



Called To FAITH

Addendum:

**Respecting the Dignity of
the Baptized Entering into
Full Communion with the
Roman Catholic Church**

***Diocesan Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation:
The Sacraments of Initiation and
First Reconciliation***

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond



Office of the Bishop

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October 15, 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am happy to share with you *"Respecting the Dignity of the Baptized Entering into Full Communion with the Roman Catholic Church"*, an official addendum to *"Called to Faith"*, our diocesan guidelines for the Sacraments of Initiation and First Reconciliation.

The Diocesan Ecumenical Commission originally presented this document as a pastoral reflection based on the rich experiences with the RCIA in the Diocese. Their reaffirmation of the dignity of the baptized highlights the pastoral, catechetical and liturgical approaches that rightly distinguish the baptized from the unbaptized within the RCIA process. They bring both sensitivity and flexibility to the formation process for baptized candidates.

I am grateful to the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission for their attention to the dignity of the baptized who come seeking full communion with us. I know their reflections will guide and assist pastoral leaders in their work with the RCIA.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Walter F. Sullivan".

Walter F. Sullivan

Bishop of Richmond

Table of Contents

Forward	3
Introduction	4
The Welcome and Pastoral Interview of Candidates	5
The Catechetical Formation of Candidates	6
The Celebration of the Rites and Actual Reception of the Candidates into Full Communion	7
The Rite of Welcome	7
The Call to Continuing Conversion	8
The Celebration of the Scrutinies and Presentations	8
The Celebration of the Easter Vigil with the Elect and the Candidates	
The Rite of Reception of the Candidates into Full Communion	8
Related Pastoral Concerns	9

Forward

In 1997, Bishop Sullivan issued the document *"Called to Faith: Diocesan Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation: The Sacraments of Initiation and First Reconciliation"*. The document was published as an interim text, with an invitation for suggestions based on a pastoral implementation of the guidelines.

In response to that invitation, the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission presented formal reflections to Bishop Sullivan on the proper distinctions between Candidates (baptized persons seeking full communion with the church) and Catechumens (unbaptized persons seeking full initiation into the church). Bishop Sullivan accepted those reflections, and has approved them as an official addendum to the document *"Called to Faith"*.

That addendum is presented in this document under the title *"Respecting the Dignity of the Baptized Entering into Full Communion with the Roman Catholic Church"*. As an official addendum, this document becomes an authorized part of the guidelines for sacramental preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation and First Reconciliation for the Diocese of Richmond. The text of this document will be adapted for inclusion in the text of *"Called to Faith: Diocesan Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation: The Sacraments of Initiation and First Reconciliation"* when that document is issued in its final form.

Introduction

A Re-Affirmation by the Ecumenical Commission

Every Easter, the Church brings forth new life and experiences the Paschal Mystery anew through the sacramental initiation of adults. In the twenty-plus years since the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* was reinstated, the Church has experienced a new energy and a deepened understanding of the baptismal call to ministry and the universal call to holiness. This in turn has affected the prayer, liturgy, and community life of local parishes and dioceses.

In large and small, rural and urban parish and campus communities, a variety of experiences testifies to the richness of the Rite. That same variety has resulted in a diversity of practice as each local community adapts the RCIA process to its own needs and situations. It is common in many parishes to develop a combined process to initiate Catechumens (the unbaptized seeking full initiation) and Candidates (baptized Christians seeking full communion) into the Catholic Church.

Although practical in terms of time and energy, this practice raises a caution.

The baptismal life and Christian faith of the already baptized must be acknowledged and affirmed. The distinction between Candidates and Catechumens must be respected in both the RCIA process and the celebration of the Rites. The General Introduction (#4) speaks of the significance of the status of the baptized:

Baptism is a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been signed by it. Because of that unchangeable effect (given expression by the anointing of the baptized person with chrism in the presence of God's people) the rite of baptism is held in highest honor by all Christians. Once it has been validly celebrated, even if by Christians with whom we are not in full communion, it may never lawfully be repeated.

