

Five things your RCIA team may not know about the dismissal  
Posted by Nick From TEAM RCIA reprinted with permission

The very first time I heard about the RCIA was at a diocesan information meeting in St. Louis in 1982. I don't remember a lot about the meeting, but the one thing that really grabbed my attention was when the presenter said that we would be dismissing the catechumens from Mass after the homily. At the time, that was such an unheard of idea that I knew instantly it would cause a great stir in parishes. And indeed, it did cause an initial shock in parishes that implemented the dismissal. Many other parishes decided to simply not do it because it was such a radical departure from the way we had always done things.

It seems like we have gotten over the initial shock, but there is still a lot of resistance to the dismissal. There is also a lot of confusion about it. So here are a few thoughts of mine about why I think it is important. I'd love to hear yours as well.  
Hostility or hospitality?

I don't hear this as often, but there used to be a refusal to dismiss catechumens because it seemed inhospitable. I hope that thinking has died out. We are not sending the catechumens away because they are somehow unworthy. We're sending them out to do the work that is appropriate to their order in the Body. The job of the Order of Catechumens is to hear the Word of God. During the dismissal session, they focus more intently on the Word, listening deeply to God's call to them. This is an essential part of their training in the Christian life.  
Don't do catechesis

Another reason for not dismissing is parishes say they don't have enough catechists. This is a confusion. The dismissal is not a time for catechesis. It is a time for reflection, prayer, and faith sharing the flows from God's Word at that moment. The leader does not need to be a catechist. He or she only needs to be someone who can lead a reflection on faith. That could be a youth minister, a first communion preparation catechist, a choir member, a lector, someone from the parish council, a Bible study participant, or a member of the Womens Guild. It could even be a catechumen who has some experience with the dismissal process. Or it could be a neophyte who has been through at least a year's worth of dismissals already.  
A single exception

A somewhat legitimate reason to skip the dismissal that sometimes comes up is that a parish has only one catechumen. I think you could do a dismissal session with only one or two catechumens, but it is true that having a few more participants is beneficial. If you decide not to dismiss the lone catechumen, it is still important to break open God's word with him or her. You would simply do it after Mass instead of after the homily. After Mass, you could gather a few of the baptized to also share faith and the catechumen will not seem so isolated.  
Keep the baptized candidates in the Mass

Here is one of the biggest confusions. Oftentimes, a Protestant who is married to a Catholic and who has been going to Mass for years decides he wants to become Catholic. Too often, the poor soul is stuck into the catechumenate and is then sent forth from the liturgy every Sunday without his wife. These people almost never belong in the catechumenate. Someone who has been to Sunday Mass regularly for years is catechized. They might need

more catechesis, but they do not require the beginning conversion level of catechesis that the catechumens need. And since they are not in the catechumenate, these catechized Protestants would not be dismissed from Mass.

Keep the Catholics in the Mass

And, of course, parishioners should never be dismissed. That seems obvious, but we still get lots of questions about sponsors, spouses, and other team members. The only baptized person who should leave with the catechumens is the dismissal leader. By way of adaptation, baptized uncatechized participants in the catechumenate might also be dismissed. But my preference is that even these folks stay with the other baptized members of the assembly as a sign that they are in a different order the Order of the Faithful.

So what happens in your community? Are you dismissing catechumens every week? What about in the summer? And what are you doing with the children? Please share your thoughts.