

# The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as a Process of Christian Initiation in The Catholic Church

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## ABSTRACT

Today unlike before, more Christians are baptised shortly after birth as infants, but the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist are postponed for years later. This practice which is usual is how ever far from the ideal or normal. The norm as set out in the Rite of Christian initiation is that a person should receive all the three sacraments during the annual celebration of the Easter vigil, following a suitable period of formation known as the Catechumenate. The catechumenate as practiced today in the Rite for Christian Initiation of Adults is the only ordinary way through which an adult can become a Christian. It is against the aforementioned background that this paper sets to evaluate the necessity of the RCIA in the Catholic Church. The paper also evaluates the various challenges of pastoral agents towards the teaching and smooth implementation of the RCIA in the church. Many Christians were initiated haphazardly and wrongly, and so it is no wonder that there is a lot of apathy, indifference and complacency among Christians in issues that pertain to the faith especially when this faith begs to be defended. These considerations indicate and demand for urgent rescue operation, because weak faith of the faithful cannot withstand the waves of modernism, globalization and the growing stronghold of Islam that sweeps across the world.

## KEYWORDS

Catholic Church, Christian Initiation, Rite of Christian Initiation of adults

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Roman Rite that was published first in 1972 is one of the most important Church documents since the Second Vatican Council. It revives for those preparing for the sacraments, the process whereby a person is gradually introduced into the Church's life and mission, as a preparation for full communion by initiation. Today unlike before, more Christians are baptised shortly after birth as infants, but Confirmation and Holy Eucharist are postponed for years later. The norm as set out in the New Rite of Christian initiation is that a person should receive all the three sacraments during the annual celebration of the Easter vigil, following a suitable period of formation known as the Catechumenate. However, for pastoral reasons and other reasons when the norm cannot be observed, that is, when Baptism is not followed immediately by Confirmation or when the sequence of Confirmation and Eucharist is reversed, the ritual still calls for some post baptismal anointing to replace Confirmation. The Baptism is renewed and reaffirmed and the Confirmation rite leads to Eucharistic communion. The new rite re-establishes the Catechumenate period as the structure of adult initiation in the Catholic Church. As practiced today, the Rite for Christian Initiation of Adults is the only ordinary way through which an Adult can become a Christian.

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

For the sake of this paper, the following will be defined:

### A. *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A)*

The name, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is given to the official liturgical process for initiating adults into the Catholic Church, and in its adapted form for children who have reached the age of reason. This process is set down in a Vatican document called the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. To avoid confusion, the title of the document, whether in full or abbreviated, is normally written in *italics* as the *RCIA*. The process set out in the RCIA document is always written in ordinary type as The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults or RCIA. It may also be referred to as the RCIA process. It's the way adults become Catholic.

### B. *Catechumenate*

The concept of Catechumenate as used in this study refers to the period of Pastoral Formation of the Catechumens accompanied with distinct rites at different stages gearing towards their full initiation into the Church by the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist). The Catechumenate process is aimed at properly establishing the faith of the Christian faithful on a better footing. The expectation is that a careful way of catechesis would result in the profound conversion of heart that would enable Catholics to live the Christian life according to the Gospel of Christ.

### C. *General Understanding of the Rite of Christian of Adults (R.C.I.A)*

The Church teaches that adults who are seeking to become Christians must follow a program of catechesis, which is called the RCIA. The Church does this for four important reasons; (a) so that the adult must be appropriately acquainted with all the dogmas of the Church, (b) so that they may learn from the Christian community how to live this new way of life; (c) so that they will start calling on God in prayer and (d) appreciate the celebration of the liturgy of the Church in all its spheres. In the early Church, people seeking baptism spent a long time in formation. As more people were baptised as infants, this process, known as the Catechumenate, almost disappeared. For Barga, the R.C.I.A is basically for the following group of individuals;

- adults and young people who are unbaptised
- adults and young people who are already baptised in another Christian Church
- Catholics who have been baptised but have not completed their initiation into the Catholic Church
- Adults, baptised Catholics as infants, who have not had religious formation in the Catholic Church (224).

