

A Family Approach to Christian Initiation

Supporting Scripture and Document Quotes and Their Applications

Acts 2:38-40

Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio, Pope John Paul II: articles 17, 21, 51-52,86

Directory for Catechesis, articles 226, 229-231,232-d, 233-235, 258

Why a whole family approach to Christian Initiation?

*And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.**” And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (**Acts 2:38-40**, emphasis added).*

*Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio- The Role of the Family in the Modern World, Pope John Paul II,
November 1981: “Family, Become What You Are.”*

Part Three, The Role of the Christian Family

Article 17:

“Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, *become what you are.*”

Q. What is the family?

In God’s perfect plan, the family has been established as an “intimate community of life and love” (FC, 17). This is the identity of the family- this is what it *is: an intimate community of life and love.*

- Each family is *summoned* to discover both its *dignity* and its *responsibility*. John Paul II relates in article 17 that the family finds in God’s plan not only its identity and what it is, but also its *mission*- i.e., what the family can and should *do*.
- From the family’s being- what it *is*- should also come what it *does*- its *mission*.
- Its mission then, its *responsibility*, is “to become more and more what it is- that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfillment...in the Kingdom of God” (FC, 17).
- “...the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love” (FC, 17).

Article 21:

For *Christian Initiation for Families*, we can look to article 21, where Pope St. John Paul II speaks about building the community of the domestic Church: “A fundamental opportunity for building such a communion is constituted by the educational exchange between parents and children, in which each gives and receives.”

- In families with unbaptized children of catechetical age, there is very little, if any educational exchange between parents and children regarding Christ, his Church, or matters involving the spiritual life. Often, the parents do not know how to engage in this type of educational exchange. Holy Mother Church gives us the grace and the tools to help them change this dysfunctional dynamic.

Article 51:

“...the domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence its duty regarding permanent education in the faith.”

- Christian Initiation for Families is a *golden opportunity* to begin constant and intense evangelization of the domestic Church, which remains largely unevangelized at present.

Article 52:

"To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community."

- Realistically, most of the parents we serve have not accepted the Gospel themselves, nor have they matured in faith. It is highly probable they have never *received* the invitation of Christ as *personal* to them. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect the family to become an "evangelizing community" unless we *invite them to personally accept the Gospel and mature in faith*. A family must first *be* evangelized before it can in turn evangelize other families.
- To evangelize families, *it is critical for the parents to be evangelized. It does not work to evangelize the children without including the parent(s)*.

Continuing in article 52, Pope John Paul II then quotes Pope Paul VI from his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71: "The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part."

- In families with unbaptized children of catechetical age, the family is generally not a place where the Gospel is transmitted, nor from which it radiates. Instead, the "gospel of the world" is transmitted and radiates its errors to others. The families then become evangelizers of "the world" rather than evangelizers of Christ and this is then spread into the neighborhood, the school, the city, etc.

John Paul II continues in **article 52**: "...the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home. This *apostolic mission of the family* is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan" (emphasis added).

- Since there are very few "Churches of the home" in this, our time of salvation history, and the Sacrament of Baptism is generally undervalued and often thought to be no longer important, we can begin to see why the *apostolic mission* of the family is largely unknown.
- Since this mission receives its grace from the sacrament of marriage and fewer and fewer couples are seeking this sacrament, we can see why there is *very little* "strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan." Therefore, we can begin to understand why evangelization is not going as well as we had hoped, since it "depends in great part on the Church of the home."
- Fewer baptisms + fewer sacramental marriages= little or no strength to transmit the faith and sanctify and transform society according to God's plan. In other words, the laity's mission to sanctify the temporal order becomes anemic and society is transformed according to someone else's plan as opposed to God's perfect plan.

Article 86:

At the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, our sainted pontiff exhorts, "...my thoughts turn with earnest solicitude to you, upright men and women, who for any reason whatever give thought to the fate of the family. *The future of humanity passes by way of the family*" (emphasis in original).

- The stakes are high. It is imperative that we help families to *become what they are*.
- Pope John Paul II then paints the big picture for those of us who are called to this crucial mission: "I feel that I must ask for a particular effort in this field from the sons and daughters of the Church" (meaning you and I).
- Since we have knowledge of God's wonderful plan, we "therefore have an extra reason for caring for the reality that is the family in this time of trial and grace" (FC, 86). Yes, this is a time of great trial for the family, the domestic Church, by which the future of humanity passes. It is also a time of grace- but we must help families, especially the parents, to open up to *receiving and cooperating with this grace!*

- The family needs to learn and understand *who* they are, so they can *become what they are*: an intimate community of life and love mirroring the Holy Trinity. As a result, each family can be equipped to complete its mission: to evangelize our world.

Directory for Catechesis
Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, July 2020

Chapter VIII, Catechesis in the Lives of Persons (224ff)

Section 1- Catechesis and the Family

- **Articles 226-265**, give the “big picture” for assisting all age groups in the family.

Article 226- Here we see the definition of what a family *is* from *Familiaris Consortio*: “The family is a community of love and life...through which each human person is introduced into the ‘human family’ and into the ‘family of God,’ the Church.”

- We also see a phrase in article 226 which strikes a harmonious chord for those of us who work with families: “Thanks to the family, the Church becomes a *family of families* and is enriched with the life of these domestic churches.”
- Article 229 repeats: “The Christian community is a *family of families* and is itself the family of God.”

Articles 229-230: *Catechesis with the family*, is treated in these paragraphs of the *Directory* and emphasizes the *kerygma* as central to the “dynamic of missionary conversion.”

- “Missionary conversion” is precisely what the family approach to Christian Initiation is all about. We are missionaries to entire families with unbaptized children ages 7 through 17.
- “...catechesis with families is characterized by a style of humble understanding and by a proclamation that is concrete, not theoretical and detached from personal problems. The community...marks out paths of faith that should help them to have a clear awareness of their own identity and mission: it therefore accompanies and supports them...In this way the family is made aware of its role and becomes, in the community and along with it, an active participant in the work of evangelization.”
- A family approach to Christian Initiation helps the family to *become what they are*: an intimate community of life and love which images the Holy Trinity, while actively participating in building the Kingdom of God by evangelizing other families as well as society in general.

Article 231: *Catechesis of the Family*. This paragraph opens with the following proclamation: “As a domestic church founded on the sacrament of marriage that also has a missionary dimension, the Christian family takes part in the Church’s mission of evangelization and is therefore an agent of catechesis.”

- The Christian family is either an agent of catechesis taking part in the Church’s mission of evangelization...*or not. If not, why not?*
- We are not seeing the above quote in the General Directory as a reality for many families. For families seeking Baptism of older children, the parents are most often not married sacramentally, so there is no “domestic church founded on the sacrament of marriage.” Therefore, there is no “missionary dimension,” and the family does not take part in the Church’s mission of evangelization.
- If there is no sacramental marriage, and the family has not been evangelized or catechized, how can it be expected to have a missionary dimension by evangelizing others and being an agent of catechesis? It can’t.
- Many (if not most) of the parents do not understand why a sacramental marriage is so important. Nor do they understand what a domestic church is, or how to *be* a domestic church. All this must be modeled and “taught towards” with the families.

Pastoral Guidelines, Article 232d: “The *catechesis of parents whose children are making the journey of Christian Initiation*: the community fosters the involvement of parents in their children’s journey of initiation, which for some of them is a moment to deepen their faith and for others is an authentic space for its first proclamation.”

- This is precisely what we are doing in a *Christian Initiation for Families* process- providing an authentic space for the first proclamation.

Articles 233-235: New Family Scenarios-Article 233 speaks of family dysfunction and its resulting change in family scenarios that we are seeing in our time. “In spite of the wounds, the depletion of its transcendent significance, and the weaknesses that characterize it, there is however a sort of nostalgia for the family, since there are so many who, intuiting its value, are seeking it and want to build it.”

- The reality is we are seeing many families who, in spite of their various dysfunctional situations, *intuit the value of the family, still seek it and desire to build it...but they do not know how*. They do not realize that coming into relationship with Christ and His Church is the beginning of building the family life they are truly seeking. This is what we capitalize on with *Christian Initiation for Families*
- Article 234 talks about *turning with love to these families*. We *look realistically at their situations and accompany them in love and truth* as we reach out and help them to *find their way of participating* in the community.
- These families have been living outside of the arms of our loving Father. Subsequently, they are in *crisis*- (Remember the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32).
- Our mission: to bring them back into His loving arms and back into community with their brothers and sisters.

Section 4- Catechesis of Adults

Article 258 Speaks of “-adults who, although they have been baptized, have not been adequately formed or have not brought Christian initiation to completion, and can be referred to as *quasi-catechumens*.”

