

Resources to Engage the Elect and Candidates During Covid-19

In this time of social distancing when it has become impossible for communities to gather for worship, the coronavirus has greatly impacted and delayed many thousands of individuals throughout the United States and world journeying through the RCIA process toward full initiation into the Catholic Church. For some, this is a source of frustration as they had hoped to be initiated by Easter. This frustration in a few circumstances, has seen individuals leaving before being initiated into the Church. While that number is small, this real circumstance calls all parish leaders to stay connected and be a source of encouragement to those waiting to be initiated into or to complete their initiation in the Church.

The elect and candidates should be fully formed for living the Christian life. Hopefully we can incorporate them into parish life the same way we involve the rest of our parishioners. Specifically, with the help of their godparents and sponsors we can encourage them to continue to meditate on God's word and to live as Christians in their domestic churches, their homes. Pope Francis underscored the importance of the domestic church at The World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in 2015. He quoted both the Second Vatican Council document, *Lumen Gentium* and Pope St. John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* when he said, "Christians don't leave home to "go to Church" – the family is the "domestic church," the smallest pastoral unit of the Church where much of the life of the church takes place." A parish's ultimate goal then is to engage individuals and families to fully, consciously, and actively participate in the church's worship through the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Hours, live-streamed Masses (in a limited way), and to witness to their faith through acts of charity and kindness as much as they are able to in these circumstances.

While sheltering in place directives last, we can continue to meet with the elect and candidates online through Zoom and other ways to break open the word and share faith. And we should be doing that with the rest of our parishioners as well. Once the quarantine is lifted, godparents and sponsors should be sure the elect and candidates are fully participating in the life of the parish as they approach their initiation.

From his poignant description of the Church as a field hospital, to proclaiming the need for mercy in a jubilee year and beyond, Pope Francis has spoken again and again about our need to meet people in whatever circumstances life has given them and to walk with them in compassion and love. In his profound exhortation on *The Joy of the Gospel*, the Holy Father referred to this as the art of "accompaniment." He understands accompaniment as being crucial in the evangelizing mission of every disciple. In all times, but especially in this pandemic each disciple is called to seize this time as one to deepen their understanding of Pope Francis' urgent call and explore both new and traditional ways to make accompaniment real in all aspects of parish life.

The following resources are offered to empower the domestic church for those whose initiation into the greater Church, is postponed as well as those who accompany them.

Pray for the Elect, Candidates, their Godparents and Sponsors

Please continue to pray at Masses, prayer rituals and in private prayer, for those seeking reception into the Church as well as those sponsoring them. Saint Mark reminds us, "I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours." (Mk 11:24)

The following are sample Universal Prayers options that can be added to a community's list of Sunday and daily intercessions.

+For the elect and candidates seeking to join the Catholic community of faith; that trusting in the truth of Christ even in the midst of waiting during this time of pandemic, that they may be strengthened in their freedom of mind and heart, and persevere as they wait for the celebration of Sacraments of Initiation. Let us pray to the Lord: R. Lord, hear our prayer

+For the elect and candidates God has called to join us as His own; that they, with the entire community of faith wait during this time, they may be filled with the hope of the life-giving Spirit and prepare themselves thoroughly for the Sacraments of Initiation and Full Communion with the Catholic faith. Let us pray to the Lord: R. Lord, hear our prayer.

+That God will continue guide the elect and candidates in the days ahead; strengthening them in their vocation, building them into the kingdom of His Son, and sealing them with the Spirit of His promise. Let us pray to the Lord: R. Lord, hear our prayer.