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is more than just an official Church rite. It is a vision of what the Church really is, or perhaps better, could be. It offers a pastoral and liturgical model which expresses a way of being Church which is open, welcoming and dynamic. It challenges every member of every parish to overcome fear and indifference and instead, to

work towards establishing the Kingdom of God in earnest. For McFadden "the R.C.I.A model of the Church is the official vehicle for welcoming and receiving new members into the Catholic Church" (18). McFadden further said that, within the R.C.I.A, there are ministries which require particular skills. There is recognition that no individual possesses all the gifts necessary to be Church, but that when we work together, we can better show the world what it means to be God's people. Ministry is something open to all, something demanded of all, and the R.C.I.A gives many different opportunities to minister to our neighbours (1). According to Tomalak "the R.C.I.A is not presented to us as a programme but as a journey, not as a fixed term of catechesis but as an ongoing process of inquiry, growth and maturing" (24).

The Catechumenate journey is God's work; it is the privilege and the duty of the faithful to assist, not hinder, those who are coming to the faith. The complete and usual form of the Rite is intended for the preparation of unbaptized adults and includes rites proper to the Catechumenate as well as the sacraments of initiation (25). The R.C.I.A should therefore be seen as a model; the image of the faith journey, and the form and ethos of the Catechumenate, it is an attractive model for preparation for other sacraments and as means of understanding further growth in the Christian life.

Furthermore, Harmless declared that the "R.C.I.A is much more than a collection of rites and rubrics; it is ultimately a pastoral statement that re-envision both the mission and character of Christian community" (8). Not only does it resurrect ancient rituals, practices, and stages, it also attempts to retrieve an ancient and quite radical vision of the Church one which places conversion at the heart of things, which reshapes community roles, which radically redefines the meaning of catechesis, and which sees baptism as the taproot and catalyst for life long transformation (9).

Through it all, Aidan Kavanagh, in his book *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* said "their faith, progress, and prognosis in communal faith-living are the concerns of the entire local Church met for solemn public worship" (112). He goes on to say, catechumens form a corporate presence that discharges a true ministry in the Church by witnessing constantly to the Church her need for continuing conversion in Christ (112). Mitchell testified that "R.C.I.A restores the sacraments of initiation to their original order and their original ritual proximity" (81). No longer is baptism to be separated from confirmation by weeks or even years, as had happened in the medieval Church (82). Kavanagh noted that R.C.I.A implies that adult baptism should once more serve as the norm for Christian initiation. To raise such concerns would be to misunderstand what a norm is and how it functions. He said, "a norm has nothing to do with the number of times a thing is done, but it has everything to do with the standard to which a thing is done" (109).

The R.C.I.A, has a clear structure that presents the process of initiation and continuity even after the reception of the sacraments of initiation. It is divided into four distinct periods of Christian formation:

The first period is called the pre-Catechumenate. This is also called the period of evangelisation. During this period the bible is presented to the catechumens to enlighten them to be strong in faith.

This is followed by the period of the Catechumenate during which the catechumens are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance to enable them live the Christian life. This period ends with election or enrolment of names when candidates express their desire to receive the sacraments. The third period is purification and enlightenment. This period is the time for the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation: baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. The fourth period is called post baptismal catechesis or mystagogy. At this period, the neophytes experience fully their belongingness to a Christian community and participate fully in the celebrations especially the Eucharist and other sacraments.

The stages of the Catechumenate are designed to offer periods of challenge and reflection. From enquiry to catechesis, enlightenment to mystagogia, the parish community is invited to grow ever more deeply in faith and in love (McFadden, 1). This vision is an on-going one, the different points of the Catechumenate are celebrated in style, with liturgical expression and general rejoicing. It is a positive expression of our faith, and one which will inspire and encourage all those who enter into the process. Throughout the period of the Catechumenate, the candidate is encouraged to grow in prayer, in faith and in love. He or she is supported in their personal faith journey by one-to-one encounters, small group meetings, and large community celebrations.

