

RCIA – What is it?

Parishes welcome new members into the Catholic Church through a process of education, faith sharing, and rituals known as the ***Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)***. This process includes several stages marked by prayer, study, and discussion. Included in the process are several Rites, which take place within the context of the Mass. The RCIA process follows the ancient practice of the Church and the normal way adults prepare for baptism. The RCIA is structured over a series of ceremonial steps and periods of learning. One may take as much time as he or she needs in the initiation process before becoming ready for full initiation through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Initiation within the Church is a journey of conversion that is gradual and ongoing and suited to individual needs.

The Steps of Christian Initiation:

- **First Stage:** Pre-Catechumenate – a time of inquiry, not of commitment.
 - Rites: *Acceptance and Welcoming*
- **Second Stage:** Catechumenate – a time of learning more about what the Church teaches through exploring the Sunday Scriptures.
 - Rites: *Election (1st Sunday of Lent)*
- **Third Stage:** Purification and Enlightenment – a time of retreat and reflection.
 - Rites: *Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*
- **Fourth Stage:** Mystagogy – uncovering the meaning of living as a Catholic.

Who is welcome to begin the RCIA Journey?

All people who are open to discerning their personal experience of faith and to learning more about the Catholic Church are welcome to begin the RCIA process. Many people come to an awareness of their desire to learn about membership in the Catholic Church in various and different ways. Often it may be a personal faith experience, overcoming personal difficulty and tragedy, or a relationship or discussion with a person of our community which leads one to begin this exciting journey. All that is truly required is a sincere desire to learn, to grow, and to develop one's relationship with God.

The RCIA process can be applied to the following 3 groups:

- **Unbaptized:** persons who have never been baptized and who need a process to help them grow in awareness to God's call to conversion as well as ways to respond to that call. They are considered *catechumens*.
- **Baptized in another Christian Church:** persons who were baptized into another Christian denomination and wish to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. They are considered *candidates*. For baptized Christians interested in possibly joining the Catholic Church, the process will vary depending upon the depth of one's religious and spiritual readiness.
- **Baptized but un-catechized Catholic Adults:** persons who were baptized as infants and not given any religious instruction in the Catholic faith. These adults will be prepared to celebrate the sacraments of penance, confirmation and Eucharist. They are also considered *candidates*.

Note -Candidates do not always need to take part in the full process. If they have been actively living the Christian life in another denomination, they may be welcomed into the Church after a short period of preparation.

Adult Catholics who were baptized and received their First Reconciliation and First Eucharist in the Catholic Church and are interested in the Sacrament of

Confirmation should contact the parish office or email: RCIA@stfrancisbend.org
This is for Catholics who have been instructed in the Catholic faith but who have not received the Sacrament of Confirmation. St. Francis recommends they join RCIA program to help prepare them to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation with the Bishop normally during the feast of Pentecost.

The Steps of the Journey

The Rite of Christian Initiation is based on the principle that the process of conversion proceeds gradually, in stages. Progress from one stage to the next is marked by a liturgical celebration in the midst of the parish community. The experience and needs of those in each category described above differ, and so the length of time may vary for each person. Yet there are certain similarities among all the groups and the process they will experience. RCIA consists of **four periods of formation** which are marked by rituals that celebrate what has been completed and that call a person into the next phase.

Period of Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate

The first stage is called the **period of inquiry** (or the pre-catechumenate). This is when the individual first expresses an interest in becoming a Catholic, and begins to explore, with the help of the parish community, what his or her relationship with Christ might be and how that relationship might be fulfilled and deepened by joining the Catholic Church. There is no liturgical rite to mark the beginning of this stage. There is no time limit or constraints placed on this period. It is rather a very flexible and open time period, which may take several months or several years. Some people engage in this first stage as a long process of searching and discernment. For others, it is a much shorter period of time. *This stage is completed when the inquirer feels ready to move forward and the community is prepared to welcome him or her.*

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

Once the inquirer decides to continue the journey, he or she seeks acceptance into the ***Order of Catechumens***. This is a liturgical rite in which the inquirer states publicly in the midst of the parish community that he or she wants to become a baptized member of the Church. The Church, through the local parish community, affirms this desire by accepting the person and his or her intention to follow God's call. Included in this ***rite are the renunciation of false worship, taking of a new name, and the presentation of a cross***. The candidate is now affirmed by the local community and strengthened to continue the journey.

