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| **RCIA SURVEY 2022** |

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O F F I C E O F

**CHRISTIAN** **INITIATION**

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is the process through which those who have a desire to become a member of the Catholic Church are prepared
to enter fully into the life of the Church.

 The function of the Office of Christian Initiationwithin the Archdiocese
is to provide support and training for parishes conducting
 the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and young adults.

# **The Aim of the Survey**

The aim of this project is to gather information from RCIA teams that will help the Office of Christian Initiation (OCI) to determine the support needed by parishes in becoming more effective in facilitating the RCIA process.

The aim of the Survey was twofold:

* To ascertain an understanding of how the RCIA process is offered within parishes
* To detect ways in which the Office of Christian Initiation (OCI) can better support this process within parishes

The findings will inform the direction of the strategic plan for the Office for 2023-2028.

**The Setting**
The setting was the parishes within the metropolitan area of the Archdiocese of Perth who have a history of offering RCIA.

# **The Participants**

A total of 45 parishes were identified as having conducted an RCIA process within the past three years. This was ascertained from data on parishes who presented Catechumens and Candidates at the Rite of Election for the same period. These parishes were invited to participate in the survey. Of the 45 parishes, 19 participated, comprising of 19 Coordinators and 7 Catechists. In total 26 participants responded.

# **The Data Collection Instrument**

The survey consisted of 32 questions broken up into 6 sections. Some of the questions have been adapted from a study by Sharon Brewer *Are Parishes Ready, Willing and Able to Welcome People into The Catholic Faith?* (2020)[[1]](#footnote-2)

Section A **Setting the Scene**

Overview of the RCIA process within the parish

Section B **How the RCIA Process is conducted within parishes**

Time Frame

 Facilitators of the process

Frequency of the sessions

Section C **Celebrating the Rites and Rituals**

 Rites

 Dismissal

Full Initiation

Section D **Pastoral Care of the Catechumens and Candidates**

 Discernment

Supporting the Neophytes

Section E **The RCIA Team**

 Recruitment of Catechists and Sponsors

 Formation of Catechists

 Training of Catechist

Section F **Support from the Office of Christian Initiation**

 Website

Communications

Information

The Survey was made available to parishes in three ways:

* Copies of the survey were distributed at regional meetings of Coordinators. (self-stamped and addressed envelopes were supplied)
* Copies were sent via email to all Coordinators of RCIA.
* A copy was uploaded on the website.

Overview of the Findings

# **The Scope of the Survey**

# This survey was designed not to compare the RCIA process within the Archdiocese against other studies in this area, but to understand more fully the way the RCIA process is offered in parishes within the metropolitan area of the Archdiocese of Perth.

**Section A**  **SETTING THE SCENE**

# *Section A of the survey sought to gain an understanding of where in the Archdiocese the RCIA process was being facilitated. Also, to ascertain if there is a particular pocket of the Archdiocese where further support is needed to make RCIA an integral part of parish ministry.*

# The Archdiocese of Perth has 82 Parishes within the metropolitan area. 45 of these parishes have indicated that they have an RCIA process. After several requests were made to these parishes to participate in the Survey, to RCIA Coordinators and parish priests, 19 parishes took up the initiative to participate in the survey with a total of 26 respondents.

**The distribution of the Survey**

A hard copy of the survey was distributed to all Coordinators who attended one of the annual Coordinators meetings in June with a self-stamped and addressed envelope for the return of the survey. The survey was then sent via email to all parishes in the metropolitan area of the Archdiocese of Perth, to RCIA Coordinators or parish priests where a parish has indicated that they are an RCIA parish but have not provided the Office of Christian Initiation with a parish contact. The Survey was also placed on the Office of Christian Initiation website for RCIA Teams to complete online. A total of 26 surveys were received, 16 through the post and 10 were completed online. The 26 who responded represented 19 parishes.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RETURN OF SURVEYS** | **Actual Number** | **%** |
|  Through the Post | 16 | 62 |
|  Completed online | 10 | 38 |
|  *N=26* | *N= 26* | *100* |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PARTICIPATING PARISHES | Actual Number | % |
| Applecross | 1 | 4 |
| Balcatta | 1 | 4 |
| Bedford | 1 | 4 |
| Bentley | 1 | 4 |
| Canning Vale | 1 | 4 |
| Clarkson | 1 | 4 |
| Fremantle | 1 | 4 |
| Girrawheen | 1 | 4 |
| Greenwood | 1 | 4 |
| Innaloo/Karrinyup | 1 | 4 |
| Kalamunda | 2 | 10 |
| Kwinana | 1 | 4 |
| Maida Vale | 1 | 4 |
| Myaree | 1 | 4 |
| Perth Chinese Catholic Community | 5 | 26 |
| Thornlie | 1 | 4 |
| Whitford | 1 | 4 |
| Willetton | 3 | 14 |
| Yangebup | 1 | 4 |
| *N of parishes=19 responses* | *N= 26* | *100* |

# The following data shows the 19 Parishes that participated in the survey.

Further analysis of the parishes that contributed across three corridors of the metropolitan area shows that the largest number of respondents, 42%, came from parishes in the northern corridor. This was followed by 32% of respondents from parishes in the southern corridor, and 26% of respondents coming from the parishes situated in the eastern corridor of the metropolitan area.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CORRIDOR** | **Actual Number** | **%** |
| North (Largest in population) | 8 | 42 |
| South | 6 | 32 |
| East (Smallest in population) | 5 | 26 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

1. Do you currently have a RCIA process in your parish?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CURRENT RCIA PROCESS IN PARISH** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Yes | 13 | 68 |
| No | 6 | 32 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

Of the six parishes that indicated they do not currently have a process, the last active process ranged between 2019 to 2021. Covid was a contributing factor.