The Diocesan Ecumenical Commission recognizes the dedication of parishes to the RCIA process and to the Rite. Accordingly, the Commission offers the following reflections to priests, pastoral coordinators, deacons, RCIA coordinators, and other parish ministers. The Commission hopes that these reflections will lead parish communities to affirm and celebrate the baptismal dignity of all Candidates who present themselves for reception into full communion with the Catholic Church. This statement has four parts, addressing issues relating to the reception of the already baptized into full communion with the Catholic Church:

- The welcome and pastoral interview of Candidates
- The catechetical formation of Candidates
- The celebration of the Rites and the actual reception of Candidates into full communion
- Related pastoral concerns

The Welcome and Pastoral Interview of Candidates

The Commission wishes to emphasize the critical nature of the initial pastoral interview. Because the pastoral interview is so important, the Commission recommends that the pastor or pastoral coordinator be involved as well as team members.

All parishes seek to offer a warm and open welcome to all who present themselves as participants in the RCIA process. Although the RCIA process cannot be tailored to the needs of each and every person, the pastoral leaders and team members should be aware of the background and situation of each person.

Every person comes with a unique faith story which should be explored in the initial interview to determine the specific faith needs of those seeking full reception into the Catholic Church. Often the interview can help guide the choice of a sponsor who can be responsive to the needs of the individual.

Guidelines for the initial interview:

- The candidate's Christian baptism should be respected and affirmed.
- The already-baptized are not asked to reject their baptism or faith origins. Rather, their faith tradition and the gifts it has provided them should be affirmed as the foundation of their ongoing journey and an enrichment to the community they wish to join.
- The initial interview should attempt to discern the unique background and the specific questions and formational needs of the individual.
- Pastoral options exist for fully catechized persons, which might include Candidates with a rich history of catechetical formation and involvement in another faith tradition, or those who have been non-sacramental participants with their families in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catechetical Formation of Candidates

- Catechetical formation may not require a lengthy program or process; however, formation in the Roman Catholic Church’s traditions and practices should be included.
- The Rite of Reception is not necessarily limited to the Easter Vigil, but may be celebrated at Sunday parish liturgies throughout the year, unless pastoral considerations warrant a smaller celebration.
- Baptized but uncatechized individuals may appropriately be included in the catechumenal process, provided their baptismal dignity is respected.
- Candidates who have had a negative experience with another faith tradition should be welcomed warmly and care must be taken never to condemn or belittle another faith tradition.

The Catechetical Formation of Candidates

As with Catechumens, Candidates should be encouraged to share their faith stories, ask questions and dialog with their sponsors.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults states that Candidates are “to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church” (Part II, 5, #477). Further, the document stipulates that Candidates should be led to a deepened inner adherence to the Lord and to the Church where they now seek to find the fullness of their baptism. Finally, “During the period of preparation, the candidate may share in worship in conformity with the provisions of the Ecumenical Directory” (Part II, 5, #477).

Sacramental catechesis should recognize that many Candidates come from traditions that share a common theological and liturgical understanding with the Roman Catholic Church regarding the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation and Eucharist). Catechesis, therefore, must affirm the common threads of understanding while noting differences.

The Celebration of the Rites - Reception into Full Communion

Roman Catholic practice encourages the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation by Candidates prior to their reception into full communion (cf. National Statutes for the Catechumenate, #36). The Candidates should receive thorough preparation and catechesis for this sacrament.

Adult faith formation experiences must not end with the Candidates' reception into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. In the light of the U. S. Bishops' pastoral letter *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, newly received members should clearly understand that faith formation is a lifetime endeavor. They should be guided and encouraged by their sponsors and parish leaders to participate in ongoing adult formation.