- The term quasi-catechumen, coined by Pope St. John Paul II, was used in article 44 of his *Apostolic Exhortation, Catechesi Tradendae*.
- This is precisely who we are evangelizing and catechizing using the catechumenal model, the model for all catechesis, as we parallel the adult quasi-catechumens through the Christian Initiation process while preparing their children to receive the Sacraments of Initiation.
- Preparation of these adults begins with an *emphasizes in evangelization* using a *pre-pre catechumenate* approach. As they move forward in trust, curiosity and openness while hearing both the call and the promise as directed to them personally, their preparation includes, but is not limited to the following: regularizing marriages (if possible), completing the Sacraments of Initiation (if needed), preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (for the first time in *many years*), receiving Holy Communion (for the first time in *many years*), regular Sunday and Holy Day Mass attendance, and deepening their relationship with Christ through meditative and contemplative prayer. Prayer as a family (rosary, etc.) is taught, modeled, and encouraged, as is family communication and discussion.

~The stakes are indeed high; therefore, we may be assured the grace is abundant~

Forming Disciples Using the Baptismal Catechumenate as the Inspiration and Model for Evangelization and Catechesis (Precatechumenate Focus)

Presenter: Lori Smith, avemaria003@gmail.com

This handout indicates the proper correlation between phases of evangelization and catechesis and stages of relationship with our Lord. It is critical that those we serve move forward to the next phase *only when truly ready*, and that the proper aspect of the Covenant is emphasized at each phase. This is accomplished within the pastoral, liturgical, and catechetical aspects of the catechumenal model (RCIA), which is the inspiration and model for all catechesis (cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, 2; 61-65).

STAGES OF RELATIONSHIPⁱ

What is meant by the term formation? It means being conformed to Jesus Christ, so that we may *recognize our Lord through one another*. This is not something forced, but rather is a result of a *free choice* to enter into an increasingly intimate union with God. *How we relate to God is mirrored by how we relate to one another, and vice versa.* Growing closer in relationship often moves through the following stages, which are somewhat fluid.

TRUST (PASSIVE)- This stage is characterized by *testing* to see if the inquirer is safe with the evangelist (the evangelist being *you*). During this stage, the inquirer may think, “How safe am I with this other (what can I reveal of myself)?” During this stage there is often doubt or skepticism about the trustworthiness of the evangelist, which can then be projected onto our Lord.

CURIOSITY (PASSIVE)- There is further exploration, and attentiveness to the gesture or manner of the evangelist. Further testing is often undertaken, but there is some level of curiosity, or attraction toward a more significant relationship with the evangelist.

OPENNESS-PASSIVE OPENNESS MOVING INTO ACTIVE OPENNESS

PASSIVE OPENNESS- Testing may continue, but perhaps with a bit more hope that the evangelist is in fact trustworthy. There is recognition of potential with the relationship. During this stage, the inquirer may think “this can potentially be an important relationship, but *it will cost me something*.” There is recognition that sacrifice will likely be necessary *if* the participant *chooses to commit* to the relationship.

-CRISIS OFTEN OCCURS HERE-

ACTIVE OPENNESS- The inquirer steps out onto the bridge and begins to cross, taking a chance that developing the relationship is worth both the effort and the risk involved. “I will have to make some changes in my life, it will cost me something, but I am willing to take the risk because I believe (hope) it will be worth it.” This is where the crisis comes in because a leap of faith must be made voluntarily by the person.

SEEKING (ACTIVE)- Having made the judgment that the evangelist (*and therefore the Lord*) is trustworthy enough, and that the potential sacrifice is worth the effort, the inquirer actively seeks to develop the relationship. ~***This is the proper stage to encourage the inquirer to begin formal catechesis in the faith~***

COMMITMENT (ACTIVE)- This stage is characterized by acknowledgment of the long-term character of the relationship, and the *choosing* to be faithful. *To commit to permanent faithfulness is to enter into covenant.*

Covenant Theology as it Pertains to Faith Formation

"Covenant theology is a key to understanding the faith, and therefore faith formation. To put it simply, a covenant is a permanent committed relationship, characterized by faithfulness to the other...Every relationship that is important to us is in some way covenantal. Faith is the way of acting upon what the covenant stipulates (demands of us). Thus, to form someone in the Christian faith is to witness-to, testify to- the New Covenant, the committed relationship we have with our Lord, and to show the way of entering into Covenant with him." Fr. Michael Sweeney, O.P.

Every Covenant has at least four aspects:

THE CALL: an invitation and summons into relationship that names the covenant partners.

Example: We come to know our own identity better by being summoned into a truly personal relationship.

THE PROMISE: assurance of something hoped for, as well as assurance of a covenant partner (witness).

Example: When we stand in our Lord's place, we are empowered to directly offer to others what our Lord has promised us: life in abundance, knowledge of Truth, a friend, an advocate, a place in heaven, etc.

THE STIPULATION: clarifies what must be done in order to keep faith with the covenant partner (not as in a contract, but as a communion born of love).

Example: To keep faith is to be attentive to the covenant partner- to always remember who he is. Thus, not only is a covenant stipulation betrayed through direct offense, but also through inattentiveness or neglect of the covenant partner.

THE SIGN: evidence that the covenant is accepted.

Example: **Sacrifice**, most particularly the *offering of oneself*, is always a covenant sign.

The sign of the covenant here *is* sacrifice.

The goal of formation is that each person meet the risen Christ, thereby becoming His disciple and ultimately being sent as an apostle to bring Christ to others.

Period of Evangelization and the Precatechumenate

Stage of Relationship: Trust/Curiosity/Openness

Trust: The precatechumenate is the primary period of evangelization- the initial proclamation and reception of the Gospel, where the participant *develops a sense of trust* with the disciple and by extension, with the Lord.

Curiosity: The pre-catechumen or inquirer, including the adult parent who may often be thought of as a “quasi-catechumen” (or even a quasi-pre-catechumen) becomes *curious* about what is being proclaimed by the disciple’s words and witness.

When we speak of disciple(s) we mean those who evangelize and catechize (aka evangelists). These include but are not limited to: priests, catechists, family members, godparents/sponsors, hospitality teams, prayer teams and actually, *the entire parish.*

Passive Openness: At some point, a level of *passive-openness* develops in the pre-catechumen (or pre-quasi-catechumen), who often experiences a *crisis* due to the *truth* that is encountered. It is vital at this point, that the disciple teaches the participant *how to pray*. He or she now *begins to see the Lord more explicitly through the disciple as well as in prayer.*

Active Openness: passive openness will lead to an *active* openness, or *beginning seeking*, whereby the disciple can encourage the pre-catechumen to *begin formal instruction* in the faith.

Aspect of the Covenant: The Call/The Promise

The Call: During the period of the precatechumenate, the participants learn of *the call and promise of the Covenant our Lord offers*. This occurs on both implicit and explicit terms. They are *invited and summoned into relationship with the Lord* both through their relationship with the disciple, and through receiving the proclamation of the Good News. The call must be personal and specific (as in a personal invitation). It is critical that each person hear the call as *directed specifically to them.*

The Promise*: They learn of the *promises our Lord has made and receive them* as promised directly to them: ***you*** will live, ***you*** will have eternal life, ***you*** will have a friend and advocate who will be with you always.

***If the precatechumens (or baptized children and/or adults) do not hear the promise, there can be no formal instruction, or if there is, they will likely not hear it.**

The Three Aspects of the Catechumenal Model

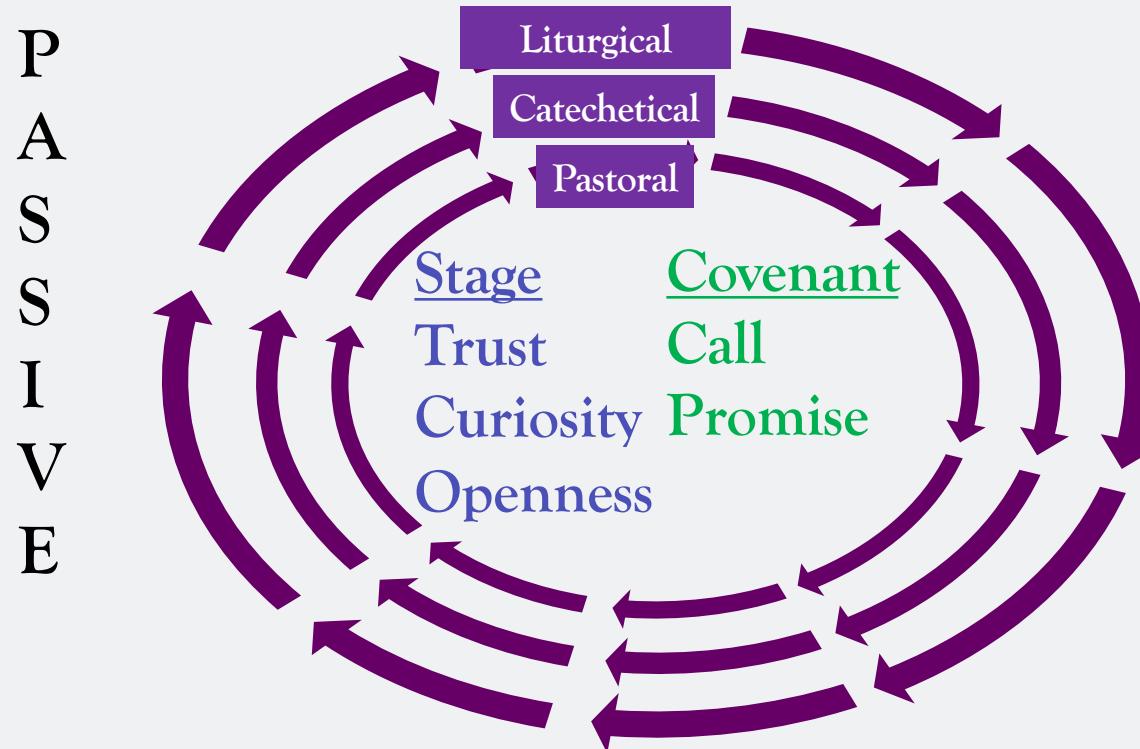
Swirling around and through the stages of relationship and the aspects of the Covenant are the following aspects of the catechumenal model:

- Liturgical
- Catechetical
- Pastoral (as in the pastoral accompaniment and witness of disciples/evangelists)

These three aspects are in constant and fluid movement throughout the entire process, although often in different proportions according to the period in which the participant is engaged, as well as the needs of the disciple in formation at any given time. However, the *Order of Christian Initiation* itself is primarily liturgical, which is the reason we teach both *to* and *from* the rites in the OCIA (RCIA). This can also be accomplished when preparing for any sacraments as well as in a mystagogical sense for those who have received the Sacraments of Initiation.