1. What is your role in the RCIA process? (Please select all that apply)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ROLE OF RESPONDENTS WITHIN THE RCIA PROCESS** | **Participants** | **%** |
| Parish Priest | 0 |  |
| Assistant Priest | 0 |  |
| Deacon | 1 | 3 |
| RCIA Coordinator | 17 | 52 |
| RCIA Catechist | 14 | 42 |
| RCIA Sponsor | 1 | 3 |
| *N of respondents=26* *responses* | *33\** | *100* |

*\*Five Coordinators indicated that they assume both the role of Coordinator and Catechist. One Catechist indicated that she assumes both the role of Sponsor and Catechist*.

The data reveals that the largest group who responded to the survey are the RCIA Coordinators. While all involved in the RCIA were invited to participate in the survey, it is not surprising that the Coordinators are the main contributors to the survey for all information was directed to them for distribution. The second significant group to respond came from the Catechists.

It is clear from the data, that the RCIA process is under resourced in parishes and those coming forth to be part of this ministry are diminishing. The survey indicated that a large number of Catechists are also assuming the Coordinator’s role. Also, it seems that the Catechist’s role is not shared among the members of the RCIA Team or with the parish priest, indicating that a sizeable responsibility rests on the shoulders of one person.

This information is important as it gives the context for the following responses in the survey. This will assist in indicating to whom to direct the support from the Office of Christian sought by respondents.

1. Does your parish share the RCIA process with a neighbouring parish?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **THE RCIA PROCESS SHARED WITH A NEIGHBOURING PARISH** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Yes | 4 | 21 |
| No response | 15 | 79 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

Working in parish Hubs[[2]](#footnote-3) is a new initiative instigated by the Parish Renewal Team within the Archdiocese of Perth. The purpose of this question was to discover the number of parishes who work together, sharing resources, people power or in other ways in facilitating RCIA. The data shows that of all the parishes who participated in the survey, only 4 parishes share RCIA resources. Of the 4 parishes 2 are working together north of the river and 2 parishes are collaborating south of the river.

However, those parishes working in Hubs are seeing the benefits of collaborating, making the RCIA process richer for the Catechumens and Candidates, and less onerous on the Catechists and RCIA Team. Following the call made by Pope Francis for the Church to be more collaborative than ever in its ministry, not building walls but “breaking them down[[3]](#footnote-4), the Archdiocese of Perth is encouraging a collaborative pastoral practice model as a way forward for meaningful engagement within parishes and with neighbouring parishes. In using combined gifts and talents, parishes together are much more able to achieve shared goals and receive the support and expertise needed to grow the parish and make contribution to the growth of the Archdiocese.

In creating RCIA Hubs with nearby parishes, it will encourage the sharing of resources and expertise, which will help to strengthen and enhance the work of the RCIA team. The process will function more efficiently and effectively. The wisdom and knowledge shared in the Hubs will promote a more integrated approach in conducting the ministry in the wider Church and ultimately enable parishes to share resources, including expertise and share the workload across the parishes– less burnout, to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Since the survey, 3 new RCIA Hubs have been created sharing in the RCIA Process. Each Hub is made up of 4 neighbouring parishes giving a total of 16 parishes sharing aspects of the RCIA process, allowing smaller parishes who are inexperienced in the process, to build confidence and resources.

1. Does your parish cater for the initiation of young adults?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **INITIATION OF YOUNG ADULTS** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Yes | 8 | 42 |
| No | 8 | 42 |
| No response | 3 | 16 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

Parishes that indicated that they do not cater for the initiation of young people remarked that they leave this task to the Catechist of PREP (Parish Religious Education Program), even though the PREP program is specifically designed for the religious education of primary school aged children. Others indicated that they leave this task to the Catholic school.

1. Are you aware that the Office of Christian Initiation have produced materials specially for use with young adults?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **AWARE OF THE RCIYP RESOURCE “COME AND SEE[[4]](#footnote-5)[[5]](#footnote-6)** | **Participants** | **%** |
| Yes | 8 | 31 |
| No | 1 | 4 |
| No response | 17 | 65 |
| *N of respondents =26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

*The RCIyp (Rite of Christian Initiation of Young People) “Come and See” is a new resource in the Archdiocese launched in October 2021. It is unique within the RCIA process in that there are not many resources available in Australia suitable for this age group. The resource was created from a need expressed by RCIA Catechists and PREP (Catechists of the Parish Religious Education Program) Catechists.*

One third of the respondents indicated that they are aware of the new Archdiocesan resource. When compared to the response from question 5, it would suggest that those parishes who are facilitating the RCIA process for young adults are using materials other than the new resource. This is to be expected as the resource is new and still in the inservicing stage across the Archdiocese. Trying to determine why many respondents did not respond to the question needs to be examined further. Was it that they did not understand the question, which could suggest that they have not heard of the new resource, or is it that they have not had young people enquire in their parish, and therefore did not respond because it did not apply to them.

