



Christian Initiation
Australia Network

NETWORK NEWS

Summer 2020/21

Words from the Chair



Dear Friends,

It's nearing the first anniversary of the WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic. Of course, we mourn the

tremendous human loss brought by this disease and its widespread consequences, but as it continues the Church has also had to adjust her faith practices. A number of dioceses are either modifying or delaying their Rites of Election this Lent. The Vatican has also issued directives for Ash Wednesday with the sprinkling rather than signing of the ashes on recipients.

The CIAN Executive met recently and discussed some of these changes. We were encouraged to hear that the Lord continues to work in the lives of people in the midst of these difficulties so that we are still in the position to need the Rite of Election for adults entering their final stage of preparation for Christian initiation at Easter. We hope and pray that our churches will be open for Holy Week so we can enter into a full liturgical commemoration of the Paschal Mystery this year.

Pope Francis has proclaimed a "Year of Saint Joseph" from 8 Dec. 2020 to 8 Dec. 2021 in order to mark the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX's declaration of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. Pope Francis explains that this is also an occasion for us to foster a deeper devotion to St Joseph who, with a true father's

heart for Jesus and as the beloved husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, cooperated in the mystery of our redemption. This year is an opportunity for RCIA teams to focus on the role of the Holy Family in the mystery of salvation, for God does not save individuals, but a family.

This edition of Network News includes an enlightening article by Nick Wagner on the Rite of Election which has been edited by Max Norden to reflect the clauses in the Australian rite, which differs in some respects from the rite-book used in the USA. The particular value in this article is the importance of the Rite of Election as a decision point, not just for the catechumens but also the entire community, to arrive at a judgement about the catechumens' state of formation and progress.

We would love to have some photos of your Rite of Election for our July edition of Network News, just email the photos and details to our editor Max Norden (email details are on the back page).

John McGlynn has been reflecting on how COVID-19 has impacted on our RCIA processes and how it has forced us to rethink the way we journey with catechumens and those already baptised and seeking full communion of the Catholic Church. He challenges us by asking how we are meeting the expectations of our inquirers.

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Christian Initiation Australia Network seeks to support all those who share the vision of the RCIA

Call to All Catholics Campaign

By Mark Bowling



Media blitz: Grant and Jacinta Gelderbloem with their children. Grant is one of the faces of the new campaign to call Catholics back to church.

FORMER Test cricketer Matthew Hayden is going into bat again – this time opening for a major advertising campaign calling all Catholics to come to church.

The campaign will run across South East Queensland early next year and is pitched middle stump at “baptised but not practising” Catholics.

Recent census figures show only about eight to 10 per cent of more than 700,000 people across the Archdiocese of Brisbane who identify as Catholic, actually come to Mass.

The endorsement of the swashbuckling former Test opener will appeal to one of the campaign’s prime target audiences – men aged 35 to 54 – with Mr Hayden sharing his own journey back to faith.

“As the Church in Brisbane, we want to do everything we can to reach those who don’t join us for worship,” Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge wrote in a letter sent to all parishes and church communities last week.

“To this end, early in 2021 the archdiocese will be launching a large-scale campaign to invite all baptised Catholics to discover the deeper meaning of their baptism.”

The campaign will start with an advertising blitz in the Brisbane Times, on popular radio station Triple M, in Westfield shopping centres, and online and social media platforms.

Matthew Hayden will feature on billboards, video clips and interviews.

The campaign will also feature Brisbane Catholics Grant Gelderbloem and Vanessa Comminos – part of a strategy to reach multiple target audiences including professional working women.

Evangelisation Brisbane executive director Deacon Peter Pellican said

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Words from the Chair

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What’s one aspect of your parish RCIA that you’ve had to adapt or change over the past year? What’s one change that your seekers and catechumens are responding well to? Share your thoughts on our Facebook page @CIANRCIA.

We also have a report on the Brisbane Archdiocese’s new initiative to reach out to inactive Catholics, news on the upcoming Alive in the Spirit conference (postponed from 2020), a review of a book that may be helpful in RCIA, and suggestions on how to foster prayer within the home, particularly in light of the 2020 lockdowns .

Yours in Christ,

Dr. Christine Wood

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Will your Rite of Election be a true decision point this year?

By Nick Wagner and Max Norden

Will the Rite of Election be celebrated in your parish worship space this year?

