCIA these children must be fully initiated (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at the same celebration.

II. Canonical requirements:

Canon 852 --

§1. *What is prescribed in the canons on the baptism of an adult is applicable to all who are no longer infants but have attained the use of reason.*

§2. *One who is not of sound mind (non sui compos) is equated with an infant so far as baptism is concerned.*

Canon 851 --

It is necessary that the celebration of baptism be properly prepared. Thus:

1° *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 of sacramental initiation, in accord with the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms published by it.*

Canon 865 --

§1. *To be baptized, it is required that an adult have manifested the will to receive baptism, be sufficiently instructed in the truths of faith and in Christian obligations and be tested in the Christian life by means of the catechumenate; the adult is also to be exhorted to have sorrow for personal sins.*



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§2. *An adult in danger of death may be baptized if, having some knowledge of the principal truths of faith, the person has in any way manifested an intention of receiving baptism and promises to observe the commandments of the Christian religion.*

Canon 866 --

Unless a grave reason prevents it, an adult who is baptized is to be confirmed immediately after baptism and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, also receiving communion.

III. Catechetical guidelines:

This process must be adapted according to the needs of the individual child, possibly over several years and honoring the several steps

The Catechumenate is on-going for as long as needed. This stage is completed when discerned by the pastor in consultation with the parents and catechist. Catechesis during this stage takes place in various venues and using multiple approaches. For example, some parishes may need to utilize peer group religious education classes plus:

1. Children's Liturgy of the Word: catechizing from the scripture readings and extending the understanding of them beyond Mass and in light of their life.
2. Ritual context: making good use of symbol and ritual in their prayer services and taking the opportunity to unpack with the children these symbols and rituals; allowing the children to express their reaction to and understanding of the ritual celebrations and the symbols often brings more understanding than our telling them what they stand for or what they mean.

It would be important to include some inter-generational sessions, perhaps including the sponsoring families, their own spiritual companions as well as their peers from the religious education class. A holistic approach would respect the age and capacity of each child. It would help them deal with their spiritual issues, give them an experience of a wide range of Catholic prayer and invite into service (e.g. with parents or peer groups). It would be important to have family materials available each session.

Everyone is unique and each faith journey is also unique. Discernment is key and must be on-going throughout the entire process of preparing catechetical age children just as it is for adults.

The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings recommends that age appropriate curriculum materials and texts be used in the catechetical formation of children preparing for initiation. It is the policy of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings that only curriculum approved and listed on *The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Conformity*



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Listing of Catechetical Texts is used in parish and school catechetical formation programs. This list is extensive and can be obtained by contacting the Diocesan Office of Youth Catechesis or the USCCB web site:
www.usccb.org/catechism/document/currentlist.pdf

IV. Liturgical guidelines:

Recognizing that we are formed by our words and our actions, it is of the utmost importance that the rites of initiation be celebrated with great care and attention. The symbols and rituals involved are major elements in the sacraments celebrated. It is in putting our bodies on the line, so to speak, that the words which are said come to life and take hold of our spirits. For children this is most true. They are formed more by what they see and do than by what they are told. "Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations weaken and destroy faith" (*Music in Catholic Worship*, #6).

Some of the rites should be celebrated in public at the parish Sunday Eucharist. Others may be celebrated among their companions in the initiation group or in the child's religious education class or with the support group of sponsor, catechist and family members. The choice depends on the age and needs of the child, and is made in discernment with the pastor, catechist and parents.

The rites, even the minor ones, are to be expressed in such a way as to show forth their full meaning and impact in a clear fashion. They need to be simple and understandable, without useless repetition and unnecessary additions. Good celebrations do not require explanations. The clear and simple wording of the prayers, and the respectful and beautiful expression of the ritual actions which accompany them are allowed to enter into the hearts and minds of the children. Afterward, the catechist, sponsor, companions and/or parents can help them unpack the deeper meaning as they discuss what happened, how they felt, what it might be saying to them of God, Jesus and the Paschal Mystery.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Part II, Chapter 1 has very fine introductions to each section and contains suggestions for the carrying out of the celebrations. Catechists and liturgists working together will be able to craft celebrations that are appropriate for the children concerned in relation to the parish family and the place of the celebration. Whether we are considering small parishes with few resources or large parishes with many, the celebrations can be well done, with familiar and supportive people participating and helping the children to feel a part of the parish family. In this way, the idea of initiation into the family of God becomes more apparent and real to them.



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Stages/Formation

Rites/Celebrations

Pre-catechumenate:

This usually takes place in the family, comes in the form of witness of parents and others and in participating in religious and/or liturgical celebrations with them.

Acceptance: (#264 - 275)

When signs of personal faith indicate the child is ready for serious preparation, this rite is celebrated at a Service of the Word, not Eucharist, with a small group present. (#260-261)

Catechumenate:

This may take place over several years, in the company of a peer group or in a family setting. It may follow the curriculum of the local religious formation group and include time with the sponsor and a group of peers also preparing for initiation. Time for personal questions and discernment is essential.

– Various prayers and blessings need to be a part of this preparation.

Election/Enrollment: (# 277-280)

Read carefully and discern the proper celebration for each group as they all differ in need. (This is celebrated during Mass).

**Lenten Period of
Enlightenment:**

*This may be adapted to the needs
of the children involved.*

Scrutinies (Penitential Rites) (# 291-294)

Baptized companions usually celebrate Penance at this time, but **not** at this rite. (#293 and 303 seem a bit ambiguous on this point, however, we should not mix a sacramental celebration with the scrutiny/penitential ritual.)



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Sacraments of Initiation B/C/E: (#304-307)

Usually at the Easter Vigil, or Easter Sunday or some other Sunday during the celebration of Eucharist. Allowance is made for those already baptized to complete their initiation at this time. (# 308)

Mystagogia:

A special time of unpacking and reflecting on the sacraments of initiation is needed (#330). The true Mystagogy continues through the rest of one's life in faith.

Revised & Promulgated
By Bishop Michael W. Warfel
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