

## A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

The Rite of Christian Initiation is a proven method of welcoming those who are just coming to the faith, but what about those already here? How can parishes create a welcoming environment for everyone?

Here are just a few recommendations, courtesy of Diocesan Publications.

**Make a good first impression.** This starts with making sure your greeters actually greet people. Sometimes, greeters forget that what they are doing is absolutely vital to parish hospitality. Open the door as people walk in. If they know the person, greet them by name. Say, "Thank you for joining us today. We're glad you're here." It may not seem like much, but a couple of friendly faces as a person walks in go a long way in making someone feel "at home."

**Be kind to parents.** Soothing a crying baby is one of the hardest things for parents. They are trying to teach their young children how to behave at Mass, only to be given a look by someone in the pews around them. Kids are kids. They are going to be squirmy. They will talk when they are not supposed to. The best way for parishes to thrive and grow is to make sure young families are welcomed.

**Move over.** When the pews start to fill up, move over. Don't make the older couple crawl over you and your three kids to get into the pew. And be cheerful about it.

**Make parish registration a truly welcoming experience.** Hold off on the envelopes. Sit down with the person or family. Tell them they are welcome. See if they have any questions, not just about the church, but the area, if they've just moved. A welcoming gift is great: a parish directory and a crucifix are always nice.

More great resources are available at [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org).

### Indicators for Effectively Welcoming New Members (RCIA)

*(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 35.A.)*

- We recognize that Christian initiation is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life and so should include more than instruction.
- We provide a parish formation process that includes four stages and the rituals that mark those stages.
- We provide a parish formation process characterized by gradual conversion, ample use of Scriptures, systematic and comprehensive Catechesis, prayer and ritual celebrations and involvement of the whole parish community.
- We provide sponsors who mentor catechumens through the initiation process.
- We provide opportunities for catechumens to reflect upon the Word of God at Sunday liturgies.
- We properly prepare candidates to receive all the sacraments of initiation. *(see sections on Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation)*
- We provide opportunities for the newly initiated to understand and receive the sacrament of Reconciliation. *(see section on Reconciliation)*
- We summon the catechumens to profess faith in the person of Jesus Christ from the heart, to follow him faithfully, and to become his disciple.
- We gather the newly initiated periodically for mystagogia, including an anniversary Mass.
- We incorporate the catechumens into the life of the Christian community.
- We remember that an effective RCIA program need not follow the academic year and can begin at any time.

