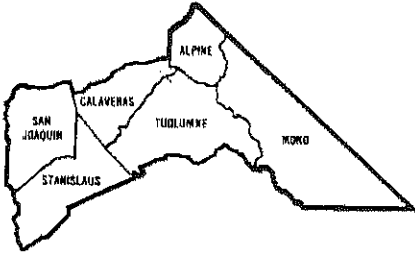


# DIOCESE OF STOCKTON



## Policy on the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and Persons in Irregular Marriages

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, promulgated in 1974 and revised in 1988, is a ritual process through which unbaptized persons are formed as disciples of Jesus Christ through evangelization, catechesis, and the sacraments of initiation.

Sometimes persons come to the Church for Christian initiation (or to complete initiation) who are in irregular marriages, that is, marriages not valid according to Church law. Perhaps the person has been previously married and is now in a civil union; or it might be that the person seeking initiation is civilly married to someone who has been previously married. In either case, the person wishing to enter the Church is not free to validate his or her current marriage. Because a person cannot fully participate in the sacraments while in an invalid union, it is required that persons in irregular marriages be free to marry prior to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

As a matter of justice and pastoral care, it is important that persons coming for initiation who find themselves in irregular marriages have these situations surfaced and addressed during the initial interviews. The Initial Interview and Discernment forms provided by the Office of the Catechumenate can be used for this purpose. Since the type and complexity of these marriage situations differs with each case, it is essential that the assistance of the pastor, parochial vicar, or tribunal aide be sought as early as possible to resolve any previous marriages so that the person is declared free to marry in the Church. The diocesan Tribunal stands ready to provide guidance to parish personnel in this process.

### UNBAPTIZED PERSONS SEEKING CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Unbaptized persons coming to the Church for discernment normally enter a period of evangelization prior to acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. Having manifested "first faith . . . and an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ" (*RCIA*, n. 42), persons—even those in irregular marriages—can be accepted into the Order of Catechumens. Indeed, because unbaptized persons are joined to the Church in

a special way as Catechumens, those in irregular marriage should not be denied this means of sanctification and solicitude (c. 206, §1).

The "National Statutes for the Catechumenate," promulgated as particular law for the Dioceses of the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, states that the period of the catechumenate

should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation. Ordinarily, this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year (n. 6).

It is during these periods of evangelization and the catechumenate that persons in irregular marriages can grow in their faith and discipleship under the pastoral guidance of the Church at the same time that their previous marriages are working their way through the Tribunal process. Persons in irregular marriages must understand at the outset, however, that they will remain in the Order of Catechumens until their previous marriage situations have been satisfactorily resolved. In some cases, this may mean a person spends several years as a Catechumen.

Since the Rite of Election signifies the start of the final preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, it would be unjust to call to the Rite of Election one who cannot properly celebrate the sacraments. Therefore, while persons in irregular marriages can be admitted to the Order of Catechumens, it is the policy of the Diocese of Stockton that Catechumens will not be permitted to celebrate the Rite of Election until any and all marriage cases have been completed. The Local Ordinary can make exceptions to this policy, after consultation with the Judicial Vicar.

#### BAPTIZED BUT UNCATECHIZED CATHOLIC ADULTS

Adults previously baptized as Catholics in infancy but never subsequently catechized come to the Church to complete their Christian initiation with the celebration of the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. Baptized but uncatechized adults who are in irregular marriages may celebrate the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates (*RCIA*, nn. 411–433), but they are not to celebrate the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion (*RCIA*, nn. 446–458) until any and all marriage cases have been completed.

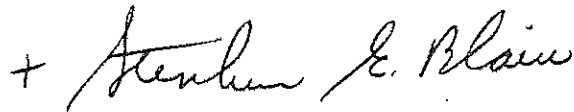
When the baptized but uncatechized adult (or the person to whom he or she is civilly married) is free to marry, and once the civil marriage is convalidated, then the adult may celebrate the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. It is not necessary to withhold the completion of Christian initiation until the following Easter (see "National Statutes," n. 26). In addition, priests are reminded to request from the bishop the faculty to confirm if required (c. 883, 2°; "National Statutes," n. 28).

BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS SEEKING FULL COMMUNION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In some cases, it may benefit baptized Christians seeking full communion to celebrate one or several of the liturgical rites for baptized but uncatechized adults (*RCIA*, nn. 411–472), bearing in mind that “no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity” (*RCIA*, n. 473).

Baptized Christians in irregular marriages may celebrate the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates (*RCIA*, nn. 411–433), but they are not to celebrate the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion (*RCIA*, nn. 446–458) until any and all marriage cases have been completed. If these optional rites are not celebrated, baptized Christians in irregular marriages cannot be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church (with the celebration of confirmation and Eucharist) until any and all marriage cases have been completed.

This policy is effective from January 22, 2001.



The Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire  
Bishop of Stockton



Chancellor

Given at the Chancery  
on this 22nd day of January, 2001.