**Section B HOW IS THE RCIA PROCESS OFFERED IN PARISHES?**

*Section B of the survey is designed to ascertain how parishes implement the RCIA process. The data will be useful in determining areas of the process which may need further understanding, development and support*.

# **THE TIME FRAME OF THE PROCESS**

1. What is the usual timeline for the RCIA process in your parish?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **TIME FRAME OF THE RCIA PROCESS [[6]](#footnote-7)[[7]](#footnote-8)** | **Parish** | **%** |
| July/August through to Easter | 3 | 15 |
| July/August through to Pentecost  | 10 | 47 |
| Year-round intake of enquirers | 6 | 29 |
| On demand | 2 | 9 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

Traditionally the RCIA process in the Archdiocese of Perth begins soon after Pentecost and continues through to Mystagogia in the following year. The data indicates that the trend continues with approximately two thirds of parishes running the process over nine months (this includes 10 weeks not meeting due to school holidays) and journeying until Pentecost.

What has also emerged is that some parishes are also considering a model in which enquirers are welcomed into the journey whenever they approach the parish - a year-round Catechumenate. This seems to be gaining momentum in the Archdiocese, as it is one model proposed in the training and formation of RCIA Catechists offered by the Office of Christian Initiation.

1. What is offered to enquirers who come forth after your process has begun for the year?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ENQUIRERS WHO COME FORTH AFTER YOUR PROCESS HAS BEGUN** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Ask them to wait until the next process starts | 7 | 28 |
| Invite them to come to Mass and wait until the next process starts | 5 | 20 |
| Connect them with Parishioners | 3 | 12 |
| Case by case | 2 | 9 |
| Not applicable as have a year-round Catechumenate | 8 | 42 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

Question 8 reaffirms the findings reported in question 7. Question 8 shows that there is a growing trend to move to a a year-round Catechumenate, accommodating the enquirer at the time that they make contact with the parish. The data also indicates however, that a total of 48% of parishes do not welcome enquires into the process after the nominated start time in the parish. This raises concerns about how these parishes keep these ‘pre-enquirers’ connected with the parish during the waiting time.

**FACILITATORS**

1. Who facilitates the RCIA process in your parish?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FACILITATORS OF THE RCIA PROCESS [[8]](#footnote-9)[[9]](#footnote-10)** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| RCIA team and Parish Priest/Assistant | 9 | 48 |
| RCIA team only | 8 | 42 |
| Parish Priest only | 0 |  |
| One on one sessions facilitated by a Catechist or Priest | 1 | 5 |
| One on one sessions facilitated by the Deacon | 1 | 5 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

The data reveals that 48% of parishes have a shared mode of delivery with only 10% of parishes indicating that they have one on one sessions with Catechumens or Candidates. In 42% of parishes the task is left solely to the RCIA team. This supports the findings in question 3 which reveals that Catechists bear the greatest load in the process.

**CATECHETICAL SESSIONS FOR CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES**

1. How often are sessions for catechumens and candidates held in your parish?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FREQUENCY OF SESSIONS** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Weekly | 14 | 75 |
| Fortnightly | 0 |  |
| Monthly | 0 |  |
| On demand | 2 | 10 |
| Two weeks in three | 1 | 5 |
| No response | 2 | 10 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

The data indicates that the 75% of parishes meet weekly with their Catechumens and Candidates. 25% of parishes try to allocate meeting times around the availability of the Catechumens and Candidates, especially parishes where there is a higher percentage of FIFO workers and shift workers. All parishes have face to face sessions at least fortnightly.

**SECTION C CELEBRATING THE RITES AND RITUALS**

*Section C of the survey is designed to ascertain how the liturgical elements of the RCIA process are celebrated. The data will be useful in determining areas where Rites may need further inservicing*.

1. Which of the RCIA Rites and rituals are celebrated in your parish?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RITES and RITUALS CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| The Rite of Acceptance | 7 | 20 |
| The Rite of Sending | 2 | 6 |
| The Rite of Election | 6 | 17 |
| The Scrutinies |  | \*\* |
| The Presentation of the Creed | 5 | 14 |
| The Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer | 6 | 17 |
| The Missioning after Mystagogia (Pentecost) | 1 | 3 |
| None of the above | 2 | 6 |
| All the above | \*\*6 | 17 |
| *N of respondents =26 responses* | *35* | *100* |

The data indicates that less than a third of the parishes who participated in the survey celebrate all the required liturgical Rites within the RCIA process. The Rites which are least celebrated in the community include the Rite of Sending, the Scrutinies and the Missioning after Mystagogia. 6 parishes indicated that they celebrate all the prescribed Rites, including the Scrutinies.

