

Real Stories of Christian Initiation

Real Stories of Christian Initiation

Lessons *for* and *from* the RCIA

David Yamane and Sarah MacMillen
with Kelly Culver



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by •••

Excerpts from the English translation of *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* © 1985, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. All rights reserved.

© 2006 by the Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yamane, David.

Real stories of Christian initiation : lessons for and from the RCIA / by David Yamane and Sarah MacMillen with Kelly Culver.

p. cm.

Summary: "Relates real experiences from parishes that have used the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the Roman Catholic Church; draws lessons for the church from these experiences"—Provided by publisher.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8146-1826-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8146-1826-X (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Catholic Church. Ordo initiationis Christianae adultorum. 2. Initiation rites—Religious aspects—Catholic Church—Case studies. 3. Catholic Church—United States—Membership—Case studies. I. MacMillen, Sarah. II. Culver, Kelly. III. Title.

BX2045.I553Y46 2006

264'.020813—dc22

2005009453

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction ix

Notes on Terminology and Sources xix

1. St. Mary's: "We're About Making Disciples" 1

2. St. Mark's: "Faithful to the Past" 31

3. St. Innocent: "Only Just the Beginning" 55

4. St. John Bosco: Task-Completion Initiation and "Experience" 79

5. Queen of Peace: "Come and Follow Me" 99

Conclusion 124

Key Sources 135

Index 138

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the many individuals and organizations who made this book possible. Our data-collection effort was funded by grants from the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion (www.louisville-institute.org), the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Religious Research Association, and the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts. We are particularly grateful to James Lewis of the Louisville Institute for his support of our work.

In developing and implementing our study, we received valuable input from RCIA directors in the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese, especially Jay Freel Landry and Regina Wilson. We also participated and learned from students in the Notre Dame Theology Department's ritual studies and Christian initiation seminars.

We received critical feedback on the book manuscript at a workshop we convened at Notre Dame in July 2004. Grants from the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith (www.practicingourfaith.org) and the John S. Marten Program in Homiletics and Liturgics at the University of Notre Dame (www.nd.edu/~mdiv/marten.html) funded the workshop. Thanks to all of the workshop participants, especially the main commentators: Rita Ferrone, Tony Garascia, Shirley Griffin, Steve Harnadek, Max Johnson, Lisa Marino, Mike McCallion, John Melloh, Chris Miller, Patty Norris, Fr. Bill Schooler, and Chris Welling.

Of course, we could not have done our study or written this book without the willing participation of the individuals and parishes who subjected themselves to our investigation. We were always made to feel at home in the parishes we observed. It is not easy to be subjected to criticism, but we hope whatever critical comments we make in this

book are offset by our deeper and broader appreciation for the efforts of those on the front lines and in the trenches.

Finally, David would like to acknowledge the Yamane family, for tolerating his many absences over the past four years, and especially his wife, Megan Polzer, without whom he would be spiritually—if not physically—dead.

I ntroduction

2002 was a significant year for adult initiation in the Catholic Church. It marked the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which so profoundly transformed the ethos and practices of the church, including calling for a restoration of the ancient catechumenal model of initiation. It marked the thirtieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adulorum*, a new process for bringing adults into the church based on the catechumenate. And it marked the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, without question the most important organization promoting the full and faithful implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in the United States. In the spring of 2002, the church welcomed 163,305 new adult members, including roughly equal numbers of unbaptized individuals (81,013) and adults already baptized in other churches (82,292). The majority of these individuals were initiated through some version of the RCIA process.

2002 was also the capstone year for a long-term study we have been conducting of the RCIA. As significant as it has been in the contemporary church, we have very little empirical knowledge about how the RCIA is actually implemented.¹ So, with support from the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion, we spent nearly a year (from August 2001 through June 2002) observing the adult initiation process in six parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. During that time, we attended hundreds of meetings and dozens of rites, met scores of individuals who were considering becoming Catholic, and recorded more than a thousand typed, single-spaced pages of observational notes. These observations are the basis for the five case studies—*real stories of Christian initiation*—presented here.

