



RCIA MINISTRY

Diocese of Winona-Rochester

“...to seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion”

(Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults #1)



THE RITES OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

What should I say to the Elect who are preparing for the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil?

If they are comfortable with moving toward receiving the sacraments this Easter...

The Scrutinies may be held in private celebrations during Lent, and the Sacraments of Initiation in a private celebration of the Vigil. (Caution must be exercised that the gathering does not exceed the CDC maximum recommended number of persons.)

If the sacraments are to be celebrated at a later date...

Option A: The RCIA text provides for “a form of Christian initiation that is simpler than the usual, complete rite [when] exceptional circumstances may arise.” This is the rite for “Christian Initiation of Adults in Exceptional Circumstances” (found in paragraphs #340-#369 of the RCIA text), and it contains an order for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation for use outside of the Easter Vigil. This rite may be used at any appropriate time, and can be repeated, if necessary, to accommodate all of the Elect. Please note the directives for using this rite in paragraphs #336-339 of the RCIA text. (Use of this rite requires permission to be obtained from the Bishop. However, in the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, priests already have this permission in their list of faculties, so it is not necessary for them to ask permission from Bishop Quinn to use this rite.) This option may be a way to be able to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation in small groups without exceeding the recommended gathering size limit.

Option B: If a pastor wishes, rather, to celebrate the full rites of Christian initiation that belong to the period of purification and enlightenment, the RCIA text also allows for these rites (i.e., the Scrutinies and Presentations of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer) to “be held outside of Lent and the sacraments of initiation [to] be celebrated at a time other than the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday.” (See RCIA text paragraphs #26-#30.) Please note the following directives from the text in this regard:

- Even “[w]hen the time is changed ... the structure of the entire rite, with its properly spaced intervals, remains the same” [#26].
- “As far as possible, the sacraments of initiation are to be celebrated on a Sunday, using, as occasion suggests, the Sunday Mass or one of the ritual Masses ‘Christian Initiation: Baptism’” [#27].
- “Care should be taken to ensure that [the celebration] has a markedly paschal character ... and the readings are chosen from those given in the Lectionary for Mass, ‘Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation apart from the Easter Vigil’” [#208].
- Priests have permission in our diocese to dispense with some, or all, of the required Scrutinies and Presentations if deemed necessary.

[If choosing Option B...]

How are the Scrutinies to be celebrated?

The Scrutinies are “rites for self-searching and repentance” celebrated for the Elect who are preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. [See paragraphs #20 and #141-#146 of the RCIA text.] They are normally to be celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, and take place within the ritual Masses “Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies.” The RCIA text does allow for the following under “unusual circumstances” [see paragraphs #26-#30 and #146]:

- The Scrutinies may be celebrated outside of Lent, and on either Sundays or weekdays.
- They may be celebrated as Masses (always using the ritual Masses for the Scrutinies), or as Liturgies of the Word. In the latter case, a priest or deacon may be the presiding celebrant.
- Even when celebrated outside of the normal time, the “usual intervals” for the Scrutinies (of one week between each of them) should be maintained.

How are the Presentations to be celebrated?

After the celebration of the first and third Scrutinies, “the Church lovingly entrusts to [the Elect] the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer” [see RCIA #147-149]. If the Scrutinies are celebrated outside of Lent, the Presentations can still be celebrated after each of these Scrutinies. If only one or two Scrutinies are to be celebrated, the Presentations should take place before the Elect’s reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

What about those who will be received into full communion with the Catholic Church?

It seems prudent at this time to delay full reception, as those individuals are already numbered among the baptized. Reception may take place later in the Easter season (celebrated privately, if conditions dictate), or at any Sunday Mass later in the year after conditions have improved.

The revised Roman Missal and Lectionary provide an order for an extended Pentecost Vigil, and, if conditions have improved, this would be a very good time to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation for the Elect in a more solemn form.

[Also, please note that in order to Confirm a Baptized Catholic who is not in danger of death, permission must be obtained by contacting the Vicar General’s Office.]

What if someone who is preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation, or to be received into the Church, becomes seriously ill?

It must always be kept in mind that, if, at any time, someone who is preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation, or to be received into the Church, falls seriously ill, the appropriate sacraments should be celebrated for them without delay according to the rite of “Christian Initiation for the Dying,” or the “Continuous Rite of Penance, Anointing and Viaticum (with Confirmation).” Both rites may be found in the green Pastoral Care of the Sick ritual book.

What if I have other questions about our Elect and Candidates during this time?

Please contact Todd Graff (tgraff@dowr.org / 507-858-1270) or Camille Withrow (cwithrow@dowr.org / 507-858-1271) who coordinate RCIA ministry for our diocese. Additional information is being provided to the pastors from the diocesan Office of Divine Worship (Fr. Patrick Arens: parens@dowr.org).