

100 ways to involve parishioners in the RCIA

Posted by Nick



The first step in building a team is to realize the team already exists. You are not creating anything new. You are enhancing and building on what already exists. Get your RCIA book and turn to paragraph 9 (page 4 in my version). Underline this phrase, about four lines down: —“the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized.”

Now repeat this mantra: “Initiation is not my job. It’s their job.” Your job is to help them do their job. The RCIA gives you a five-point outline of their job

description to guide. Let’s take a look at it together (still in paragraph 9).

Inquiry

“[T]he faithful should remember that the supreme purpose of the apostolate is that the church’s message is made known to the world by word and deed and that his grace is communicated.”

How in the world are they going to do that? Like this (still in paragraph 9):

1. Live like a Christian in a way the candidates can see them doing so
2. Invite the candidates into their homes
3. Talk to the candidates
4. Invite the candidates to community gatherings

That’s what they have to do. What you have to do is think of creative ways to help the parishioners do these things. Don’t fall into the rut of taking on these tasks yourself. Sit down right now and list 20 ways you can encourage the parishioners to take on their role. I started a list [here](#). You can go there and add your 20.

Liturgies

Whenever you celebrate a ritual with the catechumens, “the faithful should seek to be present and should take an active part in the responses, prayers, singing, and acclamations.”

Can you think of 20 ways to help them do that? Come up with your own list before you [check out mine](#).

Election Sunday

The election of the catechumens is a huge event. It really ought to be second only to the Easter Vigil in your parish. It is like a couple that has been dating for a long time finally announces their engagement. Like an engagement, the election of the catechumens doesn’t just change them; it changes the entire parish family.

“On the day of election, because it is a day of growth for the community, the faithful, when called upon, should be sure to give honest and carefully considered testimony about the catechumens.”

Obviously, if the faithful have not been involved in the lives of the candidates during the inquiry and catechumenate stages, they won't be able to give honest testimony. So steps one and two are critical helping the parishioners fulfill this part of their job description. Assuming you've gotten them this far, what are 20 things you can do to help them testify? Once you have your list, [check out mine here.](#)

Lent

"[T]he faithful should take care to participate in the rites of the scrutinies and presentations and give the elect the example of their own renewal. At the Easter Vigil, they should attach great importance to renewing their own baptismal promises."

Give me 20, and then [check mine.](#)

Easter

"[T]he faithful should take part in the Masses for the neophytesâ€welcome the neophytes with open arms in charity, and help them to feel more at home in the community of the baptized."

Got your 20? If you do, [compare them to mine.](#)

100 ideas for involving parishioners

Inquiry

1. Once a month, remind the parishioners that there are [number] people asking questions about being Catholic
2. Print a question in the bulletin that an inquirer asked and how you answered
3. Once a month, write a paragraph in the bulletin or Web site about something an inquirer witnessed in your parish that impressed him
4. Give the names of the inquirers to the elderly and homebound and ask them to pray for the inquirers
5. Create a once-a-quarter dinner schedule for each inquirer. Ask parishioners to sign up to host an inquirer for dinner.
6. Create a 3 x 5 prayer card to hand out at Mass. Side A, a prayer for the inquirers; Side B, three ice-breaker questions to ask an inquirer to engage her in conversation
7. Create large, bright name tags for the inquirers to wear to parish events; Tell parishioners to look for the name tags
8. Obtain or create a master list of parish meetings and events. Ask for volunteers to call and invite inquirers to the events.
9. One month before Halloween, ask for volunteers to invite the children of an inquirer to go trick or treating with their children
10. One month before Thanksgiving, ask for volunteers to invite an inquirer over for Thanksgiving dinner
11. One month before Christmas, ask for volunteers to invite an inquirer over for Christmas dinner or a Christmas party
12. One month before July 4, ask for volunteers to invite an inquirer to view the fireworks or come to a picnic
13. Create a Facebook page for each inquirer. Ask the teens and young adults to invite the inquires to be "friends" on their Facebook pages
14. Ask the children in the parish school or parish catechetical program to invite the children of the inquires to be "friends" on their Myspace pages
15. Add pictures and short bios of the inquirers to the parish Web site
16. One month before Pancake Sunday (or your parish equivalent), line up volunteers to invite an inquirer to sit with them during the meal
17. Start a friendly "points in heaven" competition among the parishioners; they get a point for every person they introduce an inquirer to whom the inquirer hasn't met before. Keep score on the parish Web site.
18. Ask the youth group to personally give the inquires a free gift certificate to the annual car wash or equivalent parish fund raiser
19. Ask the parish school or catechetical program children to create a poster of the inquirers
20. Ask the teens or young adults to create a YouTube clip of each inquirer and post on the parish Web site

[Click here](#) to add your ideas to the list!