ⁱ *The Stages of Relationship and Covenant Theology applied to the catechumenal model in this handout were originally created by Fr. Michael Sweeney, O.P. for the Faith Formation Course of the Lay Mission Project. With his permission and blessing, it has been developed further as an offering to assist others in developing processes for various faith formation settings. www.laymission.net*

Evangelization and Precatechumenate





Christian Initiation for Families Registration Form

Information on this form is held in confidence and is not shared without your permission.

Today's Date: _____ Name of child/teen: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Age: _____. Grade in school: _____. Name of school _____

I. Parent Information

Name: First: _____ Middle: _____

Last: _____ Maiden Name (if applicable): _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____

Place of Birth:

Include: **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**.

Full Mailing Address:

Cell Phone: _____ Occupation: _____

Email:(Home) _____

Name of Father/Mother of the child/teen you are registering: _____

Address: same _____.

Address: other _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

II. Religious Information

1. What, if any, is your present religious denomination/church? _____

2. Have you ever been baptized? Yes No I am not sure

If you answered "Yes" to Question 2, please provide the following information:

(a) In what denomination/church were you baptized? _____

(b) Date or your approximate age when you were baptized: _____

(d) Place of Baptism (name of church/denomination): _____

(e) Address, if known: _____

(f) Location, if known: _____

*(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)*

3. If you were baptized as a Catholic, check those sacraments you have already received:

Penance (Confession) Eucharist (First Communion) Confirmation

Check the appropriate statement(s) below and provide any information requested beneath each statement.

1. I have never been married.

2. I am engaged to be married.

(a) Your Fiancé(e)'s Name: _____

(b) Your Fiancé(e)'s Current Religious Affiliation (if any): _____

(c) For you: This is my first marriage. I have been married before.

(d) For your fiancé(e): This is his/her first marriage. My fiancé(e) has been married before.

3. I am married.

(a) Your Spouse's Name: _____

(b) Your Spouse's Current Religious Denomination/Church (if any): _____

(c) For you: This is my first marriage. I have been married before.

(d) For your spouse: This is my spouse's first marriage. My spouse has been married before.

(e) Date of Marriage: _____

(f) Place of Marriage: _____
(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

(g) Officiating Authority of Marriage: _____
(civil government, non-Christian minister, Christian minister, Catholic cleric)

- 4. *I am married, but separated from my spouse.*
- 5. *I am divorced and I have not remarried.*
- 6. *I am a widow/widower and have not remarried since my spouse's death.*

2. *Please describe the types of religious education you have received, as a child and as an adult.*

3. *What contact have you had with the Catholic Church recently?*

4. *What is the most important goal you have for your child/children? (What do you want most for your child/children, what is the highest and best thing you desire for them?)*

5. *What is the most important goal you have for your family? (What do you most want for your family, what is the highest and best thing you desire for your family?)*

6. *What do you want for yourself? What is the highest and best thing you want for yourself?*

III. Child/Teen Information

Child/teen lives with: Parents Mother Only Father Only Other (please explain):

If child/teen lives with one parent/guardian, please indicate who has legal custody and/or if the child/teen also lives with a step-parent:

1. Has your child/teen ever been baptized? Yes** No I am not sure

If you answered "Yes" to Question 1, please provide the following information:

(a) In what denomination was your child/teen baptized?

(b) Date or approximate age/date when your child/teen was baptized:

(c) Place of Baptism (name of church/denomination):

(d) Address, if known:

(e) Location, if known:

(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

2. If your child/teen was baptized, please check all other sacraments he/she has received.

Penance (Confession) Eucharist (First Communion) Confirmation

IV. Family Information

List the name(s) of any other children or other dependents (e.g., Daughter — Jane; Stepson — John).

Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____
Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____

Are any of the above children or dependents baptized?

IV. Other Children/Teens You are Registering

Name of child/teen: _____ Date of Birth:_____. Age:_____

Grade in school: _____ Name of school _____

Child/teen lives with: Parents Mother Only Father Only Other (please explain):

If child/teen lives with one parent/guardian, please indicate who has legal custody and/or if the child/teen also lives with a step-parent:

1. Has your child/teen ever been baptized? Yes** No I am not sure

If you answered “Yes” to Question 1, please provide the following information:

(a) In what church/denomination was your child/teen baptized?

(b) Date or approximate age/date when your child/teen was baptized:

(f) Place of Baptism (name of church/denomination):

(g) Address, if known:

(h) Location, if known:

(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

2. If your child/teen was baptized, please check all other sacraments he/she has received.

Penance (Confession) Eucharist (First Communion) Confirmation

Some Resources for the Precatechumenate (or for *Paralleling* the Precatechumenate with Adult Parents/Godparents)

For Adults, Teens, and Jr. High:

First 7 weeks: *Augustine Institute, The Search* (on FORMED- or can buy dvd).

Watch as a group together and then break into adults/jr. high/teen groups for discussion with catechists.
7 sessions. www.formed.org

Backpack Productions: The Backpack, Improves relationship with self, others, God. Combines cutting edge psychology, neuroscience, and theology- 26 lessons. Carries an *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat*.

The program is available either online on your own or live via Zoom (from Ireland). Best to go through the program yourself first to understand its value both for you and for others.

Facilitator training is no-cost if you are facilitating a group.

Note: Choose Backpack for Adults and/or Backpack for Young Adults/Teens.

(*Backpack AFF* is something else- it is good, but it has a different focus. For the Family Approach choose **The Backpack**. www.thebackpack.life

3/4/5th:

Ruah Woods Institute, Revealed (Parish edition). Theology of the Body for children. Uses Caledcott Medal story books to develop themes and generate discussion regarding the dignity of the human person, making a gift of self, etc. Begin with Level 3, then move to level 4 (English only). Pre K through grade 12.

Video training available for catechists to access on their own time gives them a background on Theology of the Body and trains them how to use the material effectively. Helps the children cross the bridge of trust and move into curiosity.

To teach them to pray the rosary as a family, the *On a Mission to Love* books (in English and Spanish) are wonderful. www.ruahwoodsinstitute.org

And/or *TOBET- Theology of the Body Evangelization Team, The Body Matters Series*. K through 8 (some books are in Spanish) www.tobet.org

Note: As the catechists learn TOB at the level of the children, they learn it for themselves and they can then teach it to their children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces, nephews, etc.

Liturgy Training Publications, From Mass to Mission. Good for 3/4/5th and Jr High. www.ltp.org

Augustine Institute/Ignatius Press, Word of Life Series Level 3. www.augustineinstitute.org

Note: Some lessons of The Backpack can also be modified and used for this age group.



The Backpack

The Backpack Program promotes human and spiritual well-being by prompting healthier relationships with self, others, and God. It is based on a 26 lesson workbook.

The Backpack Program has been taught in high schools, middle schools, Confirmation preparation courses, parish youth groups, community colleges, rehabilitation centers, and at universities.

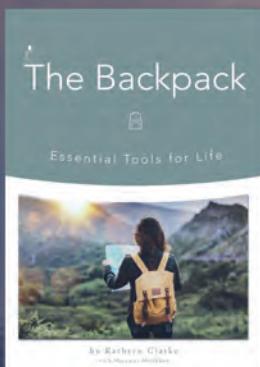
Combining cutting edge psychology, neuroscience, and theology, this program is tailored to teens and young adults but suitable for any age group.

In 2018 *The Backpack Program* received a formal Imprimatur*. This gives us great confidence to offer the program in Catholic arenas.

A Human and Spiritual Formation Program



Essential Tools for Life



Developing self-awareness through the study of relationship with self, others, and God.

*An Imprimatur is a statement by a Catholic Bishop that the material is consistent with Catholic teachings.



