



DAVID J. WALKOWIAK

Decree of Promulgation of Diocesan Norms for Christian Initiation of Adults

Whereas “The regulation of the Sacred Liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, which rests specifically with the Apostolic See and, according to the norms of law, with the Bishop” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 22 §1);

Whereas Bishops, as “governors, promoters, and guardians of the entire liturgical life in the church committed to them” (*Christus Dominus* 15) also rightly direct the use of liberty provided by the law;

Whereas the Bishops of Grand Rapids have historically moderated the liturgical life of the Diocese through publication of a *Sacramental Handbook*;

Whereas changes in universal law, national adaptations, and the particular judgments of the Bishops of Grand Rapids in the decades since publication of the previous *Sacramental Handbook* have derogated from its provisions in many ways;

Whereas the division of the *Sacramental Handbook* into numbered sections allows for their separate publication and implementation; and

Whereas the revised National Statutes for the Christian Initiation of Adults and *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* provide impetus for renewed pastoral care of adults who seek full communion with Christ in the Catholic Church;

Therefore I, the Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak, Bishop of Grand Rapids, hereby promulgate, attached to this decree, a new “Section 100” of the *Sacramental Handbook* as particular law for the Diocese of Grand Rapids.

This promulgation is effected through publication on the webpage of the Office for Worship of the Diocese of Grand Rapids (<https://grdiocese.org/ministries/worship-3>). The norms of Section 100 come into force on the First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2024, contrary custom notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery, Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan, on the Solemnity of All Saints, November 1, 2024.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids

Very Reverend Colin J. Mulhall, J.C.L.
Ecclesiastical Notary

100

CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

INTRODUCTION: A VISION FOR SACRAMENTAL LIFE

There is no greater joy for a parish community than to experience the initiation of new members at the Easter Vigil. On this “truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld,”¹ the community encounters the risen Christ in the initiation of new members; they hear the Easter Gospel proclaimed anew as they see men and women rise with Christ to a new life of grace.

The font of baptism is like a tomb. In these waters, Christians imitate the death of Christ as they leave behind their old selves. The font of baptism is like a womb. Here new Christians, freed from the power of darkness, are adopted by God as sons and daughters who claim eternal life as their promised inheritance. This sacramental sharing in Christ's dying and rising becomes the pattern for the Christian's life.²

Before the community calls catechumens (and candidates) to the sacraments of initiation, it must do all that it can to foster a genuine conversion in those to be initiated. What is seen and experienced in the sacraments of initiation ought to reflect a genuine conversion of mind and heart in response to the challenging word of God. It may require a radical refashioning of one's life, thinking, values, and commitment.

The process of conversion is lifelong and uniquely connected to different levels of human development. Christian initiation presumes that the Word of God has already begun to transform the life of the individual. The person now cooperates with the Word to put into practice what one believes and to pattern one's life on the teaching of Christ.

The whole Christian community is called to take responsibility for preparing men, women, and children for the sacraments of initiation. As the introduction to the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* states:

the People of God, represented by the local Church, should always realize and show that the Initiation of adults is its own concern and a matter for all the baptized. It should therefore show itself always prepared to fulfill its apostolic vocation by helping those who seek Christ. In the varying circumstances of everyday life, as in the apostolate, every disciple of Christ is individually obliged to spread the faith.³

¹ *Roman Missal*, Easter Vigil, Exsultet.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1212-1419.

³ *OCIA* 9.

By actively participating in the formation and initiation of new members, the faithful themselves are gradually renewed in their own baptismal call. The deeper their own conversion, the more effective they will be in leading others to mature faith.

Conversion of mind and heart, a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching, as well as a spirit of faith and charity,⁴ take time to achieve. The formation envisioned in the Order of Initiation must be spread over a time frame that allows for a consistent hearing and reflection on the word of God, spiritual counsel or direction, a thorough catechesis, learning to pray with the Church, sharing in the Church's apostolic work, and, through association with the faithful, learning from them the values, morals, and spirit of the Catholic community.

While the process of Christian initiation as outlined in the rites may at first appear to be difficult to implement, its vision for fostering a mature Christian life is essential to every parish's well-being. In other words, the paradigm of formation for ministering to new members becomes the model for the parish's life and mission.

All Christians are called to an ongoing conversion, to a more intimate participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, to a fuller appreciation of the Christian tradition of prayer, creed, and ongoing faith formation, and to a more active role in the Church's mission. Consequently, all pastoral efforts to fully implement the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* will inevitably affect the life of the parish.

The process of Christian initiation, then, is not just one more thing a parish is expected to provide. It lies at the heart of its vocation. The ministry of evangelization and initiation influences every area of parish life and indeed provides a theological and sacramental vision that holds all the rest together.

The implementation of this sacramental vision may point out inconsistencies in parish priorities or ways of doing things that need to be reevaluated. This realization does not happen overnight. But parish renewal demands that we earnestly review our priorities and our parish structures and systems in order to refashion the parish for more effective service in the future.

The pastoral challenge is to review how consistent our overall sacramental and catechetical parochial practice is with the theological and sacramental principles articulated in the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. This liturgical ordering of formation provides a picture of what it means to be the Church. Our religious education programs and Catholic schools can receive direction from the vision found in these documents.

What follows here is intended to assist parish communities in the full implementation of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The initiation of new members is a ministry to persons which presumes a pastoral sensitivity and respect for the unique background and personal history of individuals. It is difficult to provide absolute norms or pre-set programs that will apply in every situation. Initiation is a process that demands flexibility on the part of all and humility that enables us to see the Holy Spirit working in our midst.

⁴ OCIA 120.

Nevertheless, this respect for adaptation does not relativize all pastoral norms, whose observance is necessary to uphold the communal nature of Christian initiation and preserve its fundamental form. The policies provided here establish how universal pastoral norms, which do not resolve every question encountered in pastoral practice and entrust certain decisions to the diocesan bishop, will find expression in our local church. These policies highlight key areas of concern for our local church but are not exhaustive. They do not dispense from careful study of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* and other relevant ecclesiastical documents. Instead, they promote a consistent practice of the sacraments of initiation with the aim of safeguarding the spirit underlying the Church's rites. Through mutual support and accountability, it is hoped that all parishes will implement and sustain a common vision.

PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

Ministry to Adults

POLICY 101:

The *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* is normative in the Diocese of Grand Rapids. Every parish shall be prepared to minister to those who seek Christ and initiation into his Church through the implementation of the current Order of Initiation mandated for the universal Church.

a) Use of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* is mandatory in the following circumstances:

1. The Baptism of adults;⁵
2. The Baptism of children who have reached catechetical age (about the age of seven);⁶
3. The Baptism of adults or children of catechetical age in exceptional circumstances;⁷
4. The Baptism of adults or children of catechetical age in danger of death;⁸
5. The reception into full communion of baptized non-Catholic adults and children of catechetical age.⁹

⁵ *OCIA*, Chapter I.

⁶ *OCIA*, Chapter II.

⁷ *OCIA*, Chapter III.

⁸ *OCIA*, Chapter IV.

