

Module 7: Develop an apprenticeship plan

Session 1: Training in the Christian way of life

Objective: Discover how catechumenate formation means showing children a way of life.

My girls are soccer players. They became soccer players, not by reading books on soccer, or going to soccer class, or watching soccer film. They became soccer players by playing soccer. Over the past ten to twelve years, they have had good training. Coaches and teammates have shown them how to play soccer by putting the ball at their feet and playing the game with them.

So it is with becoming a Christian. Children learn to be Christians from other Christians. They receive training in the Christian way of life by being with other Christians. And, just like learning to play soccer, it takes a while. When my girls first joined a team at age four, no one knew if they would really become soccer players. Having a little jersey and little cleats didn't really make them soccer players. But, gradually over the years, they really learned and loved the game. They became soccer players.

Becoming a Christian is also a gradual process. Children need time to learn the way of life and decide if they want to be a follower Jesus. The period of the catechumenate is designed to give them the time and the training they need to be good Christians.

The training program

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults really does call it "training." It says that the catechumenate is "aimed at training them in the Christian life" (no. 75; Canada no. 75). Then the four components of the "training program" are outlined. In this first session, we'll discuss the general vision of the training that is provided in paragraph 75. Then, in sessions 2, 3, and 4, we'll explore 75.2, 75.3, and 75.4. In Module 8, we'll come back to examine 75.1, which is all about the suitable catechesis that happens during the catechumenate. In Module 7, we'll show you how to do catechumenate catechesis. But catechesis is just one part of the training program, so let's return to general vision of catechumenate.

A way of life

The key to catechumenate formation is the *Christian way of life*. You can teach doctrine and Scripture and tradition, but a way of life must be lived and modeled. Thus, in addition to the teaching component of catechumenate formation, you have to create opportunities for the children to be in and amongst other Catholic Christians. Please don't assume it will just happen. Remember these folks are rather new to church life, so although some of this will happen informally, you also need to create opportunities for the children and their families to:

- Listen to the word of God and learn the teachings of the Church (no. 75.1),
- Be with, pray with, and socialize with other Catholic Christian families (no. 75.2),
- Worship with others (no. 75.3),
- Witness and “work actively with others to spread the Gospel” (no. 75.4).

These four components of the “suitable pastoral formation” described in paragraph 75 — catechesis, community, worship, and apostolic works of service — combine to form a comprehensive approach to forming new Christians.

Also, remember this formation “is to be extended over several years, if need be” (no. 253; Canada no. 243). So don’t panic and think you have to do all this in a few short months. The period of the catechumenate “should extend for at least one year” (National Statutes, no. 6; Canada n/a). It takes as long as it takes. Or, as the RCIA would say, the journey “varies according to many forms of God’s grace” (no. 5; Canada no. 5).

Derek’s story

A real-life example may help to give a picture of what catechumenate formation looks like. Let’s go back to Derek and his mom, whom we met in Module 6. Remember that they came sporadically at first but then began to show more commitment and more interest, so we celebrated the Rite of Acceptance. Here are some examples of Derek’s catechumenate formation and how we tried to show him the Catholic Christian way of life.

- (75.1) Derek came to nine o’clock Mass every week and was dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word for dismissal catechesis (75.3). He and his mom also came to the catechetical sessions after Mass. More on this in Module 8.
- (75.2) Derek and his mom were paired with the Johnsons who served as their sponsoring family. The Johnsons served as role models. More on this in Session 2.
- (75.3) We celebrated the minor rites of the catechumenate with Derek. More on liturgical formation in Session 3.
- (75.4) Derek and his mom both got involved in some service activities in the parish. More on this in Session 4.

You can see that Derek’s formation involved a lot more than catechetical sessions. In Module 8, we’ll walk you through how to do all the catechesis. However, before we do the module on catechesis, let’s think about paragraph 75 as a whole. Then we’ll continue on with 75.2.

FUN FACT

Paragraph 75

I’m applying some healthy peer pressure when I say, “*Everybody* knows paragraph 75.”

So if you want to impress your initiation friends and neighbors, memorize no. 75! It might just be the most important paragraph in the RCIA!



