

January 31, 2011

RCIA AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

There are times when a member of an Eastern *Orthodox* Church requests to come into full communion with the Catholic Church. It is important that those who work in RCIA and related ministries are aware of the important differences between an Orthodox and an Anglican or Protestant who wishes to come into full communion because there are important implications that affect other sacraments (such as marriage and orders) later.

Please recall that there are 22 Catholic Churches; 21 *Eastern* Catholic Churches and the *Roman* (Latin Rite) Catholic Church. When Orthodox come into full communion with the Catholic Church, they become members of the *Eastern* Catholic Church that corresponds to their Church of origin (NOT the *Roman* Catholic Church). Therefore, it is crucial that you obtain a baptismal certificate from the church of baptism in order to determine of which Eastern Orthodox Church the person is a member.

An Orthodox Christian is usually chrismated (confirmed) and receives Eucharist when baptized, even as an infant. They are already fully initiated. Therefore, all that is required is the profession of faith, made by reciting the Nicene Creed and then adding the words: "I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God" (RCIA §§474, 491). An Orthodox Christian should NOT be confirmed (unless it is proven that they were not chrismated as an infant). The sacramental record should note the profession of faith and to which of the *Eastern* Catholic Churches the person now belongs. This fact may have important ramifications when it comes to the sacraments of marriage or holy orders, or if entering religious life.

This is another reason (irregular unions is another) why a careful history must be obtained from those coming into RCIA or related programs. This matter can be quite confusing, so please: if you have questions when a specific situation arises, call the Office of Liturgy as soon as possible and, with the Tribunal, we will be happy to help you determine the proper course of action.