⁹ *OCIA*, Chapter VI.

b) The rites and model of formation provided by the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* may also be appropriate for:

1. The preparation of baptized but uncatechized (adult) Catholics for Confirmation and/or Eucharist;¹⁰
2. The preparation of baptized non-Catholic adults or children of catechetical age for reception into full communion when they are not catechized.¹¹

c) In such circumstances, no other rite or pastoral procedure is to be used. Norms for ritual adaptation and exceptional circumstances are already provided by the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

d) As particular law for the dioceses of the United States, the National Statutes for the Catechumenate [NS]¹² are to be observed.

e) Where it is pastorally helpful, parishes may cooperate in a regional form of ministry for Christian initiation. In such cases, each parish retains the obligation to provide welcome and pastoral care for the inquirers and catechumens (and candidates) of its community.

f) Pastoral ministers should be attentive to the special needs of persons with disabilities and those from diverse cultures so that their welcome and formation will be both complete and adapted to their circumstances.

g) Those who have responsibility for planning and leading the various rites of Christian initiation are to review the possible need for ritual adaptation noted in *OCIA* 35. Proper exercise of this discretion requires that the planners become familiar with the overall structure and purpose of the “spiritual journey”¹³ that the individual rites celebrate.

h) Since the ministry of Christian initiation is concerned with welcoming people to the sacraments of initiation and the full communion of the Catholic Church, it should be kept distinct from efforts such as reconciling alienated and inactive Catholics or general adult enrichment.

POLICY 102:

“The term ‘catechumen’ is to be strictly reserved for the unbaptized who have entered the catechumenate and who are joined to the Church in a special way while they strive to lead a life of faith, hope, and charity.”¹⁴ “The term ‘convert’ is reserved strictly for those converted

¹⁰ *OCIA*, Chapter V.

¹¹ *OCIA*, Chapter V.

¹² Printed in the *OCIA* after “*Christian Initiation: General Introduction.*”

¹³ *OCIA* 5.

¹⁴ NS 3.

to Christian belief and never used of those baptized Christians who are received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.”¹⁵

POLICY 103:

Whenever possible, the fullest form of the Church’s rites is to be employed in the celebration of initiation. In some circumstances, however, the parish may, by contacting the director of the Office for Worship, receive the bishop’s permission to use the Order of Initiation given in Chapter III of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, in either its abbreviated or expanded form. These forms may be permitted:

- 1) when extraordinary circumstances prevent the catechumen from completing all the steps of the Catechumenate;
- 2) when the individual seeking initiation has reached a depth of Christian conversion and a degree of religious maturity that recommends accelerated progress through the stages of initiation;
- 3) or when there is a question of disability, advanced age or serious illness.¹⁶

Procedures for Baptism of Adults in Danger of Death (in periculo mortis):

a) Adults in danger of death may be baptized if they have some knowledge of the principal truths of the faith and indicate a desire to be baptized and to follow the Christian way of life.¹⁷ Danger of death is not confined to cases where death is imminent (a special case addressed below) but also arises from life-threatening conditions and circumstances occasioning reasonable risk of dying without the sacraments before the usual canonical conditions for reception can be fulfilled.

b) *OCIA 372* provides instruction on the appropriate rite to be used:

- 1) Deacons and priests normally use the rite found in *OCIA 340-369*, with adaptations required by the circumstances.
- 2) Catechists and other lay persons use the rite found in *OCIA 375-399*. (When an ordinary minister is not available, baptism may be conferred by any member of the faithful or by anyone with the right intention.) Clerics may also use this rite “in the case of a very urgent need.”¹⁸

c) When a priest baptizes and Chrism is available, the Sacrament of Confirmation is also to be celebrated.¹⁹

d) Admission to the Eucharist takes the form of Viaticum.²⁰

¹⁵ NS 18.

¹⁶ *OCIA 331-339*.

¹⁷ Canon 865 §2.

¹⁸ *OCIA 372*.

¹⁹ *OCIA 363, 388*.

²⁰ *OCIA 393*.

e) When death is imminent and time is short, “the minister, omitting everything else, pours water, even if it has not been blessed, but is natural, onto the head of the sick person, saying the usual formula.”²¹

f) Although the Church normally requests parents’ permission before initiating children of catechetical age,²² in danger of death the sacraments of initiation may licitly be conferred upon such children even if the parents object.²³ Nonetheless, although provision for the child’s supernatural good derogates from parents’ natural role in spiritual formation, this course of action ought not to be undertaken lightly.

Procedures for Reception into Full Communion in Danger of Death:

g) In danger of death, baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church are to be received in this way:

- 1) With a brief Introductory Rite and Liturgy of the Word, the reception is celebrated according to *OCIA* 487-492.
- 2) If Chrism is available, the priest then confirms the newly-received according to *OCIA* 493-494.
- 4) Viaticum follows as in *OCIA* 394-398, omitting reference to “today.”

Procedures in Other Exceptional Circumstances:

h) Use of the abbreviated or expanded forms of initiation in extraordinary circumstances is to be as limited as possible and should not unduly compress the process of Christian initiation. Change of residence from one parish or diocese to another is not alone sufficient reason to employ this rite.

i) So that individuals may experience as much of the Church’s pastoral care as possible, the “Expanded Form” (*OCIA* 332-335) is normally to be followed in these exceptional circumstances. Only in truly extraordinary cases is the “Abbreviated Form” (*OCIA* 336-339) to be used.

j) Catechumens prepared in an “Abbreviated Form” are to celebrate the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil and take part in the period of mystagogy, to the extent each is possible.

k) Since the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* prescribes pastoral care and liturgical norms even for extraordinary cases, its directives are to be followed in all circumstances.

POLICY 104:

To the extent it will foster their spiritual growth, the following persons may receive formation in faith together with the unbaptized:

²¹ *OCIA* 373; cf. *Christian Initiation*, General Introduction 23.

²² *OCIA* 252, 260, 265.

²³ Canon 868 §2.

- 1) candidates who were baptized as Roman Catholics but are uncatechized and now wish to complete their initiation through confirmation and the Eucharist;**
- 2) adults who were baptized in non-Catholic Christian denominations and are preparing to be received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church.**

a) The scope of formation necessary for the baptized candidates will depend upon their background and need. The *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Chapters V and VI, should be studied carefully to see how best to provide for the needs of these candidates.

b) In ministering to baptized candidates, extremes should be avoided. One ought not to presume that someone baptized as an infant possesses a mature faith and fully comprehends the meaning and responsibilities of the Christian life. However, candidates who have had a solid Christian upbringing and who give evidence of mature faith and Christian practice should not be expected to follow the same formation process as those who are first coming to faith. Instead, “discernment should be made regarding the length of catechetical formation required for each individual candidate.”²⁴

c) The rites and pastoral advice provided for baptized but uncatechized adults are most applicable to candidates who “have not yet heard the proclamation of the mystery of Christ.”²⁵ Therefore, it may not be appropriate to celebrate the optional rites of Chapter V with candidates who, while technically classified as uncatechized (because they have not received First Communion)²⁶ are already familiar with the Person and teachings of Christ when they request to complete their initiation. Likewise, such candidates for confirmation and Eucharist who already demonstrate mature faith need not wait until the Easter Vigil to receive those sacraments. “Both a doctrinal and a spiritual preparation” should, insofar as possible, be arranged “according to pastoral needs accommodated to individual cases.”²⁷

d) “Equating candidates with catechumens is to be altogether avoided.”²⁸ A clear distinction must always be made between those who are unbaptized and those who are already baptized but completing their initiation through the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist or being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. This is important so that the unique and irrevocable gift of baptism is respected and its significance is in no way overlooked.

