



Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

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Ever since its promulgation in the mid eighties, the Church has made good use of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as the official means of bringing people into the faith. Understanding this complex process has grown extensively over the past twenty years. Even those who are in leadership positions continue to grow in their knowledge of the RCIA, moving closer to the ideals of how to bring people into the body of Christ according to the rites of the Church.

There is no easy way to accomplish all that is required of the RCIA. It challenges local church leadership to do things like separate catechumens from candidates; make certain that the period of the catechumenate is of sufficient length; engage the candidates and catechumens in the appropriate rites. Every person who comes through the RCIA comes from a different faith background, each with their own needs. Conversion is not a conveyer belt process, but when used properly, the RCIA can fit the needs of anyone while forming them into faithful believers in the Roman

Catholic tradition.

Sometimes it is said that all of this looks good on paper, but it won't fly in a parish. Is it possible for one parish to address all of the needs of their candidates and catechumens? To answer this question, *Word on Worship* traveled to St. John the Baptist Church in Hillsdale, New Jersey, to ask their RCIA team a few questions, just to see how one parish is responding to the needs of their people through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Who is on your RCIA team?

We have eleven people on our team. Two team members are dedicated to working with children – people between seven and fourteen. The other nine ordinarily work with the adults. Eight are women and three are men. One team member serves on the parish staff and has a Masters degree in Religious Education and a certificate in spirituality – another team member was ordained a deacon last spring.

What are the qualifications for team members?

In general, we look for people who will be warm and welcoming – the first “face” of the Church that newcomers will experience. They have to have a good grasp of their own faith and be willing to share, and they must be open to their own ongoing education and formation in both the RCIA process and the teachings of the Church. One of our team

members actually has a doctorate in theology while another is a former candidate who was received into the Church some years ago. We do like to balance the team between male and female, and we are in the process of getting a few more men on the team.

How long has the RCIA been in use at St. John's?

It was first implemented in the late eighties, but it really began in earnest around 1993.

How many people have come through this process since then?

Since the early nineties, our parish has fully initiated into the Church seventeen catechumens and received into the Church approximately sixty-three candidates.

How do you reach out to possible candidates and catechumens?

Well, the bulletin has information posted in it at all times for people who are interested in joining the church or completing their initiation, and many do contact us directly. We do occasionally run an ad in the local paper, too, but the rites themselves have a way of bringing people in.

How is that?

During liturgies like the rite of welcoming or the scrutinies, the priest will usually say something about the RCIA process during the homily. When parishioners witness these rites, they know where to

INTERVIEW WITH AN RCIA TEAM



direct people who have expressed an interest in joining the Church or completing their sacraments of initiation.

What are some examples of the kinds of people who have come to you in terms of age and background?

The age has ranged from seven to eighty! We have had catechumens who were raised in other religions, some with no religious background at all and some non-baptized Pentecostals. Many were married to parishioners. We have also welcomed into the Catholic Church many of other Christian denominations, and of course, we have confirmed many adult Catholics who were not confirmed as children.

How do you minister to these differences?

In general, we separate children from adults and we also separate our candidates from our catechumens. We then divide ourselves up according to scheduling. One of the first things we ask potential candidates and catechumens after we know they are ready to commit to the process is what their best times are to meet with us. Then we know how we will need to break up the team according to scheduling and the needs of each person.

Why do you think it is important to separate candidates from catechumens?

We need to meet people where they are and bring them along the way. If we put everyone together, it seems to say they should all be in the same place, but that is rarely true. Some people have very little catechetical background and need a lot of focus. Others know more. Even the language we use to explain things to one person can be much different than with another.

We did have a man who came to us who knew a lot of Catholic theology. He had very specific questions, and mostly he met one on one with a team member. We did have him at some meetings with the other catechumens, but if we had them together all the time, some of the others may have felt intimidated.

How often do you meet with catechumens and candidates?

Every Sunday the catechumens are dismissed from the Mass they attend and one or more team members go with them to break open the word. This meeting is solely focused on the Scripture readings of the day. Then we have one other meeting with the catechumens during the week or on a Sunday afternoon to talk about other topics of the church.

