

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) names the process by which interested persons gradually become members of the Roman Catholic Church.

The RCIA is primarily a journey of faith:

- "From the awareness of stirring of faith and curiosity within one's heart,
 - through all those stages of asking and seeking,
 - through beginning involvement with Roman Catholic people,
 - through hearing the Gospel proclaimed and by faithful reflection and prayer on this Word of God,
 - through study and discussion about the Catholic experience,
 - through doubts and hesitations,
 - through discernment of God's call for them as individuals,
 - through the steps of commitment,
 - through the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)
- to a life of faith, love, and justice lived in communion with Catholics throughout the world."

The RCIA Process

- The implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is addressed to the following groups:
 1. Unbaptized Adult Converts (RCIA Part I);
 2. Unbaptized Children of Catechetical Age (RCIA Part II, chapter 1);
 3. Baptized but Uncatechized Adults and Children of Catechetical Age (Catholic or Non-Catholic) Preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist (RCIA Part II, chapter 4);
 4. Baptized Christian (Non-Catholic) Candidates for Reception in the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.

The RCIA contains five main stages or phases:

- The Period of Inquiry (Also known as the time of Evangelization or Pre-Catechumenate),
- Catechumenate,
- Period of Purification and Enlightenment/Scrutinies,
- The Paschal Triduum with the Sacraments of Initiation and
- Mystagogical Catechesis.

The Period of Inquiry

Period of Inquiry has as its purpose a time

1. to become acquainted with the Roman Catholic Church and to hear the good news of salvation from Jesus Christ our Savior;
2. During this period, the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, and inquirers look within their own story to make and mark connections.
3. This period lasts as long as the person needs it to last, from a few months to several years, if necessary. During this period, some may decide that this is not the right time for them to become a Catholic.

The Rite of Acceptance (and Welcome)

- The Rite of Acceptance (and Welcome) is a liturgical rite, marking the beginning of the catechumenate proper, as the candidates express and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ. (RCIA, Part 1)
- This rite may be celebrated at any time of the year, and more than once during the liturgical year, as groups of candidates in the precatechumenate become ready to celebrate it.

Period of the Catechumenate

- Period of catechumenate embodies the first stages of commitment leading to full membership. It is the lengthiest period of the initiation process.
- The four ways in which the catechumenate period brings to maturity the initial faith that is manifested in the Rite of Acceptance and Welcome are: (1) catechesis, (2) liturgical rites, (3) community life, and (4) apostolic works (RCIA no.75)
- During this phase, the catechumens now gather with the Catholic community on Sundays for the first part of the mass, during which, together, we hear the Scriptures, respond to them, and reflect on the meaning of God's Word for us personally and as community through the homily. After the homily, catechumens are dismissed, and with their Catechist, continue a process of reflection and application of the Word of God proclaimed in the Sunday assembly.

With the help of the sponsor, the catechumen or candidate should be introduced to other members of the parish community, and take part in parish activities to the extent that they are able.

The Rite of Election (and Call to Continuing Conversion)

- The Rite of Election (and Call to Continuing Conversion) is the liturgical rite, celebrated at the Cathedral, on the First Sunday of Lent, by which the Church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness for the sacraments of initiation and recognizes the candidates preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist or reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church and the catechumens, now the elect, and the candidates express the will to receive these sacraments.
- Before the rite is celebrated, the catechumens and candidates are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. (RCIA no.120)

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

- The Period of Purification and Enlightenment corresponds to that time known in the Roman Catholic Church as Lent and has the character of a time of retreat for the elect who are preparing for Baptism, for the candidates who will complete their initiation or enter the full communion of the Catholic Church, and for the faithful who will commemorate their own Baptism at Easter.
- The centerpiece of this period of prayerful preparation is the celebration of the Scrutinies. Although the candidates will not be the subjects of the Scrutinies, catechesis for both the elect and the candidates during this period is related to the celebration of the Scrutinies.
- Throughout this period, the elect and the candidates are invited to join with the whole Church in a deeper practice of works of charity and in the practice of fasting.
- The Scrutinies are celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of the Lenten season. At the Masses at which the Scrutinies are celebrated, the cycle A readings must be used (RCIA no.146).
- The presentations, to the elect, of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are also celebrated during this period.
- The elect and the candidates are advised that on Holy Saturday they should refrain from their usual activities, spend time in prayer and reflection, and as far as they can, to observe a fast (RCIA no.185). The preparation rites (RCIA no. 185ff) assist this process of prayer and reflection.

Celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation

- The Sacraments of Initiation is the liturgical rite, integrated into the Easter Vigil, by which the elect are initiated through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.
- By the waters of Baptism, a person passes into the new life of grace and becomes a member of the Body of Christ.
- Anointing with special holy oil called chrism seals the initiation by the power of the Holy Spirit and participation at the Table of the Lord in the Eucharist marks full membership in the church.

Reception of baptized Christians (candidates) into the full communion of the Catholic Church can be integrated into the Easter Vigil or may be celebrated, within Mass, at another time, when the candidate is ready.

Period of Mystagogy

- The Period of Mystagogy lasts from Easter Sunday until the completion of the Easter season, fifty days later on Pentecost Sunday and completes the initiation process. Those who have just shared in the sacraments of initiation are now called Neophytes and during this period of Easter joy they reflect on what they have just gone through and look to the future as to how they can now share in the mission of Christ who came to bring salvation and life to the whole world. This period of time reminds the whole church that life in Christ constantly calls us to grow and to look for new ways to live the life of grace, personally and together.

Catechumen or Candidate?

- By means of the processes described in the document, R.C.I.A., interested non-baptized persons become Catechumens, and Catechumens become full members of the Catholic Church by means of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist, which are referred to as the Sacraments of Initiation.
- Those adults who were baptized as infants either as Roman Catholics or as members of another Christian community but did not receive further catechetical formation, nor, consequently, the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist are also included in the RCIA process. They are referred to as Candidates - a candidate for the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation and a candidate preparing to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church and thus become a full member of the Catholic Church.
- As in the case of catechumens, the preparation of candidates requires an extended time. Most often, a program of training, catechesis suited to the Candidate's needs, contact with the community of the faithful, and participation in certain liturgical rites are needed in order to strengthen them in the Christian life. (RCIA 401) For the most part the plan of catechesis corresponds to the one laid down for catechumens. The differences in the process are tailored by the candidate in conjunction with the RCIA Director and the Church-provided Sponsor.
- Since candidates are already baptized, the liturgical rites that mark the steps of the formation process are different from those of catechumens. There is the Rites of Welcoming The Candidates, the Rite of Calling The Candidate To Continuing Conversion and a Penitential Rite. Reception Of Baptized Christians Into The Full Communion Of The Catholic Church is the liturgical rite by which a person born and baptized in another Christian Community is received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

How long does it take?

- "The Rite of Christian Initiation is not a program.
- It is the church's way of ministering sensitively to those who seek membership. For that reason some people will need more time than others to prepare for the lifetime commitment that comes with membership in the Catholic Church. The usual length of preparation is from one to two years. For those already baptized and who seek full communion in the Catholic Church, the time will also vary.

- It seems reasonable that catechumens or uncatechized candidates experience the yearly calendar of Catholic practice at least one time around in order to make an informed decision.
- The process of spiritual renewal and catechesis should not be hasty, especially for those not accustomed to the fasts and feasts and Sundays and seasons the way Catholics observe them.

The Christian Initiation of Adults must be integrated into the Easter Vigil, except in exceptional circumstances. The Reception of Baptized Christians Into The Full Communion Of The Catholic Church may take place at any Mass, whenever the candidate is ready to make a Profession of Faith and/or receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist."

What is the first step?

Anyone who is seriously thinking about become a Roman Catholic-Christian or who would simply like more information can contact their parish office for more information. You may also contact your local Diocese Office ask for the Diocesan Office of Evangelization.