**DISMISSAL**

1. Does your parish dismiss the Catechumens?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DISMISSAL of CATECHUMENS** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Do not dismiss our Catechumens  | 15 | 80 |
| Only during Lent  | 2 | 10 |
| Throughout the process | 0 |  |
| Monthly | 1 |  5 |
| Other appropriate times | 1 | ..5 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

Dismissal is one of the weakest elements of the RCIA process within the Archdiocese. Two thirds of the parishes who participated in the survey indicated that they do not the dismiss the Catechumens.

The data from questions 11 and 12 indicate strongly that there is a lack of understanding of the RCIA process in parishes. It is especially evident that the Rite of the Scrutinies are clearly among the Liturgical Rites not celebrated in parishes. A concern here is that the Scrutinies are not celebrated in most parishes. The RCIA process stresses the importance of celebrating the Scrutinies on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent. The Scrutinies are Rites of Exorcism, the first stage of the Baptismal Rite. They are of such importance that only the Bishop may dispense from one of them for serious reasons or, in extraordinary circumstances, even from two [RCIA 137-143, 151-157, 158-164].

The findings here demonstrate that parish priests must also have a lack of understanding about the Liturgical Rite and their significance in the RCIA process, because if this was not the case, they would guide the RCIA team to the importance of these Rites for the Catechumens and the Candidates and for the whole parish community [RCIA 6-8. 41-72, 105–124]].

**Full Initiation of Catechumens and Candidates**

1. When are the Catechumens and Candidates usually fully initiated into the Church?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **USUAL TIME FOR FULL INITIATION**  | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Only ever fully initiated at the Easter Vigil ceremonies | 11 | 57 |
| Only ever fully initiated at Pentecost | 1 | 5 |
|  |  |  |
| Baptism at Easter and together with Candidates receive Confirmation and First Eucharist at Pentecost | 0 |  |
| Whenever it is determined Catechumens/Candidates are ready | 6 | 32 |
| No response | 1 | 5 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

According to the RCIA process, Easter is the preferable time for full initiation. [RCIA 8, 17, 198-233]. This practice is supported by the data. Three parishes indicated that Easter is their preferred time for initiation but recently have initiated Catechumens and Candidates when they have shown signs of readiness [RCIA 26-30]. No parishes indicated that they separate the sacraments over Easter and Pentecost.

**Section D PASTORAL CARE OF CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES**

*Section D of the survey is designed to ascertain how Neophytes are supported after Mystagogia. The data will be useful in determining further support in this area.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **SUPPORT FOR CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES** | **Parishes** | **%** |
| Appoint a Sponsor from the Parish to accompany them on their journey | 6 | 33 |
| Ensuring the Parish Priest/Deacon is in contact with them at all stages of the process | 4 | 21 |
| Appoint a Sponsor from the Parish if the Catechumen/Candidate do not have one | 2 | 10 |
| RCIA stay in contact via social media tools | 3 | 16 |
| Catechumen and Candidate choose their own sponsor | 1 | 5 |
| Weekly fellowship with RCIA Volunteers | 1 | 5 |
| No response | 2 | 10 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | *19* | *100* |

1. How do you support your Catechumens and Candidates throughout the RCIA process?

One third of the parishes revealed they select Sponsors from the parish to accompany the Catechumens and Candidates. Two parishes indicated that they support their Catechumens and Candidates by appointing a Sponsor from the parish, even if the Catechumen or Candidate have nominated a friend or family member as a Sponsor. The reason for this is that the Sponsor from the parish will help the Catechumen or Candidate engage with the community into which they will be initiated.

One quarter of the parishes indicated that the parish priest is in contact with the Catechumens and Candidates at all stages of the process. One parish shared that the whole RCIA Team engages in the pastoral care of the Catechumens and Candidates throughout the process and therefore the Sponsors are allocated solely from the RCIA Team. This happens each year.

**DISCERNMENT**

1. When a Catechumen or Candidate is showing signs that they are not ready to be initiated, how is this addressed?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DISCERNMENT - Readiness**  | **Parishes** | **%** |
| RCIA Coordinator, Parish Priest and/or assistant Priest have a discussion with the person suggesting that they take some further time to prepare | 11 | 59 |
| If not attending Mass regularly, RCIA Coordinator, Parish Priest and/or assistant Priest will invite them to consider if they need more time to work through commitment | 1 | 5 |
| Speak to the Sponsor to ascertain readiness | 1 | 5 |
| Parish Priest interviews Catechumen/Candidate | 1 | 5 |
| Situation has not arisen | 3 | 16 |
| No response | 2 | 10 |
| *N of parishes=19* *responses* | 19 | 100 |

Discernment is an integral part of the RCIA journey. The Rite calls for a process of discernment to be applied at the end of each stage of the journey [RCIA 43, 107, 110]. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that the RCIA Coordinator, together with the parish priest or assistant priest, are involved in discerning the readiness of the Catechumens and Candidates at various stages throughout the process. When it is evident that a Catechumen or Candidate is not ready for full initiation, the Coordinator and/or the parish priest have a discussion with the person encouraging them to journey further until signs of readiness become more evident.