*Do you want
to learn more
about your
spirituality?*

Building Resilience

*Can you calm
your body in
times of stress
or anxiety?*

*Can you set reasonable
goals in your life and
work effectively to
achieve them?*

*Do you know
your 4 personal
boundaries and
how to respond
when they are
crossed?*



26 Lessons

Part One: Relationship with Self

- Lesson 1:** The Truth About Me
- Lesson 2:** The Process of Developing as Human Beings
- Lesson 3:** My Physical Well-Being
- Lesson 4:** My Mental Well-Being
- Lesson 5:** Learning How To Drive My Brain
- Lesson 6:** Dealing with Strong Emotions
- Lesson 7:** Zooming in on Anxiety
- Lesson 8:** Becoming Self-Aware

Part Two: Relationship with Others

- Lesson 9:** I am Imperfect
- Lesson 10:** Family and Friends
- Lesson 11:** Imperfection Do's and Don'ts
- Lesson 12:** Conscience

- Lesson 13:** My Listening Skills
- Lesson 14:** Boundaries
- Lesson 15:** Unhealthy Relationships
- Lesson 16:** Bullying
- Lesson 17:** Healthy Relationships

Part Three: Relationship with God

- Lesson 18:** Examining my Relationship with God through Church
- Lesson 19:** Who is God?
- Lesson 20:** The Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Lesson 21:** Living an Undefended Life
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- Lesson 23:** Finding the Church in the Individual Person
- Lesson 24:** Vocations
- Lesson 25:** Contemplative Prayer
- Lesson 26:** Wrapping Up

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What is The Backpack Program?

The Backpack Program is a human and spiritual development program. Originally developed for teenagers, it has been adapted to be suitable for teens, young adults, adults, and specific populations such as college students or recovering addicts. It has been and is currently running in schools, youth groups, parishes, and colleges and universities across Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the United States.

The Backpack Program is a resilience initiative. The contemporary formation provided through this program teaches people to regulate their emotions, calm their minds and bodies, manage stress, develop self-awareness, and instill boundaries for healthier relationships, as well as how to pray contemplatively and cultivate their own personal relationship with God. In this day and age, resilience and peace are more essential than ever, and worryingly lacking in society as a whole. The Backpack seeks to fill this gap and restore people to their strongest, healthiest selves.

The Backpack aims to benefit the lives of all people. We seek to develop and elevate Catholic thought and thinking by assisting individuals in improving their relationships with themselves, with others, and with God. Our teachings have been piloted and crafted over many years. Based in cutting-edge psychological science as well as theological and philosophical teaching, there is nothing casual about the concepts or the strategies utilized. Join us and begin a journey that will take you to higher thinking and higher Christian expression in the world.

Participant Feedback

"This course gets to the heart of who you are. If you are working on personal growth, this will jumpstart your journey to know yourself better, to connect well with others, and feed your soul with the desires you have for God. This course is about changing the world; by first changing what's inside each one of us."

"Since taking the Backpack I have a deeper ability to pray, to stay more quiet and still and to talk to Jesus. I'm better at tolerating my difficult feelings and also challenging my thoughts. I'm more humble in my view of other people, more accepting of them in my own mind."

"I don't feel as anxious as I did when I started the course. I find it much easier to reject the thoughts which were causing me to feel very stressed and worried. During the meditation exercises, I was able to calm myself down. It's a gift to realize that I have more control over my fears than I thought I did!"

"This course provided a fresh way of looking at my life and taught me that I can make changes to myself. As I make changes to myself, others around me notice these changes and adjust themselves accordingly."

"In general I feel more compassion towards others since taking The Backpack."

"I noticed that my body is healthier... my heart rate dropped a few points, etc. I also have become more confident in my faith and in setting boundaries and how to respect the boundaries of others. Now it is done firmly but with a lot of compassion and understanding."

"Since taking The Backpack, I am kinder and slower to anger."

"It's a really practical program that will give you great tools for living a happier, more peaceful and meaningful life, and for developing a healthier relationship with yourself, others, and God, and learning how to pray in a really beautiful and imaginative way."

"Take it! It has helped me on so many levels. It educated me about my relationships with both myself & others. I have always strived for balance in my life and The Backpack is a fantastic tool for accomplishing that goal. It's interesting, informative, and the principles can be put into practice immediately."

"This is a great self-improvement course that covers all areas of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth. It is life changing and uplifting."

"The Backpack program joins Catholic teachings and science to help with our emotional well-being... especially during this COVID time. THANK YOU for doing this!!!!"

“Do it! It's really interesting, and will help you learn to be kind to yourself, and to others. There are tools taught in it that are so beneficial, as we can forget to consider our emotional wellbeing in our busy lives. This helps bring it to the forefront.”

“I found this a very positive and profoundly hopeful program that teaches skills that are essential for life, and that we all really need! I think it has the potential to transform how we view ourselves, others and God, and therefore can radically change our lives for the better - I'm very glad I took part! It beautifully marries all the elements of ourselves from spiritual to psychological and physical to emotional. A very well integrated program, well done and thank you :)"

“Thanks so much for this incredible experience!!”

“This was really wonderful. It was a safe place to grow and learn. Thank you for making it possible.”

“You would expect that this course would be hard work and time consuming. It is not. It's easy. It's enjoyable. It's a breath of fresh air! I always looked forward to the next session. The workbook is easy to follow and will be a great resource. And, the course leader was simply fantastic!”

“This class has helped me organize my experiences - it's as if I didn't know how much chaos I lived with until this program helped me consider all the different ways a person interacts with self and others and God.”

“I feel empowered with new life strategies. Helps me to have a fresh perspective.”

“Each lesson was presented in a straightforward way and allowed a lot of personal growth. The boundaries sections were the most needed for me... My life could have been a lot better sooner with this information.”

“[This program] is so fresh and accessible. Very, very helpful.”

“I have struggled to be assertive in many situations... For years, I have been a perfectionist. ‘Crossing Your Own Boundaries’ helped me understand why I feel the way I do sometimes, but more importantly, that I have the ability to change.”

Some Science Behind the Backpack

The Backpack Program is a resilience building initiative, incorporating psychological, social, and spiritual development skills for better resilience outcomes in participants. Here is a brief look at some of the scientific concepts underlying and informing the curriculum.

If you would like more information on the science behind the program please contact us at contact@thebackpack.life.

- Implementing resilience building initiatives has been shown to increase emotional and social skills, leading to improved social functioning and mental wellbeing (Khanlou & Wray, 2014)
- Resilience is correlated with better help-seeking behaviour, healthy relationships, emotional intelligence, and adaptive coping skills (Jung et al., 2016)
- Students who participate in resilience building programs demonstrate improved academic outcomes, more positive social behaviour, decreased participation in risky behaviours (e.g., substance abuse), and enhanced problem-solving skills (Cahill et al., 2014)
- Reframing negative/distorted thoughts and beliefs can reduce depression, stress, and anxiety, and increase life satisfaction and happiness (Leaf, 2013)
- The brain can be rewired for positive change at any stage, and patterns of trauma or emotional injury can be healed and habits changed by implementing neuroplasticity practises and principles (Shaffer, 2016)
- Having a personal relationship with God and a healthy spiritual life is linked to better mental and physical health, and prayer enhances the neural functioning of our brain (Newberg & Waldman, 2010)
- A regular prayer practise has a number of benefits on the body, mind, and brain, including improved immune functioning, better physical health, a calmer and more positive worldview, faster healing, etc (Zeiders & Pekala, 2004; Simão & De Carvalho, 2016)

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RCIA & Adult Faith Formation: RCIA Adapted for Families—It's All About the Parents, Part One

Authored by Lori Smith in Issue #7.1 of *Catechetical Review*



"For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." Acts 2:39

Challenging times require innovative solutions. These are indeed challenging times, both in our world and in the Church. It is important for lay catechists to shine as beacons of light in the darkness to draw entire families to the one, true Light—that of Christ himself in the Catholic Church. Most importantly, it is *the time* for the wise process of the RCIA to move to the forefront of our endeavors for the evangelization and catechesis of entire families.

Whether we realize it or not, for many years we have been training providentially for the time in which we are now living. Holy Mother Church takes good care of her children and she has been preparing us for decades. From the restoration of the baptismal catechumenate at Vatican II^[1] to the *General Directory for Catechesis*,^[2] the *National Directory for Catechesis*,^[3] and most recently to the newly published *Directory for Catechesis*,^[4] the Church has held up the baptismal catechumenate as the essential model upon which all catechesis should be based.

The new *Directory for Catechesis* states that it “is becoming ever more urgent, that catechesis should be inspired by the catechumenal model” (DC 62). What is it about the RCIA that makes it such an inspiring model? The new *Directory* enlightens us: “This formative experience is progressive and dynamic; rich in signs and expressions and beneficial for the integration of every dimension of the person” (DC 2).

