

# Prioritizing Accompaniment in the RCIA Process



**Nicholas Hardesty**  
*Initiate Webinar Series*  
May 6, 2021



1



## Agenda



- Opening prayer
- Introductions and Setting the Stage
- Presentation on Accompaniment
  - What Is Accompaniment?
  - Why Accompaniment Should Be Prioritized in the RCIA
  - How We Can Do This
- Breakout Conversations
- Large Group Sharing/Q&A
- Wrap-Up
- Closing Prayer

2



## What Is Accompaniment?



**Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*:**

- The “art of accompaniment ... teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.” (169)
- It “must lead others ever close to God, in whom we attain true freedom.” (170)

**Catholic Apostolate Center, “The Art of Accompaniment”:**

- “Spiritual accompaniment is the apostolate of intentional relationship that is oriented toward a definitive direction of growth in holiness and transformation in the Person of Christ.” (pg. 8)
- “A relationship between two or more people who share mutuality and reciprocity on the journey of the spiritual life.” (pg. 8, 11)

**In short:** Accompaniment is *intentional friendship*

3

3



## Why Accompaniment Should Be Prioritized in the RCIA

**Reason #1: It's an essential part of the process.**

- “By **joining the catechumens** in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, **the faithful provide an example** that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.” (RCIA, 4)
- “The right of initiation is suited to **a spiritual journey of adults ...**” (5)
- The faithful “should therefore show themselves ready ... to welcome [the candidates for the catechumenate] into their homes, **into personal conversation**, and into community gatherings (9.1)
- “A sponsor **accompanies any candidate** seeking admission as a catechumen.” (10)
- “It is the responsibility of godparents **to show** the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, **to sustain** the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, **to bear witness**, and **to guide** the candidates’ progress in the baptismal life.” (11)
- “As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by **the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community**, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer” (75.2)

4

4



## Why Accompaniment Should Be Prioritized in the RCIA

### Reason #2: In our zeal to catechize well, accompaniment is often unintentionally minimized

- In the 1970s and 80s, the RCIA, if it was implemented at all, lacked much of the catechetical rigor that was supposed to have
- In many parishes, the idea was to avoid memorization, avoid being overly dogmatic, avoid being authoritarian
- As a result, sessions within the process overly emphasized feelings, subjective experience, and relationship-building – even at the expense of objective truth
- But, as the catechetical project of JPII's pontificate began to be realized – especially with the publication of the CCC in 1992 – and after the resurgence of Catholic apologetics in the 90s and early 2000s, parishes swung sharply in the other direction
- The emphasis began to be placed on teaching everything the Church taught
- And since we ourselves learned in classrooms, and our lives are so dictated by the typical school calendar, it seemed obvious that we would structure our sessions in this way
- But, it's hard to accompany someone or to fold them into the ecclesial community in a classroom setting, and it's almost impossible to guarantee conversion in 8-9 months.

5

5



## Why Accompaniment Should Be Prioritized in the RCIA

### Reason #3: It is an essential way to know and to enter into communion with Jesus

- That is, after all, the point of all this, right?
- How do we come to know Jesus? Not just know about Him, but *really know Him*, to have the kind of intuition and closeness of intimate friends?
- Well, you learn about Him, about His life, what He said and did, who He is
- You hear Him speaking in the bible, in the liturgy, in prayer
- In the liturgy, Jesus even shares His own life with you
- What I think we tend to forget is that Jesus can also be found in other people, and other people help us to see and to hear Jesus in the other sources
- I wonder if we've forgotten this because our parish communities aren't places where we expect to get to know Jesus
- Is your parish welcoming and hospitable? Does it care about the every-day needs of people and strive to meet them? Is it warm, and gracious, and joyful? Does it fight for justice but also extend mercy? Is it a place where people actually find healing? Is it a place where the gospel is proclaimed?
- If we're honest, we have to admit that our parishes aren't always like this, and the work to get them there seems so difficult, it's easier to just make sure we teach everything and we celebrate the rites well, and then hope for the best

6

6



## How to Prioritize Accompaniment

### Space out your teachings more

- The period of evangelization and pre-catechumenate has no predetermined length of time (RCIA, 18; National Statutes, 1)
- The catechumenate stage should take *at least* a year, if not longer (RCIA 7.1, 76; National Statutes, 6)

### Make the parish the curriculum

- "The Parish Is the Curriculum ... Thus, while the parish may *have an* adult faith formation program, it is no less true that the parish *is* an adult faith formation program." (USCCB, "Our Hearts Were Burning within Us, 118-121)
- As Diana Macalintal says, "We have to stop trying to get the parish involved in the RCIA and start getting the catechumens and candidates involved in the parish."

### Form your sponsors and godparents in accompaniment

### Interview your catechumens and candidates at important moments

### If you must be in the classroom, at least make that time discussion-friendly

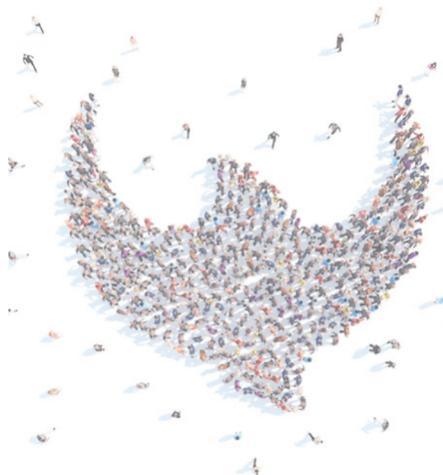
### You don't have to cover *everything*

7

7



## Your experience



### Breakout discussion:

How does your parish community form catechumens and candidates?

If you see a need for improvement, what are some changes you could make to prioritize accompaniment?

What's keeping you from making these changes, and what can you do about it?

8

8



## Conclusion

**For more information:**

- *Your Parish Is the Curriculum: RCIA in the Midst of the Community*, by Diana Macalintal (142 pgs, \$18.95)
- ["The Art of Accompaniment: Theological, Spiritual, and Practical Elements of Building a More Relational Church"](#), developed by Colleen Campbell and Thomas Carani, Catholic Apostolate Center
- TeamRCIA.com
  - ["The parish is the RCIA catechetical plan"](#)
  - ["The one, most important thing we have to teach in the RCIA"](#)
  - ["The RCIA challenge of developing intimacy with Jesus"](#)
  - ["Six RCIA actions that guarantee intimacy with Christ"](#)
  - ["Sponsors: Nine must-know facts"](#)

**How can I help? Let me know:**

- Email: [nhardesty@catholicaoc.org](mailto:nhardesty@catholicaoc.org)
- Some possible options:
  - RCIA team training (what RCIA is, how to get 1-on-1, how to lead a small group, etc.)
  - Sponsor training
  - Creating an RCIA calendar
  - Training on catechetical methodology
  - How to prioritize accompaniment

9

9



## Announcements


TOGETHER

**Next *Initiate*: May 20**  
 "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do: New Approaches to Forming Candidates"

[www.catholicaoc.org/together](http://www.catholicaoc.org/together)



BEACONS of LIGHT  
Pastoral Planning for Our Third Century

[www.catholicaoc.org/beacons](http://www.catholicaoc.org/beacons)

10

10