Candidates are not dismissed on Sunday from Mass because they are already baptized members of the assembly. We have catechetical sessions with them based on the catechumenate process: breaking open the word, sharing faith, church teaching. They meet during the week or on Sunday afternoon, but even if the catechumens are meeting at the same time, we still keep them separate for these sessions.

Does your RCIA process follow the school calendar, beginning in September with graduation at the Easter Vigil?

No. We follow the liturgical year. If we feel they are ready, anyone can enter the catechumenate any time of the year, but they must go through at least one full liturgical year before they are initiated.

Are there any particular resources you use when catechizing?

The Gospels. The lectionary. The cross. Even the church building itself and the signs and symbols of the liturgy. We also use *Foundations in Faith*, but we are not afraid to go off the topic. We do make extensive use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the periodical *Catholic Update*.

How long does the average person spend in the catechumenate?

It is never less than a year long. As a rule, those entering the process will not be initiated until at least the following Easter. That is, two Easters from the time they enter the catechumenate. We don't follow the academic calendar, but a lot of people tend to enter the process in the fall, so it is usually at least twenty or more months that they are catechumens.

We also have people in the inquiry stage for a long period of time before they are ready to commit to the catechumenate, some even for a few years. We make it clear that once they commit to the catechumenate, they have to take it very seriously.

What would you think about a "mandatory" two year catechumenate?

It would probably be quite good, especially for those who come in "cold," with no faith background. It would stress the importance of faith formation and would give them more time to prepare for such an important time in their lives.

It would be good, though, to have some flexibility. Some catechumens, even though they are not baptized, have been coming to Mass for years with a spouse and can even be involved with parish ministries. We would never advo-

cate anything less than one full liturgical year plus the time leading up to the next Easter Vigil for any catechumen, but requiring two full years (plus the time leading up to the Vigil) may not be necessary for everyone.

What are the age ranges of the children you have worked with in the catechumenate?

From seven to fourteen. They usually spend two years in the catechumenate, and we also require a serious commitment from the family for the ongoing religious education of the children after initiation. Most of them are enrolled in regular religious education classes both during and after the catechumenate. This is in addition to what we do with them through the RCIA.

And you dismiss them each week, too, with a catechist?

Yes – after the homily they are dismissed from the assembly. Some weeks they will go out with the children’s liturgy of the word after the opening prayer. Before the children return, the catechumens are dismissed from the children’s Liturgy of the Word with a catechist. This provides a good opportunity for other young people to become aware of the RCIA as well.

How do you find working with the children?

It is actually easier when they are younger and they can be fully initiated and then enrolled into religious education. As long as we have a sense of commitment from the parents, we know that the children, even though initiated at a young age, will continue to grow in the faith.

We also find it helpful to invite classmates of young catechu-

mens in the religious education program to the rites. This gives the other children the opportunity to learn about the RCIA, and afterwards it raises good questions from the children about the sacraments of initiation.

Let’s talk about the rites themselves. When do you celebrate the rite of welcome?

Not until we feel they are ready. By ready, we mean that we are looking for a level of commitment to the catechumenate and the Church. They need to know some very basic things about Jesus, prayer and Scripture which we help them with during inquiry. Even more importantly, we want to know that they are entering the catechumenate because they want to be initiated, they want to be Catholic, they want to follow Christ, no matter what it takes. As long as they have a sincere desire, we can help them with the rest.

Once we feel they are ready, we will celebrate the Rite of Welcome on any Sunday of Ordinary Time. We try to keep clear of the other Sundays of the year because we don’t want to distract from the focus of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. Of course, Lent and Easter have a lot of RCIA rites for those who are catechumens, too, so we don’t want to overburden them by adding the Rite of Welcome as well.

How do you prepare for the liturgical rites of the RCIA?

We make sure that the catechumens or candidates are focused. Sometimes we will walk them through the rites beforehand, but not in any great detail because we don’t want them to feel like we are rehearsing for a show. We want the rites to have a full effect upon them when they

actually occur.

One of us meets with the priest ahead of time. You can’t tell a priest moments before Mass begins that there is going to be a scrutiny at Mass! We also consider the space where the rites will take place in terms of visibility. We know how important it is that the parish understands itself as part of the rites and of the initiation process.

