



Ritual Timeline of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults¹ (Catechumens) in the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

First Step: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

This is a liturgical rite, celebrated some time prior to Christ the King Sunday in the Diocese of Birmingham. This is normally done in the context of a parish Mass in every parish and marks the beginning of the catechumenate proper. Individuals publicly express for the first time and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ. This rite includes the First Acceptance of the Gospel and the signing of their bodies with a Cross (as well as the senses) for the first time. Optional Rites include the presentation of a bible, the presentation of a cross, and the Exorcism/Renunciation of False Worship as appropriate.

Period of Catechumenate

This is the time, in duration corresponding to the progress of the individual, for nurturing and growth of the catechumen's faith and conversion to God; celebrations of the word and prayers of exorcism and blessing are meant to assist the process. Intense study, prayer and reflection continues in this period until the First Sunday of Lent. In most parishes, ongoing RCIA programming facilitates ones ongoing formation and discernment. During this time minor exorcism prayers and prayers of blessing may be offered at appointed times as well as the anointing with the Oil of Catechumens which has been appropriately blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass.

Second Step: Election or Enrollment on Names

This is the liturgical rite, celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent, by which the Church formally ratifies the catechumen's readiness for the Sacraments of Initiation and the catechumens, now the elect, express the will to receive these sacraments. In the Diocese of Birmingham, this is done at the Cathedral Church in the presence of the Bishop on the afternoon of the First Sunday of Lent.

Candidates are sent from diocesan parishes through a Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election, ideally on the morning of the First Sunday or Lent at their respective parishes Mass. This Rite appropriately takes place after the homily.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

This is the time immediately preceding the elect's initiation, namely the Lenten season preceding the celebration of this initiation at the Easter Vigil. It is a time of reflection, intensely centered on conversion, marked by the celebration of the scrutinies and presentations and of the preparation rites on Holy Saturday.

Scrutinies are to be celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sunday's of Lent.

¹ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Liturgy Training Publications. Chicago. 1998.

RCIA No. 150 notes that the texts and readings for Mass are always those given for the first scrutiny in the Missal and lectionary for Mass among the Ritual Masses, “Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies.”

Therefore, at the Mass where the Scrutinies are celebrated, Masses are to use the proper FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SCRUTINIES. Mass Propers are the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sunday of Lent are therefore NOT used except where explicitly indicated in the rubrics, such as when the Preface is indicated.

- In the first Mass of the Scrutinies, the Gospel of the Samaritan woman is always read. (3rd Sunday of Lent)
- In the second Mass, that of the Man born blind, (4th Sunday of Lent)
NB: While Rose vestments are permitted on the 4th Sunday of Lent, the Mass which celebrates the scrutinies should make use of violet, as the *Laetare* proper is not used.
- In the third, Mass, that of Lazarus (5th Sunday of Lent)

Presentations of the Creed ideally takes place during the week after the first scrutiny (not on a Sunday) in the presence of the faithful, within Mass after the Creed. (No. 157) A weekday Mass is an appropriate time.

Presentations of the Lord’s Prayer, which takes after the third scrutiny (not on a Sunday) should also preferably be celebrated in the presence of a Community within Mass. A weekday Mass is an appropriate time.

On Holy Saturday, it is appropriate that the Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer be made, if it has been deferred (see RCIA nos. 149,178-180), the “return” or the recitation of the Creed be done (RCIA nos. 193-196), the *Ephpheta* Rite be celebrated (RCIA nos. 197-199), and the choosing of a baptismal name be done (RCIA nos. 200-202). These Rites can often be accomplished when catechumens come for a logistical rehearsal in preparation for the Easter Vigil.

Third Step: Celebration of the Sacrament of Initiation

This is a liturgical rite, integrated into the Easter Vigil, by which the Elect are initiated through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

This is the time, usually for the whole of the Easter Season, following the celebration of initiation, during which the newly initiated experience being fully a part of the Christian community by means of pertinent catechesis and particularly participation with all the faithful in the Sunday Mass. This is not to be taken lightly or omitted. RCIA curriculums should endeavor not to neglect this critical period. Easter is not a “graduation” from the process of initiation.