Some dioceses may shift the rite out of the cathedral and into the parish because of the COVID-19 pandemic (See RCIA #12, 34.6 [Australian Rite] for delegation by the bishop and #113 & #115 [Australian rite] for outside of Lent). And in dioceses where the celebration will still be held at the cathedral, the number of people present will be dramatically smaller to allow for social distancing. The Rite of Election is going to be very different for most of us in 2021.

It is important that our catechumens understand the purpose of the Rite of Election. And it is just as important for our parish

communities to understand it. The Church says that prior to this ritual moment, the bishop, priests, deacons, catechists, godparents, and the entire community . . . *“should, after considering the matter carefully, arrive at a judgement about the catechumens’ state of formation and progress. After the election, they should surround the elect with prayer so that the entire Church will accompany and lead them to encounter Christ”* (RCIA #108 [Australian Rite]). RCIA #9.3 (Australian rite) *“On the day of election, because it is a day of growth for the community, the faithful, when called upon, should be sure to give honest and carefully considered testimony about the catechumens”* also highlights that the church says that this ritual moment is the focal point of the church’s concern for the catechumens.

You might have thought baptism would be the focal point. The reason election is the focal point is that it is the time of decision, the time of choosing. Baptism is important, but it is a foregone conclusion to the act of enrollment. The Rite of Election is where the drama happens.

Or at least it used to. Nowadays, a seeker is often told before they even become a catechumen what the date of their baptism will be. Often, there is no true discernment of the seeker’s readiness to live as a disciple. But in the early church, that was not the case.

What did the Rite of Election look like in the early church?

A fourth-century Spanish nun, named Egeria, reported on the Holy Week ceremonies in Jerusalem. She noted that after a lengthy period of preparation (sometimes as long as three years), the catechumens would be brought before the bishop by their godparents. The godparents would then offer testimony about how well their catechumens were living as Christians.

The bishop would interrogate the godparents, asking about the lifestyle of the catechumens. The bishop wanted to know if the catechumens had honoured the widows, visited the sick, done good works, honoured his or her parents, always told the truth, and refrained from getting drunk. And he would also interrogate the neighbours and others who might know these catechumens.

If the bishop was satisfied with what he heard, he would direct that the names of the catechumens be written down for initiation at the next Easter Vigil. If he was not pleased with the progress of a catechumen, the bishop would deny initiation and direct that the catechumen continues in formation for another year.

Imagine the tension! Imagine what the years of preparation would be like if you knew how carefully the bishop was going to scrutinize the lives of your catechumens.



Photo by [Christina @ wocintechchat.com](https://www.unsplash.com/photo-1573496000000-000000000000) on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/)

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Brisbane archdiocese launch ad campaign calling all Catholics to come to church

◀ (Continued from page 2)



Go make disciples: Vanessa Comminos is part of the new evangelisation campaign

can have a chat with at the end,” Deacon Pellicaan said.

“We are acutely aware that faith is caught not taught. Just giving people information is not enough to draw them back in.”

Parish groups across Brisbane are being asked to engage with the campaign, according to Archbishop Coleridge, “through prayer for the opening of hearts, accompaniment to those who are seeking, and welcoming new faces in the churches”.

middle-aged men made up the fastest-declining group in the Church.

“They are typically parents, they are not engaged in faith, they are probably engaged in sport,” Deacon Pellicaan said.

“They can be pretty busy, trying to survive, pay a mortgage, get the kids fed and to bed.”

Deacon Pellicaan said another prime target audience were “multicultural females – who have come from overseas, had faith but are now not engaged in their faith”.

He said the campaign had taken most of 2020 to develop and fine-tune, and aimed to answer the needs of baptised, but not practising Catholics and help them engage in faith.

“Our hope in the first instance is to attract them (non-practising Catholics) with our big and broad advertising campaign – to send them to our website that we are developing that provides them with a resource of 30 days of reflections that basically unpack what their baptism means,” Deacon Pellicaan said.

“And that resource can be sent in the mail or sent as daily reflections in your inbox.

“We are doing a podcast for it as well.”

The next key component of the campaign is an online 10-session adult formation course prepared by Evangelisation Brisbane adult formation associate director Shane Dwyer.

“The intent is to have a collection of video presentations in a Tedx Talks-style that can be watched in a small group setting or even with someone who you

“To help us reach as many people as possible, we will need your help to get the word out,” he said.

In January, Evangelisation Brisbane will provide parishes with flyers, posters, fence banners and a video featuring Archbishop Coleridge to play in place of the Sunday homily on Sunday, February 7.

Deacon Pellicaan said it was hard to predict the impact of the campaign and the accompaniment that followed through online resources, Catholic parishes and communities.