Unpacking this magisterial statement, we begin to see the benefit of using the catechumenal model to form disciples of all ages. The RCIA is a shaping or forming experience that advocates a change from who the person is at present toward the person God created him to be. This change, or *metanoia*, is meant to be very powerful and energizing for the participant. It involves much more than passively attending sessions to jump through hoops and receive a certificate of completion at the end. A program has a beginning and an end, whereas a process is fluid and ongoing. The RCIA process is designed to renew and bring into union every aspect of the person with Christ and his Church for all eternity. This change is going to cost each participant something. The way he or she has lived life in the past will now change in many ways, which can be more than a bit unnerving. The signs and expressions cannot be perceived as “rich” until the person begins to change and seeks to learn and understand how God moves in his or her soul. Each individual needs to be given the necessary time coupled with accompaniment by formed disciples to “to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God’s love” as they begin to desire to follow Christ.^[5]

Missionary Outreach

Deep in the trenches of parish life, our RCIA team has recently begun what may best be described as a *missionary outreach* to parents approaching Mother Church with their unbaptized children who have reached the age of reason through age seventeen. In the past, we would have focused primarily on preparing these young people via the RCIA process adapted for children and teens. Albeit a worthy endeavor in itself, we have found through experience that it often ends up being both a catechetical and spiritual dead end.

Most often, the parents have never been evangelized themselves, and if they have been catechized, it has been many years since they have received any formation in the faith. This, coupled with the fact they rarely attend Mass (if at all), are not an active part of the parish community, and often have irregular marriage situations, makes it all the more essential to focus on the parents as well as their children and teens. In other words, if we do not minister to the adult parents in whatever situation they happen to be, the children will be unable to practice their faith in the community to which they have been welcomed because we will never see them again. They receive their sacraments, and they are “done”—often for life, due to the lack of spiritual support in the home.

In the RCIA, we teach progressively and in stages *toward* the upcoming liturgical rite and *from* that rite to the next. These young people are prepared liturgically, spiritually, and catechetically through the different periods of the RCIA for four sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance. The prevailing thought in many parishes has been since the parents and godparents have already received their sacraments, they are catechized, and the grace of the sacrament “supplies” for any lack of ongoing catechesis.

Yes, they have received their sacraments. However, in many (if not most) cases, the graces of these powerful sacraments lie dormant because they have atrophied due to the lack of a response by the child of God who received them many years ago. In other words, they are often among those who are “far off” as our Scripture quote above describes.

The fact that the RCIA is structured to be a gradual and continuous journey of faith (cf. DC 232a) makes it the ideal model to evangelize and catechize the parents along with the children and teens because it allows them to embark on the journey together as a family. The *Directory* emphasizes this by stating, “the community fosters the involvement of parents in their journey of initiation, which for some of them is a moment to deepen their faith and for others is an authentic space for its first proclamation” (DC 232). This wise counsel in a magisterial document gives us the model from which to build.

Quasi-Catechumens

It was Pope St. John Paul II who coined the term *quasi-catechumen*.^[6] Reaffirming the definition, the *Directory* under the section “Catechesis with Adults” identifies “adults who, although they have been baptized, have not been adequately formed or have not brought Christian initiation to completion, and can be referred to as *quasi-catechumens*” (DC 258).^[7] The new *Directory* picks up and develops this term further by stating, “Precisely because of its missionary character, the catechumenate can also inspire the catechesis directed toward those who, although they have already received the gift of baptismal grace, do not actually taste its richness: in this sense one speaks of a catechesis *inspired by the catechumenal model or a post-baptismal catechumenate . . .*” (DC 61).^[8] This model, rather than denying the baptismal grace already received by these adults, actually revives the grace that has been dormant—perhaps for many years, thus breathing new life into the souls of the parents.

This idea is expanded upon further in the *Directory* when it speaks of “three catechumenal initiatives,” the third being “a *catechesis of catechumenal inspiration* for those who have received the sacraments of initiation but are not yet sufficiently evangelized or catechized, or for those who desire to resume the journey of faith” (DC 62).^[9] In parish ministry, this is precisely where we find the parents who bring their unbaptized children of catechetical age for sacrament preparation. We often find godparents in the same situation, and they are strongly encouraged to participate with the parents. Preparing these young people for sacraments without evangelizing and catechizing the parents and godparents makes no sense. In fact, we can go so far as to say that if the parents are not interested in developing the effects of their baptismal grace, dropping their children off once a week at the parish is going to perpetuate this unfortunate situation. We have found it is better to wait until at least one of the parents is ready, willing, and able to participate in what we have aptly named “RCIA Adapted for Families.”

What might a “catechesis of catechumenal inspiration” look like for parents who are willing to answer the Lord’s call and receive the promise, as our opening Scripture proclaims? In the next issue we will explore how to develop a process that incorporates post-

baptismal evangelization and catechesis for parents and godparents inspired by the RCIA model.

"And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house." Acts 16:32

Lori Smith is a mentor and task writer for the Catechetical Institute's RCIA Track at Franciscan University. She lives in Chico, CA, where she is RCIA Director for St. John the Baptist Parish and Formation Chair of the RCIA Committee for the Diocese of Sacramento.

Notes

[1] The restoration of the baptismal catechumenate can be found in the following Vatican Council II documents: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), 64–66; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 14; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965), 13–15; Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus* (October 28, 1965), 14; and Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Prebyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965), 5–6.

[2] Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC, 2008), 59.

[3] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC, 2005), 35d.

[4] Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020), 61–65 (hereafter cited in text as DC).

[5] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 37.

[6] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), 44.

[7] Emphasis in original.

[8] Emphasis in original.

[9] Emphasis in original.

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RCIA & Adult Faith Formation: RCIA Adapted for Families—It's All About the Parents, Part Two

Authored by Lori Smith in Issue #7.2 of *Catechetical Review*

Developing a Process

"And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house." Acts 16:32

In part one we established the rationale for the wise process of the RCIA to move to the forefront of our endeavors for evangelization and catechesis of entire families. Taking guidance from the *Directory for Catechesis*, our focus is on a “catechesis of catechumenal inspiration for those who have received the sacraments of initiation but are not yet sufficiently evangelized or catechized or for those who desire to resume the journey of faith.”^[1] This article explores the elements involved in developing a process incorporating post-baptismal evangelization and catechesis for parents, inspired by the RCIA model.

First Things First

A warm welcome with time set aside for conversation with the parents is essential as we begin our relationship with them. In other words, the more familiar model of “signing up” or “registering” the child for sacramental prep does not work in this situation. At this point we are most interested in meeting the *parents* and establishing a relationship.

Once a rapport has been developed, it is essential to determine why the parents believe it is important to bring their children of catechetical age to be baptized now and where they are in their faith journey. It is critical to begin looking into what their lived experience of “church” has been to determine what (if any) relationship they have with the person of Christ. Often, we find a bridge of trust with the Church itself through reception of sacraments as children, through relatives, etc., but not with Jesus Christ. They somehow sense God’s call but are often unable to articulate it. Our mission is to take them from where they are, bring them into the merciful arms of Jesus, and form them to be his disciples so that they, in turn, can form their children.

Experience with the thresholds of conversion: trust, curiosity, openness, seeking, and intentional discipleship^[2] is essential in these conversations because it assists us in finding out where the parents are in their faith journey. We need to discern this in order to know where to begin accompanying them on the path to meet the risen Lord and become his disciples. This helps us tailor our evangelization and catechesis to the particular threshold in which we find them.

The *RCIA Adapted for Children* parallels the adult RCIA with the application of the four periods of conversion: evangelization and the precatechumenate, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment, and mystagogy. Applying the thresholds of conversion to the four RCIA periods, we see that the period of evangelization and the precatechumenate generally coincide with the passive thresholds of trust, curiosity, and openness.^[3] This is when the participants (the family in this case), begin to develop a sense of trust with the disciples who are evangelizing them (you and your team). As they witness your love for and trust in the Lord, they hopefully begin to develop trust, initially in you, which then extends to Christ as they progress. Having gained sufficient trust, they begin to feel safe enough to become curious about the Lord and his life. As they witness *you* in relationship with him, they wonder if this might be possible for *them*. The stage here is very passive in that they are observing and testing to see if the disciples who are catechizing “walk the walk” as well as “talk the talk.” In other words, are you asking them to jump through a series of hoops in a certain period of time to receive a certificate, or are you a disciple of Christ who can show them the path to eternal life?

As their curiosity is stoked, the precatechumens, along with their parents and godparents, begin to cross into the threshold of openness, meaning “I *might* be open to the *possibility* of change.” This stage continues to remain at a level of passive openness, for the future disciple has not yet *decided* to change; he is simply open to the *possibility* that he might need to change. The older the person is, the more frightening this can be, often becoming a kind of crisis as he encounters the truth that a decision needs to



be made, which will cost him either way. This threshold requires prayer and accompaniment on the part of the disciples who teach and accompany, as well as prayer from the participant. Precatechumens who have begun to learn the habit of prayer tend to move with less drama into an active openness which precedes and carries over into the threshold of seeking, where formal instruction in the faith is most effectively received.

The Call and the Promise

As disciples, we are privileged instruments of Christ. We are to make his call audible to those he sends us. What do they receive if they answer yes? Attached to his call is the promise of the Covenant our Lord offers and which we are responsible for presenting as promised directly to each individual: you will live, have eternal life, and have a friend who will be with you always. If the precatechumens do not hear the Lord's call, they cannot be curious about the promise, and if they do not hear the promise, they will not respond to formal instruction because they will not hear it. The same naturally applies to the parents. Perhaps they have never heard the call and the promise, maybe they gave forgotten it, or possibly it lies buried in the past, deep in their subconscious.