**SUPPORTING THE NEOPHYTE**

1. How does your parish support the neophytes**[[10]](#footnote-11)** during their first year?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **PARISH SUPPORT FOR NEOPHYTES DURING FIRST YEAR** | **Respondents** | **%** |
| Intentional inviting and connecting them to join Parish activities | 6 | 22 |
| Sponsors remain their contact person during their first year and make a conscious effort to connect their Neophyte to Parish events | 5 | 17 |
| The newly initiated are encouraged to keep using “Exploring the Word (Summit)” to prepare for Mass each week | 2 | 8 |
| All adults preparing for full initiation would be actively invited to other Parish activities | 2 | 8 |
| Invite them to ongoing Bible study in the Parish | 1 | 4 |
| The group is invited to meet up two or three times a year for support | 2 | 8 |
| Informal contact by the Team | 1 | 4 |
| Via WhatsApp group | 1 | 4 |
| Parish Priest informal contact | 1 | 4 |
| All the above | 2 | 8 |
| No ongoing support | 1 | 4 |
| No response | 3 | 9 |
| *N of respondents= 26 responses* | *\*27* | *100* |

\**Numbers in red indicate that some Parishes selected more than one from the selection given.*

The Rite indicates that a newly baptised is considered a Neophyte for up to three years. It is the time when the Neophytes grow in the faith they proclaimed at Easter, with the assistance of the whole community [RCIA 234-238]. The results show that there is not one predominant way in which support is given to the Neophyte. Across the parishes, a number of approaches are employed, ranging from face to face contact, and via email, Facebook and WhatsApp. Staying connected via email, Facebook, WhatsApp are highlighted more sharply because of the impact of Covid. 13% of parishes did not respond to this question or indicated that they give no further support to the Neophyte after Mystagogia while 9% of parishes indicated that no support is offered to the Neophyte after initiation.

The data supports the ongoing trend experienced in the past, that this stage of the RCIA process is the weakest. Many parishes ‘finish’ the process at the Easter Vigil. The OCI needs to develop strategies to educate the RCIA Teams and parish priests on the importance of this stage of the process for the Neophytes.

**Section E RCIA TEAM MEMBERS**

*Section E of the survey is designed to establish the proportion of commissioned Catechists in the Archdiocese and to gain feedback on the formation currently offered.*

**RECRUITMENT OF CATECHISTS AND SPONSORS**

1. How does your parish recruit new Catechists and sponsors?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RECRUITMENT OF CATECHISTS AND SPONSORS** | **Parishes** |  |
| Priest identifies suitable Parishioners for the role | 4 | 21 |
| RCIA Team identifies suitable Parishioners | 3 | 16 |
| A notice is placed in the newsletter asking for an expression of interest | 5 | 27 |
| A member of the RCIA team speaks at Sunday Mass about the role of the Catechist and Sponsor and invites interested Parishioners to a gathering to find out more information | 3 | 16 |
| The RCIA team speak at Sunday Mass about the role of the Catechist and Sponsor and asking for expressions of interest |  |  |
| Expressions of interest asked on Commitment Sunday | 1 | 5 |
| All the above | 1 | 5 |
| No response | 2 | 10 |
| *N of Parish =19 responses* | *19* | *100* |

The data indicates that the most common way Catechists and Sponsors are recruited within parishes is by expression of interest from parishioners. An expression of interest notice is usually placed in the Sunday Bulletin. When a name comes through, a member of the RCIA team then contacts those who have expressed interest and invites them onto the RCIA Team.

The data also indicated that in 21% of parishes, the parish priest actively interviews prospective Catechists and Sponsors to ascertain their suitability to the role.

**ONGOING FORMATION OF CATECHISTS**

1. How many Catechists does your present RCIA team have:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Formation of Catechists** | **Respondents** | **%** |
| Completed the Initial Formation Course offered by the Archdiocese and have been commissioned  | 17 | 66 |
| Not attended the Initial Formation Course offered by the Archdiocese  |  |  |
| Attended faith development discussions in the Parish  |  |  |
| Attended courses offered by the Centre for Faith Enrichment  |  |  |
| Had no formation in faith or in the RCIA Process  | 8 | 31 |
| Have attended an RCIA Conference  | 1 | 3 |
| *N of respondents =26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

One of the requirements of the Archdiocese is that all people in ministries are properly prepared, especially those pertaining to faith formation. This reflects the call by Pope Francis that it is important that people who share faith with others are adequately formed as he believes that ‘the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel’ (GDC 234).

Of the 19 parishes who participated in the survey, 66% indicated that they have completed the Archdiocesan requirements for commissioning as an RCIA Catechist. This is higher than expected. These come from 9 parishes. In these parishes, the parish priest requires that the Coordinator and Catechists all have some formation before taking on the role. 31% from the other eleven parishes indicated that they are not commissioned or have had no formation in the RCIA process.