To be sure, the pastoral literature on the RCIA is already voluminous and growing every year. We would be reluctant to add yet another book

to this library were it not for the fact that the existing works share an obvious and important problem: the failure to understand and learn from systematic observation of the actual practice of adult initiation in common parish settings. The image most books present of the RCIA process is an abstract ideal, one which is difficult to implement under the real constraints ministers face in the trenches of church life. Implementing the RCIA is a resource-intensive enterprise, and many commentaries seem to assume unlimited resources in the parishes.

The RCIA process requires economic, human, cultural, and social capital. Just as these kinds of capital are not evenly distributed in our society, they are not evenly distributed across parishes. One way of thinking about this is as analogous to a card game. The outcome is the result of a combination of the cards that are dealt and the skill with which those cards are played. Some parishes are dealt few, mostly bad cards (little money, few volunteers, no professional staff) but make the most of them, while other parishes are dealt many excellent cards (bountiful resources), but squander them. Of course, the best RCIA processes tend to be found in those parishes that combine ample resources and maximal use of those resources—akin to winning the World Series of Poker!

Our approach to understanding the RCIA begins with reality and presses toward the ideal. In contrast to Paul Wilkes's project on *Excellent Catholic Parishes*,² our project might be called *Actual Catholic Parishes*. Which is not to say "average Catholic parishes," for our observations reveal that every parish does some excellent things. We believe that assessing "excellence" must be done with the actual circumstances of the parish in mind. By studying normal parishes that do excellent things, we can envision how every parish might improve.

This title of this book—*Real Stories of Christian Initiation: Lessons for and from the RCIA*—summarizes its substance and goals. At the heart of the book is the stories of five of the six parishes we observed. Although the names and other potentially identifying characteristics of the people and places described in this book have been changed, their stories are real. At the same time, we realize that these stories are *case studies*, not a random or even a representative sampling of all parishes in the U.S. Our work centers on one typically Midwestern diocese. Even within this diocese, we do not examine African American or Latino parishes, rural or priestless parishes, the Christian initiation of children or campus ministries. We can only plead innocence by virtue of finite resources to any charge of bias in our selection of cases. Considering our limited time, money, and linguistic abilities—as well as the need to be granted

access to the parishes—we did the best we could with the hand we were dealt. If readers find our approach enlightening and useful, we hope some will engage in further observations in parishes more representative of the full diversity of the Catholic Church in the U.S.

Each of the five core chapters contains the story of the RCIA in a single parish that assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the process given the actual circumstances of the parish. David Yamane was primarily responsible for observing and writing about St. Mary's (chapter 1) and St. Mark's (chapter 2), Sarah MacMillen for St. Innocent (chapter 3) and St. John Bosco (chapter 4), and Kelly Culver for Queen of Peace (chapter 5). From these five stories collectively, we draw concluding lessons *for* the RCIA in general as well as consider the lessons the church as a whole might learn *from* how the RCIA works in real parishes. Before presenting the RCIA stories of these five parishes, however, we need to step back to put the RCIA itself in some context for those less familiar with its history and implementation.

Restoration of the Catechumenate

The changes introduced into the Roman Catholic Church by the Second Vatican Council have been revolutionary and, as with most revolutionary changes, Vatican II has been the source of considerable conflict over the past thirty-plus years. "Liberals" and "conservatives" in the church continue to fight over the consequences and, indeed, the very meaning of the council.³ These days, aging liberals—what Dominican priest Paul Philibert calls "Vatican II Fundamentalists"—frequently lament the failure of the church to live up to "the vision of the Council," all the more so in the wake of the priest sexual abuse scandal. On the other side, church conservatives lament, in Ralph McInerney's phrase, "what went wrong with Vatican II," all the more so in the wake of the priest sexual abuse scandal.⁴

Given these serious divisions in the church, we do well to recognize how widespread is the support for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults—a product of the council. Although its implementation is not above criticism, the ideal of adult faith formation embodied in the RCIA finds praise in all corners of the church. As Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly have put it, "At once extremely conservative and traditional, yet forward-looking and progressive, the *Order* has proven to be one of the most dramatic 'surprises' of the Second Vatican Council."⁵

The restoration of the catechumenate for adults was called for in the Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 64), and realized when a book of rites for this process was published in 1972 in Latin under the title *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*. This new "Order of Initiation" was introduced into the Catholic Church in the United States with a provisional English translation made available in 1974. It was not until 1988, however, that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published the official American English translation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and promulgated the "National Statutes for the Catechumenate," establishing norms for and mandating the use of the new process. Although it is not yet fully implemented in every parish, the RCIA is the officially recognized liturgical and formational process by which adults "become Catholic" today. Since 1988, over a million individuals in the United States have entered the church through the RCIA process.