Ministry to Children of Catechetical Age

POLICY 105:

The formation of children who have reached the age of reason and are of catechetical age shall follow the general pattern of the Catechumenate as far as possible. The *Order of*

²⁴ OCIA 478.

²⁵ OCIA 400.

²⁶ See Policy 113.c herein.

²⁷ OCIA 477.

²⁸ OCIA 477.

Christian Initiation of Adults, Chapter II, pertains specifically to children of catechetical age.²⁹

a) Once a child has reached the age of reason (presumed at seven years old),³⁰ the *Order of Baptism of Children* is no longer the proper ritual to use. An unbaptized child of catechetical age should be welcomed into a process of formation adapted to children³¹ which takes the child's age and background into account. Since the child will be confirmed and receive the Eucharist as part of the initiation process, the child should have attained the use of reason by the time he or she receives the sacraments of initiation. In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the category "children of catechetical age" includes all children who have attained the use of reason but not yet completed sixteen years of age. The Church considers the faithful who are sixteen years and older to be canonically liable for their actions and of sufficient age to serve as a sponsor.³² Therefore, in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, children of sixteen years and older are, for the purposes of Christian initiation, bound by the same norms as adults who have reached their majority.

b) The permission of at least one parent (or legal guardian) is required before a child is accepted into the Catechumenate and before the child is initiated into the Church.³³ Parents are encouraged to participate in the process of formation to whatever extent they are able and to offer the support and example the children need.³⁴ When parents are unable to be present or to offer full support for growth in the Catholic faith, sponsors are to be chosen to take the place of the parents.³⁵

c) If parents indicate that they are seeking baptism alone for their child of catechetical age, they should be informed that, because of the interrelation among the sacraments of initiation, they are being asked to consent to their child's full initiation into the Catholic Church. The child should be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil. If appropriate circumstances exist, the parents and child may be invited to share in the parish celebration of first Communion, keeping in mind that the child received first Communion at the Easter Vigil but now wishes to receive the Eucharist with his or her peers.

d) The *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* provides a theological, liturgical, and pastoral framework for ministry to children preparing for the sacraments of initiation. It does not require young catechumens to receive faith formation exclusively for and among the unbaptized. On the contrary, the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* presumes that catechumens of catechetical age undergo some of their formation alongside their baptized peers who can support them in their journey of faith.³⁶

²⁹ Canon 852 §1; NS 18.

³⁰ Canon 97 §2.

³¹ *OCIA* 252-330.

³² Canon 874 §1.2; 1323 1°; 1324 §1 4°.

³³ *OCIA* 252, 254, 260, 312.

³⁴ *OCIA* 254.

³⁵ *OCIA* 260.

³⁶ *OCIA* 254.

e) The needs of children preparing for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church may be similar to those of children who are catechumens. Consequently, their formation and preparation for confirmation and the Eucharist may be accomplished together with children who are catechumens. Baptized and unbaptized children who have shared formation in this way may receive the Sacraments of Initiation in the same celebration;³⁷ the circumstances of each group will determine whether it is of greater pastoral benefit for the time of this celebration to be that preferred for initiation of catechumens (at the Easter Vigil) or for reception into full communion (at a Sunday Eucharist,³⁸ in which case the Office for Worship should be consulted about permissions needed for baptism outside the usual time).

f) If children and their parents are being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, the children are ordinarily received into the Church with their parents.

g) The initiation of children must be understood within the larger context of the parish community. The parish staff and pastoral council should work closely with parents to provide a healthy and effective environment within which young children can grow in age, wisdom, and grace. Parish efforts in religious education, youth and family ministry, and liturgy need to be coordinated in order to provide a consistent and well-integrated vision and pastoral approach.

h) Pastors do not have the authority to separate either Confirmation or Eucharist from the celebration of Baptism for children of catechetical age.³⁹

RECEPTION INTO THE FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

POLICY 106:

Adults and children of catechetical age who were baptized in a non-Catholic Christian denomination are formally received into the Church through the “Order of Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church of Those Already Validly Baptized” (OCIA, Chapter VI).

a) Children younger than sixteen whose parents are being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church are ordinarily received into the Church with their parents.

b) The reception of children and adults into full communion needs to be recorded in a dedicated register kept in the parish archive.⁴⁰ This register of those received into the full

³⁷ OCIA 256, 308.

³⁸ OCIA 256, 304. The option to baptize at another Sunday Eucharist is granted specifically for children of catechetical age. The initiation of adults sixteen years and older is more strictly tied to the Easter Vigil.

³⁹ Canons 843 §1; 885 §2.

⁴⁰ NS 16 §1.

communion of the Catholic Church is distinct from the baptismal register. A record must also be made in the confirmation register whenever that sacrament is conferred.

c) Baptized children younger than catechetical age do not go through any ceremony to be received into the Catholic Church. Rather, they become members of the Catholic Church on the basis of their parents' intention that their children become Catholic. The priest's ratification of this intention accomplishes the reception into full communion and is to be made manifest through an entry in the register of those received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The child's original baptism is recorded in the parish baptismal register with a notation of his or her being received into the Catholic Church.

MINISTERS OF INITIATION

The Christian initiation of adults, children, and infants takes place in the midst of the community. Pastors should remind the faithful again and again of their spiritual kinship with those who are to be initiated. The faithful should be encouraged to support and pray for catechumens and candidates, infants and their parents.

The faithful, by living lives of charity and justice and by taking an active part in the mission of the Church and its worship, give witness to all who are preparing for Christian initiation or growing up Christian.

In reaching out to catechumens and candidates, members of the faithful may be selected as sponsors and godparents or chosen to introduce the inquirers, catechumens, and candidates to the various apostolates of the Church through a period of apostolic apprenticeship.

Collaboration of All Ministers

POLICY 107:

Because the initiation of adults is "a matter for all the baptized,"⁴¹ pastors shall associate with themselves men and women of the parish who, as catechists, as sponsors and godparents, and in other roles, collaborate with them in the formation and initiation of new members. It is the pastor's responsibility to see that those who assist in the initiation process have been properly trained.

Catechists

POLICY 108:

Catechists who minister to adults and children of catechetical age should be well trained in the role of presiding at prayer and in catechetical methodology according to the *National*

⁴¹ OCIA 9.

***Catechetical Directory.* Their instruction should be filled with the spirit of the Gospel, adapted to the liturgical signs and cycles of the Church year, suited to the needs of catechumens and candidates, and, as far as possible, enriched by local traditions.**

a) A catechist should be a person who continues the process of formation in his or her own life and becomes a prayerful person who is educated and updated in the faith. A catechist needs to understand the flow of the liturgical year and be able to direct celebrations of the Word. When so formed, the catechist can lead catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with the dogmas and precepts of the Church, but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.⁴²

b) Through the apostolic letter *Antiquum Ministerium*, Pope Francis established the lay ministry of catechist as an instituted ministry alongside those of lector and acolyte. These catechists, stably instituted in their ministry by the bishop through a liturgical rite, are the only lay ministers who may celebrate minor exorcisms (*OCIA* 94) and blessings of the catechumens (*OCIA* 97; *Book of Blessings* 519-521).