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Session 2: How a disappointing reception changed the way catechumens became part of the parish family

Objective: Learn how to get the whole parish to warmly embrace the child catechumens.

Many years ago at a lovely reception after our parish Easter Vigil, I sat with a family whose three children had just been fully initiated. We all enjoyed the cake and punch while the kids opened the gifts that their godparents had given them. All around us parishioners mixed and mingled, aglow in the glory of the Vigil. Yet, I am sad to say, no one, other than the parish staff, came up and spoke to the family.

On that night, I vowed that would never happen again. I would be sure that the children in RCIA and their families would be more dearly embraced by the parish, and, in turn, that we'd spend more time with the community, rather than isolated in our cozy classroom.

Win-win: more connection and more people at the Vigil

This would be a win-win. I thought that if we had the children's RCIA group more visible and active in the community, then everybody would win:

- Child catechumens would win—the catechumens and their families would be more immersed in the community of disciples and thereby learn more of the Catholic Christian way of life.
- Community members win—more people from the parish would come to the Vigil because they would know the catechumens and want to come, welcome, support, and celebrate with our newest members.
- More people at the Vigil is a win for the entire parish! We are all renewed and strengthened in faith by our participation in the paschal mystery at the Easter Vigil.

So we started the ministry of sponsoring families as a way to get RCIA families more immersed in parish life.

Sponsoring families help the new folks feel connected to the parish

I strongly believe that one of the best ways to insure that a catechumenal family is not only connected, but *formed* by the Christian community is by pairing them with a sponsoring family. Or another option is to have an individual sponsor or sponsor couple. Not only does the sponsor or sponsoring family help the catechumenal family connect to the community, it takes some of the work and worry off of you. You have so many responsibilities; it's hard to keep track of how well the catechumenal family is being integrated into the parish. Give that job to the sponsor.

In addition to helping the catechumenal family, asking sponsoring families to take a responsible role in the formation of a child and family helps to engage more parishioners in the process of initiation. Remember, initiation is the responsibility of all the baptized (no. 9; Canada no. 9). Furthermore, on several occasions, when we have asked a parish family to serve as a sponsoring family, the experience has transformed a “marginally active” family into an “active” parish family. By this I mean to suggest that you should be open and broad in your recruitment of sponsoring families. Look beyond the folks who already “do everything.” RCIA can be a journey of conversion for sponsors, too.

Besides accompanying the catechumenal family to parish social, service, and worship events, ask sponsoring families to also do some of or all of the following:

- Introduce the catechumenal child and family to others in the parish (no. 38; Canada no. 38).
- Invite the catechumenal family to your home.
- Talk about family prayer: grace before meals, prayers before important occasions, the rosary, Advent prayers, or other family traditions.
- Actually pray together! Make it super simple. Prayer often needs to be taught through modeling. Many catechumenal families don’t know “how” to pray.
- Visit other Catholic churches or institutions in your area. For example, St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, home of our newest American saint, St. Mother Theodore Guerin, is in my city. I ask sponsoring families to take a “field trip” to visit Mother Theodore. This is also a good thing to do around the Solemnity of All Saints.
- Stand up with the catechumenal family during the rites.

The entire Christian community

Certainly, sponsors and sponsoring families do not have sole responsibility for helping the catechumens and their families “become familiar with the Christian way of life” (no. 75.2; Canada no. 75.2). As paragraph 75.2 continues, they are “helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents and the *entire Christian community*.” Here are some other ways to encourage the parish to give help and example to the catechumens:

- Pray for the catechumens.
 - In the general intercessions at Sunday Mass (no. 83.2; Canada no. 83.2)
 - In religious education, youth ministry, and Catholic school
 - In the bulletin and parish newsletter
- Ask the parish social committee or evangelization committee what they could do to welcome the catechumenal family.
- Have everyone in adult and children’s RCIA participate in a parish function together -- go to the parish festival, make sandwiches for the soup kitchen, attend the Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration.

