

Handbook for the Catechumenate with Children

Christian Initiation of Children who have reached catechetical age¹

Sacramental Preparation for Non-Baptized Children and
Baptized Non-Catholic Children of Catechetical Age (Ages 7 – 13)

Supporting Documents:

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), Decree

From the 1st of September 1988 the use of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is mandatory in the dioceses of the United States of America. From that day forward no other English version may be used.

Canon 852

“The provisions of the canons on adult baptism apply to all those who, being no longer infants, have reached the use of reason.”

RCIA: National Statutes for the Catechumenate # 18

Since children who have reached the use of reason are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults (canon 852.1), their formation should follow the general pattern of the ordinary catechumenate as far as possible, with the appropriate adaptations permitted by the ritual. They should receive the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens.

RCIA 252

“This form of the rite of Christian initiation is intended for children not baptized as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age. They seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative. Such children are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation of conscience.”

RCIA 253

“The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. The process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children’s growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive. Accordingly, as with adults, their initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments.”

RCIA 254

The children’s progress in the formation they receive depends on the help and example of their companions and the influence of their parents. Both these factors should therefore be taken into account.

1

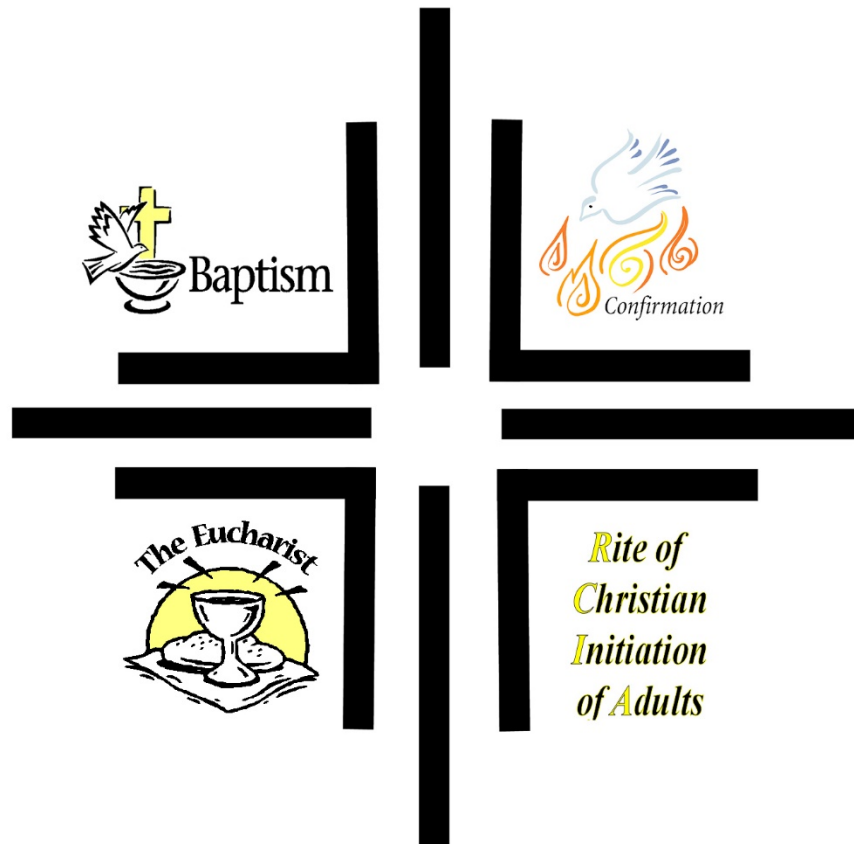
RCIA 1 – 35: Introduction

RCIA 36 – 251: Part One: Christian Initiation of Adults

RCIA 252 – 330: Part Two, Chapter One: Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age

Goals:

1. Non-Baptized children of catechetical age (ages 7 – 13) will be prepared and brought to the sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) through their participation in the catechumenate process presented in the 1988 *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.
2. Baptized Non-Catholic children of catechetical age (ages 7 – 13) will be prepared and brought to full communion in the Catholic Church (Profession of Faith, Confirmation and Eucharist) through participation in the catechumenate process presented in the 1988 *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.
3. Parents, guardians, and families of unbaptized and baptized non-Catholic children of catechetical age, preparing for Christian initiation will be involved in the catechumenate process in order that they develop and grow in the Catholic faith, establishing a more stable and effective domestic Church.