Talking about conversion as the aim of the Catechumenate, Finn describes conversion as "A Ritual Journey". And this journey is from one way of walking to another. The destination for Finn is called "Salvation", and many are called to embark on this journey. He goes further to opine that some conversions seemed sudden (like that of Paul of Tarsus) and had a strong emotional overlay (like that of Augustine). Most, however, were gradual, the result of time and testing. For those ancients who sought the Christian "way," the journey had clearly marked stages: (1) a period of preparation that emphasized instruction and testing and involved personal struggle; (2) penultimate preparations for baptism also characterised by instruction, testing, and ritual struggle; (3) baptismal immersion; and (4) post-baptismal "homecoming" celebrations, which included the Eucharist (3).

### **III. STAGES OF THE R.C.I.A**

It was D.S Amalorpavadass in his Article, "*Catechesis as a Pastoral Task of the Church*" in the Journal *Lumen vitae Vol. XXXVII*, that described religious pedagogy of education in Christian faith "as a long spiritual journey in quest of the living God and the gradual discovery of Him, resulting in an ever more intimate and ever deeper communion in Jesus." He went on to say that, this spiritual journey is marked by several stages which include Christian initiation of adult converts from the former state of unbelief to the state of living faith as full-fledged Christians, education of children born to Christian parents, guardians from the childhood up to the state of mature adult Christians through the catechesis of various age-groups and the further stages of the movement or procedure in any catechesis (110). It is these different stages in the Spiritual journey that Timothy Barga in his book, *Parish Pastoral Renewal: A Vision for Ministry*, speaks about. Barga furthermore opined that the mission of catechesis as the springboard of the Church's mandate in the world does not begin and end with those who are received or incorporated into the Church. In his opinion, "faith as the answer to the proclamation of the Christian message is a gift, which has its stages of development into maturity" (225).

But then one needs to be prepared and disposed to accept, understand, own, internalized and appreciate it in one's life. Barga, compared this faith journey through different stages to the biblical parable of the Sower (Luke 8:5-15) which for him illustrates the daily experience of the Missioners who prepare the ground (first step, pre-evangelisation), to sow the seed of God's word (second step, evangelisation) and endeavours to develop the incipient faith to a fuller understanding of God's revelation for the practice of Christian life (third step, catechesis proper). The fourth stage could be referred to the harvest of the fruit of catechesis. So also the process of catechizing needs a gradual moment in order to arrive at a successful growth in Christian life. These three stages characterised and distinguished by their specific goals are in turn the prerequisite for the next step. And their procedure should be observed in any missionary catechesis (226).

Therefore, the stages of the process of Christian initiation are periods during which the candidates reflect on what they are being taught, are properly instructed on what they are about to receive and the practice of the Christian life is systematically stressed. These stages are divided into four main groups:

- the pre-Catechumenate
- the Catechumenate
- purification, Enlightenment and illumination
- mystagogy

#### **IV. THE PRE-CATECHUMENATE STAGE**

Faith, it is said comes from hearing and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ-Romans 10:17. The period of the pre-Catechumenate is the first stage of the R.C.I.A; it calls for prayer, knowledge, work and liturgy. These are all leading to conviction and conversion. It is also called the period of evangelization. It is the time when the person is making the first contact with Christ and the Church. The candidates at this stage are called Enquirers. Pre-Catechumenate as a stage has a two-fold function, one negative and the other positive. Negative in this sense means that it reveals man's needs for salvation as it exposes him to understand his sinful situation. It is positive because it does not leave man in his predicament but offers man hope as a result of his conversion. The guiding principle for this first contact with the unbeliever is what is commonly called an "anthropocentric" approach by which the catechizer must take into account the individual as he or she is, with his or her thought patterns, opinions, and the influences of his environment and culture. In dealing with such individual, the catechizer must be armed with understanding, love, patience and respect for his or her legitimate world-view. Barga continued to say that because of the different situations and circumstances involved, the length of the period will depend on the person. This factor when taken into consideration helps to forestall the possibility of the seed falling unto rocky grounds, hence the need for great tact and assessment of the person's sensitivity and, respect for his freedom. As an enquirer, he is accepted when he attends catechism class and when absent should be encouraged, Force or intimidation should be carefully ruled out. (229).

