Preparing for the Rite of Acceptance

Opening Prayer and Scripture Reflection – *preferably the Gospel of the Sunday coming*

From *Enlightened by Faith, Prayers for the RCIA Journey* by Anita Ahuja

Fill Me with Light and Truth, page 8. Read and break open significant phrases.

Activity: Personal Salvation Timeline

Need: Paper (ideally adding machine tape) and pens

Draw a line through the middle. Mark one end with birthdate and one with Easter Vigil. About two inches to the left of that, mark it today. (if paper is smaller, then maybe 1")

Ask those gathered to label five to seven significant life events on the timeline: Graduation; Marriage; Birth of Child; Career Change; Moving; Significant Death; Sickness; Vacation; Turning 30/40/50

Next, label 3 to 5 moments that you think might have led you to be here now. When do you remember feeling the presence of God/Higher Power? Who have you known that has taught you about God/faith/love/mercy/hope – when did you meet them? Any spiritual experiences or encounters? Birth of a child? Witnessing a Catholic Wedding? Attending a funeral?

Share with your sponsor or another person a few highlights from your timeline, centering around what was going on in your life when you had a spiritual experience.

Ask for some large group sharing.

Make observation that the events in our life are all leading us to today. Our lives are a journey and there are events or experiences that mark that journey and define pivotal moments. Sometimes there are "signs" along the way to guide us; or encounters with the Holy that inspire or transform us.

RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults – is a process that leads you further on your journey of faith with the ultimate goal of sacramental celebration. *(show book)*

Show Four Periods Handout (*Note: separate attachment*). Point out:

Pre-evangelization; Catechumenate; Purification and Enlightenment; Mystagogy

Distinguished by three Rites: Acceptance; Election; Sacraments of Initiation

What are Rites? – liturgical acts; involve ritual action and symbols that point to God and a truth; but also celebrate a change in the one participating.

Mark on your timeline Rite of Acceptance Date; Change? – Inquirer to Catechumen

Rite of Election; Change? – Catechumen to Elect

Easter Vigil; Change? – Elect to Neophyte (Catholic Christian)

Say: Basically, the last three periods of the chart – the RCIA Process - fits into the last two inches on your timeline. Sometimes people wonder why the process is so long; can't I just get baptized? But now you see how much is yet to happen, and what a small percentage it is of your whole life that has led you to this moment. Perhaps you can see the wisdom of the church in allowing the Spirit to work in you just a bit longer. This time your journey includes the support of the whole community, this team, and your sponsor.

Also, the whole timeline prior to today has been part of the first period – Pre-evangelization. Do you see that to be true in your own life? *(time for comments/reflections)*

Rite of Acceptance - what "change" is being celebrated in you as you participate in it?

Let's look to the Rite to see what it is asking

Show RCIA Text. Read RCIA 41. They look at handout while you read.

Break open what these bullets mean. Discuss:

<u>What has been discerned in you:</u>

- Evidence of first faith
- Intention to change their lives and enter into a relationship with Christ
- Evidence of the first stirrings of repentance
- A start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer
- A sense of Church
- Some experience of the company and spirit of Christians

During the Rite, we celebrate this growth and "stirrings of faith" and ask you questions. Discuss:

<u>What you'll be asked:</u>

What do you ask of God's Church? (Looking for personal response. Or *Faith.*)

What does this offer you? (Looking for personal response. Or *Eternal life.*)

First Acceptance of the Gospel

You reply, "I am."

Signing with the Cross

Book of the Gospels

Dismissal

Role of Sponsor

Role of Community

Significance of being a Catechumen – RCIA 47.

Note: *Briefly walk through the rite as you go through these items, highlighting and stressing points as appropriate. It is not necessary to fully rehearse the Rite of Acceptance prior to the celebration. Simple directions can easily be given as the rite unfolds. See Addendum One for important considerations!*

Closing Prayer: from *Enlightened by Faith, Prayers for the RCIA Journey* by Anita Ahuja

I Seek You, O God, page 9

Addendum One

Parishes have different traditions and approaches to celebrating the Rite of Acceptance. Within the rite there are several OPTIONS that are sometimes used. Before you walk through the rite with your catechumens, make sure you know what the celebration will look like at your parish that Sunday. Where people will stand and move; the signing of the senses; the giving of a cross necklace and the book of the Gospels are all elements to consider. Plus, it is encouraged that the catechumens provide their own answers to the questions they are being asked about "***why*** they are joining the church", which makes sense seeing as people don't have the same reasons. However, some pastors/parishes/liturgists prefer to have everyone answer with the examples that are listed in the text (RCIA 50). Don't prep the catechumens one way if they are going to be asked another. And don't surprise them to come up with their own answer; give them time to reflect and prayer on it. Look to the text of the rite for direction. (RCIA 48-68, 74.)

Addendum Two

What if we have candidates at our session too?

It is quite likely that you will have candidates and catechumens gathered together for your sessions. On a day like this, if your groups are large enough, you may choose to divide them. You can do a similar faith journey activity with both groups, but the process going forward may look very different for the various seekers gathered. If doing the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates, then you would explain their next steps (RCIA 411-433). Unlike the Inquirers, they are "already part of the community because they have been marked by baptism. Now the Church surrounds them with special care and support as they prepare to be sealed with the gift of the Spirit in confirmation and take their place at the banquet table of Christ's sacrifice." (RCIA 412)

But with a little nuance and explanation, you can likely keep both groups together and help one another appreciate the difference in their spiritual journeys and relationship with the Catholic Church as baptized versus unbaptized.

Do make a distinction between the baptized and unbaptized. It is not appropriate to treat them all is if they are the same. The Catholic Church honors the baptism of other Christian denominations as members of the Church and children of God.

Addendum Three

Follow up Activity

Collect the timelines from the participants at the end of the session and hold onto them until they participate in Mystagogy after Easter. At that time, give them back and ask them to turn them over. The rest of their life is ahead of them. Write some "goals" or plans they have for continuing their journey, growing closer to God, and participating in building up the Kingdom of God through service and prayer.

This could also be done with the Candidates for Full Communion after they have celebrated the sacraments, or at the session before to encourage them to continue growing in the faith.