

## Moving Forward Together: From the Board

The 2009 annual Gathering of the North American Association for the Catechumenate was hailed as a great success in many ways. Evaluations from the forty participants were very positive in all areas including keynote speaker, workshops, worship, and the conference site. Several newcomers attended and one remarked, "This has been one of the best and most helpful conferences I've

attended in my entire ministry!" We were blessed with emerging church musicians Emily Scott and Isaac Everett. We were motivated by our keynote speaker, Dr. Craig Satterlee from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

The Gathering was not without its challenges, however. The 2009 event turned out to be one of the most expensive in NAAC's history since the organization ended up

supplementing registration fees by about \$5,000 to cover all the costs of the event. A number of factors made for this situation and the board has reviewed them all with a pledge to at least "break even" with the 2010 gathering. To accomplish this we have to set a goal of at least fifty participants for next summer's gathering.

Perhaps among the most im-

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## Florida the NAAC Destination in 2010

Dr. Gordon Lathrop and Dr. Gail Ramshaw will headline the 2010 gathering, speaking on the theme "When Heaven Touches Earth: Reclaiming the Mysteries of Faith for Baptismal Living Today." The emphasis will be on the Triduum or "Great Three Days," especially the Easter Vigil and its formative role in welcoming new Christians into the community of faith. Both speakers are well known and

respected in ecumenical circles for their work in liturgy. Joining the team as conference musician will be Mark Mummert currently serving as Minister of Music at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Houston. See details on the NAAC website as plans for the Gathering develop.



## Living Wet

Check out "Living Wet" on the NAAC website, [www.catechumenate.org](http://www.catechumenate.org). There you can join the conversation on a site dedicated to sharing ideas for faith formation, nurturing disciples, and baptismal living.

Some of the conversation focuses on the idea of a year-round catechumenate and practicing catechumenal formation outside the walls of the church.

Check it out!

## NAAC News on the Web

Issues of NAAC News are available on the website and ready for downloading. The issues are available on the homepage of the site. Items, articles for future issues, and ideas for the newsletter should be forwarded to the editor. Back issues are also available. We welcome writers.

# Christian Initiation Year Round

by Daniel T. Benedict

How are congregations working the catechumenal process supposed to serve inquirers with grace and hospitality? Do we have to say, "Well, next fall we will be beginning an inquirer's group and you will just have to wait until then?" To paraphrase Jesus, "The process was made for seekers; not seekers for the process." Clearly, we can't put people on hold. The processes of Christian initiation are not meant to be obstacles to persons seeking faith and hope.

The assumption (presumption?) in churches is often that adult Christian initiation as proposed in various adaptations of the rites of initiation of adults is that there is one, or, in some schemes, two points in the year where adults are appropriately prepared for baptism: Lent leading to Easter and Advent leading to the baptism of the Lord. One reason for the assumption is not the calendar of the liturgical year, but the seeming limitations of the catechumenal ministry team: "We just have to have a break, so we'll start a new process in the fall and be finished by a week or two after Easter."

But the reality is that seekers do not come to the church on a schedule or Christian calendar. They come as nudged by the movement of the Spirit and their circumstances. If God is evangelizing the world and the church is bearing a faithful witness in deed and word, then those thirsting for meaning, belonging, love, and God may show up any time. So how might congregations re-imagine and re-think ways to accommodate and welcome inquirers and catechumens

year round?

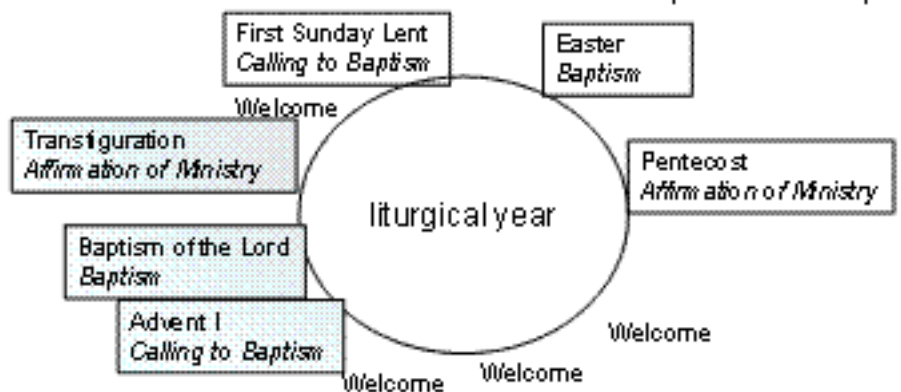
Consider the following:

- Take a team approach. Your team of pastor(s), catechist(s), coordinator, and sponsors can be hosts to inquirers and seekers any time of the year. Don't allow the responsibility to fall on one person for listening and guiding every searcher.
- Tailor your initial response to persons making inquiry to suit each one's needs. In most small to medium size congregations, there will not likely be more than one or two inquirers at anyone time. In larger churches you may have many and need to start a small group for inquirers every four to eight weeks.
- Offer the rite of welcome whenever you have an inquirer who is ready to become a hearer. See *Come to the Waters* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), pages 34, 103-104.
- Begin formation groups as needed. A formation group can be a hearer, a sponsor, and a catechist or group leader who sit down weekly to reflect

the group scripture reflection part of the time together.

- Accept the fact that some formation groups will go on for eight months to a year or more. Once Lent comes (on the baptism once-a-year approach) or Advent comes (on the baptism twice-a-year approach), work with inquirers but hold the Service of Welcome until after baptism. See the diagram. Then hold the rite of welcome and begin a new formation group. In the summer months, if weariness is a factor, vary the times, frequency, and leadership of the group.
- Remember that people who are truly being loved, listened to, and accompanied on a journey are not likely to feel deprived. Despite North American impatience, part the discipline of discipleship is learning to wait on the Lord and to enter into the rhythms of the church's communal celebration.
- Group "hearers" (unbaptized adults) and "returning members" (baptized persons) together in formation

Year round Christian initiation on Lent-Easter and Advent-Baptism of the Lord pattern



on the scripture used in worship, to pray, and to listen to what God is saying to them in loving God and neighbor in daily life. Groups should not be larger than seven people, though more than one group could meet at same time and break up for

groups. Respect the differences, but let them journey together. See *Come to the Waters*, pages 139-142.

- Other ideas? In your context you and your leadership team will come up with other insights about how

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## Book Review: The Impact of the RCIA

Explorers in a dense jungle wish they could get a view from above to see where they are and where they need to go. Many church leaders seeking to implement the ancient church's way of making disciples will benefit and be grateful for *The Impact of the RCIA*. It offers the reader an eagle's view of the implementation of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 1988) over the last twenty years or so in the Roman Catholic Church, and offers insight and challenges for fuller and deeper implementation in the decades to come.

The fifteen essays share a common structure around two poles: memories and challenges. Each writer shares stories and reflections from their unique perspectives and experiences with the RCIA and offers clear proposals for what they now can see as correctives to the first generation's incarnation of the catechumenal process.

This book might be bewildering for readers new to the challenges of contemporary implementation of the catechumenate, but for those seasoned with it in parish life or in resourcing it from denominational agencies or seminaries, it has something of *déjà vu* about it: "I think I have been there! I recognize that experience." In this, the book comes as a companion to us, and the stories and reflections invite us to revisit questions we have asked and with which we still need to struggle. The stories, especially those told by Anita Ahuja, Ron Lewinski, and Pamela Folse, mirror our own first steps in introducing the rites of

initiation. There are confessions too — confessions of failure to live up to the full vision of the RCIA and helping the reader to acknowledge failures with which we may have prematurely made peace. I was especially moved by Marguerite Main's questions as she retires after thirty years of working with people in the RCIA (p. 59).

There are difficult issues that recur in the essays; ones that we in the North American Association for the Catechumenate (NAAC) will recognize:

- The lack of integrity in combining catechumens with previously baptized but uncatechized persons
- Settling for a five-to-eight month program rather than committing to a year-round process
- Balancing the faith (content) and faith (lived relationship and practice with the risen Christ)
- Full, active, and conscious participation of the whole congregation and catechumenate teams rather than "one person, many lectures"
- The urgency of the pastor/priest being trained and committed to the process

It is good for us to know that our Roman brothers and sisters have and are still working to deepen their implementation of the vision of the RCIA.