Sponsors and Godparents

POLICY 109:

A sponsor or godparent must have completed his or her sixteenth year unless, for just cause, the pastor or minister of the sacrament makes an exception. In any case, a sponsor or godparent must be a confirmed Catholic who has also received first Communion and is leading a life in harmony with the Catholic faith. A sponsor or godparent cannot be a parent of the one to be baptized and/or confirmed and cannot be bound by any canonical penalty.⁴³

a) In addition to the explicit canonical requirements, sponsors and godparents should be ready to commit the time and personal care necessary to nurture and support the candidate, whether a child or an adult. Ideally, they should be willing and available to participate in the process of formation with their inquirers, catechumens, or candidates. One's godparents can never be changed since they were the historical participants in the baptism.

b) Sponsors and godparents may perform their liturgical responsibilities by proxy. The sponsor or godparent must give, in writing, a mandate to the proxy to serve on his or her behalf.

c) Catechumens and candidates need the support and spiritual companionship of a parish sponsor who acts as their mentor during their formation. This parish sponsor, assigned at the beginning of the formation process, may be chosen later as the godparent or sacramental sponsor for the sacraments of initiation.⁴⁴

⁴² *OCIA* 75.

⁴³ Canon 874.

⁴⁴ *OCIA* 10.

- d)** At the time of the Rite of Election, the person who is a catechumen, in consultation with the parish priest and the initiation team, chooses a godparent in accord with the ritual norms. The godparent can be the catechumen's spouse, but this is not recommended.⁴⁵
- e)** Several weeks prior to reception into full communion, the person who is a candidate chooses a sponsor for the celebration of confirmation in keeping with the general norms of the Church.⁴⁶ The confirmation sponsor can be the candidate's spouse, but this is not recommended. The confirmation sponsor cannot be the candidate's parent.
- f)** Although the selection of two godparents is customary for the baptism of infants, only one godparent is required. Those baptized as adults customarily choose only one godparent. A godparent can be either male or female. If two godparents are chosen, one must be male and one female.⁴⁷ A godparent must also be a fully initiated Roman Catholic who is free to receive the Sacraments.⁴⁸
- g)** A baptized non-Catholic Christian can be chosen as a Christian witness provided there is a Catholic godparent.⁴⁹ In this case, the (Catholic) godparent and (non-Catholic) Christian witness can be of the same gender. A Christian witness may not be represented by a proxy.

Directors of Christian Initiation

POLICY 110:

Parish directors of Christian initiation oversee the organization and pastoral implementation of the Order of Initiation. They are to be well prepared for their ministry and are to minister in close collaboration with the pastor, pastoral staff, parish pastoral council, parish liturgy committee, and the director of religious education.

Bishops, Pastors, Priests, and Deacons

POLICY 111:

The ordinary ministers of Baptism are bishops, priests, and deacons. In imminent danger of death, when no priest or deacon is available, any member of the faithful, indeed anyone with the right intention, may and sometimes must administer Baptism.⁵⁰ As a rule, however, in order to maintain unity among the sacraments of initiation, only a bishop or priest may baptize adults and children of catechetical age.

⁴⁵ *OCIA* 11, 123, 404.

⁴⁶ Canons 892-893, 874 §1, 5°.

⁴⁷ Canon 873.

⁴⁸ Canons 892-893, 874 §1.

⁴⁹ Canon 874 §2.

⁵⁰ Canon 861.

POLICY 112:

Any bishop or priest who baptizes an adult or a child of catechetical age is also to confer confirmation on that person. Only the priest who baptizes an elect or receives a candidate into full communion possesses the faculty to confirm the individual in question. The celebration of confirmation and reception of the Eucharist should not be deferred.⁵¹

- a) Diocesan faculties granted to priests approved for ministry in the Diocese of Grand Rapids include the faculty:⁵²
1. “To baptize one who has completed the fourteenth year of age without previously referring the matter to the diocesan bishop, provided that the requirements of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* (OCIA) have been met.”⁵³
 2. “To confirm those persons who have attained the use of reason and whom they baptize in accord with the requirements of the OCIA. Pastors enjoy this faculty by virtue of their office.”⁵⁴
 3. “To confirm those persons who have attained the use of reason and who are already baptized in another church or ecclesial communion, on the occasion of their profession of faith and admission into full communion with the Catholic Church.”⁵⁵
- b) When an adult is baptized, he or she is to be confirmed at the same time, unless there is some serious reason not to do so,⁵⁶ such as an emergency baptism in which it is impossible to confirm because no priest is present to baptize or no Chrism is available.
- c) When a priest receives a baptized Christian into full communion with the Catholic Church, he receives from the law itself the faculty to confirm the candidate⁵⁷ and is obliged to use it for the sake of the candidate.⁵⁸ The confirmation of such candidates may not be deferred, nor should they be admitted to the Eucharist until they are confirmed.
- d) Outside the danger of death, a priest must, as a rule, obtain special delegation in order to validly confirm a baptized Catholic. All priests granted faculties in the Diocese of Grand Rapids have been granted this delegation “to confirm at the Easter Vigil Catholics, who, although **baptized as a Catholic earlier**, have **not yet made their First Communion**, on the occasion of their request to resume the practice of the faith.”⁵⁹ However, a special mandate is still required to confirm a Catholic who simply has not yet received the sacrament or to confirm a previously uncatechized Catholic at a time other than the Easter Vigil.

⁵¹ OCIA 14; canons 866; 883, 2°; see Policy 119 herein.

⁵² Diocese of Grand Rapids *Pagella* of Faculties for Priests 1-3.

⁵³ Canon 863.

⁵⁴ Canons 866; 883, 2°.

⁵⁵ Canon 883, 2°.

⁵⁶ OCIA 24.

⁵⁷ Canon 883, 2°.

⁵⁸ Canon 885 §2.

⁵⁹ Diocese of Grand Rapids *Pagella* of Faculties for Priests 4; canon 884 §1.

e) Pastors and parochial vicars have a special responsibility to oversee the rites of Christian initiation, to preside and preach at them, and to prepare the faithful by appropriate catechesis.

CELEBRATING THE RITES

Rites for Catechumens

POLICY 113:

The major rites provided for inquirers, catechumens, and the elect may not be omitted because the liturgies of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* are an integral part of the initiation process. The rites are to be well prepared so that they will inspire the faithful and effectively touch the lives of the catechumens.

a) The Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate may be celebrated when there are unbaptized inquirers who are ready to take this step. This rite may be celebrated a number of times throughout the year according to pastoral need.⁶⁰

b) It can be advantageous for baptized but previously uncatechized adults to participate in those rites belonging to the catechumenate most suited to their condition and spiritual needs, e.g., the handing on of the Creed (*OCIA* 157-162) and of the Lord's Prayer (*OCIA* 178-182).

c) The optional rites for baptized but uncatechized adults found in the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Chapter V, "may also be used in accordance with the individual needs and circumstances of the candidates."⁶¹ These can be celebrated along with the rites for the unbaptized as provided in Appendix I of the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, "Combined Rites" (*OCIA* 505-594).