**TRAINING OF CATECHISTS**

1. How do you rate the formation Course for RCIA Catechists?
 (Please select all that apply)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **COMPLETED FORMATION COURSE FOR RCIA CATECHISTS**  | **Respondents** | **%** |
| I have not done the course so I cannot comment | 7 | 28 |
| The course is very useful | 11 | 43 |
| The course is not helpful | 1 | 3 |
| Initial Formation Course of 10 weeks is too long | 2 | 6 |
| Would prefer training to be in neighbouring hubs | 5 | 20 |
| *N of respondents = 26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

Of the respondents who have completed the Initial Formation Course, 43% found the course particularly useful for their ministry as it gave them a good overview of the RCIA process. One hindrance that was identified by those who have had little or no formation was the length of the course in its present form. 20% asked that the formation courses be conducted in Hubs suggesting that the course would be accessible and appealing to more people interested in the ministry.

1. Do you have any specific recommendations for improving this course?

|  |
| --- |
| **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THIS COURSE** |
| ***Initial Training of RCIA Catechists*** | Continue Initial Training for Catechists and Coordinators in Hubs |
| Offer regular training/workshop/short course opportunities /information to allow Catechists to refresh their knowledge |
| Offer short modules over a longer period  |
| Provide an online course/training modules for those who cannot attend meetings |
| Add an experience in the training of walking through a scenario of a parish starting up RCIA:* Learn about the processes and objectives
* Connect with Hubs, RCIA office for help
* Materials and framework support
* Handholding for a period to help them get started
 |
| ***Course Content*** | Include a course on Catholic moral teachings |
| Attention needs be given to an appreciation of the structure and goals of RCIA with understanding that RCIA is a conversion of heart, not merely a theological course |
| Course should help Catechists to better understand their role, instead of syllabus/knowledge orientated, Catechists are agents between Candidate and Jesus/God. Essential to help Candidates to build their relationship with God throughout the course |
| Equip Catechists with understanding and knowledge so that they can better lead their Catechumens to know Christ in their situation – meeting them where they are at |
| Point Catechists in the areas of learning how to understand basic human emotional needs, ages and stages in life, marriage and real-life situations, sickness and suffering within the guidelines of the Church |

Questions 19 and 20 looked at the formation course currently offered to RCIA Catechists to ascertain further support that could be offered by the Office of Christian Initiation (OCI). The data indicates that 50% of those who have completed the Initial Formation Course agree that the course was useful in developing an understanding of the process.

With regards to improving the course, respondents recommended that short regular refresher courses be offered to allow Catechists to refresh their knowledge and share their experiences with others. Again, a preference for making the Initial Formation Course available in RCIA Hubs was raised as a way of encouraging more people from parishes to attend.

Ideas for enhancing the content of the course were also offered with a strong request for greater attention to be given to the spiritual development of the Catechumen and Candidates, as well as for the Catechists and Sponsors. Once more, the support for Catechists on the moral development of the Catechumen and Candidates was raised.

1. Who pays for the training of RCIA Catechist courses?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FUNDING OF TRAINING OF RCIA CATECHIST FORMATION** | **Respondents** | **%** |
| Parish | 16 | 63 |
| Self-funded | 5 | 19 |
| Both  | 3 | 11 |
| No response  | 2 | 7 |
| *N of participants = 26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

The data indicates that 63% of parishes fund courses relevant to the formation of RCIA Catechists. 11% of respondents indicated that while the parish funds the Initial formation Course, they have chosen to self-fund those courses that they themselves have chosen to attend. 19% of respondents indicated that the policy within the parish is that all courses taken by parishioners are to be self-funded while others stated that are prepared to pay for all courses themselves.

**Section F SUPPORT FROM THE OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION**

*Section F of the survey is designed to ascertain from Catechists and RCIA Teams the support they need to carry out their ministry more effectively.*

1. In what ways can the Office of Christion Initiation further support you in your role within the parish**?**

The feedback by Catechists and other members of the RCIA Team has been classified into three groups: ongoing formation, communication and support at a parish level.

|  |
| --- |
| **FURTHER SUPPORT FROM OCI** (in order of priority) |
| **Ongoing formation** | Continue Initial Formation Course for Catechist and Coordinators in Hubs |
| Offer regular training/workshop/short course opportunities and to allow Catechists to refresh their knowledge |
| Organise a study day, invite speaker, forum to give Catechists opportunities to share their experiences/challenges and learn more skills to run RCIA courses more effectively |
| Organise a retreat day for the RCIA teams |
| **Communication** | Provide a contact list of all RCIA Coordinators for easy communication and referral |
| Provide guidelines on the qualities and skills needed to be involved in RCIA MinistryProvide a space for feedback and for sharing what the different parishes are doing |
| **Parish level** | Encourage parishes to work towards developing RCIA hubs |
| Ways of approaching priests to become proactive especially during the pre-enquiry stage  |
| Provide ways of engaging the whole parish in supporting the RCIA process |

1. What can the Office of Christian Initiation do to better serve your needs?

|  |
| --- |
| **RECOMMENDATIONS TO OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION TO BETTER SERVE NEEDS** (in order of priority) |
| **General** | Encourage people to support by working towards developing RCIA hubs |
| Provide one to one support to Catechists experiencing difficulties in their group e.g explaining moral issues, the expectations of commitment by the Catechumens and Candidates, encouraging the priest to check the validity of marriages |
| Provide more opportunities for parishes and Candidates to connect to meet their peers |
| Organise a meeting with the RCIA teams of all parishes annually to share experiences |
| Organise an end of year gathering to improve Catechist relationships |
| **Information**  | Provide a hard copy version of the Calendar of events for the year |
| Reintroduce the Bi-monthly RCIA newsletter with current news about RCIA issues |
| Send reminders of closing dates for formation sessions |
| **Priests** | Encourage priests to become more involved in the process   |
| Facilitate RCIA training sessions for priests together with the RCIA team |

