

# RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS



## What is the RCIA and what is its structure?

The **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)** is a process (not a program) modelled after the Church's ancient practice of initiating adults (including children 7 years of age and older) into the community of believers through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Conversion is at the heart of the RCIA process.

Prior to beginning the RCIA process, an individual comes to some knowledge of Jesus Christ, considers his or her relationship with Jesus Christ and is usually attracted in some way to the Catholic Church. This period is known as the **Period of Evangelization/Pre-catechumenate**. For some, this process involves a long period of searching; for others, a shorter time. Often, contact with people of faith and a personal faith experience lead people to inquire about the Catholic Church. After some time such a person, known as an **"inquirer"**, may seek acceptance into the **Order of Catechumens** through the **Rite of Acceptance**. During this Rite, the inquirer stands amidst the parish community and states that he or she wants to become a baptized member of the Catholic Church. The parish assembly affirms this desire and the inquirer becomes a **"catechumen"**.

The period of the **catechumenate** can last for as long as several years or for a shorter time. It depends on how the person is growing in faith, what questions they encounter along the way, and how God leads them on this journey. During this time, the catechumens consider what God is saying to them in the Scriptures, what changes in their life they need to make to respond to God's inspiration, and what Baptism in the Catholic Church means. When a catechumen and the priest and the parish team working with him or her believes the person is ready to make a faith commitment to Jesus in the Catholic Church, the next step is the request for baptism and the celebration of the **Rite of Election**. Even before the catechumens are baptized, they have a special relationship to the Church.

The Rite of Election includes the enrollment of the names of all those seeking baptism at the coming Easter Vigil. Typically, on the first Sunday of Lent the catechumens, their sponsors, and families gather at the cathedral church. Before the diocesan bishop, the catechumens publicly express their desire for baptism. Their names are recorded in a book and they are called **"the elect"**.

The days of Lent are the **"Period of Purification and Enlightenment"** leading up to the Easter Vigil. Lent is a period of preparation marked by prayer, study, and spiritual direction for the elect, and prayers for them by the parish community. The Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation takes place during the Easter Vigil Liturgy on Holy Saturday when the catechumen receives the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. Now the person is fully initiated into the Catholic Church, and as a new member is known as a **"neophyte"**.

After the person is initiated, formation and education continue in the period of the post baptismal catechesis, which is called **"mystagogy"**. This period continues at least until Pentecost. During the period the newly baptized members reflect on their experiences at the Easter Vigil and continue to learn more about the Scriptures, the Sacraments, and the teachings of the Catholic Church. In addition they reflect on how they will serve Christ and help in the Church's mission and outreach activities.

## **Who needs to attend RCIA?**

People who have not received the sacrament of Baptism must attend RCIA for an extended period — ideally, a year, and sometimes longer. The length of the process depends greatly on your readiness for the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

## **What is meant when people refer to men and women coming into "full communion with the Church?"**

Coming into full communion with the Catholic Church describes the process for entrance into the Catholic Church for men and women who are baptized Christians but not Roman Catholics. These individuals make a profession of faith but are not baptized again. To prepare for this reception, the people, who are called "**candidates**", usually participate in a formation program to help them understand and experience the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Some preparation may be with catechumens preparing for baptism, but the preparation for candidates is different since they have already been baptized and committed to Jesus Christ, and many have also been active members of other Christian communities.

## **I'm already baptized in another denomination. Do I need to attend RCIA?**

That depends. The Catholic Church doesn't re-baptize people who are already baptized. If you are baptized but never received any instruction in the faith, you should receive instruction now and finish any sacraments you didn't complete. We strongly recommend RCIA, even if you have been well instructed in another faith tradition, since you will need to learn how the beliefs and practices you grew up with differ from the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. If you are a baptized and confirmed Catholic returning to the practice of the faith, you should talk to the pastor of the parish about how to proceed.

## **I've been divorced but am not remarried. Can I become Catholic?**

Certainly. Unless you plan to marry, you do not need to obtain an annulment to enter the Catholic Church. However, pursuing the annulment process is often very healing and prepares one for the possibility of a future marriage in the Catholic Church. One should consult the pastor of the parish about such circumstances.

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

You and your current spouse need to begin the annulment process which is an investigative inquiry into the sacramental validity of the first marriage(s) which is presumed binding unless proven otherwise. You should begin it as soon as possible ***even if your spouse is not considering entry into the Church***. Of course, you can attend RCIA instructions while the annulment process is ongoing. However, reception into the Church has to wait until the annulment process has been completed and a declaration of invalidity of the first marriage is granted in favour of the subsequent one being entered into in the Catholic Church.

## **I've only been married once but not in the Catholic Church. How does this affect my choice to become a Catholic?**

If neither you nor your spouse was Catholic at the time of the wedding and you were free to marry then there is no further concern. Your marriage is already considered sacramental if you were both baptized Christians or it will become sacramental upon your baptism in the Catholic Church. If your marriage was with a Catholic outside of the Catholic Church then it needs to be "sacramentally blessed" before your reception into the Catholic Church. This also reconciles the Catholic party with the Church and allows him/her to return to Eucharistic Communion.

## **I heard I need a sponsor in order to become Catholic. What is that, and how do I get one?**

A sponsor is a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church who accompanies you on your journey through RCIA. The sponsor has the responsibility 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. 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.