The Rites of the RCIA are so important because they are “real.” So much of our world focuses on celebrities and fictional movies and television shows. This is something that is actually happening to them. These rites are meant to have a real effect on their lives, so we try to celebrate them as fully as possible.

What is their reaction to the rites celebrated at the cathedral, namely the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion?

The catechumens and candidates are both very impressed with the liturgies at the cathedral. They always come back saying, “wow!” They are often quite moved, and it gives them a sense of belonging to a truly universal Church. It moves them out of parochialism.

The role of the bishop is very important in the initiation process. We see these rites as an essential part of the RCIA process – not an option! The Church is not an enclave in Bergen County where our parish is, but we are part of a much larger Church, the Church of Newark, which is varied and diverse. When we bring our people to Newark, they witness the larger Church in action through the Archbishop himself at our great cathedral.

The Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion are a big piece of the process and they are not to be missed. Even though it can mean a little extra work for the team, we make certain every year that at least one of us escorts our catechumens and candidates with their sponsors to these important events.

What are the initiation rites like at the Easter vigil?

Glorious. Some years ago we had an additional pool constructed which fits around two sides of the baptismal font. The catechumens kneel in the water and the priest pours from a large pitcher when he baptizes. There is no denying that you will get wet at our baptisms!

We wrap them in towels and bring them into the sacristy to dry off, change and we put them in white albs. When they come back, they receive a large, new candle and we celebrate confirmation with plenty of chrism on their heads. It is very dramatic and moving for all to witness. Even though the Mass is longer when you have catechumens, it never seems long. In fact, we often hear complaints when there are no baptisms at the Vigil!

What kind of mystagogy do you do with the neophytes?

We are still working on how to do this well. We see mystagogy as a time of sublimating them into the life of the parish. We would like to do something on a monthly basis perhaps for the first year after initiation.

Whenever we meet with the newly initiated, we try to help them break open the mystery of the sacraments they have received. We help them

examine what is happening in their spiritual lives and get them more in sync with the liturgical year.

RCIA can have a cocooning affect, and we want to bring them out of that small group into the wider parish experience. We make certain that they have support in their faith life through family or other parishioners. Once they are fully initiated, they tend to have even more questions which we address with them.

What do you think about the norm that requires full initiation (not just confirmation) at the Easter Vigil?

We have no problem with it. We only fully initiate catechumens (elect) at the Easter Vigil. If you combine candidates for confirmation with the elect at the Vigil, the focus on baptism can get obscured.

Occasionally, if we have no one for full initiation, we will receive into the Church and confirm any baptized non-Catholics at the Vigil. Of course, we never confirm adult Catholics at the Vigil. Usually all of our adult confirmations and receptions into the Church occur on Pentecost or one of the other Sundays of Easter.

Some people say that the catechumens and candidates going through the process together should be initiated together. What do you think about this?

Well, first of all, they should not all be going through the process together! As we said earlier, we break them up. Candidates and catechumens may come together for some things during the process, but mostly they are separated. We always encourage them to attend each other's celebra-

tions. Most of the candidates will come to the Easter Triduum liturgies and witness the initiation of the catechumens, and many of the neophytes will attend the confirmations of the candidates during the Easter season.

What is your overall impression of the catechumens and candidates who go through this process?

They all come in for different reasons, but they all leave happy and gratified for the process. Many are blown over by what happens to them during this time of deep conversion. All the ones we have worked with who still live in the area are present on Sunday and many get involved with other ministries of the parish.

How do you determine who the sponsors will be?

Beyond the canonical requirements, we let them pick someone with whom they feel comfortable. Many times it is someone in the parish we know or occasionally they will even ask a team member. Sponsors are invited to attend the catechetical sessions and many do come.

How does the RCIA affect the faith life of the parish?

It has a positive effect on the parish, but there are still people who do not understand it. Usually, those who witness the rites have a better feel for the RCIA. It is always helpful when the priest explains a little during his homily if a rite from the RCIA is going to be celebrated at Mass. It draws connections so the people in the pews can relate it to the rest of what is going on at the liturgy. But the rites also speak for themselves.

When people witness the public nature of the rites, they do

comment on how much the people in the process must want to be members of the Church. It makes them examine their own faith lives. The RCIA makes parishioners think about their own baptism and what it means to them.