POLICY 114:

The Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate (*OCIA* 41-74) is to be celebrated with unbaptized inquirers who seek initiation. When unbaptized children of catechetical age have received a preliminary catechetical formation and have shown signs of initial faith and conversion appropriate to their age, they are to celebrate the Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate adapted for children (*OCIA* 260-276). The Rite of Welcoming the Candidates (*OCIA* 411-433) may be celebrated with baptized but previously uncatechized adults or children of catechetical age who are seeking to complete their Christian initiation through

⁶⁰ *OCIA* 41-47, 505-506.

⁶¹ *OCIA* 407.

the sacraments of confirmation and the Eucharist or to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

- a)** The Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate and the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates are celebrated in the parish church “on fixed days during the year”⁶² and at a time when a good number of the parishioners can participate.
- b)** The names of those who have entered the Catechumenate are to be recorded in a parish register of catechumens.⁶³
- c)** Once accepted as catechumens, these men and women are considered part of the household of Christ. Consequently, they are entitled to:
1. celebrate their marriage in the Catholic Church and receive a Christian funeral;⁶⁴
 2. participate in the apostolic and charitable works of the Church, especially works of mercy;
 3. take advantage of opportunities given to Catholic parents in the parish or region concerning the enrollment for their children in Catholic schools;
 4. be buried in a Catholic cemetery.⁶⁵
- d)** “Upon entry into the catechumenate, catechumens incur the following obligations:
1. They are to participate in the Liturgy of the Word, preferably on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, with the community if possible;
 2. They will continually purify their motivation for Baptism, live an upright life, and be ready to witness to their conversion to Christ, as they seek to grow in their knowledge of and assent to what the Church believes and teaches.”⁶⁶
- e)** Children seeking to become catechumens or candidates may participate in the Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate or the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates along with their parents who are celebrating these rites.
- f)** In the case of children, the celebration of the Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate or the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates may take place in a community of the children's peers.⁶⁷

⁶² *OCIA* 44; 18.3: “Two or, if necessary, three more suitable days or occasions in a year should be set for celebrating the rite.”

⁶³ *OCIA* 46; canon 788 §1.

⁶⁴ *OCIA* 47; canon 1183 §1. The celebrant must take care to avoid ritual options that refer to the deceased as having received sacraments.

⁶⁵ NS 9.

⁶⁶ NS 8.

⁶⁷ Cf. *OCIA* 257, 260.

POLICY 115:

“Ordinarily, a person who has entered the catechumenate is to remain in it from at least the Easter Time of one year until the beginning of the Easter Time of the next year; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year.”⁶⁸

POLICY 116:

In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, all parishes with adult catechumens are expected to participate in the combined Rite of Election of Catechumens and of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion celebrated annually at the beginning of Lent with the bishop at the cathedral.

a) All parishes receive an annual invitation to participate in the Rite of Election of Catechumens and of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion at the cathedral. Normally, more than one celebration is needed, and information including the number of participants is requested to enable the Office for Worship to assign parishes to particular celebrations.

b) Parishes are encouraged to celebrate the optional Rite for Sending Catechumens for Election, usually at a Sunday Mass on the day of the Rite of Election. In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, catechumens are not to sign the Book of the Elect during the Rite for Sending. Catechumens who are being admitted to Election sign that book during the Rite of Election.⁶⁹

c) Adult catechumens who seek to be baptized at the next Easter Vigil must, as a rule, participate in a diocesan celebration of the Rite of Election of Catechumens and of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion. Adults who are unable to participate in a diocesan celebration must still be admitted to Election by “a Priest or a Deacon who acts as the Bishop’s delegate”⁷⁰ before they may receive the sacraments of initiation. The Book of the Elect is signed during this Rite of Election.

d) The Rite of Election is optional for children of catechetical age,⁷¹ but catechumens age fourteen and older are encouraged to participate in the rite celebrated at the cathedral because they have reached the age at which their election and initiation is entrusted especially to the bishop.⁷² Additionally, younger catechumens are encouraged to participate in this cathedral liturgy when their parents are also catechumens seeking election for initiation that Easter. Other catechumens who are children may, with preparation, participate as well.

⁶⁸ NS 4.

⁶⁹ The Book of the Elect is to be kept in the archives of the parish.

⁷⁰ *OCIA* 121; cf. *OCIA* 12.

⁷¹ *OCIA* 253, 277.

⁷² *OCIA* 12; canon 863.

POLICY 117:

When for pastoral reasons it is not possible for one or several adult catechumens to attend the diocesan celebration of the Rite of Election, approval for a pastor to celebrate the rite in a catechumen's parish may be obtained from the Office of the Vicar General.

a) In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the Rite of Election for children of catechetical age (*OCIA* 277-290), an optional rite, would ordinarily be celebrated among the children's peers or at a parish community celebration at the beginning of Lent. Pastors do not need to obtain delegation to celebrate the Rite of Election for children in the parish. If adult catechumens are also to receive the Church's election, the rite for adults (*OCIA* 129-137) is to be used, and appropriate delegation is to be obtained.

b) The Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion is optional. Candidates (baptized Christians) are invited to participate in the combined rite at the cathedral or in a Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion in the parish, but they are not obliged to do either. No delegation is necessary for the parish priest to preside at this rite.

Scrutinies**POLICY 118:**

All three Scrutinies are to be celebrated for the adult elect.

a) The Scrutinies are celebrated within the ritual Masses "I.2: For the Celebration of the Scrutinies" which are celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. The readings are those given for these Sundays in the Lectionary for Mass, Year A (even during years which otherwise employ cycle B or C).⁷³

b) "If for pastoral reasons the Scrutinies cannot take place on these Sundays, other Sundays in Lent or even more convenient weekdays may be chosen." Even if the period of purification and enlightenment takes place outside of Lent, the ritual Masses are celebrated in their proper order, with the usual intervals between celebration.⁷⁴

c) The diocesan bishop may dispense "from one Scrutiny in view of serious impediments or even, in exceptional circumstances, from two."⁷⁵ This dispensation may be requested from the Office of the Vicar General.

d) The Penitential Rites (Scrutinies) provided for children of catechetical age (*OCIA* 291-302) are to be celebrated during the final preparation of the children for baptism. "At least one rite is to be held. If it can be done conveniently, however, a second may be added."⁷⁶

⁷³ *OCIA* 146.

⁷⁴ *OCIA* 146.

⁷⁵ *OCIA* 34.3.

⁷⁶ *OCIA* 294.

Reception of Sacraments at One Celebration and in Proper Order

POLICY 119:

The Christian initiation of the elect, both adults and children of catechetical age, is to include at one celebration: baptism, confirmation, and the first reception of the Eucharist. Likewise, the reception of baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church is to include in the same celebration their reception of confirmation (if not yet confirmed) and the Eucharist. In accord with the ancient practice of the Church, these sacraments are to be received together and in their proper order.⁷⁷

a) The reception of confirmation and first Communion by children of catechetical age who are being baptized or received into full communion is not to be delayed to a later time so that they receive those sacraments with their age peer group. They are to receive them when they are baptized or received into full communion.

b) The newly baptized may receive a baptismal garment immediately after their baptism. The use of a stole, the symbol of ordained ministry, is not appropriate and shall not be used.

