

The RCIA and Children of Catechetical Age

In 1988 the Bishops of the United States mandated the full implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation for the dioceses of the United States. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults included a chapter for the initiation of children. To help parishes understand the implications of this chapter the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy and on Pastoral Research and Practices and the USCC Committee on Education published a joint statement on the *Pastoral Challenge of Implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age*. The following chart outlines the material contained in this statement.

Unbaptized Children of Catechetical Age	Unbaptized infants and small children who have not reached the age of reason	Baptized Catholic Children
<p>Participate in an age appropriate catechumenate process including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evangelization and pre-catechumenate • <i>Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate</i> • catechumenate for at least a year {including dismissal from the Sunday Eucharist every Sunday and the other rites of this period } • <i>Rite of Election</i> • Purification and Enlightenment {including a Penitential Service/Scrutiny } • <i>Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday</i> • full initiation...<i>Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist</i>...at the Easter Vigil or on a Sunday of Easter 	<p>These children will be baptized and then participate in the usual catechetical and sacramental formation process for those baptized in infancy.</p>	<p>These children have the right to the sacraments because of their baptism.</p> <p>These children have the obligation to participate in the full celebration of the Eucharist every Sunday.</p> <p>They do not participate in the Catechumenate process.</p> <p>Rather, they are catechized along with their peers for as long as a parish deems necessary and receive the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist when the parish and their parents discern that they are sufficiently prepared.</p> <p>They also participate with their peers in the preparation process for Confirmation and are confirmed along with their peers.</p>

The difficulty of initiating children in these various ways arises most frequently when in the same family there may be children who fall into more than one of the above categories. The bishops realize this difficulty and encourage parishes to help parents to understand the differences set out above. Unbaptized infants and small children are to be initiated using *the Infant Rite of Baptism*.

However, when a child has reached catechetical age he/she is capable of entering into a relationship with Christ, nurturing and growing in that relationship, and therefore needs to be prepared for full initiation through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

A child who has been baptized in infancy already has the life of the Holy Spirit dwelling within. The formation of these children focuses on bringing them to a deeper awareness of this divine life within them and preparing them to complete their initiation along with their peers.

Since the RCIA continually emphasizes the role of the community in the initiation process it is important to help the peer group understand their role and responsibility as they journey as companions to children being initiated or completing their initiation.

It is also very important to include the parents in this preparation process since they have the primary influence on the preparation process of their children and since this is their primary responsibility.

The path of children, who were baptized in another Christian tradition (Lutheran, Methodist, etc.) whose baptism is recognized as valid by the Catholic Church, was not addressed by the bishops in their 1988 statement. These children may be part of the catechumenate process adapted for children and be received into full communion when they are sufficiently prepared.