Are the other sacramental preparations in your parish (i.e. infant baptism, first Communion, adolescent confirmation) modeled after the RCIA? If so, how?

The RCIA has definitely influenced them. Confirmation here is done in high school, and the meetings involve a lot of faith sharing and discussions on important Church topics. They also have retreats. It does not follow a classroom model. The first Communion children also have a retreat day before they receive, and they are given a book to work on at home with their parents as part of their preparation. All parents of children for infant baptism have to come to a formation session where they learn about the importance of their own baptism as well as their children's.

What would you say to a parish that does not currently make use of the RCIA?

They're missing out. There is nothing like it. By being part of the RCIA, everyone grows in faith, not only the candidates and the catechumens. The RCIA is a rich, public way of entering the Church, and of identifying the Church as an initiating community. There is no sneaking in the back door! Ministry and service also flow from those who participate in the RCIA.

You sound like you have come a long way in your understanding and implementation of the RCIA. Is it as easy as you make it sound?

No! It was not always like this! At the very beginning, it was a messy process. There is so much to the RCIA that it was hard to know where to begin with it. Our philosophy at the start was that anything is better than nothing, so we began and have built on it each year and continue to do so even in the present. You have to be willing to grow with it and improve it with each year. You have to continue to learn, go to workshops and meetings and follow the guidelines of the Church and the Worship Office. The RCIA is what the Church is asking us to do. No one ever said it would be easy, but you can't get stuck with an incomplete understanding of the RCIA, even if it makes things easier for the team. Otherwise, you find yourself creating molds which you try to force people into, instead of looking at each person, seeing where they are with their faith, and move them in the right direction through the RCIA.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. God bless and keep up the good work.

Rev. Thomas A. Dente
Director, Office of Divine
Worship

EXPLAINING AND INVITING: ADVERTISING THE RCIA

The term “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” is quite a mouthful and can sound almost frightening to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It is common practice to place information about the RCIA in the parish bulletin to educate parishioners about the process, to encourage adult Catholics who have not been fully initiated to do so and to invite newcomers into the Church. Below are some sample bulletin announcements which clearly yet gently invite people into this process of initiation. They may be used as printed or adapted for local use.

RCIA. Those four letters stand for the **R**ite of **C**hristian **I**nitiation of **A**dults. This process is for those who might be interested in becoming members of the Catholic Church. The RCIA introduces people to the Catholic faith and helps them discern if this is where God is calling them. The RCIA eventually leads to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, namely, baptism, confirmation, and first Communion. The RCIA process can also help Catholics who have not received first Communion or confirmation to prepare for these sacraments.

IS GOD GIVING YOU A NUDGE?

- Have you thought about joining the Catholic Church?
- Are you a Catholic who regrets never receiving first

Communion or confirmation?

- Are you married to or dating a Catholic and feel drawn to learn something about your partner’s Church?
- Do you have questions about what the Church teaches and believes?

If you answered YES to any of the questions above, God may be nudging you to learn more about the Catholic faith. You can respond to that push from the Lord by attending the INQUIRY SESSIONS that are part of our Adult Faith Formation Program. These sessions are for adults with “inquiring” minds and hearts. They take place (date) and they are led by (name). You can come whenever you feel ready to “inquire” about the “nudge” you may be feeling from God. ***Our next Inquiry Session will be (date and location). For more information call (number).***

READ THIS AND SEE IF GOD IS CALLING YOU TO INQUIRE!

Our relationship with God is something that grows over time as God calls us ever closer. You may be currently experiencing that call from the Lord in your life. It can come in various ways, for example:

- You may be thinking about joining the Catholic Church.
- You may have questions about what the Church believes and teaches.
- You may be wondering about baptism.

- You may be a Catholic who never received first Communion or confirmation.
- You may be a Catholic who wants to grow closer to Christ and the Church.
- You might be married to or dating a Catholic and you may feel drawn to learn something about the faith that nourishes your partner.
- You may be hungry for something more in life.

