

RCIA Canonical Issues

Baptism An adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and is to be led so far as possible through the various stages to sacramental initiation. [Code of Canon Law 846, 851--hereafter CCL]. Every person not yet baptized and only such a person is capable of baptism. [CCL 852]

Sponsor There is to be only one male or one female sponsor or one of each. [CCL 873]

Validity of previous Baptism Non-Catholic baptism is valid if it is done with water in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and if the minister of baptism “intends to do what the Church does.” [Dir. of Ecumenism 95, CCL 862,2]

There are several ecclesial communities whose baptism is invalid. Check the Canon Law section of the Diocesan website for a list of invalid or questionable baptisms. Examples of an invalid baptism would be [1] one that does not use water or the Trinitarian formula. [2] one that uses inclusive language or functional language [Creator, Redeemer, etc] If after investigation a doubt remains as to the validity of a baptism or doubt if in fact the person was not baptized, baptism is to be conferred conditionally [CCL 869,3]

See Handout on Valid and Non-Valid Baptism

Confirmation Some ecclesial communities purport to celebrate confirmation; however “chrismation” in the Orthodox Churches is the only other valid confirmation. [Eastern CCL 897]

Note: a person from Eastern Orthodox Churches who wishes full communion with the Catholic Church is brought into the corresponding Eastern Rite Catholic Church. [eg. Greek Orthodox becomes Greek Catholic] Although Eastern rite Catholics may attend mass and receive sacraments in the Latin rite, they belong to the Eastern rite jurisdiction. [CCL 112,2]

Marriage A valid marriage bond exists between a man and a woman who have given their consent to each other.

1. Catholics are bound to the canonical form of Marriage, a priest or deacon and two witnesses [CCL 1059 and 1118]. Lack of canonical form, without dispensation, affects the validity of marriage so that a person involved in such a marriage is not properly disposed to receive the sacraments. Such a marriage is to be regularized before initiation or reception into full communion with the Catholic Church. The Eastern Orthodox is the only other Church that requires a particular form of marriage.
2. Non Catholics who marry either in their own church or civilly are validly married. [CCL 1058, 1060]
3. Divorce and remarriage can present an obstacle to initiation and full reception into the Church. Since the person is in an irregular state and not disposed to receive the sacraments, [CCL 843,1] any person in this situation should be referred immediately to the Pastor or other person entrusted with submitting cases to the Tribunal for a “declaration of nullity of marriage” as soon as possible. The review for declaration takes from 18 to 24 months. While such a person may take part in inquiry, it would be ill advised to admit them to catechumenate while his or her status remains uncertain. Although divorce per se is not an impediment for baptism and reception into the church, the divorced person may insist that he or she has no intention of marrying, yet there is no certainty of this. The individual should submit the former marriage for a review for a declaration of nullity of marriage. Because a negative decision by the tribunal is a possibility, it may be inadvisable to admit such persons into the catechumenate, because it could cause spiritual harm to him or her.
4. Should a person coming for baptism or reception into full communion be married to a person [Catholic or non-Catholic] with prior marriage[s], their present “marriage” is “irregular” and an obstacle for initiation or reception. All prior marriages of the present spouse must be submitted for a review for a declaration of nullity so that the present marriage can be validated, even if the spouse has no intention of becoming Catholic.

Directors should also be aware that the RCIA is governed by its own law (*General Introduction, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* introduction, and the *National Statutes for the Catechumenate* (NCCB). They should also be aware that the Diocese has its own particular law entitled *Guidelines for the Christian Initiation of Non-baptized Children and Youth of a Catechetical Age in the Diocese of Oakland* that were issued by the Christian Initiation Committee on May 15, 1986.