

Children and youth in the RCIA process or Confirmation program

The argument that is often made by parents, and sometimes by pastors or parish staff members, who want the child or youth in question to “do things with their classmates” and delay First Communion and Confirmation must not hold sway. The law requires their full initiation, unless there is a grave reason to the contrary (*nisi gravis obstet ratio*), cf. canon 866.

Unbaptized Children: Unbaptized children who have attained the use of reason (approximately age 7) have the same rights as adults for the purpose of Christian initiation (canon 852 §1, RCIA #252). These children are to be admitted to the catechumenate and be led through the several stages to sacramental initiation (canon 851 §1). These stages can and ought to be adapted to their age. A minor older than seven and who has the use of reason is to be treated as an adult in terms of the law and should be initiated per the process described in Part I, chapter One of the RCIA (RCIA #'s 36-251). They should receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil [or whenever they are initiated] (canon 866 and RCIA *National Statutes*, #18).

Baptized and catechized (non-Catholic) Children. Children baptized and catechized in a separated ecclesial community with the use of reason (ages 7-18) who are seeking full communion are also considered adults for purposes of Christian Initiation. For those already baptized and catechized, “no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity.”¹ They should be brought into full communion using the rites described in Part II, chapter 5 of the RCIA: “Reception of Baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church.” (RCIA #'s 473-504). They may participate in liturgical rites marking their progress (RCIA #478). These children make a profession of faith, are received into the Church, are confirmed and receive Eucharist (RCIA, #490-498). Reception of candidates into the communion of the Catholic Church may take place at a Sunday Eucharist of the parish (RCIA *National Statutes*, #32). Reception may also take place at the Paschal (Easter) Vigil, for pastoral reasons (RCIA *National Statutes*, #34).

Relevant Canons in the Code of Canon Law

Can. 2 For the most part the Code does not define the rites which must be observed in celebrating liturgical actions. Therefore, liturgical laws in force until now retain their force unless one of them is contrary to the canons of the Code.

Can. 97 §1. A person who has completed the eighteenth year of age has reached majority; below this age, a person is a minor.

§2. A minor before the completion of the seventh year is called an infant and is considered not responsible for oneself (*non sui compos*). With the completion of the seventh year, however, a minor is presumed to have the use of reason.

Can. 98 §1. A person who has reached majority has the full exercise of his or her rights.

§2. A minor, in the exercise of his or her rights, remains subject to the authority of parents or guardians except in those matters in which minors are exempted from their authority by divine law or canon law. In what pertains to the appointment of guardians and their authority, the precepts of civil law are to be observed unless canon law provides otherwise or unless in certain

¹ RCIA #473, quoting Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 18.

cases the diocesan bishop, for a just cause, has decided to provide for the matter through the appointment of another guardian.

Can. 99 Whoever habitually lacks the use of reason is considered not responsible for oneself (*non sui compos*) and is equated with infants.

Can. 111 §1. Through the reception of baptism, the child of parents who belong to the Latin Church is enrolled in it, or, if one or the other does not belong to it, both parents have chosen by mutual agreement to have the offspring baptized in the Latin Church. If there is no mutual agreement, however, the child is enrolled in the ritual Church to which the father belongs.

§2. Anyone to be baptized who has completed the fourteenth year of age can freely choose to be baptized in the Latin Church or in another ritual Church *sui iuris*; in that case, the person belongs to the Church which he or she has chosen.

Can. 842 §1. A person who has not received baptism cannot be admitted validly to the other sacraments.

§2. The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Most Holy Eucharist are interrelated in such a way that they are required for full Christian initiation.

Can. 851 The celebration of baptism must be prepared properly; consequently:

°1 an adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and is to be led insofar as possible through the various stages to sacramental initiation, according to the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms issued by it;

Canon 852 §1. The prescripts of the canons on adult baptism are to be applied to all those who, no longer infants, have attained the use of reason.

Can. 863. The baptism of adults, at least of those who have completed their fourteenth year, is to be deferred to the diocesan bishop so that he himself administers it if he has judged it expedient.

Can. 866 Unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, an adult who is baptized is to be confirmed immediately after baptism and is to participate in the eucharistic celebration also by receiving communion.

Can. 883. The following possess the faculty of administering confirmation by the law itself:

°1 within the boundaries of their jurisdiction, those who are equivalent in law to a diocesan bishop;

°2 as regards the person in question, the presbyter who by virtue of office or mandate of the diocesan bishop baptizes one who is no longer an infant or admits one already baptized into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Can. 884 §1. The diocesan bishop is to administer confirmation personally or is to take care that another bishop administers it. If necessity requires it, he can grant the faculty to one or more specific presbyters, who are to administer this sacrament.

§2. For a grave cause the bishop and even the presbyter endowed with the faculty of confirming in virtue of the law or the special grant of the competent authority can in single cases also associate presbyters with themselves to administer the sacrament.

Can. 885 §2. A presbyter who possesses this faculty [to confirm] must use it for the sake of those in whose favor the faculty was granted.

Relevant sections of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

INTRODUCTION

RCIA #24 In certain cases when there is serious reason, confirmation may be postponed until near the end of the period of postbaptismal catechesis, for example, Pentecost Sunday.

RCIA #215 In accord with the ancient practice followed in the Roman liturgy, adults are not to be baptized without receiving confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and the Holy Spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized.

CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE REACHED CATECHETICAL AGE

RCIA #252. This form of the rite of Christian initiation is intended for children, not baptised 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 in conscience. But they cannot yet be treated as adults because, at this stage of their lives, they are dependent on their parents or guardians and are still strongly influenced by their companions and their social surroundings.

RECEPTION OF BAPTISED CHRISTIANS INTO THE FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

RCIA # 473 This is the liturgical rite by which a person born and baptised in a separated ecclesial Community is received, according to the Latin rite², into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The rite is so arranged that no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity.³

APPENDIX III ,NATIONAL STATUTES FOR THE CATECHUMENATE (USA)⁴

#28 Priests mentioned in canon 883:2 also have the faculty to confirm

- (a) in the case of the readmission to communion of a baptized Catholic who has been apostate from the faith and also
- (b) in the case of a baptized Catholic who has without fault been instructed in a non-Catholic religion or adhered to a non-Catholic religion, **but**

² See Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 69, b; Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*. no. 3. Secretariat for Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Directory* 1, no. 19: AAS 59 (1967), 581.

³ See Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 18.

⁴ USCCB. *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, no.28 In accord with canon 788 §3, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops decrees that the *National Statutes for the Catechumenate* should govern the catechumenate in the United States. Approved: General Meeting, November 1986. Reviewed: Holy See (Congregation for Divine Worship), Letter from Apostolic Pro-Nuncio (Prot. No. 2757/88/4) July 1988. Promulgated: Memorandum to All Bishops, July 22, 1988.

(c) **not** in the case of a baptized Catholic who without his or her fault never put the faith into practice [emphasis added].

#29 In the instance mentioned in no. 28c, in order to maintain the interrelationship and sequence of confirmation and eucharist as defined in canon 842:2, priests who lack the faculty to confirm should seek it from the diocesan bishop, who may, in accord with canon 884:1 grant the faculty if he judges it necessary.