Children who belong in the Catechumenate (RCIA):

A. Unbaptized Children of Catechetical Age (Ages 7 – 13)²

This is the primary group of children involved in the catechumenate. Part One and Part Two, Chapter 1 of the rite, addresses their special concerns. They should without exception participate in the catechumenate and celebrate all three of the sacraments of initiation together, at the same liturgical celebration.³

B. Baptized Non-Catholic Children of Catechetical Age (Ages 7 – 13)

Seeking Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church

This group of children may be included in the norms set forth by the RCIA. Their situation is addressed in part by the description of the catechumenate for children found in Part II Chapter 1 of the rite. Their situation is also addressed in Part Two, Chapter 5 of the rite, which concerns the reception of baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church. The priest who presides at the reception of these young candidates receives from the law the faculty to confirm them (**canon 883.2**) and must use it (**canon 885.2**). Therefore, children who are received into the Church and who have not been validly confirmed must be confirmed at the time of their reception. The process of formation for these baptized children may be carried on in the catechumenate, with the clear understanding that they are candidates, not catechumens. Just as the participation of baptized adults is allowed in the adult catechumenate for pastoral reasons, so the participation of baptized children is allowed in the catechumenate.

Note

The initiation of adolescents (teenagers), ages 14 - 17, should follow the rite for adults in every respect (See RCIA Part One for the unbaptized, and RCIA Part Two, Chapters 4 & 5 for the baptized), rather than following the adaptations for children that are found in Part Two, Chapter 1 of the RCIA.

Children who do not belong in the Catechumenate (RCIA):

A. Unbaptized Children younger than catechetical age (Ages 0 – 6)

This group of children are to be baptized according to the *Order of Baptism for Children*, which is the rite used for infant baptism. Their Confirmation and First Eucharist are then deferred until a later age, according to parish and archdiocesan policy.

B. Protestant Baptized children younger than catechetical age (Ages 0 – 6), whose parents are being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

This group of children are received into the Church on the same date as their parents with no rite required. Notation of their reception and record of the date and place of their baptism should be made in the parish baptismal register. They then receive the remaining sacraments of initiation with their Catholic peers at the appropriate time according to parish and archdiocesan policy.

² Children of catechetical age are those who have reached the age of reason, which is generally considered to be **age seven**. The category of "children of catechetical age" **extends up to the age of thirteen**. Children of catechetical age are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults and are to be included in the norms set forth by the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Children of catechetical age are old enough to hear and understand the call of Christ, and to respond with faith at their own age level. Consequently, their initiation is not based, as is the Baptism of infants, entirely on the commitment of the parents and the faith of the Church but requires a genuine faith response on the part of the child. At the same time, the child is still dependent on his or her parents and will need continued nurturing in faith.

³ **RCIA 305** At the third step of Christian initiation, the children will receive the sacrament of baptism, the bishop or priest who baptizes them will also confer confirmation, and the children will for the first time participate in the liturgy of the eucharist.

C. Protestant Baptized children younger than catechetical age (Ages 0 – 6) whose parents were baptized Catholic.

This group of children are received into the Catholic Church at the time of their first holy communion, with no additional rites required of them. The date of their first holy communion should be noted on the parish baptismal register as the date of their reception into the Catholic Church. (The date of their protestant baptism should also be noted along with the date of their reception into the Catholic Church).

D. Catholic Baptized children of Catechetical age (Ages 7 – 13)

This group of children are to prepare for the remaining sacraments of Christian initiation (Eucharist and Confirmation) under the current policy of the Archdiocese of New York.