Site for the Celebration of Baptism

POLICY 120:

The celebration of baptism is to take place in the parish church.⁷⁸ Baptisms in private homes are not permitted except in cases of emergency.⁷⁹ Anyone who baptizes in a case of emergency is obliged to notify the baptized's pastor so that the baptism is recorded in the appropriate register.⁸⁰

Baptism by Immersion and Partial Immersion

POLICY 121:

“Baptism, the original and full sign of which is immersion, efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb by the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to live a new life.”⁸¹ When a church is built or renovated, pastors and parish leadership should consider whether the font can be constructed to celebrate this sacrament “in the most expressive way by triple immersion in the baptismal water.”⁸²

a) “Both the rite of immersion, which more suitably signifies participation in the Death and Resurrection of Christ, and the rite of pouring can lawfully be used.”⁸³ Accordingly, “Since

⁷⁷ OCIA 215, 475, 481; canon 866; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1212; see Policy 112 herein.

⁷⁸ Canon 857.

⁷⁹ Canon 860 §1.

⁸⁰ Canons 877-878.

⁸¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 628.

⁸² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1239. Cf. OCIA 213, 1214, 1239.

⁸³ Christian Initiation, General Introduction 22.

Baptism in Catholic churches may take place by immersion in the water, or by infusion (pouring), fonts that permit all forms of baptismal practice are encouraged.”⁸⁴

b) Every method of celebrating baptism requires that water flow over the head. Baptism can be conferred “by immersion of the whole body or of the head only” or by “taking baptismal water and pouring it three times on the person’s bowed head.”⁸⁵

c) When building a new church or renovating an existing church, the parish should consult with the director of the Office for Worship, the Church Art and Architecture Commission, and the Diocesan Building Committee regarding the construction of the font.

TIMES AND SCHEDULES

The rites of the Christian Initiation of Adults reach their climax in the celebration of the Easter Vigil. The sacraments of initiation draw their fullest meaning and significance from the solemn celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death. “Those who are baptized are united to Christ in a death like his; buried with him in death, they are given new life again with him, and with him they rise again. For Baptism recalls and makes present the paschal mystery itself, because in Baptism we pass from the death of sin into life.”⁸⁶

The entire initiation process and our celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist must respect the integrity of the liturgical year, looking toward the Triduum as the source and climax of the initiation process.

The Usual Time for Celebrating Initiation

POLICY 122:

The Easter Vigil is the privileged time for celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation. The recommendations of the documents regarding initiation outside the usual times are to be followed.⁸⁷

a) The Easter Vigil is the usual time for reception of the Sacraments of Initiation by the elect⁸⁸ and baptized but previously uncatechized adults.⁸⁹ Should Easter fall within the first few weeks after their birth, infants, too, are recommended to receive Baptism at the

⁸⁴ *Built of Living Stones* 69.2.

⁸⁵ *OCIA* 226.A-B.

⁸⁶ Christian Initiation, General Introduction 6.

⁸⁷ *OCIA* 208.

⁸⁸ *OCIA* 23, 207.

⁸⁹ *OCIA* 409.

Easter Vigil.⁹⁰ It is preferable, however, that reception of baptized candidates into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil. While the Rite of Reception “normally should take place during Mass,”⁹¹ the distinction between the elect and candidates is respected better by receiving baptized Christians into full communion during a regular Sunday Mass of the community.

b) For unbaptized adults and children of catechetical age, it belongs to the diocesan bishop to “decide whether and when the Order of Initiation can be celebrated at other times” than the Easter Vigil.⁹² To celebrate Election, Purification and Enlightenment, or the sacraments of initiation outside the usual times, permission must be received from the Office of the Bishop. Permission will only be granted “for serious pastoral needs.”⁹³

c) When the celebration of Initiation takes place outside the usual time, care should be taken to ensure that it has a markedly paschal character. Thus, the texts for one of the ritual Masses “I.3: For the Conferral of Baptism” are used, and the readings are chosen from those given in the *Lectionary for Mass* 751-755, “Christian Initiation apart from the Easter Vigil.”⁹⁴

Post-Baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

POLICY 123:

A suitable period of mystagogy or post-baptismal catechesis is to be offered to the newly baptized so that they might live more deeply the mysteries they have celebrated.⁹⁵ Ordinarily, continued pastoral care for neophytes should extend for one year.

a) Pastoral care of the newly baptized beyond the time of initiation is strongly encouraged. During the period of mystagogy, transition should be made to active sharing in the mission of the Church. Ongoing catechesis is to be provided.

b) The sponsors continue to help and support the newly baptized to fulfill their baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ.

c) When Christian initiation is celebrated outside the usual times, in Masses for neophytes the texts for the Sunday Masses of the Easter season, including the readings from year A, may be used.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ *Order of Baptism of Children* 8-9.

⁹¹ *OCIA* 475.

⁹² *OCIA* 34.2.

⁹³ *OCIA* 26.

⁹⁴ *OCIA* 208.

⁹⁵ *OCIA* 244-246.

⁹⁶ *OCIA* 247.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Although the sacrament of penance is not a sacrament of initiation, there are often questions about celebrating the sacrament of penance in conjunction with the process of initiation. These policies are provided here for the sake of completeness. Please refer to Policy Section 600 for the policies for the sacrament of penance.

Catechumens' Penitential Rites

POLICY 124:

Catechumens and elect preparing for baptism do not celebrate the sacrament of penance prior to baptism. They are to be invited to participate in non-sacramental penitential rites so that they may come to understand the reality of sin and appreciate the comforting message of God's pardon.

- a) Since the catechumen is not baptized, he or she cannot receive the sacrament of penance. The reception of baptism itself frees us from all sin.⁹⁷
- b) This policy refers to both adults and children of catechetical age.

Candidates' Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

POLICY 125:

Candidates are to receive a thorough catechesis on the sacrament of penance and to be encouraged in the frequent celebration of the sacrament.

- a) Candidates are to be invited to celebrate the sacrament of penance in the weeks prior to their reception into full communion, but not at the same liturgy as their reception.
- b) Candidates are required to celebrate the sacrament of penance prior to their reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church if they are conscious of serious (mortal) sin.
- c) Children who were baptized in infancy and are now preparing for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church are to be offered preparation and encouragement to celebrate the sacrament of penance some time prior to their formal reception into the Catholic Church.⁹⁸ Generally children will receive the sacrament of penance before receiving confirmation or first Communion, yet caution should be exercised so that no child is forced to receive the sacrament of penance before he or she receives another sacrament. Equal caution should be exercised to see that Penance is not denied to one who desires it.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Canon 849; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1263.

⁹⁸ *OCIA* 482.

⁹⁹ Canons 914, 988, 989.

POLICY 126:

The doctrinal elements of catechesis for the sacrament of penance must always reflect the teaching of the Church in its worship and its creeds. In preparing for their role, catechists are to rely especially on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other diocesan-approved catechetical materials.

