

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

- † **Thinking of joining the Catholic Church?**
- † **Are you wondering what the Catholic faith is all about?**
OR
Do you know someone who is asking questions?
- † **Have you been worshiping with us, and now is the time to officially take the step to become Catholic?**
- † **Have you been away from the church ... and have now returned, and want to know more?**
- † **Have you been a Catholic all your life, but never celebrated all of the Sacraments of Initiation (*Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist*)?**
- † **Have you joined us from a different background and would now like to find out more about the Catholic Church?**



Is it a little overwhelming?

Then the RCIA might provide the answer.

The RCIA is the process by which non-Catholics become Catholic, and is the Church's way of preparing adults for Baptism. The Catholic Church warmly welcomes potential new members and provides a hospitable environment for anyone to learn about the Catholic Faith. This process is also open to those who have been baptised and are yet to receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and/or Eucharist (*Holy Communion*).

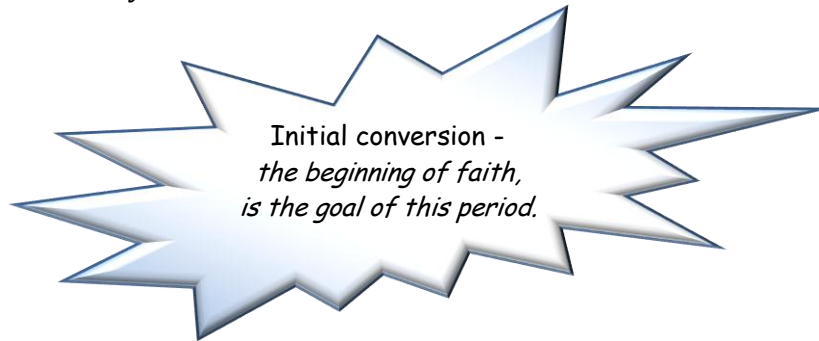


The framework of the RCIA in today's Church is based on the practices and terminology of the early Christians. Most adults entering the Catholic Church, or those just thinking about it, follow the RCIA process. It is the Church's way of ministering sensitively to those seeking to become members. The stages of the RCIA are a good model of basic faith development and a sound beginning to forming your life of faith in the Catholic Church.

The core of Catholic faith can be divided into four categories - **the essential tenets of Catholicism.**



- ✚ Basic beliefs (the faith itself)
- ✚ How to live (morality)
- ✚ How Catholics worship (liturgy)
- ✚ Prayer



What is the RCIA all about?

The RCIA is embedded in the tradition, ceremonies, prayers, and sacraments of the Church - and is a **process, NOT a program of instruction.**

Its purpose is conversion- a Journey of Mind, Heart and Spirit

The RCIA is a journey of conversion for the person seeking to become a Catholic. Through the RCIA, God works to convert people - *to transform them.*

So what do we mean by conversion?

Conversion describes the process of coming to know Jesus Christ more deeply, and the Catholic community has a responsibility to serve as an instrument to help you to grow in your relationship with the Lord.

Those who come to our parish saying, "*I want to be Catholic,*" are "*seeking*" something, and although they may not articulate it as such, are really seeking God. The RCIA then, can best be described as ***a process of coming to know Jesus Christ on a personal level.***

We come to know Jesus Christ more deeply through:

- sharing our stories: *our experiences of God in our lives;*
- sharing the Story: *our Scripture, the Bible;*
- sharing our story as Disciples of Christ: *the Tradition of the Catholic Church;*
- sharing our ongoing story of relationship with God: *prayer.*

RCIA is a way of renewing the life of the Church - we are each called to play our part

Coming to know Jesus cannot be fitted into a few weeks, as it is a process of ever-deepening growth and commitment - **a process that continues long after initiation into the Catholic Church.** Indeed, we Catholics believe that conversion to Jesus Christ is a lifelong ongoing process. To nurture and develop

such continuing conversion, the parish community invites you into this amazing process whereby you develop, deepen and enrich your relationship with a loving God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit: and by extension, it also becomes a journey of renewal and conversion for the whole parish. When we witness others changing their lives, and giving up old ways of 'doing' and 'being', and committing themselves to Jesus Christ, it inspires and challenges us as Catholics to also recommit ourselves.