If any of those things apply to you, you should consider attending our INQUIRY SESSIONS. These sessions are for adults with “inquiring” minds and hearts. Our INQUIRY SESSIONS take place (dates). They are led by (name), a member of our parish staff. You can begin to come whenever you feel ready to “inquire” about what may be taking place in your spiritual life. ***Our next Inquiry Session is (date). For more information call (number).***

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DOING IT RITE

BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION AND NON-CATHOLIC CHURCHES

VALID BAPTISMS

The Catholic Church regards as **valid** the baptisms of the following:

Adventist
African Methodist Episcopal
African Methodist Episcopal Zion
American Catholic
Amish
Anglican
Apostolic Faith Church
Assembly of God
Baptist
Chinese Christian
Christian Church
Christian Fellowship
Christian Missionary and Alliance
Church of Christ
Church of the Brethren
Church of the Nazarene
Church of God
Classical Pentecostal
Congregational Church
Disciples of Christ
Dutch Reformed Church
Eastern Catholic Churches
Eastern Non-Catholic Churches (Orthodox)
Episcopalian
Evangelical Churches
Evangelical United Brethren
International Council of Community Churches
Liberal Catholic Church
Lutheran
Mennonite
Methodist
Missionary Hill Church
Moravian Church (some communities)
New Apostolic Church
Old Catholic
Old Roman Catholic
Polish National Catholic Church
Presbyterian Church
Reformed Churches
Seventh Day Adventists
Society of St. Pius X
Swedish Covenant
United Church of Christ
Wesleyan Church

This list is not exhaustive and can change without notice. It is also a sound practice to ask candidates what words were said at their baptism and confirm that water was used.¹

Anyone baptized in the above named churches or communions who wishes to enter into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church needs to make a profession of faith and receive the sacrament of confirmation according to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA, 400-504). This occurs after a suitable period of catechesis has taken place.

VALID CONFIRMATIONS

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes the sacrament of confirmation in all Eastern rite churches (Orthodox), the Old Catholic Church, the Polish National Catholic Church, and the Society of St. Pius X. When receiving someone from one of these churches or communions, they are not to be “re-confirmed” but simply make a profession of faith according to RCIA, 473-504.

INVALID BAPTISMS

The Catholic Church regards as **invalid** the baptism of the following churches or communions:

Amana Church Society
American Ethical Union
Apostolic Church
Bohemian Free Thinkers
Children of God (The Family)
Christadelphian
Christian and Divine Sciences
Christian and Missionary Alliance
Christian Community Church (Disciples of Rudolph Steiner)
Christians of Universal Brotherhood
Church of Christ, Scientist
Church of Daniel’s Band
Church of Divine Science
Church of Illumination
Church of Revelation
Church of Scientology
Erieside Church
Evangelistic Temple
General Assembly of Spiritualists
Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association
House of David Church
Jehovah’s Witness
Mason

Mennonites (some communities)
 Metropolitan Church Association
 Moravian (some communities)
 Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)
 National David Spiritual Temple of Christ Church
 National Spiritualist Association
 New Church of Emmanuel Swedenborg (Church of the New Jerusalem)
 Pentecostal Churches (some)
 People's Church of Chicago
 Plymouth Brethren (some)
 Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
 Reunification Church (Moonies)
 Salvation Army
 Shakers (United Society of Believers)
 Spiritualist Church
 Unitarian Universalist

Anyone wishing to join the Roman Catholic Church from the above congregations is treated as a catechumen, receiving suitable catechesis while entering the steps and periods of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA, 1-251). They are fully initiated at the Easter Vigil.

These lists are supplied as a resource for those involved in Christian initiation and may change without notice. For further information contact the Commission for Christian Unity or the Office of Divine Worship.

EASTERN RITES IN COMMUNION WITH ROME

There are six liturgical rites in the Roman Catholic Church: Latin, Byzantine, Alexandrian, Antiochene, Chaldean, Armenian. There are more than twenty churches² which practice these rites, all of which are in communion with Rome. If any member of the above rites wishes to join the Latin rite, they would not become "candidates for full communion" because **they are already in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.**

A transfer of rite normally requires permission of the Holy See. Such a transfer is not to be treated under any circumstances as part of the RCIA. When a husband or wife are of different rites, one may change to the rite of the other. If the marriage should end, the person who changed rites may return to their original rite.