Once disciples in formation establish a bridge of trust through our witness and invitation, and by extension hear the Lord's call, they can begin to move into curiosity. Could God be calling them into relationship with him, sinners that they are? What might that look like? When they see disciples in their midst securely in relationship with God and continually giving witness to their journeys, they begin to see that it may be possible for them as well. It is important to note that although the promise of the Covenant has been presented personally, it must also be *received* personally so the person may respond. "Only a catechesis that strives to help each individual to develop his own unique *response of faith* can reach the specified goal" (DC 3).^[4] They now proceed toward the threshold of openness, which as was pointed out above, begins as passive receptivity to the *possibility* that they might need to change. No decision has yet been made, and curiosity continues as they test the waters to see if change may even be possible, let alone desirable.

Once the call and the promise of the Covenant are both heard and received, with God's grace they may become *open* to engage in prayerful dialogue with God. Crossing the threshold into the seeking phase disposes them to receive formal catechesis. Formal instruction in the faith can be counter-productive if the participants are still trying to build trust with the catechists, the Church, and the Lord. Keeping in mind that the parents have received formal instruction before reception of their sacraments as children, they may not have been seekers at the time of instruction. Now they have the opportunity to make the decision as adults and begin actively working on the changes needed in both head and heart to respond to their call by the Lord. The decision comes with great cost since it involves sacrifice, which can be uncomfortable; yet, the growing desire renders their hearts open to hear what they must do to respond to God's call.

Using the catechumenal model, we have now paralleled the adults through a period of evangelization and accompanied them through the thresholds of trust, curiosity, and openness as we extended God's call and the promises of the Covenant to them. Once they have crossed over the seeking threshold, which parallels the catechumenate, we can begin teaching *to* the Rites of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist for their children and *from* these rites for the parents. As their children prepare for upcoming RCIA rites, the parents are prepared concurrently, so they understand what their children are receiving. In this way, they can participate more deeply, and along the way make the choice to give their yes to God and to respond to him as we move through the stages of conversion with them.

It is critical never to shame the parents because their children are over the age of reason and have yet to be baptized. Rather, they are warmly welcomed as we share with them joy and excitement that they have heard God's call *now* and are responding, emphasizing the beauty of doing this all together as a family! Encouragement and guidance are key elements as we give them tools to become the primary teachers of their children in the faith. As parents learn their faith from an adult viewpoint, they may become excited and confident to share it with their children as well as other adults in their circle of influence. The goal is to move them in the faith from head to heart and into life as they build the kingdom of God in their families and in the world.

The Stipulation and the Sign of the Covenant

As noted above, seeking is the appropriate threshold to begin formal instruction in the faith and it corresponds with the period of the catechumenate. Here, the disciple in formation learns the stipulation concerning the call and promise of God. In other words, he learns what he must do to keep the faith and remain in the Covenant relationship with God.

During the period of purification and enlightenment, the children enter into proximate preparation for reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.^[5] During this penitential time, all “formal” catechesis ceases as the catechumens, who have now become the elect of God, dive deep into their souls for interior reflection to bring their sins to the surface to be washed away in the waters of Baptism. Paralleling this for the parents allows them to examine their consciences and see what needs to be purified in them as they confess and do penance during the Season of Lent.

By the time the children approach the sacraments of Initiation, the entire family has had the opportunity to make their commitment to become intentional, committed disciples of Jesus Christ. This is *not* the time to cease learning their faith! On the contrary, formal instruction continues. Now they develop a deeper and more intimate awareness of the mysteries of the faith by living a sacramental life. The period of mystagogy and the neophyte year are all about learning to live the life exemplified in the Acts of the Apostles in the midst of the community (RCIA 244–247). The young people are prepared to make their first Confessions during mystagogy and the families celebrate this Sacrament of Mercy with them. The entire family is now capable of better understanding the sign of the Covenant—the sacrifice of our Lord—as well as the offering of sacrifice we make as participants in Christ’s royal priesthood. As they pray together and make a gift of self to one another in their families, they begin bringing this out into their daily lives in the parish, at work, in study, at play, and in missionary discipleship to others. In addition to frequent reception of the sacraments, ongoing formation both in the home and in the parish is essential. Continual learning will nourish and sustain these families as they follow the Lord on the path of holiness to eternal life.

In the Mission Field of the Family

Application of the catechumenal model in an RCIA adapted for families process is a mission that desperately needs to be developed in this time of salvation history, for “the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”^[6] Accompanying these spiritually starving parents into relationship with Christ and his Church is building the kingdom of God. As Pope St. John Paul II exhorted in *Familiaris Consortio*, “Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, *become* what you are.”^[7] Much work needs to be done in this area of the vineyard to assist families to become what they are: a community of life and love imaging the relationship of the Holy Trinity as God intended. In this way, “all believers are *active participants* in the catechetical initiative, not passive consumers or recipients of a service, and because of this are called to become authentic missionary disciples” (DC 14).^[8]

In summary, what we are doing in our parish is using the catechumenal model and adapting it for the benefit of the entire family using age-appropriate criteria, content, and methodologies. As the *Directory for Catechesis* emphasizes, “Catechumenal inspiration also makes it possible to reconsider the primary role of the family and of the entire community with regard to children, activating processes of reciprocal evangelization among the different ecclesial subjects involved” (DC 242). Wise use of the RCIA model allows “reciprocal evangelization” to occur naturally in the family, enriching the soil in order that the seeds planted take root, grow deep, and produce much fruit.

May we continue to develop this process under the direction and guidance of the Church as we light the way for families to navigate through these challenging times. As the light of Christ flows through us as catechists into the families he brings to us, it then flows through the families out into our world, which is so badly in need of God’s mercy and love.

Lori Smith is a mentor and task writer for the Catechetical Institute’s RCIA Track at Franciscan University. She lives in Chico, CA, where she is RCIA Director for St. John the Baptist Parish and Formation Chair of the RCIA Committee for the Diocese of Sacramento.

Notes

[1] Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020), no. 62 (hereafter cited in text as DC); emphasis original.

[2] Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012). An excellent description of the thresholds of conversion and their application in evangelization and catechesis can be found in chapters 5–8.

[3] The correlation between the periods of the RCIA and the thresholds of conversion with the corresponding stages of covenant

theology is attributed to Michael Sweeney, O.P., Lay Mission Project, Faith Formation Course, <https://laymission.net/courses/faith-formation>.

[4] Emphasis original.

[5] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 138, 277 (hereafter cited in text as RCIA).

[6] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 75.

[7] *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 17; emphasis original.

[8] Emphasis original.

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RCIA and Adult Faith Formation: Christian Initiation for Families: A Rescue Mission of Mercy

Authored by Lori Smith in Issue #9.1 of *Catechetical Review*

Having realized the growing need for a process of Christian Initiation for Families at our parish that serves unbaptized children of catechetical age *and their parents*, we have developed, implemented, and continue to fine-tune our rescue mission using a family approach for our mid-sized parish. One of the adjustments made is we now refer to the process as “Christian Initiation for Families” rather than “RCIA Adapted for Families.” “RCIA” is insider language, and, since we are hoping to attract entire families along with their unbaptized children, we realized that although they may not know what RCIA is, they will usually understand the title “Christian Initiation.”

In issues 7.1 and 7.2 of *The Catechetical Review*, there is a two-part article titled “RCIA Adapted for Families: It’s All About the Parents.”^[1] Indeed, it is. The value of evangelizing parents is confirmed over and over for us as we continue to unfold the crucial mission of the Church in this, our time in salvation history.



Part one of the article spoke of the grace of the sacraments lying dormant in the souls of the parents due to a *lack of response*. It also considered the term *quasi-catechumen* coined by Pope St. John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae*^[2] and used in the *Directory for Catechesis*,^[3] identifying “adults who, although they have been baptized, have not been adequately formed.” The directory then went on to emphasize the effectiveness of using a “*catechesis of catechumenal inspiration*,” as stated in the *Directory*, “for those who have received the sacraments of initiation but are not yet sufficiently evangelized or catechized, or for those who desire to resume the journey of faith.”^[4]

What we have discovered in practice is that although it is true the parents have not been “sufficiently evangelized or catechized,” they do not necessarily *desire* to resume their journey of faith when bringing their older children for baptism. The desire for relationship with Christ implanted by God in their souls needs to be enkindled. In other words, although we can be certain the desire is present, they do not perceive it. Nor will they, unless it is awakened by others who are *already* burning with this desire.

Part two of “RCIA Adapted for Families: It’s All About the Parents” detailed a process to evangelize the adults by incorporating the thresholds of conversion^[5] or stages of relationship (trust, curiosity, openness, seeking, and committed discipleship) with covenant theology (the call, the promise, the stipulation, and the sign of the covenant) as we parallel the four periods of the baptismal catechumenate with their children.^[6] Using this method as a post-baptismal (or mystagogical) catechesis for the parents, we related how they are accompanied from where they are when they arrive into the merciful arms of Jesus, developing a relationship with him as we move them forward in formation to become his disciples.