“We are throwing out the net wide and far,” Deacon Pellicaan said.

“If we are absolutely inundated with calls we’ll have to manage that in terms of staffing, because we do want to make sure that what we are doing is personal.

“If we got one per cent – about 6000 people – who did the whole course and re-engaged with the Church that would be a great start.”

Asked why the campaign was important now, Deacon Pellicaan quoted directly from Matthew 28:19 – “Go make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

“2020 has been a year of reckoning for a lot of people,” he said.

You can find out more about the campaign Call to All Catholics at: [Evangelisation Brisbane](https://www.evangelisationbrisbane.org.au).

email: formation@bne.catholic.net.au

website:

[evangelisationbrisbane.org.au/baptisedcatholic](https://www.evangelisationbrisbane.org.au/baptisedcatholic)

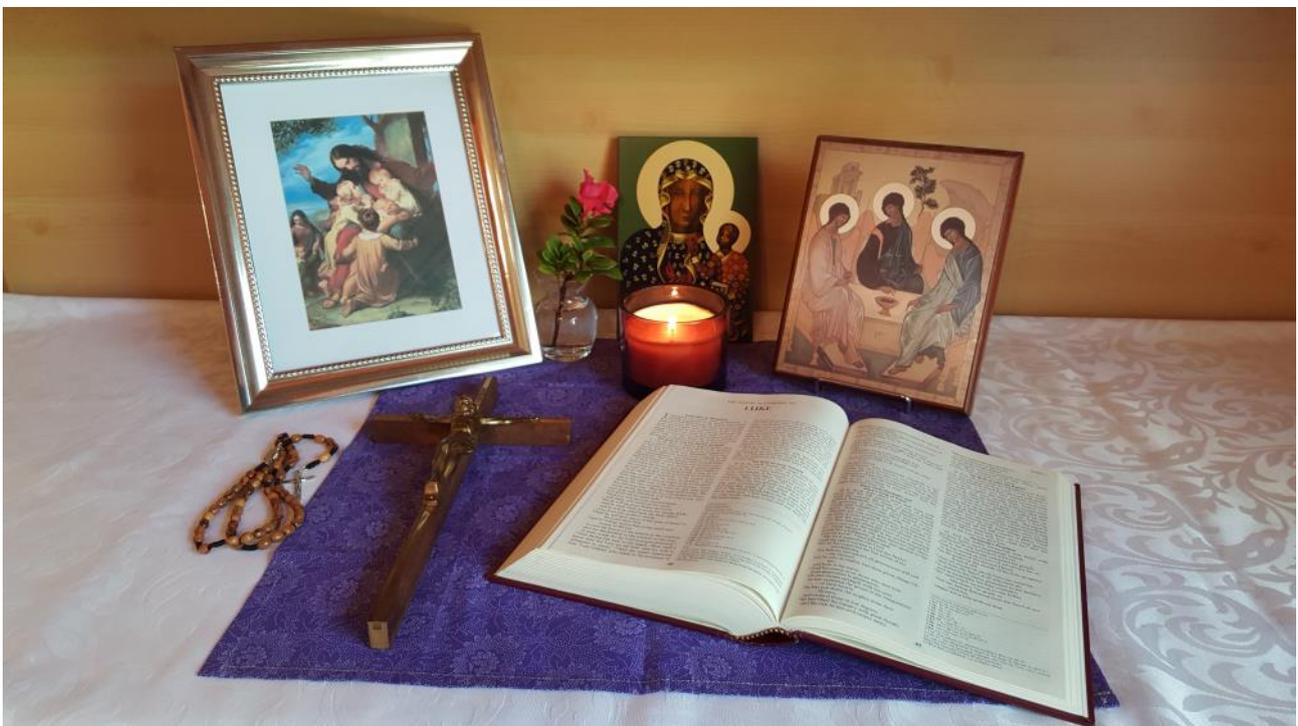
Praying During the Pandemic

By Dr. Christine Wood

Many of us felt spiritually abandoned when public Masses were cancelled last year, or more recently in localised lockdowns. But in lieu of direct access to the Eucharist the laity be creative in their spiritual activities. Recalling that through our baptism we are made sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices, we recognised that the graces received at baptism continue to work in our daily lives so long as we are united to Christ-crucified and risen, through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The baptised all share in the baptismal priesthood. Those men who have been ordained to the ministerial priesthood are at the service of the baptismal priesthood. When our priests said their daily Masses in private they continued to offer the sacrifice of Christ for our intentions. I personally know some priests who asked for specific Mass intentions during the pandemic in order to keep their parishioners connected to the parish's daily liturgical prayer.