A General Overview of the Catechumenate (RCIA) Process

Four Periods

The catechumenate process has four periods of formation:

- Period of the Pre-catechumenate (Inquiry Period)
- Period of the Catechumenate
- Period of Purification and Enlightenment (Lent)
- Period of Mystagogy

Period of the Pre-catechumenate (Inquiry Period)

The catechumenate process begins with an inquiry period that leads up to the celebration of the **Rite of Acceptance** for the un-baptized and the **Rite of Welcome for the baptized**. This is a period of evangelization for the child and their family. The inquiry period should introduce the child and family to topics basic to our Catholic faith: who is God, who is Jesus, what is the Church. The child along with his/her family should be offered inquiry gatherings for faith sharing and for the proclamation of the “*Kerygma*”.

The length of the inquiry period depends on the inquirer. Before the **Rite of Acceptance** (or the **Rite of Welcome**) is celebrated, “*there must be evidence of the first faith ...and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ*”. (RCIA # 42) “*Consequently, there must also be evidence of the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company ...of Christians... with members of the community.*” (RCIA # 42)

Period of the Catechumenate

After the **Rite of Acceptance** (or the **Rite of Welcome**), the catechumenate process continues with the catechumenate period, the formal period of pastoral formation, which is linked with the Sunday Liturgy of the Word. The child's experience with the Sunday Mass is very important to this period. For the unbaptized, at least one full liturgical year should be devoted to the catechumenate period. During the catechumenate period, “a suitable catechesis is provided” (RCIA # 75), which would include both the **dismissal catechesis for the unbaptized** and an **extended catechesis for all**.⁴

Children can be gathered in groups according to their ages and stages of development. They can be in groups of catechumens and candidates alone or in the company of their Catholic peers.

Catechumens and candidates are to be supported by their parents, sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community. The catechumens and candidates should also be encouraged to participate in apostolic activity, appropriate to their age and charisms.

The pastor, catechumenate coordinator, catechists, and other members of the team should carry out a discernment of the children's progress and readiness for the sacraments of Christian initiation. Those who are truly prepared then pass into the Lenten period of purification and enlightenment with the **Rite of Election** or the **Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion**.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The **Rite of Election** and the **Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion**, which begins this period, is normally celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. Catechumens are invited to participate in the archdiocesan **Rite of Election**. If the catechumens do not participate with the adults at an archdiocesan celebration, another option is to hold a **Rite of Election for children** in the parish (See RCIA # 281-290). A third option is to omit this rite altogether. At the Rite of Election, the catechumens are declared members of the Elect.

4

“*Suitable catechesis is planned to be gradual and complete. It is accommodated to the liturgical year and is solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the children not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.*” RCIA # 75

This period of purification and enlightenment is a time for more spiritual formation and prayer. During this period, one or two scrutinies should be celebrated with the Elect (catechumens). You may also choose to celebrate all three scrutinies with the Elect. Those children taking part in the catechumenate who are already baptized should be prepared to receive the sacrament of reconciliation during this time.

Normally, at the Easter Vigil Mass, the Elect celebrate the three sacraments of Christian initiation: **baptism, confirmation and eucharist**. The baptized candidates for full communion are to celebrate the **Rite of Reception** and the sacraments of **confirmation and eucharist** at any time during the year when they are ready.

Period of Mystagogy

After the Easter Vigil, the children should share in the joy of the fifty days of the Easter season and are to be visible to the community at Sunday Mass with their godparents and the other neophytes in a special place reserved for them in the assembly. They may attend the neophytes' celebration with the archbishop and should have a special celebration to mark the end of the Easter season, at Pentecost. Their ongoing formation should be provided by their ongoing participation in the parish religious education program or catholic school, and / or through their ongoing participation through the parish catechumenate group.