Liturgies

1. Publish the schedule of liturgies for the year which will include rites for the catechumens
2. For three weeks before each special liturgy, encourage parishioners to bring their non-Catholic and non-attending Catholic friends and family to the special rite
3. Collaborate with the musician to be sure the music at these liturgies is drop-dead-easy to sing
4. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse the rite so there are no glitches. Bumpy and awkward transitions kill participation
5. Schedule the best lectors so the assembly will be drawn into the readings
6. Schedule a team meeting with the pastor to brainstorm best ideas for the homily
7. Use big symbols that everyone can see, hear, and smell
8. Remind all the ministers to smile and relax
9. Provide a lesson plan based on the rite for the parish school religion class and the parish catechetical program
10. Ask the youth group to provide hospitality
11. Send a written invitation to the senior citizens to come to the liturgy to pray for those who are becoming Catholic
12. E-mail (or better, text message) the youth and young adults with the same invitation
13. Publish the pictures of the catechumens in the bulletin the week before and the week of the special liturgy
14. Write a note in the bulletin the week after the liturgy thanking all the parishioners who participated
15. Do a 45 second (practice until you have it down) explanation of the rite afterward, during the announcements. It's clearer for folks if they've experienced it before you explain it.
16. If possible, place the catechumens at various places throughout the assembly to create a sense of unity between them and the parishioners
17. Involve the assembly in gestures of blessing and prayer for the catechumens
18. Cut out every possible time waster in the liturgy to get people out of Mass on time or close to on time
19. Provide a detailed worship aid so those unfamiliar with the rite will know what to do
20. The following week, write a note in the bulletin or on the Web site describing the catechumens' reaction to the hospitality of the parishioners during the liturgy

[Click here](#) to add your ideas to the list!

Election Sunday

1. Invite parishioners to write a letter to the *pastor* about a catechumen. The testimony about the catechumen should begin with, "God has." (A testimony is about the action of God and not about the good works of the candidate.)
2. Invite parishioners to write a letter to the *bishop* about a catechumen. The testimony about the catechumen should begin with, "God has."
3. Place a drop box in the gathering space or vestibule of the church. Provide parishioners with 3 x 5 cards on which they can write testimonies for the catechumens.
4. Create a private e-mail address that parishioners can use to testify about a catechumen. Each testimony should begin with, "God has."
5. Ask the confirmation candidates to write a testimony for a catechumen.
6. Ask the children of the parish, especially the first communion candidates, to draw pictures of the catechumens and how God has acted in their lives. If they don't know the catechumens (why not?), have them draw a picture of how they hope God will act in their lives.
7. Collect all the written and e-mailed testimonies and the drawings in a parish archive.
8. Encourage sponsors to keep of journal that tracks the times they have seen God act in the life of the catechumen.
9. If the godparents are different people than the sponsors, encourage them to do the same.
10. Encourage spouses and other family members to do the same.
11. Encourage the rest of the team to do the same.
12. Schedule a retreat day well before the Rite of Election to discern who will be chosen for baptism. Make testimonies part of the retreat experience.
13. Invite parishioners who cannot attend the retreat to fast and pray for those who will be discerning.
14. Write your own testimony for each catechumen, and give it to him or her on fine stationery.
15. Invite the elderly and home bound of the parish to pray for those who will testify about the catechumens.
16. Invite the neophytes (those baptized at the last Easter Vigil) to pray for the catechumens and those who will testify for them.
17. In the weeks before the Rite of Election, provide a "question of the week" for parish households to reflect upon based on the journey of the catechumens. For example, "How have we seen God's spirit active in the catechumens?"
18. The week before the Rite of Election, publish a description of what testimony is and isn't.
19. During the parish rite of sending, invite the assembly to testify for the catechumens. Have a wireless mike available.
20. In the parish rite of sending, sing an acclamation at the conclusion of the testimonies. Choose an acclamation everyone knows well.

[Click here](#) to add your ideas to the list!