Each day we would do well to unite our prayer intentions to the Eucharist offered that same day by our priests even if we can't be in attendance. Besides praying for the end to the pandemic, consider praying for those who have died, who are sick, and for all the medical staff and priests ministering to the sick throughout the world. Be sure to



include our government leaders, that the Lord will bestow on them the wisdom needed to govern society well in this difficult time.

Although we lacked access to public Masses last year, we were not deprived of the liturgy altogether. Many took up the practice of praying the daily Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, in union with all those Catholics throughout the world who pray it. This enabled them to participate with the universal Church in the liturgy throughout the day. A number of websites and apps provide ready access to these prayers (e.g. universalis.com or divineoffice.org).

The practice of setting up a prayer space within the home is helpful in lockdowns, but also worth maintaining afterwards. This might include a crucifix, bible, holy picture of the Madonna and Child, a candle, and a cloth in the liturgical colour of the day to help connect us to the current liturgical season or feast. This creates a sacred space within the home where the family can gather to offer daily prayers in union with those of the local parish and the universal Church. Families can consider reading the daily Mass readings together, and praying a rosary asking the Blessed Mother for her protection and intercession to stop this pandemic. Spontaneous family prayer time helps to deepen our relationship with Jesus. Prayerful intercession of the saints, particularly Ss. Roch and Sebastian who are powerful intercessors against plagues, is a practice worth fostering.

Now is not the time to feel isolated nor abandoned. Pope Francis says, 'Every man for himself' is not a solution to pandemic. Rather, it is a time to pray in solidarity with the universal Church for those most in need. In so doing, our baptismal graces become active through our baptismal priesthood.

Will your Rite of Election be a true decision point this year?

←(Continued from page 3)

What should we keep from the early practices of initiation?

We don't want to fully replicate the fourth century election rite today. We don't want anyone turned away at the final moment. On the other hand, we can do a lot more to make our modern Rite of Election a true decision moment. We can decide long before the rite to train catechumens to live as disciples. We can act as if the bishop will be asking hard questions of the godparents at the Rite of Election. And we can make sure the godparents (and the neighbours) are doing their part to teach the catechumens how to live a life of faith.

We can also do some true discernment of readiness all during the catechumenate. We should know long before the Rite of Election if a catechumen is going to need more formation. There is no rule that inquirers have to be initiated eight or nine months from when they become catechumens. In fact, the opposite is true. The church teaches: *"The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough—several years if necessary—for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong"* (RCIA #76 [Australian Rite]).

How could we get a testimony from godparents and other members of the parish?

One more way we can make the Rite of Election into a true decision moment (RCIA #109 [Australian rite]) is to recover some sense of the testimony of the godparents and even the neighbours or members of the parish. The Rite of Election includes a ritual "Affirmation by the Godparents and Assembly," (RCIA #118 [Australian Rite]), which is an echo of the episcopal interrogations of the fourth century. We can make it a little more than an echo by expanding the affirmations into actual testimonies.

Since some dioceses may be celebrating the Rite of Election in parishes, it is possible to do this in the rite itself.

We can ask the sponsors, godparents, and other members of the assembly to give verbal testimony to the readiness of the catechumens to live the duties of the baptismal priesthood. Since many dioceses will be celebrating the Rite of Election in the parishes, it is possible to do this in the rite itself. The rubrics for the



Photo by [Christina @ wocintechchat.com](#) on [Unsplash](#)

"Affirmation by the Godparents and Assembly" allow for adaptation. So, the presider could ask for anyone who wishes to speak on behalf of the catechumens. The godparents should be prepared ahead of time for this moment. And people could also be invited to spontaneously come forward to speak. It is important, however, that the testimony focus on the work of the Spirit within the catechumens. You might suggest a form something like this:

"I saw God/Christ/the Holy Spirit acting in [name]'s life when [name] did this..."
or "said this..."
or "believed this..."

This type of response would be more in keeping with the intent of RCIA #109 [Australian rite] *"Therefore to exclude any semblance of mere formality from the rite, there should be a deliberation prior to its celebration to decide on the catechumens' suitability."*

If the logistics in your parish won't work for public testimony at the Rite of Election, you could schedule a small celebration ahead of the rite in which those closest to the catechumens gather to pray for, bless, and testify to the readiness of the catechumens.