**WEBSITE**

1. Have you visited the Office of Christian Initiation website?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ACCESSED WEBSITE** | **Respondents** | **%** |
| Yes | 7 | 27 |
| No | 4 | 15 |
| No response  | 15 | 58 |
| *N of respondents =26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

The data indicates that the website is not an effective tool of communication. 58% of respondents did not respond to this question indicating that at best they have not visited the website or at worst may not know that the website exists. 27% of respondents claim that they have visited the website. Responses from Questions 25-27 relate the comments made by this 27% of the total population.

* 1. Is there anything missing on the website that you would like included?

|  |
| --- |
| **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED ON THE WEBSITE** (in order of priority) |
| Overall appeal | More interesting pictures – first page too dark |
| Appeal for Seekers/Enquirers | Needs information to attract people finding out about the faith |
| Add a testimony/testimonies |
| For RCIA Teams | Include a ‘Noticeboard’ to share successful ideas, news or resources; a community sharing point for Catechists |
| Notifications to alert to new information added eg: dates, upcoming events etc. |
| Ability to book training opportunities online as needed |
| **Other** | Create an **app** to include:* Access to information/factual content
* Current research/news
* Online training sessions (with app able to record when sections of training are completed & tests successfully passed
 |

This question was added to the survey as the OCI is in the process of designing a new website. Feedback from the survey will be valuable in establishing what information and items Coordinators and Catechist teams wish to access.

One suggestion gaining momentum is the addition of online courses. The OCI has not looked at this possibility but with the growing demand for shorter courses and for courses to become more accessible, this is one consideration which needs to be examined.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

29-30 How would you prefer to receive information from the Office of Christian Initiation?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **PREFERENCE FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION** | **Respondents** | **%** |
| Email | 18 | 72 |
| Text Message (as a prompt) | 4 | 16 |
| Website | 3 | 12 |
| Other | 0 |  |
| *N of respondents =26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

*Communication is an area in which the OCI wishes to enhance. With the experience* of Covid, many Catechists have become more creative in passing on information. The OCI wishes to ascertain what forms of communication will be most useful in reaching Coordinators in parishes. The data indicates overwhelmingly that emails are still the preferred form of communication between the OCI and parishes. Of the 72%, 16% of respondents asked for a text message prompt to alert them when something has been added to the website.

**NEWSLETTER**

31 Did you find the quarterly newsletter helpful?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **USEFULNESS OF QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER** | **Respondents** | **%** |
| Yes | 11 | 42 |
| No  | 2 | 8 |
| Have never received a newsletter | 4 | 15 |
| No response | 9 | 35 |
| *N of participants =26 responses* | *26* | *100* |

The OCI newsletter was suspended during Covid as much information was being disseminated regularly via email to keep Coordinators abreast of the government directives. The newsletter has not been available since. The data indicates that 42% of respondents declare that in the past, the OCI newsletter has been useful. 50% of respondents have either never received a newsletter, or did not respond to the question indicating that they too may be new to the ministry and have not received a newsletter from the Office.

1. Please share some ideas on how the Office of Christian Initiation can improve communications with RCIA Teams in parishes?

The following suggestions were offered as a way for the OCI to improve communications especially with young people.

|  |
| --- |
| **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS**  |
| Use social media to communicate within RCIA, especially for RCIyp* WhatsApp for communication
* YouTube and TikTok for education
* Facebook and Instagram for witnessing
 |

**CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of the findings can only be made on the data available from the number of respondents who participated in the survey. Considering that the data came from all areas of the metropolitan area, it would be safe to conclude that the results are typical of the way the RCIA process is offered in the majority of parishes in the Archdiocese of Perth.

The findings will be very valuable in developing future strategies and support systems for those involved in the RCIA ministry. One area that needs attention, among others, is the formation of parish priests in the understanding of the RCIA process and the importance of the celebration of the Liturgical Rites as prescribed in the RCIA process.

# Recommendations

While the following is not the traditional way in which recommendations are presented, this format gives the OCI a good breakdown of what needs to be considered for future planning. The recommendations have been broken up into three categories: Formation, Communication and Website

**TRAINING AND FORMATION**

Recommendations for improving formation sessions include:

**Courses**

* offering the Initial Formation Course in Hubs
* offering regular short refresher opportunities for Catechists
* offering shorter modules over a longer period
* organising study days
* designing an online course/training modules for those who cannot attend meetings
* offering targeted support in the understanding and celebration of the Liturgical Rites of the RCIA process

**Content**

Recommendations for improving content of courses include:

* placing stronger emphasis on appreciating the structure and goals of RCIA with understanding that RCIA is a conversion of heart, not a theological course
* offering more courses on moral issues
* offering courses on the understanding of basic human emotional and spiritual development
* offering courses that equip Catechists with the understanding and knowledge of how to better lead their Catechumens to know Christ in their situation – stressing to meet them where they are at in the journey

