

# **THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION**

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## **I. What is RCIA?**

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a restoration of an ancient process for incorporating unbaptized persons into Jesus Christ through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. In this journey of faith formation, candidates and catechumen (people not yet baptized) are accompanied by members of the community as they learn more about the Catholic faith.

Our purpose is to, not only teach you the doctrines of the Catholic faith but to explain, when necessary, how Catholicism differs from out Christian sects.

## **II. R.C.I.A. is for.....**

- Non-Catholics who want to find out more about the Catholic Faith.
- Parishioners who wish to learn more about their Catholic faith.
- Those who want to join the Catholic Church through Baptism, or Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.
- Those who were baptized Catholic as infants but never received religious education, Confirmation, or First Eucharist.

## **III. Why an RCIA Process? (Wasn't the old Inquiry Class good enough?)**

Christians are made, not born. There is nothing automatic or instant in the Rite of Christian Initiation. The development of faith takes time; it cannot be rushed. The candidates must be allowed sufficient time for their faith to ripen. Ordinarily, this

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means anywhere from one to two years of formation depending, of course, on the background and spiritual maturity of the candidates.

In the past (in fact, hundreds of years ago), a person desiring reception into the Christian Community studied, prayed, fasted and did good works for three years. Initiation takes time. Initiation is more than doctrinal instruction. It is a way of coming to know the traditions, the people, the prayer, the spirituality, and the actions of the community.

## **IV. Five stages of the RCIA Process**

### **1. Inquiry or Pre-Catechumenate**

At this time, participants are encouraged to ask questions and explore the basic tenets of the Catholic faith and to reflect upon these in light of their own life experiences. During this stage there needs to be a sponsor/God parents for each of the inquirers. The sponsor can be any practicing Catholic that will be a guide for you on this journey.

### **2. The Catechumenate**

During this time most of study of Scripture, doctrine, traditions, Catholic morality, prayer and spirituality, and meeting with the parish community takes place.

### **3. Purification & Enlightenment**

For those preparing for baptism, this stage takes place during the Lenten season where they reflect upon their own faith experiences in a more intense, prayerful way. Other times during the year, baptized candidates reflect more deeply upon the meaning of their baptism and celebrate the Sacrament of Penance.

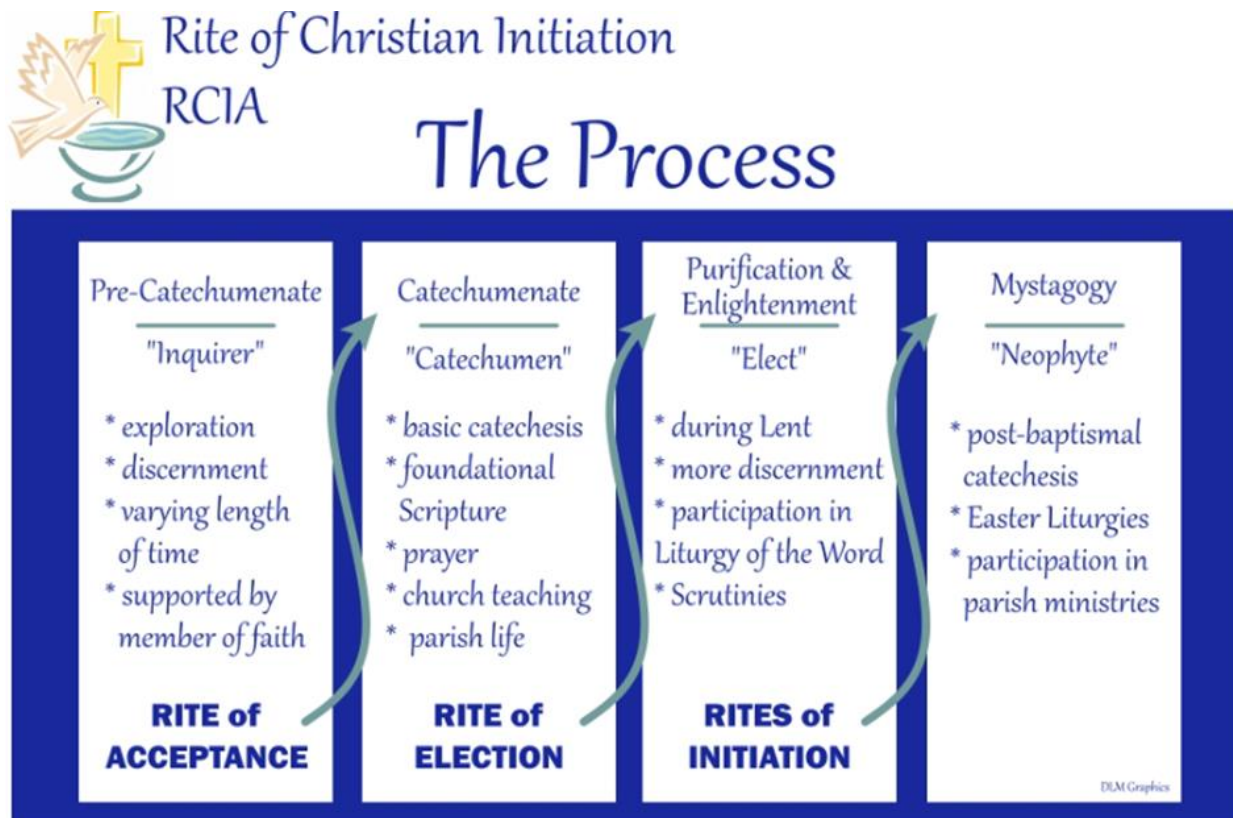
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## 4. Sacraments of Initiation