EASTERN RITES NOT IN COMMUNION WITH ROME

Anyone from an Eastern rite not in communion with Rome who wishes to enter communion with Rome does not become a Latin rite catholic. Instead, they become a member of the ritual rite indicated by their baptism. For example, a Greek Orthodox person becomes a Greek Catholic; a Syrian Orthodox person becomes a Syrian Catholic. This occurs regardless of who receives them into full communion. A Latin rite priest receiving a Greek Orthodox person into full communion does not make that person a Latin Catholic. It makes them a Greek Catholic.

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes all of the sacraments of the Eastern rites, regardless of whether they are in communion

with Rome or not. This includes the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Members of Eastern rite churches who have been confirmed, even as infants, are never reconfirmed. After a suitable period of catechesis, they simply make a profession of faith.³

CHILDREN

Children of parents who are received into the Church need special consideration. If they are not baptized and they are under the age of reason (7), they may be baptized and enrolled into parish formation with children their own age to receive confirmation and Eucharist. If they are older, they enter the catechumenate for a suitable period of time which should be more than one year and are fully initiated at the Easter Vigil. Regardless of who baptizes them, children retain the rite of their parents.

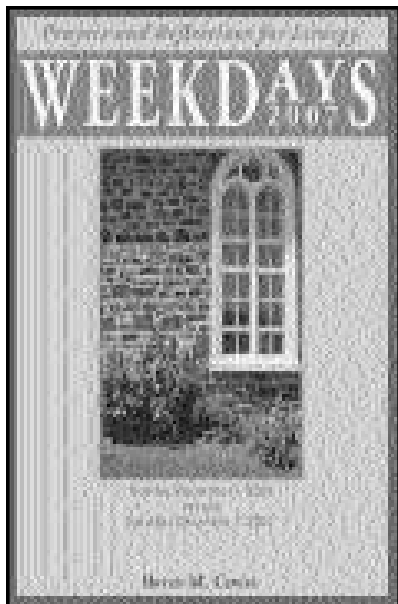
Children of adults received into the Church who are under the age of reason and are validly baptized in another communion do not need to make a public profession of faith. They should be included in the parish religious education program and sacramental preparation with their peers. At the time of first Communion, they will make a profession of faith with their fellow first communicants. It is **not** necessary for them to add the statement found in RCIA, 491. It should be noted in the first Communion registry that they have made their profession of faith. All pertinent information about their baptism should also be noted in the baptismal registry with a notation that they made their profession of faith at first Communion, including the date.

¹ "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Water must be poured over the flesh of the person.

² The following are Eastern rites which are in communion with Rome: Armenian, Bulgarian, Byelorussian, Chaldean, Coptic, Ethiopian, Greek-Melkite, Hellenic Byzantine Rite, Hungarian Greek Catholic, Italo-Greek and Albania, Krizevsky (Yugoslavian, Croatian, Russine, Macedonian, Ukranian), Latin, Malabar, Malankar, Maronite, Romanian, Russian, Ruthenian, Byzantine-Catholic USA, Slovak Greek Catholic, Syrian and Ukranian. **Note that several have very similar names to Eastern churches that are not in communion with Rome.**

³ In the case of Eastern Christians who enter into the fullness of the Catholic communion, no liturgical rite is required, but simply a profession of Catholic faith, even if such persons are permitted, in virtue of recourse to the Apostolic See, to transfer to the Latin rite. (RCIA, 474)

Rev. Thomas A. Dente
 Director, Office of Divine Worship



WEEKDAYS 2007: PRAYERS AND REFLECTIONS FOR LITURGY

This fine annual resource (dated Monday, December 4, 2006 through Saturday, December 1, 2007) is designed for use by priests, deacons and lay ministers at daily Mass. For each weekday of the liturgical year, you'll find:

- Calendar information (day, date, liturgical title, liturgical color)
- Citations for the Lectionary readings of the day
- A Penitential Rite reflecting the readings of the day
- General Intercessions, with an invitation to prayer and a closing prayer
- Daily reflections designed to inspire preaching and personal prayer

All of the information here, including the thoughtful, well-composed texts, will make your weekday liturgy planning easier and more effective. Conveniently three-hole-punched to fit in a standard binder, these pages also feature a clear, user-friendly format and large, easy-to-read and proclaim type.

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