The Christian community is expected to welcome the individuals who are now expected to begin a period of evangelisation and basic catechetical instruction. This stage ends with the rite of welcoming by which candidates are chosen for on-going instruction. After the

celebration of the rite of acceptance, the names of the catechumens are to be duly entered into the register of catechumens, along with the names of their sponsors and the minister, the date and place of the celebration. (McFadden, 2).

## V. THE CATECHUMENATE STAGE

This is the lengthy period of formation of catechumen's minds and hearts. The purpose of this second stage in R.C.I.A is to make known, to dispose catechumen to the Good News of our salvation in Christ and to solicit the answer of faith. This stage centres on growth in knowledge about Christian life, values, spiritual formation and deepening of Christian conversion. The kerygma should not be given as a set of intellectual truths drawn from God's revelation but God's own revelation is retold and his plan of salvation announced with all the striking, challenging and moving power that lies within its contents. The main aim of evangelisation according to Hofinger Johannes, in his book titled *Pastoral Catechetics*, is the conversion of the individual. And conversion refers "to that decisive change of mind by which the individual admits the basic insufficiency and error of his/her accustomed view of the world and of his/her life and thereafter willingly accepts God's message as the basis for the new life he/she is determined to start" (104). Furthermore, Barga says "faith in Christ marks the culmination of catechesis and permits the commencement of the third stage, enlightenment or as called catechesis proper" (229). During this period, the catechumens are brought to the community and they make known their intention to the community. Before the public appearance and declaration, they must have been being grounded in the rudiments of the faith. In other words, they shall have had a conversion of mind and morals, a sense of faith and charity and sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching (229).

It is during this period that the candidates are enrolled and are nourished by the Church on the word of God and helped by Christian teachings and liturgical celebrations. The most important elements of the Catechumenate are the celebration of the entry rite, the liturgy, prayer, exorcism, anointing with oil of catechumens and the enrolment in the register. This step is called election because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God, in whose name the Church acts (230). At the end of this stage of the Catechumenate, there is the celebration of the rite of election, this is necessary so as to move the catechumens to the next stage, which is the period of purification or illumination. All those who have undergone the expected conversion at the Catechumenate stage are elected and enrolled into the period of purification which is the immediate preparation period before the liturgical celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation (McFadden19).

Morris stipulated that the rite of election is a very significant moment in the entire process of initiation. In his words, "the election is not the question of the catechumens wanting and asking to be initiated; rather it is the result of the community's discernment of the catechumen; and indeed, more than only the result of the discernment of the community, it is God's choice of the catechumen through the community to embrace the mission of Jesus Christ, the mission of the reign of God in the Church" (150). The sponsor accompanies the would-be Christian from the time of inquiry all through the Catechumenate stage and beyond. As a companion during the R.C.I.A, the sponsor serves as a mentor by being a living example and role model of what it means to be a person of faith or a Christian. As such, at the rite of election it is the sponsor who can testify before the Christian community the eligibility of the catechumen for the sacraments of initiation. At the heart of this liturgical

celebration is the election by God through the community (151). In this step too, there is also the enrolment of names, this is because as a pledge of fidelity the candidates inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for the initiation. For Hofinger, it is expected that before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens should have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed in sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity (151).

## VI. PURIFICATION, ENLIGHTENMENT OR ILLUMINATION

This is the period for a more profound spiritual preparation. At this stage, the catechumens are examined on their knowledge of the Christian doctrine and their moral life. At this time, more intensive preparations which involve spiritual recollection, examination of conscience and repentance are made (Barga 230). By act of faith one becomes a catechumen and enters the last stage of preparation for baptism. In this final stage, the candidate is further acquainted with God's magnificent plan for his or her life. Evangelisation and Catechesis proper do not differ in their basic approach, for in both stages the Christian message must be presented as the joyful tidings of the unfathomable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8) (Barga 230). For Rowanne Pasco and John Redford, in their book, *Faith Alive a New Presentation of Catholic Belief and Practice*, "catechesis systematically develops a fuller understanding of the Christian faith and introduces the person into the practice of Christian life that leads to baptism" (176).