- a) Catechesis concerning this sacrament should reflect the teaching of the *Order of Penance* that this Sacrament is rooted in baptismal grace and intimately connected to the Passion of Christ made present in the sacrifice of the Mass.¹⁰⁰
- b) Baptismal dignity and the call to continuing conversion should be emphasized, along with recognition of the reality of sin in our world and our lives and our consequent need for the forgiveness God offers us in Christ. This formation should aim to instill in the candidates the desire to be spiritually worthy for Eucharistic Communion with the Lord.
- c) Regarding the “Prayer of the Penitent” (also called the “Act of Contrition”):
 - 1) The goal of formation is that candidates develop proper understanding and motivation to offer the prayer honestly and with contrite hearts. Like other penitents, candidates always have the freedom to speak this prayer in their own words.
 - 2) Nonetheless, because “it is desirable that the prayer should be based upon words of Sacred Scripture,”¹⁰¹ traditional prayers read or recited from memory are encouraged, especially those supplied in the *Order of Penance* (45, 85-92).

POLICY 127:

“A common celebration more clearly manifests the ecclesial nature of Penance.”¹⁰² Therefore, an opportunity should be provided for those who celebrate the sacrament of penance for the first time to do so in the context of a communal celebration. Those who plan such celebrations must familiarize themselves with “The Order for Reconciling Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution,” in Chapter II of the *Order of Penance*, which is normative for these liturgical rites.

- a) Such celebrations may be adapted for use with children, always maintaining the liturgical structure of the rite.¹⁰³ (General principles from the *Directory for Masses with Children* and the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* should be employed.)
- b) In the context of a celebration prepared primarily for adults (as in parish Lenten services), effort must be made to welcome and accommodate children who are celebrating the sacrament of penance for the first time.

¹⁰⁰ *Order of Penance* 2.

¹⁰¹ *Order of Penance* 19.

¹⁰² *Order of Penance* 22.

¹⁰³ *Order of Penance* 40.

c) Planning for the rite, selection of readings, and preaching should reflect the teaching of the *Order of Penance*.

d) The Order for Reconciling Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution, Chapter III of the *Order of Penance*, may not be used for First Confession and, indeed, may not be used at all.

SPECIAL PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of pastoral issues that continue to arise in the ministry of Christian initiation. The following policies are intended to assist pastoral ministers in resolving some of the most common issues.

Marriages Involving Catechumens

POLICY 128:

Because catechumens are already joined to the Church as part of the household of Christ, they are entitled to celebrate their marriage in the Church.¹⁰⁴

a) The same kind of pastoral care should be provided for catechumens preparing for marriage as for any other individuals who marry in the Church.

b) The prenuptial questionnaire should be completed and filed with other parish marriage records. It should be noted on the prenuptial questionnaire that the marriage involves a catechumen. All the usual parish marriage preparation programs should be observed. Where there is doubt about the proper procedure, one should consult the Office of the Vicar General.

c) The marriage is celebrated at a Liturgy of the Word. Chapter III of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* is to be used.

d) If two catechumens marry each other or a catechumen marries a non-Catholic Christian or an unbaptized person, no dispensation from disparity of worship is required for the catechumen.

e) When a catechumen marries a Catholic, the Catholic party is required by Church law to request a dispensation from disparity of worship.

f) The marriage should be properly recorded in the Parish Marriage Record Book and in the parish register of catechumens.

¹⁰⁴ *OCIA* 47; canon 1183 §1.

Catechumens and Candidates with Prior Marriages

POLICY 129:

Those who are responsible for initiation in the parish shall ascertain the marital status of each and every (potential) catechumen or candidate early in the process.¹⁰⁵ If a person is found to be in an irregular marriage, each and every prior marriage and divorce is to be resolved through the marriage tribunal before the person is admitted to the Rite of Election or the Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion.

a) A variety of factors might render a marriage irregular, preventing the Church from recognizing it as valid. For example, one of the parties to the putative marriage may have been previously married and divorced. Another example occurs when the person seeking initiation is putatively married to a Catholic and their marriage took place without observing canonical form or being dispensed from its observance. There may also be other impediments or invalidating factors in a particular marriage, and since they could arise from either party, questions must be asked about the condition and marital history of both parties.

b) Even if a marriage has been entered in good faith, to knowingly and freely persist in an irregular marriage prevents one from receiving the sacraments. Accordingly, an individual may not be baptized or received into the full communion of the Catholic Church until demonstrating a faithful response to the teaching of Christ regarding marriage. Submission of previous marriages to the marriage tribunal for investigation will reveal what that faithfulness requires in individual cases.

c) The tribunal process may result in all previous marriages being declared null or dissolved and the parties to the irregular marriage being found free to marry each other validly. Having made plans for the convalidation of the marriage (see Policy 130 herein), an individual may proceed to baptism or reception into full communion.

d) It may happen, on the other hand, that the validity of a previous marriage or some other impediment prevents the convalidation of an irregular marriage. In this case, the couple would need to end their cohabitation and romantic relationship in order for one or both individuals to be baptized or received into the Church.

e) Individuals in irregular marriages are free to enter the Catechumenate or begin formation for reception into the Catholic Church. However, they may not undergo the Rite of Election or of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion until it has been established that the irregularity of their current relationships will be resolved (through the means in paragraph c or d above).¹⁰⁶ Pastoral staff is to make it clear from the outset that the time needed to resolve the question of marriage may delay baptism or reception into full communion.

f) Individuals who are divorced but have not attempted remarriage and do not intend to remarry need not have their previous marriage(s) investigated by the marriage tribunal in

¹⁰⁵ NS 2.

¹⁰⁶ NS 7.

order to be accepted for the Rite of Election, the Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion, or the sacraments of initiation. However, the implications of future attempts to remarry without first having freedom to do so established by ecclesiastical authority must be carefully explained as part of the discernment to proceed toward baptism or reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

g) Pastoral staff should carefully uncover the existence of irregular marriages through personal interviews early in the process. Failure to do so is unfair to those who are seeking initiation, especially if it causes an otherwise unnecessary delay of their initiation or the inability to become Catholic.

h) If a (potential) catechumen or candidate is not yet married but has an intended spouse, pastoral staff are to investigate the marital status of the intended spouse to ascertain whether any impediments are evident which would prevent the couple from marrying validly.

i) Consultation on these matters and the presentation of marriage cases should be made with the tribunal.

Convalidation of Marriages

POLICY 130:

When catechumens or candidates are currently in an irregular marriage, the pastor shall make arrangements for the timely convalidation of that marriage.

a) Convalidation is the canonical procedure for making valid a marriage that had previously been invalid due to some irregularity. When convalidating a marriage through renewal of consent, the parties should be properly instructed that this is not a “blessing” or “recognition” of the marriage by the Catholic Church nor is it a “repeating of vows.” It is a new marriage, and the parties make a new act of the will to enter marriage.¹⁰⁷

b) If either of the parties in the marriage has been previously married and a previous spouse is still living, it is necessary to pursue the tribunal process. The convalidation of the marriage and the final stages of Christian Initiation (Rite of Election or of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion, sacraments of initiation) may not be carried out until a declaration of nullity or dissolution of the bond has been received regarding the previous marriage. (Neither may arrangements be made for convalidation in expectation of a decision from the tribunal.) Refer to the policy above on “Catechumens and Candidates with Prior Marriages.”

c) In a marriage of a catechumen who has received permission from the tribunal to contract a new marriage on the basis of the Pauline Privilege,¹⁰⁸ any convalidation or marriage

¹⁰⁷ Canon 1157.

