

RCIA: 3 reasons to provide a 15-month process

by Ann Lankford

The RCIA is a process of conversion that is meant to form and prepare adults to become committed disciples of Jesus Christ and courageous witnesses to the Catholic Faith. After experiencing the 15-month process, there is no doubt that the 9-month model is inadequate. Here are three reasons to consider starting an RCIA process in January that ends 15 months later on Pentecost. (See the Introduction, n. 7 in the Rite for Christian Initiation of Adults [referred to as the RCIA Rites Book]). While there may be objections to a 15-month process, here are three solid reasons to consider the 15-month period:

1) 15-months are needed to allow the faith to take root in the person: 9-month processes are proving inadequate. There is a staggering statistic in our country: after only one year, 50% - 80% of all new Catholics are no longer receiving the Sacraments! This speaks to the fact that we live in a post-Christian world, a society seeking to live without God as our culture has slipped into rationalism, consumerism, materialism, etc. In going against the tide, catechumens and candidates need to be formed properly in the fullness of the Truth. In order to stay committed for life, they need to receive the full Deposit of Faith. In a 9 month process, time is so short that two teachings need to be presented on many nights just to cover the basics of the Faith. How can this be called a “thorough catechesis” and “well suited instruction” as called for by the Rites Book?

2) The 15-month process speaks to the importance of new life in Christ. People are very busy. However, what are we asking of catechumens and candidates but to give time each week to grow in their relationship with Christ? We found that once men and women came to the first or second session and heard the truth presented in a clear and compelling teaching, they were committed and would come as long as it was necessary. Over time, they told us that they were becoming better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers, more generous single people in giving of themselves to serve others. Their marriages were being strengthened as they were beginning to pray together as a couple and as a family. This valuable time for spiritual formation and education in prayer cannot be rushed. Time is needed to answer their questions, to allow them to fall in love with Jesus Christ, to be inserted into the Catholic community, and to mature as Christians who are equipped to hold fast to the Faith and eventually to spread and defend it.

3) A 15-month process is necessary to allow habits of prayer to mature. Catechumens and candidates need encouragement and support to develop the habits of attending Sunday Mass, taking time for spiritual reading leading to a commitment of daily prayer as well as regularly serving a neighbor in need. In the 9-month model, most people first begin developing a habit of prayer and the commitment to Sunday Mass around Lent. After the 9-month RCIA process ends, these newly-formed habits are not truly established and seem to fade away easily.

When the 15-month process begins in January, by June the practices of the Faith are beginning to become habit. Over the summer, sessions on the Bible timeline DVD series can be used that require less preparation and are a bit “lighter” in content. In this way, vacations during the summer do not interrupt the orderly presentation of the Faith that lays the needed foundation and yet, the Bible timeline is helpful and appreciated by the candidates. With this three-month

summer period of continuing to live the Faith with support from the RCIA team, the catechumens and candidates begin in September more firmly established and spiritually ready to place Christ at the center of their lives, to receive the teachings on the Sacraments, to learn how to cooperate with God's grace, and to learn how to live out the virtues of faith, hope and charity.

In short: a parish community is not asking too much in carrying out a 15 month RCIA process; they are offering to those people seeking Jesus, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life a worthy model for eternal life. What could be more important and be more worthy of our time?

As Pope John Paul II wrote: "it would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with [a limited presentation of the faith and] a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but 'Christians at risk'" (*Novo Millennio Inuente*, n. 34). How can we offer any less to those coming to us to receive the fullness of Truth and Grace? Rather, let us give to those searching for a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church "the Pearl of Great Price."

For more information on the 15-month process or to ask any questions, please contact Ann Lankford, Director of the Office for Catechesis and Evangelization or Christopher Carstens, Director of the Office for Sacred Worship, at (608) 788-7700.