We recall from the second article that the stages of relationship of trust, curiosity, and openness precede the stage of “seeking, where formal instruction in the faith is most effectively received.”^[7] In addition, we noted that the stages of covenant relationship of the call and promise of our Lord *must* be lived out simultaneously.

Missing the Mark

Having now engaged intentionally in this battle for the family for ten years, we discovered that where many of us have tended to consistently “miss the mark” with parents in the past was right from the very beginning. Registering the children without meeting one-on-one with their parents, and not taking time to discern the entire family’s spiritual needs, treated the children as if they were in a silo and not attached to a family.

Often, we tend to make the mistake of moving immediately into formal catechesis because we are focused on the goal of sacrament preparation. The problem with this approach is that the evangelizing stages of trust, curiosity, and openness are consistently skipped. It is often assumed that the parents are in the seeking stage of relationship (where catechesis is most effective) simply because they contacted the parish office to inquire about baptism.

In addition, we fail to take the stages of covenant theology into account. In other words, if they have not heard the Lord's call as *specific to them* and it has not been *received by them personally*, they will not be curious about the promise directed specifically to them and *they will not respond to formal instruction in the faith because they will not hear it*. Formal instruction in this case can end up being counterproductive rather than enriching.

Because the parents were most likely not in the same place as children to have responded to formal instruction, they may not currently see an urgency for their own children to receive catechesis, especially when there are so many distractions vying for their attention from the world. They will attend the mandatory sessions for parents in the respective sacrament preparation programs, but they often receive the information as nothing more than noise in their ears or a hoop to be jumped through so their children can receive the "prize" at the end: reception of the sacraments. They thus believe they have done their duty as parents in this regard and move on to the next perceived requirement.

These common parental attitudes indicate they were most likely not seekers at the time of their catechetical instruction as children, nor are they now. Additionally, these adults have never asked themselves the important question, "What must *I do to respond* to the Lord's call?" because it has never been proposed for their consideration. They may never have had the experience of conversion in their souls to be able to articulate: "I hear the Lord calling *me* personally. I *accept/receive his call*, and now I am curious about what he is promising to *me*. How should *I respond* to his call and his promise? *Do I respond* to his call? *Do I accept* his promise? Now, what do *I do to keep faith and remain* in the covenant relationship with God?" Additionally, their response to God's personal call must be a free will response—either yes or no. We know well what the Lord thinks of the lukewarm (see Rv 3:16).

The Adventure Continues

What we did not fully realize when we embarked on this adventure was the extent of the deep *woundedness* of entire families that we would encounter on a regular basis. This should not be a shocking revelation considering the state of the world in our time, but we continue to be astounded at the level of brokenness as we receive these little ones back into the fold. It is truly a *rescue mission of mercy* of the highest order. Because their wounds are deep, they often feel like God has forsaken them, so they in turn forsake him, and thus they do not feel worthy that he should enter under their roof (see Mt 8:8).

Again and again, we see they desire for their *children* to be saved, but the parents feel it is too late for them. We frequently notice they tend to see their sins as greater than God's mercy, thereby undervaluing his mercy by thinking they cannot be forgiven. When asked how long it has been since their last Confession, the most common answer (after a nervous laugh) is, "Before I received my First Communion." They are usually in their mid- to late thirties and often received First Communion at age seven or eight, so it has commonly been at least thirty years since they have been to Confession. Since they have never received the Sacrament of Healing as an adult, and perhaps only once or twice as children, it is not surprising they are so deeply broken and wounded.

Many, if not most, are in irregular marriages or cohabiting, which necessitates heroic levels of patient but zealous evangelization, love, and witness as we slowly bring them to the recognition of the state they are in spiritually and what can be done to bring them back into full relationship with Christ and his Church. Often, there is no understanding of the concepts of sin or grace, nor of the power of the sacraments, especially the grace given in the Sacrament of Matrimony that would assist them in their office of parenting. This is the reason we spend an entire year with them paralleling a period of evangelization and precatechumenate. Plunging the parents right into a "review" of the sacraments, commandments, prayers, teachings of the Church, etc. will only be noise in their ears because they will not really be listening, nor will they be interested.

As we continue serving in this mission to offer a process for unbaptized children ages seven through seventeen and their parents to be formed as families of disciples of Christ, it has quickly become apparent that we must triage their wounds before we move into any type of formal formation. This includes referring to necessary professional therapy and gently working with them where they are—all the while introducing them to their dignity and patiently bringing them to the mercy of our loving God, who is the divine healer. It is important to add that extensive use of Pope St. John Paul II's theology of the body at all age levels has been powerful in helping them begin to understand *who* they are, *whose* they are, and the *dignity* they possess due to being created in his image and likeness. Additionally, the power of our witness as disciples cannot be underestimated because they do not know what it looks like to live life as a Catholic family.

A Safe Place

As the number of older unbaptized children continues to increase, it is imperative that we employ the catechumenal process to evangelize and catechize entire families, thus bringing them into relationship with Christ and our Catholic communities. We know well what happens when the sheep are separated from the shepherd and left alone out in the wilderness, and we know how Jesus feels about leaving the ninety-nine and going after the one (see Lk 15:4–7).

At first glance, it may not seem there are many families with unbaptized children of catechetical age. A closer look reveals there are many more than we might realize. In a recent article from *The Pillar*, the author states, “The number of older children being baptized—between the ages of 7 and 17—has risen over the last decade. In some dioceses, those baptisms actually outpaced the number of infant baptisms in 2019.”^[8] As both sacramental marriages and infant baptisms continue to decrease, we are indeed beginning to see an increase in the number of families requesting baptism for their older children. This is an opportune time to evangelize and catechize the entire family because there are usually situations that caused them not to seek baptism for their infants. These situations can range from emigrating to a new country to divorce, abusive relationships, family deaths, and everything in between. In the current sociological climate, it is urgent that we develop and implement effective processes in our parishes to serve these families.

One example of a family changed for the better through this process can be seen in the Preciosa family. Angel was baptized Catholic and “received all his sacraments” in Mexico as a child. His wife Tiffany was a baptized Protestant. Civilly married, neither had attended church for many years.

The family began the process and after some time Tiffany asked, “What if I wanted to become Catholic?” The short version is: their previous marriages were submitted to the Tribunal, Angel made his first Confession in seventeen years, their marriage was convalidated, and Tiffany was received into the Catholic Church. The youngest (age six) was baptized last spring and is now in First Communion preparation. The other two children are catechumens and are on track to receive their Sacraments of Initiation at Easter Vigil 2024. The family attends Mass every Tuesday night before our sessions and every Sunday as well. Confession and Eucharist have become valued sacraments for the parents, they pray the rosary regularly as a family, are on fire for the Lord, and are active in our parish community. The entire family will gladly witness to anyone who asks how their lives have changed in the last year.

The fight for the family is fierce, and we are engaged behind enemy lines. The call to this mission only deepens as we continue to witness the deterioration of family life in the world. It is high time to offer a safe place for families to come in off the battlefield to rest, heal, and gather strength from the Lord.

Serving the Lord is always an adventure. Once we have given our yes to the Lord, it never ceases to amaze us how he proceeds to work in us and through us amid the ongoing situations in our lives and the lives of those he sends to us. Our goal is to help them recognize as a family that Jesus is eager to enter under their roof and be welcomed into their hearts as they become active members of his Body in our community.

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Notes

[1] Lori Smith, “RCIA Adapted for Families—It’s All About the Parents,” *The Catechetical Review* 7.1 (January-March, 2021), and 7.2 (April-June, 2021).

[2] John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 44.

[3] Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020), 258.

[4] *Directory for Catechesis*, 62, emphasis original.

[5] Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

[6] The correlation between the periods of the RCIA and the Stages of Relationship with the corresponding stages of Covenant Theology is attributed to Michael Sweeney, O.P., Lay Mission Project, Faith Formation Course, www.laymission.net/courses/faith-formation.

[7] Lori Smith, "RCIA Adapted for Families—It's All About the Parents, Part Two: Developing a Process," *The Catechetical Review* 7.2 (April-June 2021).

[8] JD Flynn, "Older child baptisms on the rise, while infant baptisms decline," *The Pillar*, June 4, 2022,
<https://www.pillarcatholic.com/older-child-baptisms-on-the-rise/>.

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◀ Angel and Tiffany Preciosa with their children, Eloisa Lopez, 14, Venicia Preciosa, 9, and Giovanni Preciosa, 7.

'Our whole life has changed'

The Preciosa family discovers faith, holiness in the Church

BY LYNETTE MAGNINO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON WEINRICH

Tiffany Preciosa speaks of her family's journey with ease, candid and open about pain and trauma, hope and healing, faith and love. "Since coming to the faith, we've done so much inner healing," the mother of three concedes, intimating how healing is the work of love and the work of Jesus.

"We're going to be better parents," she says, stressing how "our whole life has changed since we joined the Catholic faith."

In between every word, detectable, palpable gratitude emanates from Tiffany and from her husband, Angel, and children Eloisa Lopez, 14, Venicia Preciosa, 9, and Giovanni Preciosa, 7. Together they are 21st century pilgrims, answering the call to holiness, discovering the Lord's way in the community of St. John the Baptist Parish in Chico.