Don’t leave it to chance

However you decide to organize and structure 75.2, please don’t leave it to chance, as I have done on a number of occasions. In the past, I thought, “Our parish is so friendly; it’s easy to get to know people.” Unfortunately, I could tell tales of catechumenal families kindly admitting, “We really don’t know anyone in



the parish,” even after they’d been in the catechumenate for weeks. Don’t let this happen to your catechumens. Take time to structure the way your community gives “help and example.”

Lastly, go to the online forum to suggest ways that your community helps and supports its catechumens. And spend some time with Exercise 2.

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Session 3: The church is like a mother

Objective: Discover the many ways in which the rites of the RCIA form child catechumens.

Maybe it's because I'm a mother. Or maybe it's because I've seen the power of the rites with children and their families. But one of my favorite lines in the RCIA is:

The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing (no. 75.3; Canada no. 75.3).

What is it that the church does through the rites that is like a mother who helps her children on their journey? A mother teaches and forms children through her daily actions, her daily work. Liturgy is the church's action. It is her daily work to worship God. Through the church's liturgical actions, she forms people in the faith.

Likewise, through the rites of the RCIA, the church forms children in the faith. "Little by little" the rites purify and strengthen the catechumens. In particular, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults tells us that "celebrations of the word of God" are especially important (no. 75.3; Canada no. 75.3). So let's take a look at these celebrations of the word, as well as the rites of the catechumenate, and see how they fit into the overall formation of the children during the period of the catechumenate.

Celebration of the word of God

Celebrations of the word are such a marvelous way to form children in the Christian way of life because the stories, especially the gospels, are so vivid and so instructive. And they are done in the context of liturgical celebration, so we are not doing an academic study of the Scriptures; we are celebrating and later "breaking open" God's word to us.

The RCIA says that during the catechumenate there are three types of celebrations of the word. When I name each one, I'm going to also give an example of what this might look like in your parish.

FUN FACT

Celebrate God's word!

The RCIA is quite steadfast in describing the primary role that celebrations of the word of God have in the catechumenate. You can't miss the point that we are to celebrate the word during catechumenate.

Look at all these references: 75.1, 75.3, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85-89, 92, 96, 100.

1. Special celebrations of the word arranged for the benefit of the catechumens (nos. 75.3, 81, 82).

- Your religious education program or Catholic school might have a celebration of the word to pray for the strengthening of the catechumens in your midst.
- 2. Participation in the Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass (nos. 75.3, 81, 83).
 - Child catechumens come to Sunday Mass and are dismissed after the homily with their catechist. They then gather in another space to “break open the word.” (no. 67.A; Canada no. 67.A).
- 3. Celebrations that are held at the beginning or end of a catechetical session (nos. 81, 84; Canada no. 81, 84).
 - You are having a special catechetical session on Eucharist. You end the session with a celebration of the word and a blessing of catechumens (no. 89; Canada no. 89).

Minor exorcisms, blessings, and anointing of child catechumens

One of the simplest, yet most dramatic, ways you can improve your catechumenate right now is to end your sessions with a blessing, exorcism, or anointing. As a “qualified catechist” (see nos. 91, 96, 16; Canada nos. 91, 96, 16), you may give the blessing “at the end of a meeting for catechesis.” Ask the parents to participate as well. Let me give you a picture of what it might look like.

At the end of our catechetical session, I invite everyone to gather around the enthroned word of God. Then, I use the following general outline.

- Prayer—simple and spontaneous, “Let us pray...”
- Reading—one or two brief verses from Scripture that summarize the session
- Silence
- Blessing—Have your ritual text with you. Follow the rubrics given in no. 97 (Canada no. 97).
 - With hands outstretched pray option “G” or any other prayer of blessing.
 - Option: memorize the prayer so you don’t need the book.
 - Option: memorize and sing the prayer. (If I can do this, you can! I am not a singer. It makes such a difference. Practice in the mirror at home).
 - Lay your hands in prayer on the catechumen’s head. Invite parents, sponsors, and companions to do the same.
- Closing prayer or sign of peace or song.

When you close your catechetical session in this fashion, you can literally feel the atmosphere in the room change from one of chatter and catechesis to one of reverence and ritual. When I extend my hands in prayer over the children, there is immediate silence, and their eyes widen as I pray. When I sing, their eyes widen even more!