Lent

1. Make the Sunday before Ash Wednesday a "Call to Lent" Sunday. Provide lenten prayer materials that include prayers for the elect.
2. Be sure the elect participate in the Ash Wednesday liturgies, and include them in the intercessions.
3. Provide a weekly faith sharing question in the Sunday bulletin based on the Gospels of Lent. Ask parishioners and the elect to discuss the questions with their families as part of their lenten discipline.
4. Provide a list of penitential practices for the parish to participate in as an example to the elect. See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1436-1437, for ideas.
5. Provide copies of the seven penitential psalms for parishioners. Ask them to pray the psalms regularly as a prayer for the elect. (The penitential psalms are Psalms [6](#), [32](#), [38](#), [51](#), [102](#), [130](#), [143](#).)
6. Publicize the dates of the scrutinies shortly after the Christmas season ends, and ask parishioners to put them on their calendars.
7. Put an insert in the bulletin explaining the importance of the scrutinies about three weeks before Lent begins.
8. Schedule a parish evening of reflection during each of the scrutiny weeks. Base the reflection on the scrutiny gospels.
9. Ask parishioners to make one extra lenten sacrifice as a prayer for the elect.
10. Ask parishioners to reconcile with an alienated family member or friend during Lent as an example to the elect.
11. Designate a parish charity for everyone to contribute to for Lent as an example to the elect of almsgiving.
12. Invite the elect to the parish reconciliation service. While they cannot fully participate in the sacrament of penance, they can pray with the rest of the parish and witness their example.
13. Encourage parishioners to adopt a new prayer practice for Lent. Introduce the elect to [prayer practices](#) they might be unfamiliar with.
14. Keep the font filled throughout Lent as a reminder to the parish of the coming initiation of the elect and as a reminder of their own baptisms.
15. Challenge parishioners to wrestle with and overcome one temptation this Lent as an example to the elect.
16. Challenge parishioners to identify and strengthen one virtue this Lent as an example to the elect.
17. Invite the children in the school and the religious education program to draw maps of the parish's lenten journey that include the journey of the elect to initiation.
18. Host lenten soup suppers that include the elect and a diverse mix of parishioners.
19. Host an Easter egg decorating party late in Lent that includes the elect and their children and a diverse mix of parishioners.
20. Lent is an especially good time to focus on the Corporal Works of Mercy. Encourage parishioners to chose one or two to practice especially diligently as an example to the elect. Make sure the elect are familiar with them. (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2447.)

[Click here](#) to add your ideas to the list!

Easter

1. Help parishioners remember that the Easter Triduum begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Give them three months notice to place all the liturgies of the Triduum on their calendars.
2. Ask parishioners to be in solidarity with the elect by fasting on Good Friday and Holy Saturday and refraining from their usual activities (see RCIA 185).
3. Invite the teenagers of the parish to be towel bearers for the elect during the baptisms.
4. Coordinate with the pastor's schedule so he meets with or calls each of the neophytes in the week after the Vigil to offer congratulations.
5. Ask the children in the parish school and religious education program to write notes of congratulations to the neophytes.
6. Ask the seniors of the parish to do the same.
7. Schedule a day of reflection shortly after the Vigil. Invite the parishioners and the neophytes to recall and rejoice in their experience of the initiation rites.
8. Ask some of the parish organizations (youth group, school, religious education, Knights of Columbus, etc.) to invite the neophytes to come to one of their meetings or classes to have the neophytes reflect on their experience of the Easter Vigil.
9. Encourage parishioners to participate in every Sunday of the Easter season. These are high catechetical moments for the neophytes, and the presence of the assembly teaches them about the primacy of Easter.
10. Don't be discouraged if the neophytes don't participate in small group meetings in the weeks after Easter. The primary catechesis for them is the Sunday liturgy. Be sure that's where they are showing up.
11. Publish pictures of the newly-initiated in the bulletin and on the parish Web site.
12. Ask the neophytes to sit together in a designated and visible place with their godparents for every Sunday of Easter.
13. Provide a weekly faith sharing question in the Sunday bulletin based on the Gospels of Easter. Ask parishioners and the neophytes to discuss the questions with their families during the 50 days of Easter.
14. Ask parishioners to invite the neophytes to their homes for barbecues or dinners during the Easter season.
15. Schedule an evening of reflection on the one-month anniversary of the neophytes' initiation. Invite a diverse group of parishioners to speak about what the like best about being Catholic.
16. Initiate a small faith sharing group with the homilists and a few parishioners or catechumenate team members to form [mystagogical homilies](#) for Easter.
17. Ask some of the neophytes to testify at the Masses of Easter about their experience of the Easter Vigil.
18. Be sure the godparents are bringing the neophytes to the parish festival and other spring events and introducing them to parishioners they don't know. If the godparents are not present in the parish, assign a parish proxy to fill in.
19. Take the neophytes to the diocesan Mass for the newly initiated. If you diocese doesn't have one, host a Mass at your parish, and invite all the neophytes from the other parishes to come.
20. On the one-year anniversary of their initiation, schedule a party for the neophytes.

