

## Q Who is involved in preparing people for the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist?

A The pastor. Parish staff members. Parents, godparents, and sponsors. Volunteers who are interested in that particular ministry. That's all, right?

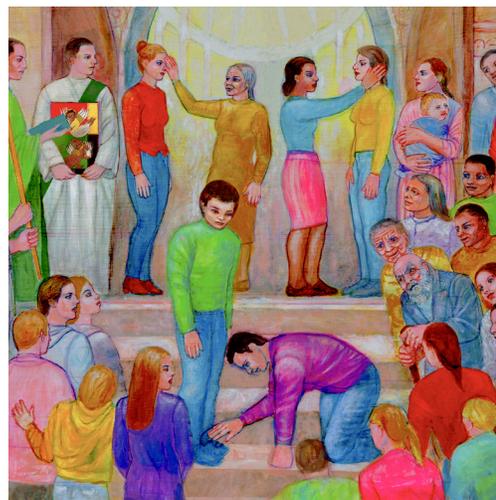
All of these people are an important part of the process, of course, but there is one group missing from the list: **the assembly**. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* gives the entire parish community an important part to play in bringing others to faith: “the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized” (RCIA, 9). At every step of the way, the Church invites all the faithful, not just the sponsors and team, to be involved in the formation of new Christians. How?

In the early stages of the process, we can help those who are hearing the call to the Christian life by our faithful participation in the worship of the Church and in outreach to others. If our faith is one-sided—all praying and no doing, or all doing and no praying—we need to remedy that imbalance so that our own lives truly reflect what a genuinely Christian life should be. We can support inquirers by getting to know them, by inviting them to dinner or to coffee, by entering into conversation, and by being prepared to give witness—to answer their questions about what we believe and how our faith shapes our lives. That might not be a question we are asked very often. What would we say? As St. Peter reminds us, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

Beginning with the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and continuing all the way to the Mass with the Neophytes, we can support those preparing for Baptism or full communion by participating fully, consciously, and actively in the rites and prayers the Church offers for them. But there is more. If we let our minds wander during the Rite of Acceptance, we might miss a very important question: the priest asks the entire assembly (“all who are gathered here with us”), “Are you . . . ready to help these candidates find and follow Christ?” (RCIA, 53). We answer that question not just with the simple words, “We are,” but by praying for those in preparation for Baptism, even if we do not know their

names, and by reaching out to them in other ways—dropping a note, saying hello, stopping for conversation.

After their Baptism, our responsibility continues. “During the period immediately after baptism, the faithful should . . . welcome the neophytes with open arms in charity, and help them to feel more at home in the community of the baptized” (RCIA, 9). We can help new Catholics put down roots by inviting them to join us in parish activities—or even by making room for them in our pew!



They say it takes a village to raise a child. It certainly takes a parish to help new Christians find faith and meaning in a Church community. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults puts great emphasis on the involvement of the entire Church, not only because it is good for new Catholics, but because it is good for all of us. After all, Jesus gave that mission to “go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15) to everyone.

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