

OCIA Update – February 28, 2025

As we approach the Rite of Election on the first Sunday in Lent, I'd like to try to answer some of the many questions being raised.

Instead of thinking in terms of which sacraments people are missing, I've summarized the main circumstances in which you are likely to find those interested in the OCIA process.

### **Unbaptized**

Those who are unbaptized are catechumens. Having celebrated the Rite of Entrance (formerly Rite of Acceptance) and completed the appropriate formation, they now will be called forward as the Elect. Their names should be enrolled in the Book of the Elect. The unbaptized in irregular marriages may not celebrate the Rite of Election until they are free to enter a canonical marriage (National Statute Norm 7).

### **Baptized Christian (but not Catholic)**

Those individuals that were validly baptized into a Christian tradition other than Catholic are candidates for full communion.

Having completed an appropriate period of formation, they may receive holy communion and confirmation at the Easter Vigil. Because they are candidates, they are not among the Elect.

They are invited to participate in the Call to Continuing Conversion, celebrated at the same time as the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent, but this is an optional rite. Their names are not enrolled in the Book of the Elect.

### **Adults Baptized Catholic but not catechized**

Often, there are those who have been baptized Catholic, but have received no other formation or no other sacraments of initiation. These people are candidates for full initiation into the Church.

Like their Christian counterparts, they are invited to participate in the Call to Continuing Conversion, celebrated at the Rite of Election, but it is not required. Their names are not enrolled in the Book of the Elect.

### **Adults Baptized Catholic, who have received holy communion**

You will also be presented with those who, for whatever reason, were never confirmed as adolescents. These candidates, like all their Catholic brothers and sisters, are to be confirmed by the bishop. They do not participate in the Rite of Election or Call to Continuing Conversion, and their names are not recorded in the Book of the Elect.

They are not to receive the sacrament confirmation at the Easter Vigil. In the Diocese of Bridgeport, Bishop Caggiano has granted delegation to pastors for one Mass on the feast of Pentecost where adult confirmation may take place.

### **Children between the age of reason and 18**

The Church sees those with use of reason (age seven) as adults. If someone who is over the age of seven, but not yet 18, presents for Baptism, they are to receive baptism, holy communion, and confirmation at the Easter Vigil. The Rite of Election for those under 18 is optional. Their names may be enrolled in the Book of the Elect.

The *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* clearly states that those who are under the age of 18 but over the age of reason are to receive all the sacraments of Initiation. If, for pastoral reasons, you decide to baptize someone on the younger age of this category, but withhold communion and confirmation, that baptism should not take place at the Easter Vigil, nor should they participate in the Rite of Election.

There must be serious pastoral concern to make that distinction. If a child is not ready to receive all the sacraments of initiation, he or she should continue in formation until he or she is properly prepared.

There is among many a concern that 'giving' a child or adolescent all the sacraments of initiation in some way detracts from any future formation. This concern only perpetuates the current struggle that a sacrament is in some way a reward for participating in formation. We must work together to help parents and catechetical leaders understand the difference between remote formation, which begins at an early age and often takes place in the home, proximate formation, which is a lifelong process, and immediate formation, which prepares one for reception of a sacrament.

Bishop Caggiano has agreed that, if parents are on board with baptizing now and delaying the other sacraments, you may enroll these children in faith formation and delay their Confirmation, at least for the next few years. As the renewal of the OCIA continues in our Diocese, there may come a time to reverse this position. However, for now, we should work with willing parents in whatever way we can.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

### **Children under the age of reason (under age 7)**

If you have unbaptized children under the age of seven, they should be considered the same as infant baptism. While this baptism could take place at the Easter Vigil, it normally takes place outside that particular celebration.

If those children are baptized, they only receive the sacrament of baptism. They would join their peers in formation and receive the sacraments of initiation at the appropriate time. Even if they will receive the sacrament of baptism at Easter Vigil, they are not considered catechumens. They do not participate in the Rite of Election and their names are not to be recorded in the Book of the Elect.

One note here: If baptized at Vigil, they do receive the Anointing with Chrism immediately after Baptism, which should not in any way be construed as Confirmation.

I hope all this information is helpful.

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