The Celebration of the Rites and the Actual Reception of Candidates into Full Communion

The Rite has a preference for separate rites for Catechumens and Candidates. However, the Commission recognizes that, for pastoral reasons, most parishes celebrate the rites together. The Rite stresses the distinction between Catechumens and Candidates seeking full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. The National Statutes for the Catechumenate state, "Those who have already been baptized in another Church or ecclesial community should not be treated as catechumens or so designated" (#30). The ritual language must clearly respect the baptismal dignity of the Candidates. Therefore, pastoral ministers should make use of the combined Rites when both Catechumens and Candidates are involved (cf. Part II, #5 and Appendix I). The following guidelines are intended for those parishes using the combined rites.

The Rite of Welcome

The Rite calls for signing the foreheads of the unbaptized as they become Catechumens, marking them with the Sign of the Cross. Any signing done with the already baptized should employ language indicating that the signing is a reminder of their baptism.

The Celebration of the Rites - Reception into Full Communion

If the presentation of a Bible is ritually celebrated, pastoral ministers should bear in mind that this may not be the first time the Catechumens or Candidates have had the Word as part of their lives.

The usual pattern of dismissal of the Catechumens after the celebration of the Word and before the General Intercessions does not necessarily involve the dismissal of the Candidates. This may pose a problem if Candidates wish to reflect on the Word with their sponsors since they have not yet been welcomed to the Eucharistic table.

The Call to Continuing Conversion

Only the unbaptized celebrate the Rite of Election, wherein they are called from the period of the catechumenate to the period of enlightenment, when they are called the Elect. Candidates are ritually called to continuing conversion, in recognition that they are already among the Elect. Any signing of books should reflect that fact.

The Celebration of the Scrutinies and Presentations

The scrutinies and the presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are rites meant for the Elect as they move toward the sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. When parishes celebrate these rites with Elect and Candidates together, it is again important to respect the baptism of the Candidates. The presentations may be celebrated at times other than the Lenten Sunday Liturgy.

The Celebration of the Easter Vigil with the Elect and the Candidates The Rite of Reception of the Candidates into Full Communion

If Candidates are received into full communion at the Easter Vigil where Catechumens are also present, it is imperative to note the distinction between the two.

The Commission acknowledges that combining Candidates and Catechumens at the Easter Vigil is the normal practice in many parishes. However, other options for celebrating the Rite of Reception of fully catechized Candidates may be preferable, e.g., the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Christ the King, or other Sunday liturgies.

In either case, the Rite clearly states that "any appearance of triumphalism should be carefully avoided." (Part II, 5, #475.2). Furthermore, "One who was born and baptized outside the visible communion of the Catholic Church is not required to make an

abjuration of heresy, but simply a profession of faith” (Part II, 5, #479). The formula for this profession is found in the Rite.

The Rite respects the traditional sequence of Confirmation before Eucharist. The priest receives from the law itself the faculty to confirm Candidates. Furthermore, this faculty applies even when the Rite of Reception is celebrated at times other than the Easter Vigil. The National Statutes clearly state that “the confirmation of such candidates for reception should not be deferred, nor should they be admitted to the eucharist until they are confirmed” (#35).

The names of those received into the full communion of the Catholic Church should be recorded in a special book, with the date and place of their baptism also noted. Many parishes choose to enter this information in the baptismal register with the appropriate notations.

Related Pastoral Concerns

When there is a reasonable and prudent doubt about a baptism, conditional baptism may be warranted after careful investigation in regard to the fact or validity. The conditional baptism *must be celebrated privately* (Cf. National Statutes, #37).

When an Eastern Christian seeks to enter into full communion, there is no liturgical rite other than a simple profession of Catholic faith. This does not preclude the seeking of those permissions for such a change to the Latin Rite. The integrity of the Eastern Rites must always be respected.

The Commission wishes to reiterate that Candidates are neither asked nor required to deny or reject their previous Christian traditions. In addition to reaffirming their baptismal vows, they are simply asked to make a profession of faith.