How the Baptismal Catechumenate Inspires All Catechesis

Why begin a discussion of the initiatory catechesis of the RCIA with the story of Michael?
Michael's initiation journey is a journey the Church hopes we will all make in our search for the living God—children, teens and adults.

Thus, my mission in this session is to:
1. Illustrate that the RCIA is the premier model for ALL catechesis in the church.
2. Explore the overarching dynamics of the RCIA.
3. Provide a model for creating a conversion centered liturgical experience.

*When the Church tells us...

*The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate when, by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the Paschal Vigil. This catechumenal formation should inspire other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism. GDC cq;

The fullness of Christian formation is embodied in the catechumenate and thus upholds that as a model for every Catholic.
In other words, the Church assumes that every Catholic has been formed with all the principles set forth in the RCIA.

*The Church understands....
What does the GDC’s insistence that RCIA should inspire all forms of catechesis practically mean for your catechetical ministry? (GDC 85-86)

* The aforementioned elements were inspired by paragraph 75 of the RCIA and were meant to be adapted for all catechesis.

* What does #75-81 set forth as primary initiatory formation?

* There are 7 elements of formation essential to the initiation process. The RCIA is...

1. Conversion Centered
2. Mystagogical Model
3. Paschal Mystery
4. Liturgical Catechesis
5. Scripture and Tradition
6. Community
7. Apostolic Life/Service

2. Conversion Centered

RCIA is a process of gradual conversion—a change of heart, transformation, metanoia.

Person sees their story in light of Christian story.

Catechumens are invited into intimate union with Jesus through prayer, personal sharing of stories—their story, story of other Christians, story of the Church and her saints, and ultimately the story of Jesus.

If you invite those you serve to reflect upon the way Christ is calling them to change their lives, their outlook, their attitudes or behaviors, if you intentionally are in the business of making committed disciples, your ministry is fostering conversion in their lives and...
1. Mystagogical Model

Mystagogia is at the heart of the catechetical enterprise.
RCIA is a return to a mystagogical model of the early Church Fathers.
Mystagogical formation reflects upon human experience—everyday life, liturgy, scripture and worship—and then extracts and draws meaning, conversion and doctrine from that experience.

"Now is the time to speak of the mysteries and to reflect systematically on the sacred ritual actions. We would not have considered it helpful to those not yet initiated, but rather a betrayal of them, if we had decided to give such a detailed explanation before baptism. Indeed it is better for the light of the mysteries themselves to have inundated you as a surprise than it would have been for us to have given an explanation beforehand.

* Ambrose of Milan – Late 4th Century
**De Mysteriis

Yes, we taught Michael about baptism. We dutifully explained our doctrine of baptism.
We prepared him to encounter the Scriptures, the symbols and enter deeply into the sacramental mysteries.
We engaged in mystagogical reflection on the sacred symbols of baptism (water, oil, light, garment), the Scriptures that define the sacrament and the doctrines that flow from it.
BUT...
It was not until he experienced those death dealing, life giving waters that he really understood baptism.

If and when you help those you serve reflect and draw meaning from their experience of life, the liturgical year, Scripture, liturgy, sacraments and tradition,
3. Catechesis in the Paschal Mystery

Catechesis in the Paschal Mystery “fosters deep and lasting conversion to Jesus Christ”—participation in his life, death and resurrection—intimate union with Jesus.

Immerses a person in the Spiritual life

Fosters a love relationship with God, life of prayer—individual and communal.

Experienced primarily in the liturgy...the primary place where the Paschal Mystery is celebrated and made present.

The RCIA insists that we intentionally invite those we serve to enter deeply into the cycle of death and resurrection and join their lives to the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

No matter what your ministry,

When you invite those you serve to reflect on the way in which God is calling them to live the daily cycle of dying and rising in their lives,

When you invite them into intimate communion with the living Christ,

When you ask the hard questions,

When you teach them about the grace and strength they will receive to live the Christian life when they join their lives—their joys and sorrows—to the cross of Christ...

YOUR MINISTRY IS INSPIRED BY THE BAPTISMAL CATECHUMENATE.

4. Liturgical Catechesis

Initiatory formation is primarily liturgically based—it is situated first within the context of the liturgical year, the liturgy, Sunday Liturgy of the Word, and the sacraments which the Church insists is primary formation--primo theologia.

Liturgical Catechesis helps adults and children prepare to enter into the liturgy, celebrate the liturgy and reflect on the liturgy in order to appropriate conversion of heart that leads to mission.
The liturgy is a broad topic. What does the Church mean when it says we must form people in the liturgy?

The liturgical year, makes present the paschal mystery. “Within the cycle of a year, moreover, the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the Lord's return” [CSL, 102].

In short, the Church insists upon it.

Why the Liturgical Year?

* #16: Catechists, when they are teaching, should see that their instruction is filled with the spirit of the Gospel, adapted to liturgical signs and the cycle of the Church's year, and suited to the needs of catechumens.

* #74: A suitable catechesis is provided, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year...*

* #82: There should be celebrations of the word in accord with the liturgical season.

* #82.3 Celebration of the word of God have as their main purpose: to explain the signs, celebrations and seasons of the liturgy.

The primary means of formation in the RCIA is the liturgical year.

Catechesis on the Liturgy Includes...

Unpacking ritual prayers and sacramental texts that reveal our doctrines and the meaning of Sunday.

What other elements constitute catechesis on the liturgy?
Liturgical catechesis insists that we take the time to unpack the ritual prayers of the Mass such as the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Eucharistic Prayers with those we serve.