The RCIA process has also become an influential model for other Christian traditions. According to the ecumenical North American Association for the Catechumenate, "During the past two decades non-Catholic Christian churches have slowly begun to understand the catechumenate as a process of faith formation and spiritual development for twenty-first-century people who have little or no previous association with the Christian faith." Among the denominations that have already implemented a catechumenal process of initiation are the Anglican Church of Canada, Episcopal Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Mennonite Church USA, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church.⁶

The RCIA as a model of adult faith formation has also been influential in the Roman Catholic Church itself. *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*, a 1992 document prepared by the International Council for Catechesis, declares, "According to ancient tradition, every form of catechesis should be inspired by the catechumenal model. Precisely because the catechesis of adults aims at living the Christian life in all its fullness and integrity, the process outlined in the catechumenate seems the most appropriate model and should be encouraged everywhere" (no. 66). This sentiment is elaborated in the *General Directory for Catechesis* published in 1997 by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy:

The concept of the baptismal catechumenate as *a process of formation and a true school of faith* offers post-baptismal catechesis dynamic and particular

characteristics: comprehensiveness and integrity of formation; its gradual character expressed in definite stages; its connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs; its constant reference to the Christian community. Post-baptismal catechesis . . . does well . . . to draw inspiration from “this preparatory school for the Christian life” (no. 91).

As in all things, moving from the ideal to reality is a halting and haphazard process. A ritual text like the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* not only needs to be translated into the vernacular linguistically, it needs to be adapted culturally and practically. In the process of implementation, it needs to be brought down to earth.

Implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Taken together, the “General Introduction,” the ritual text itself (including the combined rites approved specifically for use in the U.S.), and the U.S. bishops conference’s “National Statutes for the Catechumenate” paint a general picture of the initiation process. The broad outlines of the process as it applies to unbaptized adults (and children of catechetical age) are captured in the Table 1.⁷

This overview table, however, is only a point of departure. Like many church documents, the formal texts of the RCIA do not exactly constitute a road map for implementation.

In fact, immediately following the provisional English translation of the *Ordo* in 1974, people outside the hierarchy took the initiative in charting a path for the implementation of the RCIA in the United States. Central figures included the Belgian theologian Christiane Brusselmans and Fr. James Dunning. In 1978, Brusselmans invited a small group of individuals—including Dunning—to meet in Senanque, France, to discuss the newly published rite. Later, she and Dunning welcomed some 200 initiation leaders to Estes Park, Colorado, to reflect on the rite and its implementation in North America. This and another meeting in Calgary, Alberta, gave birth to The North American Forum on the Catechumenate (Forum). Jim Dunning served as its founding coordinator.⁸

Thus, by the time the U.S. bishops formalized the use of the RCIA in 1988, the Forum was already well established as the leading organization fostering its “full and faithful” implementation. It has since been joined by the Association for Catechumenal Ministry (founded in 1998) and the ecumenical North American Association for the Catechumenate (founded in 1994).⁹

TABLE 1 OVERVIEW OF RCIA PROCESS FOR AN UNBAPTIZED ADULT			
	Title	Length/Timing	Focus
Period 1	Evangelization and Precatechumenate	Unspecified, varies by individual need	Ensure that “the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates.” Look for “the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community” (RCIA, no. 42).
<i>1st Ritual Transition</i>	<i>Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens</i>	<i>Whenever inquirer is ready</i>	<i>During a liturgy, inquirers declare their intentions to continue their faith journey; the church welcomes them as persons who intend to become its members</i>
Period 2	Catechumenate	May be “several years” (RCIA, no. 7); “should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation” (NS, no. 6)	To give the candidates “suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life.” The four means of achieving this are: catechesis, community, liturgy, and service (RCIA, no. 75).