+That the godparents of the elect and the sponsors of the candidates, as well as the entire community of faith, may continue being examples of the Gospel living for those seeking to be fully initiated members of the Church. Let us pray to the Lord: R. Lord hear our prayer

Theological Reflection/ Lectio Divina Resources

- Informal weekly online gatherings for prayer, reflection on the previous Sunday Gospel, sharing of recent encounters with God, discussion of challenges (current and recent) considering where God is in the midst of all of this. The structure is always there, but things are somewhat free flowing with questions and discussion.
- Hold Zoom reflections on the upcoming Sunday gospel. One among several published resources that can aid in such reflections is Liguori's "Word into Life," more information about which is available for Cycle A at: <https://www.liguori.org/the-word-into-life-year-a.html>
- Check out the Sunday Liturgy of the Word services at The Pastoral Center's Worship@Home site: <https://worship.pastoral.center/>
- Be sure to encourage your people to stay connected to their parish, including through live stream events, if those are being offered by your parish. If not, please check out those offered around the archdiocese here: <https://nolacatholic.org/news/taking-mass-online>

1. Resources from Publishers and Dioceses

<https://offers.litpress.org/coronavirus-response-to-customers>

This link on the list is from Liturgical Press. Liturgical Press making the digital version of their daily prayer resource, *Give Us This Day*, available “free” through June. Both new seekers and those ready for initiation would benefit greatly just by making use of that.

<https://dioceseofraleigh.org/communications-office/faith-formation-home>

The Diocese of Raleigh has shared some of the best resources they have discovered that may be of use to parishes or families.

<https://www.davenportdiocese.org/prayer-and-support>

The Diocese of Davenport shares the following resources to support prayer in the Domestic Church, in the home.

<https://www.davenportdiocese.org/at-home-resources>

The Diocese of Davenport shares the following Covid-19/Home resources.

2. Articles/Video from *TeamRCIA*

TeamRCIA Conversion Happens Here is a free online resource for catechumenate ministry, and is a leading voice and trainer in Catholic liturgical and catechetical ministries. The following resources are offered by co-directors Nick Wagner and Diana Macalintal. Visit TeamRCIA at <https://teamrcia.com>

<https://teamrcia.com/2020/03/rcia-mystagogy-when-there-have-been-no-baptisms/>

<https://teamrcia.com/2020/04/what-do-rcia-teams-do-with-the-elect-now-that-baptisms-are-postponed/>

<https://teamrcia.com/2020/04/rcia-in-the-easter-season-how-to-continue-forming-elect-catechumens-and-candidates/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCBFIdRJyMs&list=PLJ0z7Z2YgQEpMFEzY9mwPeKUEDJ7NEMO&index=4>

<https://teamrcia.com/2020/04/an-rcia-calendar-for-celebrating-the-initiation-rites-outside-the-usual-times/>

<https://youtu.be/hw3LxTtqtgU>

Association for Catechumenal Ministry is another excellent online resource filled with free seminars, how to guides, question and answer pages, etc. Be sure to check them out and all the resources they offer at: <https://acmrcia.org/>

3. Additional Resources

CREDO, from St. Benedict Press is offering some of their resources free of charge to parishes for as long as the coronavirus crisis lasts – is available at:

<https://www.saintbenedictpress.com/index.php/credo>

Catholic Update Another resource that offers users a great deal of flexibility is based on the familiar *Catholic Update* format. (It is topical, rather than Lectionary-based. For a list of sample topics, simply go to: <https://www.liguori.org/catholic-update-100-set-topics-for-rcia.html> then click "Sample it" or "Sample Pages," and open the downloaded PDF to view the topics.)

Seekers for the Future

In the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus tells his followers then and now, “Go make disciples of all nations.”(v.19) In other words, Evangelization never stops. In addition to providing resources for those for whom Initiation Sacraments have been postponed, parish leaders need to pay attention to those who are coming to the Church by way of live stream and other opportunities. These individuals might want to inquire about your parish RCIA process. Some national statistics are showing that parish livestream attendance is up by 5% more than before the pandemic. Who are these individuals? Are they new to the faith and/or are they individuals and families who are returning from being away from the Church? For newer seekers who require more support, parish leaders will have to get comfortable with social media and video chats to assist them. Also, do not forget the “old school” resource of using the telephone for a more personal connection. At the very least, until regular face-to-face meetings can resume, new seekers can be encouraged to pray over the Sunday readings and discuss them with a parish catechist, a member of the RCIA team, a lector, or bible study member.

True Evangelization must always be directly connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. Conversion is the change of our lives that comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit. All who accept the Gospel undergo change as we continually put on the mind of Christ. May the above resources assist in the conversion process for those for whom Initiation Sacraments has been delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic.

For further support, please contact us.

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