21st century pilgrims

The Preciosa family epitomizes modern-day pilgrims looking for peace, healthy relationships and love. Through a new lens of faith, theirs is a quest for conversion, a homeward journey toward holiness, Jesus Christ and his Church.

"I started on a self-healing journey," Tiffany begins, unfolding a series of traumatic events in her life, from childhood to young adult life. After her civil marriage to Angel in 2020, she had more time to invest in her own healing, even though she was working two jobs and commuting from the neighboring town of Durham. Angel welcomed her children into his life and became a parent for the first time, legally adopting Venicia and Giovanni.

Tiffany explains how previous failed relationships, domestic violence, addictions and single motherhood left her with interior, emotional and spiritual wounds. Her children, too, experienced the same reality of abuse which challenged their innocence and well-being. Before meeting Tiffany, Angel

immigrated from Mexico and held painful memories of that experience. Most recently, a work injury led to his disability and a spiraling bout with depression.

Tiffany sought traditional therapy, but also alternative therapies and spiritual healing techniques, which prompted a range of conversations with Angel. Discussing their respective religious roots, and particularly Angel's childhood Catholic faith, Tiffany became curious.



We're all children of God. We are unique, precious, unrepeatable manifestations of God's love. I guess I am learning that. Tiffany Preciosa

"I just felt that I wanted to learn more about the Catholic faith," she shares, recounting how her own grandmother had been raised Catholic but a negative experience led her to the Baptist Church. As a result, Tiffany grew up in the Baptist Church but admits "I was turned off by religion." Angel received the sacraments and practiced his faith in Mexico when he was younger, but left the Church citing "a lot of hypocrisy," witnessing a vast disconnect between Sunday practice and everyday life.

"That's when we called

Lori Smith, Christian Initiation director for St. John the Baptist Parish, speaks with Giovanni Preciosa.



Lori," Tiffany says, of their first encounter with Lori Smith, Christian Initiation director for St. John the Baptist Parish. Tiffany recalls an immediate sense of peace and welcome even as she revealed her feelings of fear and worry. Lori assured them of a non-judgmental space and stressed how "we are brothers and sisters in Christ."

"It was such a beautiful, powerful message," Tiffany says, coming at exactly the right time.

Discovering the Lord's way

As a longtime leader and director of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), Lori launched the Christian Initiation for Families just over a year ago. She witnessed firsthand the positive effects of families learning together after COVID-19 forced outdoor "picnic table catechesis." When teachers noticed their students smiling and

watching their parents engaged in learning the faith nearby, Lori thought "we're on to something here!"

"We serve families who come with catechetical-age children and older who have never been baptized," Lori explains, referencing data that show the number of unbaptized older children equals and even outpaces infant baptisms in some dioceses.

The Preciosa family learned that Lori would guide the whole family along their faith journey with various tools, including a program called "Backpack" for adults and teens. Described as "contemporary Catholic formation," video sessions and a workbook offer human formation and self-awareness support as the necessary starting points for healing and healthy relationships with self, others and God. Subsequent modules go deeper into meaningful Catholic faith formation and spirituality.

"I felt like it fit with my self-healing journey," Tiffany



asserts, comfortable with the meditations and focus on healing the family and healing the heart. "This is where we are supposed to be 100 percent," she adds.

Lori is steadfast on two points in forming older children. First, "it needs to be a complete RCIA process," she insists, underscoring the importance of a "real pre-catechumenate, a real catechumenate, a real purification and enlightenment, and a real mystagogy." She also emphasizes that "parents need to be paralleled through that."

"Parents aren't practicing their faith for all kinds of reasons and those need to be identified and they need to be accompanied," Lori appeals lovingly knowing that children model what their parents do or don't do.

With Lori's Christian Initiation for Families approach, "it's all about getting the parents involved with their children's faith formation," and welcoming

parents back home to their faith and the sacraments, learning at an adult level.

"Tiffany and Angel came with three children who had not been baptized," Lori says, explaining how this led to a personalized journey that addressed the family's varied needs. She walked with Tiffany on a one-on-one RCIA journey, while the whole family participates in age-appropriate Christian Initiation catechesis together. They also worked with the diocese's Tribunal in seeking annulments for their previous marriages.

Angel returned to the sacraments and at Easter vigil in 2022, Tiffany was received into full communion with the Church. Giovanni, who was 6 at the time, received baptism and continues with regular instruction in preparation for his first Communion. Tiffany and Angel's civil union was con-validated in the Church. Eloise and Venicia have moved through the first pre-catechumenate year.

With "Backpack" in tow, the Preciosa's pilgrim journey continues to lead them

onward to Christ. Crossing the thresholds of trust, curiosity and openness, Tiffany says, "We're excited to see where our faith journey takes us. It's just been beautiful and life-changing since the start and we don't have plans to ever quit." Angel, too, acknowledges the hard work but shares how his faith is "different now," after addressing "a lot of baggage," seeking reconciliation in confession and surrendering to the Lord. "I feel great," Angel offers, describing how a "weight has been lifted from my shoulders."

Answering the call to holiness

Contemplating holiness, Tiffany defines it as "love, and the sharing of love, and sharing thoughts of love." For the Preciosa family, holiness is not an abstract or lofty desire but rather the uninhibited, active practice of faith and love for Christ. It is wholeness, balance and gratitude.

"I talk openly to so many people now about my faith and what it has done for me,"

Tiffany shares, pleased to convey her conversations with co-workers and friends, "because what good would it be to have all that love, and harness it all for ourselves, and not share that healing power and love of Jesus Christ with others?"

It has been as simple as Venicia sharing with a classmate about the rosary and the Blessed Mother. Or young Giovanni contemplating garden rosemary inquisitively, seeking parallels to Mary and the rosary. Their faith is top-of-mind.

In harmony, Tiffany, Angel and the children announce words they associate with their Catholic faith: *Healing. Protection. Family. Joy. Forgiveness. Acceptance.*

"We're all children of God," Tiffany expresses, calling to mind and restating what Lori often quotes: "We are unique, precious, unrepeatable manifestations of God's love." Tiffany, still settling into the magnitude and holiness of this reality, yields to her heart and concludes, "I guess I am learning that." †



▲ Lori Smith, right, with the Preciosa family.

Testimony From a Parent in the Christian Initiation for Families Process

The following testimony (used with her permission) shows a good example of moving through the relationship stages of trust, curiosity, and openness. This mother has heard the call and the promise as made specifically by God to her. She *knows* God has *called her by name*, and she has *responded* and *accepted* His promise to her. Therefore, as she entered into formal catechesis, she was *ready to receive instruction* that continues to bear fruit. Moving through the stages of seeking and into intentional, committed discipleship was easy for her, as was accepting the covenant sign, which is sacrifice. She now knows to combine her suffering with Christ on the Cross and bring good out of it. This makes her a powerful witness to others as the Lord sends her out as an apostle to bring His healing love to others. She is also well-aware she will never be “done” learning and growing in her faith, as she continues to move deeper into relationship with Christ and His Church.

As each person is a unique, precious, unrepeatable manifestation of God’s love, each case will be different regarding the time it takes to move through these stages. The important point is *to know what to look for and allow the time it takes* for each individual to move forward. *Intercessory prayer and accompaniment are key!*

“If what I did with you had been anywhere close to what I was raised up in, I would have run through those doors quicker than a cheetah chasing prey. I asked a lot of questions because I was testing the waters before baby-stepping in.

My last experience before here with any type of church was a [Protestant] church in _____, and I remember holding back my tears in the middle of this pastor’s sermon as he was openly bashing [a certain type of person] in church and telling parents, friends, and families to turn on their loved ones if they refused to repent or they would go to hell along with them.

It felt like he was telling me that God hated some of the people I love most in the world. He hated them, so I started to hate my relationship with God and the church. It felt like the whole thing was just a way to divide us more, and a place to that was supposed to be all loving and holy [was turned] into a place of hate and bigotry.

Also, I grew up going to different denominations and teachings were so different at each one, so my understanding of God was confusing. I was taught He was jealous and to fear Him, but in my heart, I always felt like the Trinity was all loving and peaceful and I didn’t find that feeling there.

I always held onto it secretly tucked away in my heart until I came to the Catholic Faith, the one, true faith- and that is when my heart started beating for the Lord again. I was filled with the love of our true Father- a loving, kind, forgiving, and accepting Father I had always wished for- and was blind to see He was with me this entire journey through all the bad and the good- Him, the saints, and my guardian angel had been there the entire time. And the veil was lifted after Communion and Confirmation into the Faith.

God put me with you because He knew you would have the words. He gave them to you.

I looked up Catholic churches and there were two listings—and I was called to [insert your parish here] because God knew that I would have run had it been any different than it was.

So, thanks be to God for RCIA at [insert your parish here] and praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for putting you in the lives of our little familia.”

We can interpret the “you” in this testimony to indicate *all of you* who are involved in this process, because God will give you the grace to serve the families He sends to you. The stakes are high; therefore we may be assured the grace is abundant.