Indeed, this is the purpose of catechesis at this stage. Hence, this stage of missionary catechesis must also provide initiation to the Christian way of living and during this period the catechumen learns by doing what is being taught, instruction aims at developing correct attitudes that dispose for justification in faith. Emphasis is laid upon the duty to prayer, participation in the Holy Mass and the practice of Christian virtues such as charity in and through the small Christian communities, which they are obliged to live in (178). The period of purification is typically liturgical in nature, marked by the celebration of the scrutinies, presentation of the creed and the Lord's Prayer, and the celebration of other preparatory rites on Holy Saturday. The scrutinies take seriously and reveal the profound love of God to bring all people to full freedom and salvation. The scrutinies are also meant to fill the elect with the meaning of Christ the Redeemer who is the living water (Gospel of the Samaritan woman), the light (Gospel of the man born blind), and the resurrection and life (Gospel of the raising of Lazarus) (McFadden126).

The last step in this stage of the Christian initiation of adults after the presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer to the elect is the celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. At this step the elect having received pardon for their personal and original sins through the process of rebirth and regeneration, are admitted into the people of God. The usual time for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation is the Easter vigil. When the celebration takes place outside the usual time, care should be taken to ensure that it has a paschal character (Barga 231).

Mystagogy: The last stage in our journey is *mystagogy* or commonly called post-baptismal instructions. In Greek, "*mystagogy*" means "entering more deeply into the mysteries," *duc in altum*. During this stage, members of the Christian community familiarize the neophytes

to the different parish ministries. This process allows the neophytes to choose how they want to become actively involved in parish life (232). This stage is also referred to as the continuity of religious formation after the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation. For Rowanne and Redford, the purpose of the post-baptismal catechesis is to help the neophytes understand the paschal mystery more fully and to bring it into their lives. The neophytes, with the help of their godparents or sponsors and ministers, they should experience a full and joyful welcome into the Christian community and enter into close ties with the other faithful. The faithful should in turn drive from it a renewal of inspiration and outlook in conversion (444).

This is the final stage of the initiation of the newly baptized which takes place throughout the Easter season. The initiates are encouraged to receive the Eucharist regularly and to relate their post-baptismal experiences to daily living. During this period, they will be corrected and helped toward a better understanding of the Christian faith. These neophytes are now renewed in mind and they grasp better the salvific works of God and so share with the community in her mission in the world at large and the Church in particular. It is at this stage that a fuller and more fruitful understanding of the mysteries is acquired. The community has made them 'disciples' indeed (Barga 232).

William A Jurgens in his book, *The Faith of the Early Fathers Volume one*, stated that mystagogy is patterned according to Cyril of Jerusalem's mystagogic catechetical lectures. His catechetical lectures are twenty-four in number. "of these, 18 are pre-baptismal discourses delivered to the *illuminandi* during Lent; and the last 5, delivered to the neophytes during Easter week, are on the liturgical ceremonies of the three sacraments which they had received during the Easter Vigil" ( 347).

To close the period of post-baptismal catechesis therefore, some sort of celebration should be held at the end of the Easter season near Pentecost Sunday or some other festivities outside Pentecost but in keeping with local custom to accompany the occasion to add colours in order to make it a memorable event in the lives of the new comers.

