



Using the *Catechist's Manual*

THIS *Catechist's Manual* is part of the ON THE JOURNEY series of books intended to be used for the Order of Christian Initiation. This *Manual* is designed to be a practical help to the catechist by offering a structured way of preparing for and presenting the catechetical portion of an RCIA session. Together with the companion *Participant's Book*, this *Manual* should enable catechists to prepare thoroughly for each teaching and to present the faith both systematically and organically (see CT 21; GDC 67). In order to understand the structure of each lesson plan and its context within the catechumenal process, it is essential that each catechist read with care all of the introductory sections of this *Manual*.

The Purpose of Section Two

This section provides a summary of the structure of the RCIA process. This highly simplified explanation offers a basic context for the following sections, which then elaborate on the *catechetical* aspect in detail. The enclosed foldout RCIA Overview Chart (discussed below) is a useful companion to this section. The *liturgical* and *pastoral* aspects of the RCIA process receive much more significant treatment in other publications of the ON THE JOURNEY series, particularly the *RCIA Leader's Manual*.

The Purpose of Section Three

The RCIA ritual book directs that catechesis should shift in emphasis and, to some degree, in method as a participant goes through the process (see RCIA 4-7). This section explains, in practical terms, how those changes serve the process and help foster conversion. The lesson plans provided in this *Manual* are primarily written for the Catechumenate period, which is usually the longest and most densely catechetical. As the character of the catechesis in each of the other periods is described, this section should assist the catechist in adapting these lesson plans to suit teaching during other stages in the RCIA process.

The Purpose of Section Four

The lesson plans are designed according to a teaching structure suggested by Msgr. Francis D.

Kelly in his book *The Mystery We Proclaim: Catechesis for the Third Millennium* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2nd edition, 1999) in chapter three of part five, as an “Ecclesial Approach to Catechetical Methodology.” This section explains the rationale behind that structure in the context of the distinctive demands of RCIA catechesis and the adult learning model.

The Purpose of Sections Five and Six

These sections are written with two goals in mind. The first purpose is to examine how to present the truths of the faith in an orderly and cohesive manner that fosters conversion and a deep hunger to know the God who reveals such wonders. Addressed here are two interrelated issues: how to teach the truths of the faith *systematically*, and how to teach them *organically*. Section Five treats the systematic question — ways to determine the order of RCIA teachings by using pastoral, liturgical, and catechetical means. Section Six treats the organic question — ways to teach the relationships among doctrines by using salvation history, the theological virtues, and the pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The second purpose of these two sections is to address certain problems that are commonly found in catechesis today, especially in the Western world. Within the Catholic Church, there has developed the problem, or perhaps the crisis, of dissent. Exploring in detail the sources of what Pope Paul VI called the “leaven of infidelity to the Holy Spirit” (PCB 41) is beyond the scope of this *Manual*. However, the effort to not perpetuate the problem is very much relevant to this discussion of catechizing those entering the Catholic Church. In RCIA catechesis, attempts are often made to initiate adults into the faith without due consideration of the cultural context of dissent, in which their adherence to the truth will be constantly challenged. If the faith has not been taught in an authentically systematic and organic manner, their hold on the truth is endangered. Participants may develop a fragmented, emaciated, and unenthusiastic view of divine truth, wherein the outright rejection of certain revealed truths or passive lack of

formation of conscience becomes accepted as normal. The results of this kind of catechesis range from nominal adherence, lukewarmness, or cynicism, to outright absence from the visible fold soon after initiation. To counter this, this *Manual* suggests the necessary, demanding, and wholly wonderful challenge of being what Pope John Paul II calls a “true catechist” (CT 30), who can genuinely say, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received” (1 Cor 15:3).

The Purpose of Section Seven

The sixty lesson plans that form the heart of this *Manual* are presented with three Tables of Contents for the sake of suggesting important considerations to the catechist. First, the lesson plans are listed in alphabetical order so as to give the catechist the freedom to determine the order of catechesis. Second, the lesson plans are listed by dividing them into the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Third, the lesson plans are listed by dividing them into the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The rationale behind these divisions is discussed in Sections Five and Six.