This year is a golden opportunity to help our parishioners understand this focal point of our concern for the catechumens. Take the time to make the celebration a true decision point to taking on the responsibilities of the baptized priesthood.

Your Turn

How are you going to make the Rite of Election a decision point in your catechumens this year? What can you do to set the stage well for the next seekers that approach your parish? Share your thoughts on our Facebook page @CIANRCIA .

Book Review:

How to Grow in Faith: A life-changing course to explore the faith, search for answers or prepare for the Sacraments

Reviewer: Sharon Brewer

How to Grow in Faith: A life-changing course to explore the faith, search for answers or prepare for the Sacraments
Fr Michel Remery

Freedom Publishing Books, Melbourne, Australia, 2020.

ISBN 9780648804437

For more details:

freedompublishingbooks.com

Approximate cost: \$33.95 (AUS)



This new release from Fr Michel Remery complements his previous popular books, *Tweeting with God* and *Online with the Saints*. As well as being a frequent visitor to the Australian Catholic Youth Festival, Fr Michel has travelled the world listening to those who want to learn more about the faith and those who are keen to share the Good News.

This offering from Fr Michel is comprehensive in its approach. My first thought as I skimmed through the pages was a slight sense of nervousness as to how a catechist or teacher would approach the book. It would certainly help them if they were familiar with the content of *Tweeting with God* and *Online with the Saints*, as both are key resources referenced by this newer book. To get the most value from this book I would suggest that the user needs to invest some time in looking through the first section in order to discover the myriad of ways the book can be used in a parish or school.

The book covers topics that people on the journey to being Catholic, and even cradle Catholics find difficult. For example, what is the relationship between science and faith, good and evil and the relevance of Scripture. Each session is broken up into different activities. And what I like about this approach is that the author mixes it up. Some sessions might have a time of silence, others

encourage group discussion and there are handy suggestions, such as, how to engage volunteers, the importance of hospitality and how to include other resources. Another handy addition is the section in each session called, "The gist of it". I found this very helpful to quickly ascertain what was going to happen in the session.

As I delved into the book, I sensed a strong focus on building relationships with God and with others, and the importance of accompaniment. Fr Michel notes this aspect in the Preface. He writes:

Therefore, to grow in faith means to grow in understanding of our family ties with God and with other people simultaneously. "No one lives for themselves," St Paul wrote (Rom14:7). [Remery, M. How to grow in faith. p5.]

Personally, I think this book could benefit from a short instructional video that would succinctly explain what is in the book and the variety of ways and settings it can be used. However, if you are putting together a "tool-box" of resources to support faith formation or the RCIA process in your parish, then this book is well worth having. Once you have understood how the book works, you will benefit from ready-to-go sessions that provide flexibility so that you can meet the particular needs of your participants.

Is your RCIA open all year-round? Managing RCIA seekers' expectations

By John McGlynn (TeamRCIA, used with permission)

One thing I've learned in this ministry is that everyone comes to it with certain expectations. This is one of the biggest challenges when working with your initiation team in moving to a year-round process. But your team and your parish leadership are not the only ones with certain expectations. Your seekers also come to the process with certain expectations, and those expectations often reveal themselves during your first contact with them. This means managing their expectations is something we need to be prepared for right from the start.

RCIA seekers expectations

If you think the idea of a year-round process is hard for your team to grasp, it's even harder for many seekers to grasp. We like to take comfort in the idea that our seekers know absolutely nothing about the initiation process, giving us some kind of "blank slate" from which to start, but in my experience these types of seekers are few and far between.

When it comes to working with adults (of any age), they already come to us with a wide variety of life experiences (and biases) that can, even subconsciously, affect how they may expect the process to work. Those expectations can be affected by:

- Knowing someone else who's been through the initiation process
- Having begun the RCIA process at another parish or years ago
- Being raised in the Catholic tradition but not ever having been baptized
- Being raised in another Christian faith tradition
- Having family or friends who are Catholic or raised Catholic

All these variables, and many others, will give your seekers a perspective that can influence what they think the initiation process may be like. The most common I've encountered is that they expect the process to be more of an academic exercise with a fixed schedule, not necessarily one driven by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

I've seen this in what is perhaps the most popular question I get from a first contact seeker — "How long does it take?" Talking them off that ledge is a challenge, especially for those seekers who are more focused on the end result than the journey itself. We need to be prepared to address this question with compassion and understanding because in many cases we're completely blowing their minds when we have to tell them that we don't know how long the process might take for them (at



Photo by DanielBrachlow-2171695 from pixabay

least, not until they've gone through the precatechumenate process).

