100 The Sacraments Of Initiation

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Introduction: A Vision for Christian Initiation

There is no greater joy for a parish community than to experience the initiation of new Christians at the Easter Vigil. "O truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!" (Exultet), the community encounters the risen Christ in the initiation of new disciples; they hear the Easter Gospel proclaimed anew as they see men and women rise with Christ to a new life of grace.

Before the community calls catechumens and candidates to the sacraments of initiation, it must do all that it can to foster a genuine conversion in those to be initiated. The process of conversion is life long and uniquely connected to different levels of human development. Christian initiation presumes that evangelization has begun, that the Word of God has already begun to transform the life of the individual, that there has been a spirit of cooperation on the part of the person to put into practice what one believes and the desire to pattern one's life on the teaching of Christ.

The ongoing call to conversion is pivotal for the pastoral understanding of Christian initiation. All Christians are invited to a more intimate participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, to a fuller appreciation of the Christian tradition of prayer, creed, an ongoing faith formation, and a more active role in the Church's mission. Consequently, all pastoral efforts to fully implement the order of Christian initiation will inevitably affect the life of the parish. Prioritizing the evangelizing mission of the Church is critical; all pastoral work must be evaluated through this lens. The implementation of this sacramental vision of Christian initiation may point to a need for ongoing parish conversion and renewal.

I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 27)

Cultural diversity in the Archdiocese must be considered in establishing parish practice. Parishes that share common cultural experiences are encouraged to reflect upon the implications of specific cultural values and customs and collaboratively move toward a consistent practice. While respecting the need for pastoral adaptation, there are nevertheless pastoral norms that need to be honored. These policies and procedures enumerate a number of these norms and clarifies some of the questions that have surfaced from pastoral practice. In promoting a consistent practice in regard to the sacraments of initiation, the hope is that the vision behind these rites will be strengthened.

Organizational Note

This document has been structured into four sections that generally reflects the manner in which parish teams bring people of all ages into the Church through the Sacraments of Initiation. There is duplication of some portions or concepts between these sections in order to make each section essentially a "stand alone" resource for its parish target leadership group.

These sections are:

- Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for Adults (Baptism, First Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation) which also includes proper initiation for previously validly baptized adult non-Catholics (Profession of Faith, First Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation);
- RCIA for children between the ages of 7-18;
- Baptism of Infants; and
- Confirmation for Catholics baptized as Infants.