Additionally, invite your pastor or the deacon to celebrate the anointing of the catechumens, especially on one of the weeks when the lectionary readings refer to anointing or Spirit or strengthening. See paragraphs 98-103 (Canada nos. 98-102, 191). This is a great way to get the clergy involved, and it doesn’t take much time.

There are certainly many ways that Mother Church forms her catechumens by means of liturgical rites. Go to Exercise 3 for further reflection on the rites.



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Session 4: Beyond service projects: a learn-by-doing model of faith formation

Objective: Explore the various ways child catechumens can learn to work with others in Christian service.

Somehow from our discussion of the lectionary readings for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the children's RCIA group decided that we would throw a St. Valentine party for the kids at the Chestnut Community Center. The center was sponsored by a local Baptist church. Lots of different churches supported it, however, and helped the underprivileged kids in the after school program. So for the next couple of weeks, instead of "regular" catechetical sessions, we gathered toiletries and school supplies and planned the party for the children at Chestnut Community.

Also, we worked together with our parish religious education program. Kids in religious education donated items, and some of them helped us with the party. Parents from children's RCIA and parents from religious education helped at the party, too.

During our next RCIA session, we talked about our experience. We had one of those "special celebrations of the word" described in paragraph 82 (Canada no. 82). It was very simple. We read the readings for the Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time again and discussed how we, as disciples, were trying to follow Jesus' call to be "light" for the world. We even brought in a little bit of Catholic Social Teaching.

A well-rounded service opportunity

There are several things I liked about the way the Valentine party happened:

- **Word**—The idea flowed from our discussion of the Sunday readings. Sure, I nudged the conversation in that direction, but the catechumens and parents came up with the idea. It was not a "service project" that was assigned to them or required of them.
- **Community**—It involved child catechumens, their parents, sponsoring families, as well as children and parents from religious education.
- **Liturgical rites**—We brought closure to the experience with a liturgical ritual.
- **Service with others**—The catechumens worked alongside members of our community to serve those in need. They did not just collect bags of school supplies and then have them delivered. The catechumens worked with baptized children in our parish, and then they reached out to other children from another community. This gave them a chance to informally "witness" to their faith .

Now, I am not suggesting that every service activity must have these four components. What I am suggesting is that opportunities for service and witness are every bit as formative as formal catechetical sessions. Thus, including formation in Christian service (75.4; Canada no. 75.4) is essential to catechumenal formation.

Other ideas

Providing formation opportunities for child catechumens to learn the ways of Christian service does not have to be as big and organized as the example given above. Below are some other simpler ideas. Please note that the first two examples allow for the catechumens to connect with their same-age parish companions. And some of these ideas may only be appropriate for some of your catechumens. Namely, you would only ask middle school catechumens to participate in a middle school service activity, likewise for high school. Finally, adapt these ideas to fit with what's going on in your parish.

- Join the middle school kids from religious education when they make Christmas cards and go caroling at the senior citizen center and nursing home.
- Join the high school youth group as they make and deliver Thanksgiving baskets.
- Ask the sponsoring family to include their catechumenal family in the Christian service that they do. Provide some ideas to the sponsoring family.
- Ask your Social Concerns Committee what your children's RCIA group can do to help with one of their projects.
- Encourage your child catechumens to come up with their own ideas for living the gospel call to serve others.

Learning to be a disciple

All in all what we are trying to do is show the young catechumens that the Christian way of life is a life of service to others. Although teaching the corporal works of mercy is fine, it's better to teach by *doing*.

Lastly, this module has given you an overview of the "suitable pastoral formation" that is described in paragraph 75. We discussed formation in the community's way of life (75.2; Canada no. 75.2), formation by means of liturgical rites (75.3; Canada no. 75.3), and formation through apostolic works of service (75.4; Canada no. 75.4). In the next module, we'll return to paragraph 75.1 (Canada no. 75.1) and examine the "suitable catechesis" that is part of the overall catechumenate formation the children receive.

Before we focus more directly on catechumenate catechesis, go to Exercise 4 to wrap up Module 7.