**Support**

Recommendations for added support between Catechists include:

* organising Catechist forums with guest speakers
* organising forum to give Catechists opportunities to share their experiences/challenges and learn more skills to run the RCIA process more effectively in the parish
* organising guest speakers, presenting different aspects of the RCIA Process

**COMMUNICATION**

**Improve communication between Coordinators**

Recommendations for improving communication between Coordinators across Parishes include:

* accessibility to a contact list of all Coordinators showing parish, parish address, phone number and email address of the RCIA Coordinator. The recommendation is for easy communication between parishes and for referring enquirers
* encouraging Coordinators to work towards developing RCIA Hubs

**Improve Relationship between RCIA Teams across the Archdiocese**

Recommendations for improving relationships between RCIA Teams across parishes include:

* Initiating social gatherings such as Christmas/New Year Party to improve Catechist relationships
* Initiating annual meetings of all the RCIA teams in parishes to share experiences, concerns, successes, etc.

**Improving communication between parishes and the OCI**

**Formation and Training Sessions**

Recommendations for improving communications in the area of formation and training sessions include:

* receiving timely notice for events e.g. Rite of Election
* receiving a hard copy of the yearly calendar of events

**Sharing of Resources**

Recommendations for sharing resources across parishes include:

* supplying information on purchasing resources books so that it can become more cost effective
* creating a space for sharing useful resources as they become available
* researching more resources suitable for the RCIA process

**WEBSITE**

**Website as a tool for more effective tool for communication**

Recommendations for improving the website include:

* add a ‘Noticeboard’ to the website for parishes to share successful ideas, news or resources as a community sharing point for all involved in RCIA
* add articles on current research and relevant articles pertaining to RCIA
* add the capacity for booking formation sessions directly online
* include a Notification app to alert Coordinators and Catechists when new information has been added eg. NB dates, upcoming events etc.

**Website as a tool for online courses**

Recommendations for making courses more accessible using the website includes:

* designing an online course/training modules for those who cannot attend meetings including an app able to record when sections of training have been completed

**Website Appeal**

Recommendations for making courses on the website more user friendly include:

* adding information and images to attract people finding out about the faith
* adding testimonials of life experiences of people going through / have gone through the process of becoming a Catholic
* making information more explicit

**Other modes of Communications for consideration**

Other Recommendations to improve communications include:

* Using social media for communication within RCIA and crucially for RCIYP
	+ For example:
		- WhatsApp as a tool for communication
		- YouTube and TikTok for education
		- Facebook and Instagram for witnessing

**FURTHER SUPPORT REQUESTED FROM OCI**

**Help in setting up a new process within a parish**

Recommendations for helping parishes new to RCIA set up a process include:

* walking through a scenario of the parish starting up RCIA to:
* learn about the process and its objectives
* learn how to connect with Hubs, and OCI for support
* provide support materials and a less complicated Framework
* handhold new parishes/Hubs for a period as they get started

**Parish Support**

Recommendations for support from OCI includes:

* OCI to encourage priests to take more responsibility for the ministry in the parish
* OCI to provide strategies which will help to encourage the faithful to support RCIA in the parish
* OCI to help in reaching out to Catechists who need extra support

Recommendations from the survey will become the basis for the OCI Strategic Plan for 2023-2028. The findings and recommendation of the survey will be shared with the Very Rev Fr Vincent Glynn, Episcopal Vicar for Education and Faith Formation, Fr Nino Vinciguerra, Coordinator Parish Renewal Team, Parish Priests, RCIA Parish Coordinators and RCIA Teams.

The survey results will also be made available on the Office of Christian Initiation Website*.*

**Thank you to all the parishes that participated in the survey.**

1. Sharon Brewer Are Parishes Ready, Willing and Able to Welcome People into the Catholic Faith. A summary of a research report on the vitality of RCIA in Australian Parishes [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. A Parish Hub is defined as a group of parishes that come together to share in and work on a common initiative. parishes can benefit from adopting a collaborative pastoral practice model with RCIA. Creating Hubs with nearby parishes, will encourage the sharing of resources and expertise, which will help to strengthen and enhance the work of the RCIA team. The process will function more efficiently and effectively. The wisdom and knowledge shared in the Hubs will promote a more integrated approach in carrying out the ministry in the wider Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Address given by Pope Francis in the US October 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The “RCIyp (Rite of Christian Initiation of Young People) “*Come and See”* is a new resource in the Archdiocese launched in October 2021. At the time the survey was conducted many parishes had not received a copy of the resource. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The “RCIyp (Rite of Christian Initiation of Young People) “*Come and See”* is a new resource in the Archdiocese launched in October 2021. At the time the survey was conducted many parishes had not received a copy of the resource. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. The “RCIyp (Rite of Christian Initiation of Young People) “*Come and See”* is a new resource in the Archdiocese launched in October 2021. At the time the survey was conducted many parishes had not received a copy of the resource. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Newly Baptised member of the Church [↑](#footnote-ref-11)