Order of Christian Initiation of Adults - For the UNBAPTIZED

Period	Name	Aim	Content	Time	Rites
Period of the Pre-catechumenate	Inquirer	Evangelization: Awakening Faith	Time to build trust to share personal stories, questions; time to proclaim the message of salvation, foster initial conversion, introduce into parish life.	Unlimited	No specific Rites suggested
CELEBRATION	OF	THE	RITE	OF	ACCEPTANCE
Period of the Catechumenate	Catechumen	Pastoral Formation: Deepening initial conversion, passing on Catholic tradition, developing a Catholic way of life.	Time to deepen faith / conversion within the living community.... through: - catechesis based of the Liturgy of the Word - participation in the life of the community - prayer and worship - introduction to the apostolic life	One to a few years (One year = Liturgical Year)	+Liturgy of the Word +Blessings +Anointing +Minor Exorcisms +Anticipatory Rites: ...Presentation of the Creed ...Presentation of Lord's Prayer +Rite of Sending
CELEBRATION	OF	THE	RITE	OF	ELECTION
Period of the Purification and Enlightenment	Elect	Spiritual Formation: Eliminate what is weak and sinful. Affirm what is holy.	Time for recollection, Lenten retreat, final spiritual preparation for the celebration of the three sacraments of Christian initiation	Lent	+Liturgy of the Word + Scrutinies +Presentation of the Creed +Presentation of Lord's Prayer +Preparation Rites for Holy Saturday
CELEBRATION	OF THE	SACRAMENTS	OF	CHRISTIAN	INITIATION
Period of Mystagogy	Neophyte	Ongoing Formation: Deepening of sacramental life.	Time for reflection on the sacramental mysteries.	Easter Time and then anniversary of initiation	+Sunday Mass +Gathering with the bishop. +Sacrament of Reconciliation

Order of Christian Initiation of Adults - For the BAPTIZED

Period	Name	Aim	Content	Time	Rites
Period of the Pre-catechumenate	Inquirer	Evangelization: Awakening initial Faith	Time to build trust to share personal stories, questions; time to proclaim the message of salvation, foster initial conversion, introduce into parish life.	Unlimited	No specific Rites suggested
CELEBRATION	OF	THE	RITE	OF	WELCOME
Period of the Catechumenate	Candidate	Pastoral Formation: Deepening initial conversion, passing on Catholic tradition, developing a Catholic way of life.	Time to deepen faith / conversion within the living community... through: - catechesis based of the Liturgy of the Word - participation in the life of the community - prayer and worship - introduction to the apostolic life	As long or as Short as necessary...	+ Sunday Mass + Sacrament of Reconciliation
CELEBRATION	OF THE	RITE	OF	CALLING TO	CONTINUING CONVERSION
Period of the Purification and Enlightenment	Candidate	Spiritual Formation: Eliminate what is weak and sinful. Affirm what is holy.	Time for recollection, Lenten retreat, final spiritual preparation for reception and the celebration of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist	Lent (Any time)	+ Sunday Mass + Sacrament of Reconciliation
CELEBRATION	OF THE	RITE	OF	RECEPTION	AND THE
Period of Mystagogy	Newly Received	Ongoing Formation: Deepening of sacramental life.	Time for reflection on the sacramental mysteries.	Easter Time (Any time)	+ Sunday Mass
		SACRAMENTS	OF	CONFIRMATION	& EUCHARIST

Issues to be Consider with the Catechumenate (RCIA) with Children

A. Time Frame

Initiation is a gradual process for children as well as for adults, and care should be taken to allow enough time for the children to grow secure in their new faith and develop bonds to the Church community. Frequently, the time needed by the children is longer than the time needed by adults.

The catechumenate process is based on their personal conversion. It is adapted to their spiritual progress and growth of faith rather than a cognitive knowledge. Because the criteria for initiation are based on assessing conversion of heart and action, there is no timeline for the initiating of children. It could take several years, if necessary. **(See RCIA # 42 and # 75)**

The rite states:

“The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances...”