## **VII. CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLIMENTATION OF THE R.C.I.A**

There are a number of problems associated with the implementation of the R.C.I.A as observed by various authors which include:

- i. Lack of correct Understanding of the Catechumenate Rite. Kavanagh admits that" there are inherent difficulties with regard to implementation of the restored policy which makes some clergy to perceive it as problematic if not impossible" (7).
- ii. Most of those responsible for the implementation of the R.C.I.A in the different Dioceses do not thoroughly understand the rite (9), hence non implementation of the rite. Some have an idea of the rite but with little grasp, so the implementation becomes difficult as well. Miller confirms that the bishops do not seem to agree on a solution because most bishops still insist on being sole minister of confirmation since they cannot be present at every celebration of sacraments of initiation in their Dioceses, confirmation is postponing until latter days (19).
- iii. Hastiness by some Priests and Catechists for Numerical Reasons: Some priests and catechists appear to be in a hurry to pass catechumens for the sacraments of

baptism, confirmation and holy Eucharist (1<sup>st</sup> holy communion). This sometimes calls to question the level of direct personal involvement of the pastoral agents in the actual formation of the catechumens. It was noted that in some places, the priests are even unaware of what the catechists are teaching the candidates before they were admitted for the sacraments (Ojemen 20). Priests and lay catechists, in addition to being adequately trained and formed, should strive hard to be diligent and zealous for the proper formation of catechumens. (*AfricaeMunus*, 109-112, 125-127)

- iv. Lack of Adequate Coordination of the R.C.I.A Process: The R.C.I.A is very extensive and technical, Corcoran suggests that it needs to include strong catechists and sponsors; adults, other children, youth, minister of hospitality and others who together form a pilgrim Church in search of God (5). However, Ojemen opines that, the R.C.I.A process is often not adequately coordinated and candidates who have just started or who have spent barely a month or two get baptized and start receiving the Holy Communion in some parishes. Most parishes have a process in which all the catechumens are grouped into one class irrespective of the time they began their RCIA programme (21). This is enough to jeopardize the aim of the R.C.I.A, Corcoran is quite convinced that if we fail to grasp this vision of the RCIA, we will not be able to celebrate its liturgical rites well (11).
- v. Decline in the Number of Adult Catechumens: The R.C.I.A was originally designed for adults wishing to be converted to Christ and become members of the Church. Adrian Hastings in his book, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* said "almost everywhere in Africa, there were large numbers of adults anxious to be received into the Church, and so the RCIA remains of the very first importance" (123). One of the reasons for that is the practice of infant baptisms. Today most catholic families baptize their children at infancy, and so there is a decline in number of adults coming up for the adult R.C.I.A.
- vi. Lack of a Uniformed Standard: The fact that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has not been fully implemented by all Dioceses and parishes, many local Churches leave its implementation to the whims and caprices of individual pastors. Ojemen observed that, the absence of a uniform standard for the R.C.I.A is problematic and tends to ridicule those priests and parishes in some places that are striving to create some standards in keeping to the laws (21).
- vii. The Length of Time of the R.C.I.A: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults stipulates that the time spent in the RCIA should be long enough-several years if necessary-for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong. The time prescribed for the R.C.I.A is considered by some to be too long. They bring in the problem of children moving to boarding schools, transfers of parents to different places, etc. some talk about their work and other difficulties. Some of these problems are real but the problems of initiation without the proper R.C.I.A are equally real (Ojemen 22).
- viii. Jurgens asserts that the R.C.I.A in the ancient Church was designed to last a number of years, between three to ten years depending on individual situations. The period of time was meant to examine the disposition of the catechumens, the character of their repentance and to ensure that their conversion was real and not simulated (285). Lack of R.C.I.A Logistics: The Rite requires insight on part of the pastors and necessary structures in Christian communities for its smooth running, but most places lack such logistics. Against this backdrop, Kavanagh maintains that even less do we possess the catechetical insights and structures necessary to form an adult

catechumen's burgeoning personal faith adequately into that mature ecclesial faith, the document describes so splendidly as requisite for sacramental initiation (7). In this light, Ojemen remarks that, the R.C.I.A cannot work well where some basic logistics have not been put in place. Such logistics include RCIA cards, registers, classification of the catechumens, etc. in most parishes these materials are non-existent and such situations render the implementation of the R.C.I.A very difficult, if not impossible (22). The actual implementation of the spirit of the adult Catechumenate program has only taken off in some Dioceses and parishes, and even them, only to a limited extent. Diocesan bishops also have the obligation to work out some definite program to address the discrepancies in the R.C.I.A program in the various parishes. If the programme is not implemented with a definite local standard it could turn out to be more of a pastoral problem than an asset.