¹⁰⁸ Canon 1143.

ceremony *must* be done *after* the baptism since the privilege is granted in favor of the faith which is actualized by the baptism. The newly baptized person is now permitted to exercise the privilege to marry.

d) If one party to the marriage is Catholic, public consent effecting convalidation must be exchanged according to canonical form.¹⁰⁹ While catechumens are permitted and, indeed, encouraged to marry according to the Church's rites, they are not bound to observe canonical form.

e) Catholic ministers may only preside at weddings in which at least one party is either a Catholic or a catechumen. The tribunal should be consulted to ensure the proper convalidation of a marriage between a candidate for reception into full communion and a non-Catholic spouse. The tribunal should also be consulted in the case of a catechumen who wishes to convalidate a marriage without observing canonical form.

f) Pastoral staff should not proceed when asked to assist with the convalidation of a troubled marriage. The parties should be assisted to strengthen their union before any convalidation is attempted.

Marriage Preparation and Christian Initiation

POLICY 131:

When a catechumen or candidate is engaged to be married, the initiation process shall not be rushed merely to allow for initiation before the marriage is celebrated. In the same manner, no marriage or its preparation should be rushed to force it to fit the initiation process.

a) It may be pastorally appropriate to postpone marriage or Christian Initiation in order to allow sufficient preparation for each.

b) Pastors should request permission for initiation outside the usual times when the need to focus on marriage preparation delays the initiation of a catechumen who otherwise would have been prepared for baptism at Easter. Initiation outside the usual times should, however, be extremely rare.

Christian Burial of Catechumens and Candidates

POLICY 132:

Catechumens have the right to Christian burial in the Catholic Church;¹¹⁰ candidates, too, are to be granted an ecclesiastical funeral.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Canons 117; 1158 §1; 1159 §3.

¹¹⁰ Canon 1183 §1; *OCIA* 47.

¹¹¹ Diocese of Grand Rapids *Pagella* of Faculties for Priests 18; canon 1183 §3.

- a) Catechumens and candidates are, in their respective ways, already part of the household of Christ.
- b) The funeral liturgy, including the funeral Mass, should be celebrated as usual, omitting only language referring directly to the sacraments which the catechumen or candidate has not received in the Catholic Church.
- c) In view of the sensibilities of the immediate family of the deceased catechumen or candidate, the funeral Mass may be omitted at the discretion of the pastor.
- d) A child may be given Catholic funeral rites if the parents intended to baptize him or her but the child died before receiving Baptism.¹¹²

Orthodox Christian Candidates

POLICY 133:

Ordinarily, an Orthodox Christian who makes a profession of faith is to be received into the corresponding Eastern Catholic Church.¹¹³

- a) It may be possible for a baptized Orthodox to obtain permission to be received into the Latin Rite but this requires special permission from the proper bishops involved.
- b) Orthodox Christians who enter the Catholic Church are received solely with a profession of faith without any liturgical rite.¹¹⁴ The sacrament of penance is to follow. A Mass in which the newly received will share in the Catholic Eucharist for the first time should be celebrated as soon as possible thereafter.¹¹⁵ The Orthodox Churches normally confer confirmation at the time of baptism, thus there is no need to confirm Orthodox Christians who are received into the Catholic Church (unless it is proven that due to exceptional circumstances they have not, in fact, been confirmed).
- c) Baptized candidates who are joining the Catholic Church may not freely choose the ritual Church *sui iuris* to which they will belong. They automatically belong to that ritual Church *sui iuris* corresponding to the church or ecclesial community in which they received their baptism.¹¹⁶ For example, a former Ukrainian Orthodox is by law assigned to the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Those who are baptized in any Protestant denominations are automatically assigned to the Latin (Catholic) Church.
- d) Because of the complexity and sensitivity of pastoral issues, parish ministers should consult with the Office of the Vicar General or the Office for Worship before proceeding with the initiation of individuals from the Orthodox Churches.

¹¹² Diocese of Grand Rapids *Pagella* of Faculties for Priests 17; canon 1183 §2.

¹¹³ See canons 35 and 897 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*.

¹¹⁴ *OCIA* 474.

¹¹⁵ *OCIA* 476.

¹¹⁶ *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 35.

Conditional Baptism

POLICY 134:

There may be a reasonable and prudent doubt concerning the baptism of some candidates for reception into full communion which cannot be resolved after serious investigation into the fact and/or validity of baptism, namely, to ascertain whether the person was baptized with water and with the Trinitarian formula, and whether the minister and the recipient of the sacrament had the proper requisite intentions. When conditional baptism seems necessary, the following norms are to be observed:

- a) The minister must explain to the person to be baptized the reasons supporting the decision to baptize conditionally.¹¹⁷
- b) Conditional baptism is celebrated when the pastor and catechists are confident that the person to be baptized possesses sufficient formation and intention to persevere in Catholic faith; this normally occurs when a date is set for a candidate's reception into full communion (e.g., a candidate anticipating reception into full communion at Easter would be baptized conditionally around the time of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion). Conditional baptism may not be celebrated during the Paschal Triduum.
- c) Conditional baptism is conferred privately,¹¹⁸ without solemnity,¹¹⁹ employing only these limited rites:
 - 1) A brief greeting or introduction to the liturgy;
 - 2) One of the following readings from the Sacred Scriptures: Matthew 28-18-20; Mark 1:9-11; or John 6:44-47;¹²⁰
 - 3) The renunciation of sin and profession of faith;
 - 4) The pouring of water with the Trinitarian formula, "N., if you are not baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;"
 - 5) A simple blessing and dismissal.
- d) Conditional baptism is recorded in the parish baptismal register with the notation, "baptized conditionally."
- e) Candidates who have been baptized conditionally should still celebrate the sacrament of penance before reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.
- f) The sacrament of confirmation is not joined to the celebration of conditional baptism.

¹¹⁷ Can. 869 §3; *OCIA* 480.

¹¹⁸ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 99.d.

¹¹⁹ *OCIA* 480.

¹²⁰ These may be found in, among other places, the *Lectionary for Mass* 760.2, 760.3, and 760.6.

RESOURCES

Liturgical Books (approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America)

- *Lectionary for Mass*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998/2002.
- *Pastoral Care of the Sick*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1982.
- *Order of Baptism of Children*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2020.
- *The Order of Confirmation*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2016.
- *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2024.
- *The Order of Penance*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2023.
- *The Roman Missal*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000.

Documents of the Holy See

Francis, [*Antiquum Ministerium*](#), May 10, 2021. [not yet published in AAS]

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. [*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*](#), March 25, 1993. Liturgical Excerpts in *The Liturgy Documents*, 4:321-338. Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2013-2014. [AAS 85 (1993): 1039-1119.]