How long does it take to become a Catholic?

It takes as long as it takes.....

Since the RCIA is a **process and NOT a program**, so there is no specified time frame for preparation to be received into the life of the Church. Indeed if you are not acquainted with Christian traditions and the Christian way of life, the period of preparation will take as long as is necessary, and at the very least, a full Church year. Becoming a Catholic is an important decision in a person's life; a decision which should only be made after careful thought and prayer. **The RCIA is NOT about last-tracking' to meet the Easter 'deadline' or some other significant event in your life.** Some people can take several years of guidance and mentoring before they feel ready to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation. Each person should take as much time to make such an important decision as they feel comfortable and confident with.

The approach taken during the RCIA is intended to enable those seeking to become Catholic Christians to experience, over an extended period of time, what it means to be a Catholic. This is after all, for most people a, 'life-changing decision', and consequently, participants should be as fully informed as possible before taking such an important step. Experiencing at least one Church year enables information to be presented at the appropriate time in the Church cycle and helps keep things in context. Over the period of time, participants learn what the teaching of Jesus is, and also how to we as Catholics live, according to that teaching.

Laying a strong foundation

Faith will be the foundation of your life so we are well advised to make that foundation solid!

Go slowly: discouragement and frustration are the two greatest stumbling blocks to faith development, so take your time and make sure you've understood the basics well. Also be aware of the importance of accurate and faithful teaching ("Orthodoxy").



Make sure that you are comfortable with your own faith development in each of the RCIA stages before moving on to the next. **Don't be persuaded by anyone else to make you move forward until you are sure you are ready.** Don't be pressured by 'calendar-based' things like, "If you don't start now, you won't be "done" this Easter" or "Don't worry if you feel you are not keeping up with the rest of the group. It will all fall in to place before Easter" That kind of pressure is the wrong basis for making a decision about your faith **and your life!**

Sometimes it seems like it takes a long time to work through all the stages of the RCIA, but **Don't Rush It.** It takes time for your faith to grow and develop, and this is after all, a 'life-changing' decision you are making.

Prayer is the foundation of Christian life.



Jesus himself taught us the need for prayer, and before anything important was about to happen, or any important decision was made, Jesus prayed. Prayer is an important tool of spiritual practice in the path of conversion. Prayer is God's activity in our lives, and is also our deciding to turn to God. Prayer is communication with God, and is accomplished in many ways. Prayer can take the form of spoken words, written words, thoughts, meditation, or song.

Prayer is best understood and appreciated through the many forms of prayer experiences offered during the RCIA process. Private prayer is also nurtured and encouraged.

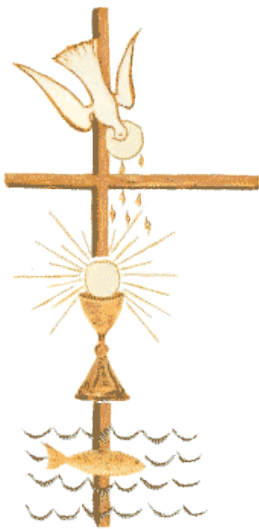
Throughout the process we help you to come to a deeper and prayerful awareness of God's loving presence in your life. The goal of spiritual formation is fostering and developing prayerful relationships that help respond to the call to conversion, and immersion into the spiritual life. **Getting to know Christ, prayer, the Catholic Church, and how Christians live** is the only way you can make an informed decision about entering the Catholic Church.

Preparation for the Unbaptised

Preparation for reception into the Church begins with the Inquiry Stage, in which the unbaptised person begins to learn about the Catholic faith and makes the decision, whether to embrace it.