Some of the essays in this book are ground breaking and especially challenging to our Protestant adaptations of the RCIA. From my vantage point, our implementations have been predominantly white and urban, stopping short of the cultural, performative, and architectural dimensions the

vision of the RCIA hold for us. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow's essay on "African American Perspectives of the Catechumenate" is both confronting and exhilarating as she raises pointedly the "lack of 'fit'" and the need for "Spirit-led evangelization." A similar, though less critical, essay by the Rev. Richard Vega raises issues for implementation of the rites in Latino contexts. And then there is the challenge Pamela Folse narrates of adapting the RCIA in a rural setting. The Rev. Gil Ostdiek, OFM, cracks through limitations of our sacramental space with his essay on "Shaping Places for Adult Initiation," in which he examines a variety of approaches to more ample spaces for baptism, gathering places for the scrutinies, and what the future requires us to consider in taking the rites seriously in our church buildings. And music — ah, music! It is here too. Steven R. Janco's essay, "The RCIA and Liturgical Music: Opportunities and Challenges," is worth the price of the book. All who plan and lead the rites in our churches will benefit from Janco's seasoned reflections on musical forms, performance, sound, and styles.

The volume is unapologetically geared to the Roman Catholic journey with the rites. But NAAC readers will have little trouble translating it into meaning and direction for the challenges before our churches. It was my privilege to be asked to write an essay from an ecumenical perspective, which I did, as requested, with The United Methodist story and challenge in view. It might have been

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portant actions taken at the 2009 Gathering was the discussion and approval of a new 5-year strategic plan for NAAC, the result of a year of planning by the board. The vision as spelled out in the document is "to be a vital, ecumenical organization of faith formation practitioners (lay and clergy) who promote and provide for training for the catechumenate, working in partnership with denominations, seminaries, universities, and other para-church agencies and congregations with the goal of helping change congregational culture so that faith communities can become lively, faithful minorities in a post-Christian, post-modern culture and serve as transformational communities of disciples for the sake of God's mission in the world." For more information, including a list of goals, check out the NAAC website at [www.catechumenate.org](http://www.catechumenate.org).

Finally, the annual gathering was favorable to a board proposal to offer four categories of mem-

ship in NAAC: \$45 a year for single membership, \$10 a year for students and retired members, \$100 a year for a congregational membership (including your catechumenal team), and \$500 for a lifetime membership. At the encouragement of participants at the annual gathering, the board has re-instated the lifetime membership in hopes that this will help us rebuild our financial resources as we seek to move forward together in some exciting directions. If you are interested in making such a contribution, contact either Pastor Bev Piro, treasurer or Pastor Mary Peterson, membership director. Special thanks to the members of the 2009 gathering team for their hard work: Dan Benedict, Isaac Everett, Clay Morris, Bev Piro, Rick Rouse, Emily Scott, and Sheryl Ann Waage. We are in the process of finalizing members for our 2010 gathering planning team. Contact me if you would like to serve with us.

Blessings on the journey. Looking forward to another good year, Rick Rouse, President

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best to offer inquirers and catechumens, along with returning members, hospitality and welcome to life in Christ throughout the year.

The terminology used in the diagram is from

*Come to the Waters*. You will easily be able to adapt this to your tradition's usage. For additional help see "Terminology...Becoming Bilingual" at <http://76.12.153.120/uploads/file/workshopterminology.pdf>.

## Book Review

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better to for the essay have taken a wider view of non-Roman adaptations inclusive of Lutheran, Episcopal, Anglican, and Reformed churches. Perhaps that will come in another volume that NAAC will sponsor when we are a few more years down the road.

The impact of the RCIA that comes through in this volume confirms what so many of us by instinct and nudges of the Holy Spirit believe: the recovery of the catechumenate has potential to reform the church in all dimensions of its life. Far from a vestige of the past, it is, as Bishop Mark MacDonald says, an artifact from the future. The Impact of the RCIA anticipates this fruition. Take up and read.

*The Impact of the RCIA: Stories, Reflections, Challenges*, compiled and edited by Jerry Galipeau (World Library Publications, 2008) ISBN 978-1-58459-407-9. Paper, 133 pages.

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