Some RCIA seekers do their homework

I've also found that an increasing number of seekers come to us after having done some homework by searching the internet to learn more about the process before they contact us. In fact, many of them are contacting us because they found us through the internet. Trouble is, the internet can be both a blessing and a curse, making my journey in this ministry both exciting and frustrating. Exciting in that it provides access to information and communication far faster and more efficiently than ever. Frustrating in that the internet is also a huge source of misinformation, incomplete information or "not entirely correct" information. This can create some confusion for those seekers relying on that information.

While we can't control what our seekers are looking at prior to talking with us, at the very least we can control the messages coming from our own parish website and social media sites. When was the last time you looked at your parish website? When was the last time you updated the information about your adult initiation processes? Is adult sacrament preparation part of your parish's regular page that discusses the sacraments? At the very least we can make sure our own web sites and social media sites are providing accurate and up-to-date information about your adult initiation processes. And most importantly, making sure that adult seekers can start these processes anytime they are ready.

Managing the seeker's expectations in your parish RCIA

It's difficult when you have to challenge a seeker's expectations, but one of the keys to success is by

➔ *(Continued on page 9)*



National Pastoral Ministry Conference

Being the Community Christ calls us to Be

8–10th July 2021

After its postponement last year, this much anticipated Conference will be going ahead as a fully-online offering. The organising committee which comprises representatives from the Pastoral Ministry Network (formerly known as NAPPA), the Mission Planners Network of Oceania and the Christian Initiation Australia Network is now working hard to bring you one of the best conferences you will experience this year. The committee is grateful for the ongoing support of the Parramatta Diocese.

The Conference encourages faith communities including clergy, staff, leadership teams, council members, ministers and volunteers; for those in pastoral care, for youth, family and education support, to engage in the life of Christ, and his Church, by exploring ways to:

- engage the wounded, the disillusioned, the disaffiliated, the discontented & disconnected members of the Body of Christ;
- heal the divisions that have caused pain in our Church;
- revitalise those Catholics who are just “hanging in there” so that they may once again share the Good News of Christ;
- encourage and resource those who have brave and bold evangelisation ideas.

We have already connected with experts in the area of video conferencing and they will be on hand for the next few months to offer their technical expertise.

We are also reviewing our workshops so as to ensure that our offerings meet the demands of a Church attempting to operate with the complexities of an unpredictable virus and unpredictable state and local government’s reactions to it. If you are aware of any areas of Church life that you think the committee should be focusing on, please get in contact with us as soon as possible.

In the meantime, please put the dates in your diaries. If you can share the information with your parish that would be terrific. Maybe you can start to organise a group of parishioners who would like to come together locally to be a part of the Conference.

More information contact:

Sharon Brewer

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CIAN Executive Committee member and member of the Alive in the Spirit planning group.

Is your RCIA open all year-round? Managing RCIA seekers’ expectations

← (Continued from page 8)

replacing their previous expectations with new expectations. After all, their goal, initiation into the Church, remains the same. What’s different is the journey — how they get there and what that road may look like. This is where an effective pre-catechumenate program can help.

You can tell seekers that while we may not know right this moment how long the process may take, we can assure them that you will be discover together what it

will take to get them to their goals. There is light at the end of the tunnel!

In the meantime, it’s important for them to understand that the RCIA process is not an academic exercise; it’s a journey of conversion. Your seekers aren’t joining a club; they are becoming part of a community. Your parish community. Part of the larger Body of Christ. Your family. So if we welcome them with open arms whatever expectations they may have had will be replaced with a sense of belonging.



Christian Initiation
Australia Network

NETWORK NEWS

Network News is the quarterly bulletin of the Christian Initiation Network Australia.

The Christian Initiation Australia Network (CIAN) is a support network of those who share the vision of the catechumenate. Its purpose is to promote the practice of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) through sharing ideas and challenges.

CIAN Membership is open to all who have a commitment to and/or work with the RCIA in Australia.

Thank you to all who contributed to this issue of *Network News*.

To send feedback or get further information about items in *Network News*, contact the editor:

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The next issue will be circulated in July 2021.

Please send stories to share, news or events to publicise, articles to contribute or resources to recommend by 22nd June, 2021 to the editor, Max Norden, (contact details above) or to the CIAN chair:

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E: christine.wood@aohtas.org.au
M: 0408 321 002

For more RCIA Resources, go to cianetwork.net/

Christian Initiation Australia Network seeks to support all those who share the vision of the RCIA