

# Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

An adult, who has not been baptized into a Christian faith community and wishing to learn about becoming a Catholic, may participate in the Rite Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). This is a process which restores the ancient practice of initiation into the Church. Focusing on conversion, it is a formation process and at various points of the journey the entire church community celebrates the conversion through prayerful rites. The RCIA leads to celebration of the sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

An adult who has been baptized into another Christian faith community and wishes to join the Catholic Church, will follow a similar process. This person's journey depends on their spiritual readiness and religious formation. The previously baptized person will be received into full communion with the Church and join fully in the celebration the Eucharist.

The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process. The structure of the process includes four time periods and three stages of the Rite of Christian Initiation of adults.

The first period is called the time of evangelization or the pre-catechumenate period. Participants are called "inquirers." It is a time of investigation during which individuals respond to "something moving within them," and seek to discover what life with Christ is like within Catholic Church communities. The local parish community welcomes the inquirers and pledges to pray for them and to assist in their religious formation. The length of this period varies with each individual and culminates with the "Rite of Becoming Catechumens."

The "*Rite of Becoming Catechumens*" is the first formal stage or gateway of the RCIA process. It marks the end of the pre-catechumenate period and the beginning of the second period for catechesis. The At this point the non-baptized person is called a "catechumen", while those previously baptized in another Christian faith are known as "candidates." During the catechumenate period, the conversion process continues - individuals gradually learn more about how God is present in their lives, and are encouraged to explore their response to God's call. It is a time to learn more about the Catholic Church – the history, the doctrine, the rituals and theology of this centuries-old faith community. Rooted in Scripture, candidates and catechumens learn about Jesus, what it means to be a Catholic Christian, and how they are called to service. Assisting in this process are the parish priest, catechists, liturgists, sponsors and/or godparents.

The second stage of the RCIA occurs during Lent, that is, the 40 days just before Easter. The “*Rite of Election*” marks the beginning of this third period, known as the “Period of Purification and Enlightenment.” The *Rite of Election* is celebrated in the cathedral with the bishop of the diocese presiding. (This is a sign of the unity of the universal Church they are joining). Passing into this period indicates that the candidates and catechumens (now called the “elect”) are firmly resolved and committed to embrace the teachings of Christ and join the Catholic Church. This is a time of intense spiritual preparation, deep reflection and prayer. Prior to the rite with the bishop, each parish celebrates a “*Rite of Sending*,” again pledging the prayers and support of the entire parish community.

Three “*scrutinies*” are celebrated on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, during regular Sunday liturgies. These rites are intended to purify the elect, removing the “barriers” of sin and evil that could prevent the elect from experiencing the fullness of God’s transforming love.

The Easter Vigil is the “high point” of the RCIA process. It is during this great celebration that the elect are baptized, and both the elect and the candidates receive Eucharist for the first time and are confirmed. This is the third stage of the RCIA process.

The six weeks following Easter are known as “*mystagogia*” – the fourth time period of the RCIA process. It is a time for deepening knowledge about the faith and for reflection upon the sacred mysteries they have celebrated -a time of looking back at what has happened, reflecting on what it was like to enter the waters of baptism, to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ for the first time, and to be sealed with the sacred oil of Confirmation. *Mystagogia* is also a time for exploring and discovering what this new life as a disciple of Jesus is like – what it means to be Catholic and what “life style” it is calling them into.

Contact the Parish Office for more information about joining the Catholic Church  
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