2nd Ritual Transition	Rite of Election	Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday	<i>Held at cathedral, presided over by ordinary (bishop or archbishop)</i>
Period 3	Purification and Enlightenment	Lent (40 days)	This is “a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance” (RCIA, no. 139).
3rd Ritual Transition	Rites of Initiation	Easter Vigil	<i>Baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, in the same liturgy and in this order</i>
Period 4	Mystagogy	Easter time; monthly assemblies until 1 st anniversary of initiation (NS, no. 24)	Sometimes called the period of “postbaptismal catechesis” because it seeks to lead the newly initiated more deeply into reflection on the experience of the sacra-

Note: NS = U.S. bishops conference’s National Statutes for the Catechumenate

TABLE 2
EXTENT OF IMPLEMENTATION
OF SELECTED COMPONENTS OF THE RCIA PROCESS

Element	Reference	Nationally	Case Studies
Ongoing inquiry	Implied in <i>RCIA</i> , nos. 36–37	21%	St. Mary's
Multiple rites of acceptance	<i>RCIA</i> , nos. 18, 44	22%	St. Mary's
One year minimum formation in catechumenate presumed	<i>NS</i> , nos. 6, 20	34% ¹⁰	St. Mary's
Extended mystagogy	<i>NS</i> , no. 24	15%	None
Separate formation processes for baptized and unbaptized	<i>RCIA</i> , no. 400; <i>NS</i> , nos. 2–3, 30–31	7%	None
Reception into full communion outside Easter Vigil	<i>RCIA</i> , nos. 473–504; <i>NS</i> , nos. 32–33	19%	Queen of Peace

Arguably the single most important book presenting an ideal for pastoral implementation is Thomas Morris's *The RCIA: Transforming the Church* (originally published in 1989, with a revised and updated edition published in 1997). Morris was executive director of the Forum from 1990 to 1998 and the book represents his years of engagement with and promotion of the RCIA. As opposed to a *school-year model* of initiation—in which individuals begin the process in September and

“graduate” at Pentecost (if not at the Easter Vigil)—Morris advocates a process of *year-round initiation*. Key elements of Morris’s model are: ongoing inquiry and multiple rites of acceptance, yearlong (minimum) and year-round catechumenate, extended mystagogy, and distinguishing validly baptized Christians from unbaptized individuals, both catechetically and liturgically. Thus, Morris’s ideal RCIA process for unbaptized adults is not linear but circular, always ongoing.¹¹

How many actual parishes implement the RCIA this fully? Not many, according to the study of the RCIA commissioned by the U.S. bishops. Although the study found 83 percent of parishes use some version of the RCIA, considerable variation exists in the specific aspects implemented.

Table 2 gives some key findings from the bishops’ national study and the five parishes covered in this book. That four of the five case studies in this book operate on a school-year model and do not effectively distinguish between baptized and unbaptized candidates for the sacraments of initiation is typical of the state of the RCIA in the U.S. today.

That said, much good is being done in the process of adult initiation. One does not even have to look very hard to find it. In our observations of actual Catholic parishes, it was all around. Recognizing the good, however, does not mean the church cannot do better. We pray that this book will benefit all those concerned about the church and especially those responsible for adult initiation. And we hope that when the RCIA celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2022, people will look back at this book and marvel at how far the church has come in its approach to adult faith formation and initiation.

Notes

¹ Among the only sources of systematic data is a report on the implementation of the RCIA, *Journey to the Fullness of Life*, released by the U.S. bishops conference in October 2000. The report was based on a three-year study overseen by Dean Hoge of The Catholic University of America and Robert O’Donnell of the Paulist Institute for Religious Research. We discuss some of its findings below.

² Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Catholic Parishes: The Guide to Best Places and Practices* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).

³ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Mary Jo Weaver, ed., *What’s Left? Liberal American Catholics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), and Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁴ Philibert includes himself in the fundamentalist category (personal conversation); Ralph McInerney, *What Went Wrong with Vatican II: The Catholic Crisis Explained* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1998). See Peter Steinfels' analysis of the present state of the Roman Catholic Church in America in *A People Adrift* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

⁵ Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children: Hope for the Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 6.

⁶ Home page of the North American Association for the Catechumenate <www.catechumenate.org>. See also Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

⁷ For a similar table that breaks the process down by baptismal status and whether or not the candidate is catechized, see Thomas Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 59. See Duggan and Kelly, *The Christian Initiation of Children*, for a consideration of the initiation of children of catechetical age.

⁸ James Dunning, *Echoing God's Word* (Arlington, VA: North American Forum on the Catechumenate, 1993) xix; "The Rite Leadership," *Church* 16 (Winter 2000) 4; and information provided by James Schellman, the current executive director of the Forum.

⁹ See the descriptions of these three organizations as well as their addresses on the World Wide Web in the "Key Sources" section at the end of this book.

¹⁰ We believe this particular statistic is inflated, perhaps because of the wording of the question: whether a year minimum of formation is *presumed*. Presumption and reality can differ greatly. Consider that the study also reports that the percentage of parishes implementing a "full-year initiation model" is only 15. See *Journey to the Fullness of Life*, Appendix E, "Statistics from Diocesan RCIA Coordinators," available only online at the website of the USCCB Secretariat for Evangelization <www.usccb.org/evangelization/rcia.htm>.

¹¹ Thomas Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church*, revised and updated edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) Figure 1, 51.

Notes on Terminology and Sources

Catechumenate refers to the second major period of formation in the RCIA. Although by virtue of their baptism they are not catechumens, in practice baptized candidates for full communion are most often grouped together with unbaptized catechumens throughout the RCIA process. For lack of a better term, therefore, we use “catechumenate” in reference to both catechumens and candidates for full communion.

National Statutes (abbreviated as *NS*) refers to the “National Statutes for the Catechumenate,” approved by the U.S. bishops on 11 November 1986 and confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship on 26 June 1988 as a complementary norm in accord with Canon 788 §3 on the catechumenate. The National Statutes govern the catechumenate in the United States.

Ordo is short for *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*, the Latin text promulgated in 1972 and translated into English as “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.” This translation is somewhat confusing because the *Ordo* is actually a collection of liturgical *rites* that together constitute the *order* of initiation. We, therefore, use the term *Ordo* to refer to the RCIA as a whole as distinct from the various specific rites (e.g., rite of acceptance, rite of election).

RCIA (in italics) refers to the officially approved English translation of the ritual text (“the vernacular typical edition”), mandated for use in the U.S. from 1 September 1988 forward.

RCIA (not italicized) refers to any process of adult initiation that attempts to follow the steps and stages given in the *Ordo* and summarized in Table 1. Some organizations, like the National Pastoral Life Center, discourage the use of this acronym because they believe it conveys a sense of the RCIA as another “program.” We do not share that fear and find the alternative (“the adult initiation process”) linguistically cumbersome.

1 St. Mary's: "We're about Making Disciples"

PARISH OVERVIEW	
<i>PARISH</i>	
Size	1,750 families/6,000 persons
Pastoral Team	Pastor, associate pastor, DRE, youth minister, adult education director, music and liturgy
Setting	Fast-growing exurban area
Masses	5 weekend, 1 daily
Self-Characterization	Extensive programming with high lay involvement and ownership
<i>INITIATION PROCESS</i>	
Leadership	Full-time director of adult faith formation
Team? Size	Yes. 8–10 regular team members
# Initiated Annually	3 unbaptized and 5 baptized adults
Structure	Full year implementation: yearlong catechumenate, year-round dismissals, ongoing inquiry

A Restrained Post-Vatican II Church in the Heart of Exurbia

The approach to Pleasanton from three sides takes you through fields of corn and soy beans. Driving on a narrow country road from the east, the farm fields give way quite abruptly to outcroppings of new houses in developments with names like Forestmound Run, Forestmound Lakes, Forestmound Trail, Forestmound Crossing, Forestmound