RCIA # 76

The National Statutes for the Catechumenate state:

“The period of the catechumenate, beginning at acceptance into the order of catechumens and including the catechumenate proper and the period of purification and enlightenment after election should extend for at least one year of formation. 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.” **National Statutes # 6**

“The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. The process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children’s growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive. Accordingly, as with adults, their initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments.” **RCIA # 253**

B. Role of the Parent(s) / Guardian(s)

The catechumenate with children should incorporate ways for the parents (guardians) of the catechumen and candidate to be involved in the process of initiation. The catechumenate coordinator or pastor should meet with the parents (guardians) and enlist their active support from the beginning of the process. A commitment to bring the child to the catechumenate gatherings is essential. The catechumenate coordinator or pastor should make clear what the process involves for the child, and that the family is expected to participate with the child in the rites and the formation process in as much as possible.

Families today take a great many different forms, due to the prevalence of divorce and remarriage in our society. The family structure also varies according to culture. Families today are frequently subject to economic pressures, and experience time pressures due to both parents working outside the home. The Church should take these factors into account in determining reasonable expectations for family involvement.

For children to be initiated into the Church, it is always necessary to have the consent of their parents, or at least one of them, or those who lawfully take their place. Children who have the consent but not the active involvement of their parents in the process of initiation should not on that account alone be barred from the process. If these children have grandparents, responsible older siblings or other key family members who will support their conversion consistently; these factors should also be considered.

C. Role of the Sponsor(s)

Sponsors are those who accompany... any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen (or candidate)
RCIA # 10

In the catechumenate with children, parents or guardians usually assume the role of "sponsor" during the catechumenate period. If parents cannot, for various reasons, do this, a sponsor or a sponsoring family from the parish is to take on this responsibility. It can be very helpful to still assign a sponsoring family for each child catechumen (or candidate) for the length of the catechumenate period. The role of the sponsor (sponsoring family) is to accompany the child (and family) at Sunday Mass and to introduce them to the life of the Catholic parish. The faithful witness given by the sponsor (sponsoring family) is an essential component of the pastoral formation during the catechumenate period.

D. Role of Catholic Peers

The support of the child's community of peers and their families will strengthen the young catechumen's and candidate's experience of the Church and of conversion and should be sought whenever possible. The special role of a "**peer companion**" does not substitute for an adult sponsor but can provide helpful support for the catechumen and candidate and should be used judiciously.

If the child is enrolled in a Catholic school or religious education program, the child's classmates should be made aware of the special journey of the child and be invited to participate in liturgical celebrations of the catechumenate for their classmate whenever appropriate. This may take the form of participation in one of the major rites held in the parish Church, or one of the minor rites, which may be celebrated with a group of children in a school or parish catechetical center.

E. At the beginning of the Catechumenate Process

The Christian initiation of children of catechetical age must therefore take special care to evaluate the following elements of the child's conversion, so that the child's spiritual / faith formation needs may be met in the catechumenate process. In the beginning of the inquiry period...these issues should be addressed by the parish leadership:

- + What is the attitude of the child's family? Is there a commitment on their part to help the child grow in the Catholic faith and in the community of the Church? Can this commitment be developed?
- + What is the child's relationship to the parish community and to Sunday worship? Is there any kind of relationship? Can such a relationship be developed?
- + Has the child expressed faith/ interest in Christ? Does the child want to belong to the Church? Can a personal relationship to Christ and to the Church be developed?

F. The Relationship of the Rite for Adults to the Rite for Children

The catechumenate for adults and children is a single reality. Adults and children may always participate in the rites together. When the children's parents are not part of the catechumenate for adults, however, the parish may celebrate the rites for them in gatherings separate from the adult catechumenate, where the fullest use of the adaptations for children may be exercised. This is a pastoral decision.

The catechumenate as it is described for an adult is the model for the catechumenate for children. What is contained in the section devoted to children (RCIA Part Two, Chapter 1) is a set of adaptations to render the adult catechumenate better suited to the pastoral needs of children. It does not constitute a different model. Whenever the introductory material in the chapter on children does not provide enough information or guidance concerning the periods or the rites, the reader should refer to the corresponding section of the rite for adults for more information. From apostolic times, families have come to the grace of Baptism together. Families that are undergoing initiation should, as far as possible, celebrate the rites of the catechumenate and the sacraments of initiation together as a family, provided that each member is ready for the next stage of the process. When there is a mixed group of children and adults, the adult rite is followed, with appropriate adaptations made for the children who are participating.

