



*Diocese of Erie*  
*Office of Matrimonial Concerns and the Tribunal*

## Concerning Issues: R.C.I.A. Canonical Considerations

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### Record Keeping is Crucial

At this time of year many parishes are working with individuals who are preparing to enter the Catholic Church through the RCIA. It is important for parish ministers to acquire accurate records of candidates' previous baptisms and marriages so they can be recorded in the parish baptismal registry. It is not uncommon for the Tribunal to work with a person who was received into the Catholic Church but whose reception was never recorded at the parish. Even more common are the cases of children who were received with their parents but whose names were never recorded. These situations can cause undue hardship on people because not being able to prove membership in the Catholic Church can have serious canonical consequences. The following is a summary of what must be recorded.

- The names of catechumens should be recorded in the parish register of catechumens along with the names of the sponsors and the minister and the date and the place of the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate (RCIA #46).
- After the Elect have celebrated the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), their names are recorded in the parish baptismal register along with the other information required for the baptismal register including marriage data. In addition, notations are to be recorded in both the confirmation register and the communion register.
- Names of persons received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church are to be recorded in the parish baptismal register under the date they made a profession of faith together with the date and place of baptism of the party, along with the other information required for the baptismal register, including marriage information. Notations are also recorded in the confirmation register as well as the communion register.
- The names of children who are received into the Church at the time one or both parents are received are to be recorded in the parish baptismal register. Their original baptism must be recorded with a note of their becoming Catholic through their parents' initiation into the Church.

### More Marriage Issues

The September and October editions of *Concerning Issues* provided charts to assist with determining what type of marriage nullity case or dissolution case may be needed for those candidates who have been divorced and remarried or who may be currently married to someone who has been divorced. There are some other marriage issues to which those involved in RCIA ministry should be attentive. These include the following:

- A divorced catechumen or candidate who is not now re-married, nor intends to remarry, is not in need of a declaration of nullity or a dissolution in order to receive the sacraments of initiation. However, the implication of future attempts for the person to re-marry without having the previous marriage(s) resolved must be carefully explained before the discernment for the rite is completed.
- The convalidation of any irregular marriage must be completed before the sacraments of initiation are celebrated. It is pastorally advisable to convalidate the marriage as early in the process as possible.
- If, instead of a convalidation, a radical sanation is to be petitioned, it should also be completed before the sacraments of initiation are celebrated. A radical sanation declares the marriage as valid from the beginning and needs no further public rite. Radical sanations are granted by the Diocesan Bishop through the Office of Matrimonial Concerns and the Tribunal.
- If two non-Catholics are married and neither have been previously divorced, and one or both desire to become members of the Catholic Church, the marriage is considered valid and no convalidation or radical sanation is to be done. This is true whether the marriage occurred in a religious ceremony or before a justice of the peace.
- Two catechumens have the right to be married in the Catholic Church.



### Often Asked Canonical Question

*Do Orthodox Christians become members of the Eastern Catholic Church or the Latin Catholic Church if they are received into full communion in a Latin Rite parish?*

- A baptized Orthodox Christian is received into the corresponding Eastern Rite of the Catholic Church, e.g., a person who is Romanian Orthodox becomes a member of the Romanian Catholic Church (Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, n. 4; CCEO C. 35).
- An unbaptized child of Orthodox parents, at age 14, may choose the rite he or she prefers (canon 111.2).
- In other cases, the request for a change of Rite should be addressed to the Chancery Office for appeal to the Apostolic See (canon 112.1).