Catechesis on the Sacramental Symbols and Sacramental Actions

Catechesis on the Liturgy also includes...

No matter what your ministry, when you help people unpack their experience of the liturgical year, the ritual prayers, the Sunday Liturgy of the Word, the sacramental symbols...

Sacramental Symbols and Symbolic Actions

* Community—gathering of assembly.
* Cross—signing with the cross.
* Word—proclamation of the word.
* Water—immersion in baptismal water.
* Imposition of hands—laying on of hands.
* Oil—anointing with oil.
* Garment—putting on new clothes.
* Bread—sharing Eucharistic bread.
* Wine—sharing Eucharistic wine.

Your Ministry is Inspired by the Baptismal Catechumenate.

Suitable catechesis also includes formation in Scripture and an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts of the church. [RCIA 75.1]

5. Catechesis: Scripture and Tradition
Scriptures are integral to initiation catechesis.

In one complete Lectionary cycle the truths of our faith are set out.

Scriptures of the liturgy reveal the mysteries we hold dear—the truths revealed by God—DOGMA.

**WORD**

**Formation in Scripture**

- 1. When you proclaim the Word,
- 2. When you reflect on the proclamation you just experienced,
- When you ask, “What did you hear, what spoke to your heart, what change took place, what is challenge?”
- 3. When you interpret the Scriptures (exegesis),

4. When you invite those you serve to make a decision to pattern their lives in accord with the Word and to go out build the Kingdom of God,

5. You are forming catechumens according to the principles set forth in the RCIA.

**When you reflect on the Sunday or Sacramental Scriptures with those you serve...**

**Catechesis in Scripture and Doctrine that is inspired by the baptismal catechumenate includes:**

Reflection on the mystery of Christ as it unfolds in the liturgical year.

Reflection on the Sunday Scriptures.

Reflection on the doctrines of the Church that flow out of the liturgical year and the Sunday Scriptures.

Teaching people how to pray.

Teaching people the morality characteristic of the Gospel how to live a moral life.

**What determines the doctrines we are to teach?**

- That which flows logically from the liturgical year or the Sunday liturgy.
- The only syllabus is the liturgical year.

**DOCTRINES MANIFESTED IN LITURGICAL SEASONS**

- Christmas: Incarnation, manifestation, salvation history, Mary, Mary, Mary, Family, Baptism.

- Lent: Reflecting, penitential preparation, witch of instruction, memory, sin, grace, sacraments, fasting, prayer.


No matter what your ministry, when you help people unpack their experience of the Scriptures and Tradition—the teachings of the Church...

6. COMMUNITY: CATECHESIS IN THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

What does a suitable catechesis in community life include?
Apprenticeship

[75:2] Catechumens are formed in the life of the community—its prayer, its activities, its play and its social outreach.

No matter what your ministry, when you mentor those you serve, when you get them incorporated into the life of the parish, retreats, social activities, outreach...

7. Catechesis in the Apostolic Life/Service

All catechesis, evangelization, and initiation formation leads to outreach and a life of service—building the Kingdom of God.

What is suitable catechesis in the Apostolic Life/Service?
Recognizing that...

- Living the paschal mystery leads to mission.
- Liturgy leads to mission.
- The Word leads to mission.
- Doctrine leads to mission.
- Community embodies it.
- Apostolic Life is the way it is carried out.
- CCC: 1997 Eucharist commits us to the poor.

No matter what your ministry, when you mentor those you serve, when you help those you serve recognize their call to serve others, when you get them involved in outreach, when you teach them how to share the good news to others...

YOUR MINISTRY IS INSPIRED BY THE BAPTISMAL CATECHUMENATE.

Conversion centered catechesis:
How can I incorporate a conversion centered element to my session that invites the participants into closer relationship with the life and mission of Jesus?
What questions do I need to ask?
- Keep in mind: Conversion must be at the heart of all we do.
- No matter what we are teaching, what our focus, we must make time to ask the bottom line question:
- “How does what we shared today invite us to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus and his cross and resurrection?”

*The intention of the RCIA is to insure that what we do with catechumens is:
* conversion centered,
* provides formation on the liturgy.
* provides conversion centered catechesis on the doctrines we teach and the Scriptures we proclaim
* forms those we serve in the life of the community and its outreach and apostolic mission.
* to create a community of people who are willing to embrace the holy fire of conversion, to step outside their comfort zone, to choose love over the status quo and ways of the world—which ultimately leads to mission.
HOW DO WE ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS OF CATECHESIS?

Refer to handout, “CATECHESIS INSPIRED BY THE BAPTISMAL CATECHUMENATE”

**Resources**

*Formed in Faith* (Sessions for Inquiry, Catechumenate, and Ongoing Faith Formation), Mary Birmingham. World Library Publications (wlpmusic.com)

*Confirming Adult Catholics*; Five Sessions for Preparation and Reflection, Mary Birmingham. World Library Publications (wlpmusic.com)

*Purified and Enlightened* - RCIA Sessions for Lent, Mary Birmingham. World Library Publications (wlpmusic.com)

*Year Round Catechumenate* Mary Birmingham, Liturgical Training Publications

*Faith, Life and Creed* (A Complete Catechesis for Christian Life; User friendly sessions for breaking open the Word for every Sunday of each cycle plus 41 doctrinal sessions). Available through TEAMRCIA.COM

*Word and Worship Workbook, Year A, B and C*, Mary Birmingham, Pauist Press

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