### **VIII. OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF R.C.I.A IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

- i. Indispensability of the Priest and other Pastoral Agents: the processes of catechumenal formation and sacramental initiation is an important task. Obviously, the process needs many hands on deck in order to successfully carry out this process. It is an ecclesial matter and not a private one; therefore, the bishop, priests, deacons, acolytes, catechists, lectors, servers etc. have specifically unique roles to play in the R.C.I.A. The priest should be able to trust his catechists, sponsors, and godparents since in many ways they are more competent to deal with the other forms of formation of the converts. The priest must be modest, prudent and humble since he cannot do everything by himself; he needs the services of other pastoral agents.
- ii. Participation of Church community: By its very nature, the process of the R.C.I.A is a communitarian action. And each parish has its peculiarities; The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has recommended that in the R.C.I.A program, the entire Christian community and some part of it, consisting of priests and acquaintances, catechists and priests, take an active part in the celebration. This can be done through various ways with the help of the parish priest and various pastoral agents. From time to time, they (catechumens) could be rotated to another association, so that the community is largely involved in the faith formation of the catechumens.
- iii. Training and re-training of pastoral agents: The period for preparing catechumens is set aside for teaching and instructions of the catechumens. The technical know-how of the teachers is very important in passing on the right teachings to the catechumens. Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Africa* teaches that the Christian community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelisation. Therefore, there should be more trained catechists and other pastoral agents, so that correct teachings of the faith can be done. In the area of collaboration with the bishop and the priests as it relates to the Catechumenate, the catechists and other lay ministers are expected to carry out the following ministries: they preside over the prayers of their local communities, teach Christian doctrines, they gather their people in the Church for divine worship on Sundays, admonish the lukewarm and indifferent, settle family disputes in their village localities, they act as travelling preachers and interpreters, they look after local outstation Churches, they visit the sick and even baptize the dying in danger of death and they help in the organisation of Small Christian Communities.

- iv. Duration for the R.C.I.A: The three-year program for the R.C.I.A discourages full and active participation. In most parishes today it is very difficult to get people participate in the R.C.I.A for three years, this is as a result of some factors; ranging from the commitments of the parents of the candidates or for reason of change in domicile. This paper therefore recommends a two-year period of intensified formation.
- v. Special catechism for the elderly adults: Experience has shown that those referred to as adults are not actually within the same age group, therefore, the methods of teaching cannot not be the same. Special considerations should be given to adults who are actually elderly, ranging from 50 years and above. More so, such people may require the use of the local language and as such, the priest should put that in consideration.
- vi. Parish register of Catechism classes: Accountability is very important in the life of the parish. This must not be only done in monetary terms but also all that concerns the spiritual well-being of the parishioners. This register should be different from the ones the teachers of the catechism classes use, the parish register should contain the names of those that are promoted to the different stages of the R.C.I.A program.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The R.C.I.A is not a theory that is far removed from reality; it is not meant to be a theory at all. To be true to its name, it must necessarily be practical and seen to be functional. The comprehensiveness and all-embracing nature of the R.C.I.A makes it the only way by which strong, committed and devoted Christians are made. The R.C.I.A, when faithfully implemented, would help to ensure the availability of Catholic Christians, particularly lay persons, who would be adequately enlightened, strong in faith, spiritually transformed, able to live the authentic Christian life and to convey the message of Christ by both words and deeds. If the Church is to move out of the spiritual complacency and pastoral apathy that is now being experienced among the faithful, priests and laity alike; and if the Christians are to become stable disciples of Jesus and a force to reckon with against the strong Islamic influences the process of R.C.I.A is not an option but a necessary process to be enforced by the bishops, implemented by the Catholic communities under the leadership of their priests, taken up by the catechists and all other agents of evangelisation, and celebrated faithfully as much as possible according to the mind of the Council Fathers.

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