G. Adapting the Rites for Children

When celebrating the rites with children only, the ritual for children should be used and adapted to the needs of the children who will participate.

Part Two, Chapter One:

- See **RCIA 262-276** (Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens)
- See **RCIA 281-290** (Rite of Election)
- See **RCIA 295-303** (Penitential Rite-Scrutiny)
- See **RCIA 309-329** (Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation)
-

Those who are involved in preparing the rites, especially catechists whose background in liturgy is not extensive, should take great care in adapting the rites. The following principles should be kept in mind:

- o The adaptations for children offered by the rite should be read and understood considering Part One of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.
- o It is the goal of any adaptation to preserve and highlight the central symbols of the rites.
- o It is necessary to avoid adding additional layers of symbolism to the symbols that are already in the rite.
- o It is necessary to understand the structures of the rites and keep those structures intact.
- o The rite as it appears in the ritual book is always our guide and reference point.

When children celebrate the rites together with adult catechumens, the adult rites is followed, with some adaptations for the children.

- a. In the ***Rite of Acceptance***:
 - + the opening dialogue with the children should ask the questions that appear in the rite for children.
 - + the affirmation of the parents found in the rite for children should be retained.
- b. The ***Scrutinies*** with children, unlike those for adults, may be combined with an anointing with the oil of catechumens. If the Scrutinies with children are celebrated with adults however, the anointing should be celebrated at another time.

H. Models for Catechesis during the Period of the Catechumenate

After the *Rite of Acceptance* or the *Rite of Welcome*, the catechumenate process continues with the catechumenate period, the formal period of pastoral formation, which is linked with the Sunday Liturgy of the Word. The child's experience of the Sunday Mass is very important to this period. Special attention should be given to cultivating a sense of wonder at God's presence in the liturgy, especially from the Sunday lectionary readings throughout the liturgical year.

At least one full liturgical year should be devoted to the catechumenate period. During the catechumenate period, "*a suitable catechesis is provided*". **RCIA 75**

Catechumens are gathered for two opportunities of "*suitable catechesis*", namely, a **dismissal catechesis** and an **extended catechesis**.

Baptized candidates are gathered for an **extended catechesis** only.

The Sunday readings are used during the period of the catechumenate as a basis for presenting the mystery of salvation as well as an introduction to Catholic dogmas and precepts.

The **dismissal catechesis** happens every Sunday, after the homily during the celebration of the Mass. The catechumens are kindly dismissed after the homily before the recitation of the Creed. The goal of the dismissal catechesis is to offer an opportunity for a catechist to help the catechumens prayerful reflect on the Sunday readings of the Mass.

The goal of the **extended catechesis** is to offer an opportunity for a catechist to present the Church's teachings to the catechumens and candidates

The **Extended Catechesis** can be offered in the following models (options):

Children Catechumenate Model:

- + catechumens & candidates only
- + immediately after the Sunday Mass Dismissal Catechesis or any time during the week

Religious Education Catechumenate Model:

- + catechumens & candidates along with their peers in the parish Rel. Ed. program
- + immediately after the Sunday Mass Dismissal Catechesis or any time during the week.

Catholic School Catechumenate Model:

- + catechumens & candidates along with their peers in the Catholic School
- + any time during the week

Intergenerational Catechumenate Model:

- + catechumens & candidates, parent(s), sponsor(s), and/or peer companions... all together
- + immediately after the Sunday Mass Dismissal Catechesis or any time during the week

Steps for the Implementation of the Catechumenate with Children

1) Check List

Period of the Pre-Catechumenate

-
-
-
-
-
-

Period of the Catechumenate

-
-
-
-
-
-

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

-
-
-
-
-
-

Period of Mystagogy

-
-
-
-
-
-

2) Resources