Sixty lesson plans can carry a parish well beyond a twelve-month period, allowing flexibility in organizing a catechumenal process that can grow beyond the bounds of the “school-year model,” and more towards the ideal of a year-round process. However, many RCIA processes operate in a period of a year, or even less. Catechists in these situations will have to decide how best to combine two or more lessons, depending on their experience of what aspects of the faith need most attention in a given circumstance. In parishes with a year-round process, catechists may opt to teach some of the more content-rich lesson plans over the course of more than a single session. Appendix II provides examples of how some parishes have chosen to combine or expand certain lesson plans using the methods presented here.

The Purpose of the Appendices

The seven appendices are intended to make this *Manual* easier to use as a catechist prepares a teaching, and as the RCIA director decides what handouts to use from the companion *Participant’s Book*. Used carefully in tandem with the lesson plans, these appendices will add to the ability of musicians, catechists, and the rest of the team to stay unified on a theme in a manner that takes full

advantage of the adult learning model and the appropriate use of liturgical catechesis.

The RCIA Overview Chart

The foldout Overview Chart enclosed with this *Manual* looks daunting at first, but the idea is to provide a picture of the whole process, from start to finish. Many parishes have found this chart valuable for training their RCIA teams. Across the top are the names of each of the periods of the RCIA process and the status of the participants, as well as terms used to identify them at any given stage. Notice that no timeframes are specified except for the period of Purification and Enlightenment, which normally coincides with Lent, and the Neophyte Year, from one Easter to the next. All of the references quoted in the chart are taken from the RCIA ritual book; as with all ecclesiastical documents, the numbering refers to paragraphs, not pages. Down the side, the journey of each possible type of participant is tracked (unbaptized in *green*, baptized uncatechized in *red*, and baptized catechized but not Catholic in *blue*), as well as the responsibilities of the Church in each period of the catechumenal process. The dark bars denote the major liturgical gateways of the process, and continue to use the color scheme, with the combining of red and blue to make *purple* in the case of baptized participants, since both of these categories of people can go through the same gateways. Each period is divided into the three aspects: liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral.

This has been done to make information in the guidelines of the ritual book more accessible and to undo some of the confusion that arises when using it. When reading through the remaining introductory sections of this *Catechist’s Manual*, the Overview Chart should be opened and examined to aid in grasping the larger context of the particular subject at hand.

As a final note to set the tone for the rest of this *Manual*, it is important to place this work in proper relation to its goal: conversion and discipleship to Jesus Christ. Authentic conversion and discipleship to Christ means learning “more and more within the Church to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity with his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to” (CT 20; see also the initiatory catechesis section of the GDC). Conversion is a gradual turning from the darkness of sin, and turning to a desire for holiness, which involves:

...being led into the mystery of God's love, who invites [participants] to establish a personal relationship with him in Christ. Under the movement of divine grace the new convert sets out on a spiritual journey by means of which, while already sharing through faith in the mystery of death and resurrection, he passes from the old person to the new who has been made perfect in Christ (see Col 3:5-10; Eph 4:20-24). This transition, which involves a progressive change of outlook and morals, should be manifested in its social implications and effected gradually during the period of the catechumenate. Since the Lord in whom he believes is a sign of contradiction (see Lk

2:34; Mt 10:34-39) the convert often has to suffer misunderstanding and separation, but he also experiences those joys which are generously granted by God (AG 13).

The catechetical endeavor native to the catechumenal process serves a deeply personal end for the catechist — discovering at an intellectual level not simply how an individual learns the faith, but how a participant falls in love. The goal of catechumenal catechesis is far more than imparting that which must be believed — it seeks to prepare participants for a new union, an embrace. This embrace is human and divine, unifying the two as water into wine, inviting participants to thereby quench the deepest call of relationship that Jesus gives — “I thirst” (Jn 19:28).