Candidates for baptism celebrate their initiation into the Church on the holiest of nights-the Easter Vigil - where they are baptized, confirmed and receive Eucharist.

## 5. Mystagogia

This is a time for candidates (now neophytes or new Catholics) to reflect upon their experiences of being new Catholic Christians and find their place in the ordinary life of the Church. They are strongly encouraged to continue there learning about the Catholic Faith.



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## V. Some Frequently Asked Questions.

Q: Must I make a commitment to Catholicism to participate in this program?

A: No! We realize that many people are searching and need to know more about the Church before they make such a commitment. We also realize that Catholicism is not for everyone. We ask no firm commitment until the Rite of Sending during Lent.

Q: I was baptized a Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Anglican, etc. Must I be re-baptized to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church?

A: Possibly! There is only one Baptism. Candidates seeking full Communion within the Catholic Church will not be baptized again, if you were baptized into the Body of Christ using the Trinitarian formula: (“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit”). Most higher Protestant churches baptize in this manner. If so, then re-baptism is not required. However, if you were baptized into a specific church or different wording was used, example: I baptize you in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier then baptism will be required.

If your baptism was valid then a simple Profession of Faith and receipt of the remaining Sacraments of Initiation, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist will bring you into full communion with the Catholic church.

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Q: I think I was baptized but am not sure. What kind of information do I need to join the Catholic Church?

A: If your church or congregation kept records, you'll need to obtain a copy of your baptismal record — a certificate or a letter from the pastor there. Because locating records can be difficult or time-consuming, you should try to obtain these records as early in the process as possible. We must see these records to confirm your baptismal status before you're received into the Church. If your church or congregation did not keep records or no longer exists, we can make other arrangements.

Q: I've been divorced but am not remarried. Can I become Catholic?

A: Unless you plan to marry, you do not need to obtain an annulment. Please talk to the RCIA director to see if you need an annulment.

Q: I've been divorced and am remarried, and my spouse is divorced and remarried. Can I become Catholic?

A: You and your current spouse need to begin the annulment process, and you should begin it as soon as possible even if your spouse is not considering entry into the Church. Please contact the RCIA director for information on how to proceed. Of course, you can attend RCIA instructions while the annulment process is ongoing.

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Q: I heard I need a sponsor to become Catholic. What is that, and how do I get one?

A: A sponsor is a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church who accompanies you on your journey through RCIA. The sponsor has the job of helping you through the process, and of verifying at the main rites that you are ready to take the next step. For baptism, the sponsor is called a “godparent,” with more serious responsibilities toward the catechumen being sponsored. At St. Clement of Rome Parish sponsors are expected to attend sessions with the candidate they are sponsoring. If you know someone who meets these criteria, you can simply ask them to sponsor you. If you don’t know anyone, the parish will provide a sponsor for you.

Q: I know who I want my sponsor to be, but that person doesn’t live locally and can’t attend sessions. Can that person still be my sponsor?

A: Yes. However, we will provide someone locally to represent that sponsor, accompany you on an ongoing basis and instructions and the rites with you. At the Easter Vigil, the sponsor you prefer will then stand in the local person’s place as your official sponsor.

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Q: How old should a person be to attend RCIA?

A: A person should be old enough to understand what is being taught. For children of catechetical age (ages 7 to 14), we encourage students to enroll in religious education. Depending on their level of maturity and interests, older teens might join the adult group. This will be based on approval of the Pastor.

Q: What texts do you use and how do I get them?

A: We use the Scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and a Catholic edition of Scripture. We will provide those texts. We provide other materials — a syllabus of subjects covered, handouts, and occasionally printed materials, as well. We also provide a notebook for your handouts.