In the early Church (*first to third centuries*), those people wanting to become Christian lived with a small Christian community to learn their way of life. The structured "apprenticeship" of the Christian in training became known as the catechumenate.

Preparation for Christians



The preparation of those who have already been *validly* baptised in another church or religious denomination differs from that of the unbaptised. Because they have already been baptised, they are already Christian, and as Christians, should not be confused with those who are in the process of *becoming* Christians.

Their doctrinal and spiritual preparation for reception into full Catholic communion is determined according to the individual case, and will depend on the extent to which the baptised person has led a Christian life within a community of faith, and been appropriately instructed to deepen his or her inner devotion and faithfulness to the Church.

For those who have been baptised but who have never been instructed in the Christian faith or lived as Christians, it is appropriate for them to receive much of the same instruction in the faith as those unbaptised, but they do not participate in the specific ceremonies intended for the unbaptised, unless they have received no Christian instruction and formation.

Bringing people into the Catholic Church.

As the representatives of the Catholic community, the RCIA Team and Sponsor (support person) will help you decide your readiness to make the commitment to Christ in and through the Church. A decision which we as a community support and celebrate.

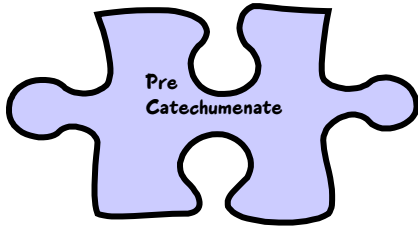
How an adult becomes a member of the Catholic Church?

RCIA stage 1: Just Looking!

(Pre-Catechumenate/Inquiry)

This is the starting place for adults who are thinking about entering the Catholic Church.

In this first inquiry stage, you are just finding out about Jesus, Christianity, and the Catholic Church. The main objective is to explore and develop your faith enough so you can make an informed initial decision about entering the Catholic Church. You won't be asked to make your final decision till much later in the process, just before you actually enter the Church at Easter when you will receive the Sacraments of Initiation.



During this stage, talk to people, ask lots of questions - get a feel for the place. That's the only way you can make an informed decision about entering the Catholic Church. As an Inquirer, you may not yet be exactly sure what you think about the Catholic Church at this point in time.

Rite of Acceptance- the first ritual step

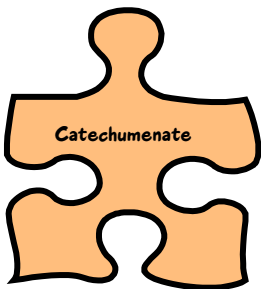
During the period of '*just looking*', some Inquirers become firm in their desire for initiation, and decide that they would like to begin more a formal study of the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. They are admitted into the next step through a special ceremony called the **Rite of Acceptance in the Order of Catechumens**. The Rite of Acceptance is the first public ritual celebrated in the RCIA. During the Rite, usually celebrated with the Church Community during Mass, the whole assembly, together with the Sponsors will offer their support and prayers for you. In this ritual the Church symbolically claims you for Christ by signing you with the cross. The Rite of Acceptance ends the period of Pre-Catechumenate and at the end of the rite, the individual is then known as a **Catechumen**.

RCIA stage 2: Learning about the Faith

(The Catechumenate)

The Catechumenate period is and should be a lengthy one. It is the longest period in the RCIA process.

During the Catechumenate you will come to mass weekly as part of the assembled people of God, and by participating in the *Liturgy of the Word*, become part of the worshipping community. You will also be encouraged to participate in parish events, (*if you come with your Sponsor you can be introduced to the people of the parish*).



By now, your faith has begun to develop. Now you need to continue to learn and grow more. You focus on learning more about the sacred Scriptures, the doctrines of the Church, how to live as a Christian, and continue to develop your the faith - *your interior life*. Your job now is to come into closer contact with the Living God and

learn more about the Catholic Faith.

Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names

This rite is one of the most significant in the RCIA process. The Rite of Election is an acknowledgment on behalf of the priest, the RCIA team, and your Sponsor, that you are adequately

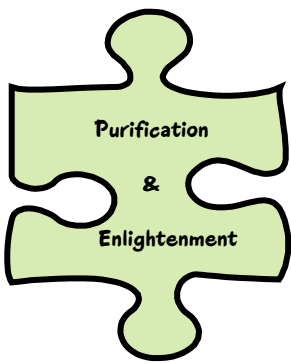
formed and ready to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. It is a formal acceptance on behalf of the Church when the Catechumen formally declares that they believe and accept all that has been presented to them during the Catechumenate. This is a formal declaration that it is your desire to become a fully active participant within the Catholic faith community. During this Rite, the Catechumen will be asked to inscribe their name into the Book of Elect. It is also when the church formally recognises that the Catechumen is ready for the Sacrament of Baptism: but before you can be initiated you must be officially called to the sacraments by the bishop or someone designated by him.

This Rite of Election is usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent in the diocesan cathedral. From this time, until you are baptised, the Catechumen is called the '*elect*'.

RCIA stage 3: Getting ready for rebirth!

(Period of Purification and Enlightenment)

The period of Purification and Enlightenment usually begins the first Sunday of Lent, and ends with the **Easter Vigil**. This is the final stage before receiving the Easter Sacraments of Initiation into the Church: *baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist*. (Those already baptised with a valid baptism in another Christian church are not baptised again.)



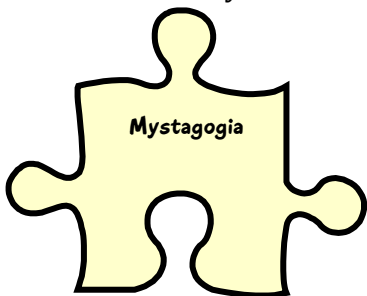
This stage calls you to deeper reflection and conversion in preparation for your renewal at Easter. This is what the season of Lent is for, but it will have a special meaning for you at this time as you are entering the Church and receiving the Sacraments of Initiation. On the Sundays of Lent, special prayers are offered at the *Eucharist* for the Elect, called *Scrutinies*. These prayers are for strengthening in grace and virtue, and help you prepare more fully for the Sacraments. Your Sponsor continues to accompany you in church and support you in your Lenten preparations.

On Holy Saturday, the parish assembles for the Easter Vigil. The Church has always recognised that in baptism we die to sin in Christ's death so that we may rise to new life with him. The Easter Vigil is the primary celebration of Lord's resurrection and is, therefore, the most appropriate occasion for the Elect to celebrate their Baptism, Confirmation and first Eucharist.

RCIA stage 4: Reflecting on the mysteries of the Mass

(mystagogy)

For the 'newly initiated', now called **neophytes**, the time between Easter and Pentecost is a special opportunity to reflect on the commitment which you have made to the Lord, to the Church and to the local parish community. **It's a time for settling in.** This is an important period of reflection for the newly initiated with the parish community.



Formation and teaching continues during this time, in order to help the neophyte become incorporated into the full life of the Christian community.

The Mass and the Eucharist are the "*source and summit*" of the Christian life in the Catholic Church, and this period is designed to help you understand, appreciate, and further develop your sense of '*belonging*' in the Catholic community. During this season the bishop may gather the neophytes for a special Eucharistic celebration called the ***Mass of the Neophytes***.

The celebration of the Sacraments may seem to signal the end of the process for new members, but the **journey of faith lasts a lifetime**, so it is more accurate to look on this time as a '*new beginning*'. The weeks after Easter are a time for new Catholics to seek out their place in the parish community, and accept the call of the Gospel by participating in the church community.

The period of mystagogy ends with **Pentecost**, however, the 'newly received' are still considered neophyte's until the anniversary of their Christian initiation, enabling continuing support and opportunities for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community.

The journey begins with one small step!