For candidates who have already been baptized and are seeking full communion with the Catholic Church, this step is called the ***Rite of Welcoming the Candidate***.

Period of the Catechumenate

For the baptized but un-catechized (not yet educated in the faith) This is a time of ***formation and education, and learning is based on Sacred Scripture as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church***. Catechumens learn about Catholic teachings and values (***St. Francis utilizes the well know and acclaimed Symbolon RCIA program on Formed.org***), what it means to be a member of the Catholic community, prayer and worship. This is also a time for the catechumen or candidate to learn how to live as a Catholic Christian through their faith journey and the support of their parish community. Each individual learns what it means to be a Catholic and what changes they may need to make in their lives. It is a time of deepening one's faith, initial conversion, and commitment to the Church. This period ends when the catechumens and candidates express their desire to receive the sacraments of initiation and the parish community acknowledges their readiness. The catechumen, with the support of the parish team working with him or her, then becomes an "***elect***," which is marked by the Rite of Election during the next stage.

Rite of Election

The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names usually ***coincides with the beginning of Lent***. The Rite includes the official enrollment of names of all those seeking baptism at the Easter Vigil. At this Rite the catechumens publicly request baptism and declare their desire to make a faith commitment to Jesus in the Catholic Church. St. Francis normally celebrates the ***Rite of Sending*** prior to the ***Rite of Election***. Godparents and catechists testify to the readiness of the catechumens for the sacraments of initiation.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The next stage is the period of ***purification and enlightenment***. It normally coincides with the ***liturgical season of Lent***. It is a time of reflection, prayer, and spiritual direction rather than a time of catechetical instruction.

This period is intended to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper personal knowledge of Christ. During this time, the ***elect (formerly the catechumens)*** and the candidates enter into a period of spiritual preparation and prayer which includes the ***three public celebrations*** of the scrutinies (for catechumens) and is marked by the presentations of the ***Creed and the Lord's Prayer***.

The Rite of Election (for catechumens) and the Call to Continuing Conversion (for candidates) are celebrated at the beginning of this stage. A Lenten retreat is offered during this period as final preparations are made for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

This period ends with the celebration of ***Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil***. (Note: only the elect are baptized.) All receive the sacrament of Confirmation and are welcomed at the Eucharistic table.

Once a person has received the sacraments of initiation he or she becomes a ***"neophyte,"*** which means "beginner" or "novice.")

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

At the Easter Vigil, the catechumen receives the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Holy Eucharist. Now the person is a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church and will continue to live out his or her response to God as a member of this faith community.

Period of Mystagogy

At this time, the newly initiated explore their experience of being fully initiated through participation with all the faithful at Sunday Eucharist and through appropriate catechesis. Emphasis is placed on the study of the Gospel, the reception of the Eucharist, and actively living a life of charity, service, and love. The period formally lasts through the Easter season and may be marked by a parish celebration on or near Pentecost. Practically speaking, Mystagogy is a lifelong process, one that all Christians are engaged in, as we all work to deepen our sense of what it means to live the Christian life.

The Pinnacle of the Journey

The celebration of the Sacrament of Initiation at the Easter Vigil marks the highlight of each person's spiritual journey, as one celebrates with family and church community full entrance into the Catholic Church.

Companions for the Journey

The Church recognizes the importance of support as one progresses through the RCIA process. Candidates with other adults who are learning about the Catholic Church. The sponsor should share the journey and accompany candidates at RCIA sessions.

This sponsor, who normally comes from the parish community, is called a **godparent** for those who have not yet been baptized and a **mentor** for those who have already been baptized.

They are asked to join the journey of faith and walk with each candidate through each step of the process. The sponsor also connects the candidate to the local parish community.

Sponsor for Adult Converts to the Faith

Many years ago, when someone wanted to become a Catholic, they would have several meetings with a priest and then be baptized or (if they were already a Christian from another faith) be otherwise brought into the Catholic Church. Since the 1970's this process is different.

Sponsors are members of the Body of Christ who accompany a person on their faith journey as they are becoming a Catholic. Many sponsors report how they too, have learned many new things about their faith, not to mention the joy of being a part of someone's life in this important step – becoming a Catholic Christian.

Becoming an RCIA sponsor:

From a recent sponsor:

"Sponsoring an individual who is joining our faith community is an experience that will last a lifetime for you as well as the person you sponsor. The experience allowed me to learn and grow in my Catholic Faith in a way that I had not expected. We learn together as a community of believers and that is really what the RCIA process is all about. So here is your chance to take cross of service and make a real difference in someone's life at the same time!"

The Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil takes place on Holy Saturday, the evening before Easter Sunday. This is the night that "shall be as bright as day" as proclaimed by the Exsultet, an ancient church hymn as we joyfully anticipate Christ's Resurrection. The Holy Saturday Liturgy begins with the Service of Light, which includes the blessing of the new fire and the Paschal candle which symbolizes Jesus, the Light of the World. The second part consists of the Liturgy of the Word with a series of Scripture readings. After the Liturgy of the Word, the Catechumens are presented to the parish community, who pray for them with the Litany of the Saints. Next, the priest blesses the water, placing the Easter or Paschal candle into the baptismal water. Those seeking Baptism then renounce sin and profess their faith after which they are baptized with the priest pronouncing the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

After the Baptism the newly baptized are dressed in white garments and presented with a candle lighted from the Paschal Candle. They are then Confirmed by the priest or bishop who lays hands on their heads, and invokes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He then anoints them with the oil called Sacred Chrism. The Mass continues with the newly baptized participating in the general intercessions and in bringing gifts to the altar. At Communion, the newly baptized receive the Eucharist, Christ's Body and Blood, for the first time.

What to expect at the Easter Vigil

What does the white robe symbolize?

The newly baptized are dressed in a white garment after baptism to symbolize that they are washed clean of sin and that they are called to continue to walk in this newness of life.

What does the candle symbolize?

A small candle is lit from the Easter candle and given to the newly baptized as a reminder to them always to walk as children of the Light and to be the light of Christ to the world.

What does the Sacred Chrism symbolize?

The Sacred Chrism, or oil, is a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to the newly baptized. It is also a sign of the close link between the mission of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who comes to the recipient with the Father in Baptism.

Why was this ancient rite restored?

It was restored in the Church to highlight the fact that the newly baptized are received into a community of faith, which is challenged to realize that they too have become different because of this new life in the community.

Is there a ceremony or preparation for Catholics who never or seldom have practiced the faith?

For Catholics who have been Baptized, Confirmed and made First Communion but then drifted from the faith, the way they return is through the Sacrament of Penance. Catholics who were baptized but never received Confirmation and/or Eucharist also participate in a period of formation. This process of formation is completed with the reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Communion often at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter Season.

What is the role of a godparent for an adult being baptized?

Prior to the Rite of Election, the Catechumen may choose one or two godparents, who will accompany the Catechumen on the day of Election, at the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, and during the Period of Mystagogy.

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They are called to show the Catechumens good example of the Christian life, sustain them in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, bear witness, and guide their progress in the baptismal life.

Course Syllabus

Knowing the Faith

Session 1 – Oct

THE JOURNEY OF FAITH: Trinity, Faith, & the God Who Is Love .

Session 2 - Oct

DIVINE REVELATION: God Seeking Us & The Compass for Our Lives .

Session 3 – Oct

THE BIBLE: God’s Love Letter to Humanity 35

Session 4 – Oct

THE STORY OF SALVATION: Creation, Fall, & Redemption .

Session 5 – Oct

WHO IS JESUS? Just a Good Man or Lord of Our Lives? 59

Session 6 – Nov

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY: The Mystery of Jesus’s Death & Resurrection .

Session 7 – Nov

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LIFE OF GRACE: God’s Divine Life Within Us .

Session 8 – Nov

WHY DO I NEED THE CHURCH?: The Mystery of the Catholic Church .

Session 9 – Dec

MARY AND THE SAINTS: Our Spiritual Mother & the Communion of Saints .

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Session 10 – Dec

THE LAST THINGS: What Happens After We Die? ■

Living The Faith

SESSION 1 – Jan

THE SACRAMENTS: Baptism & Confirmation

SESSION 2 – Jan

THE EUCHARIST: Source & Summit of Christian Life

SESSION 3 – Jan

WALK THROUGH THE MASS: Exploring the Sacred Liturgy

SESSION 4 – Jan

PENANCE AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK: God's Mercy Revealed

SESSION 5 – Feb

MATRIMONY AND HOLY ORDERS: The Sacraments of Service & Communion

SESSION 6 – Feb

A CATHOLIC MORAL VISION: Virtue, Grace, & the Path to Happiness

SESSION 7 – Feb

A LOVE THAT LASTS: Discovering Authentic Love

SESSION 8 – Feb

A LOVE THAT LASTS: God's Plan for Sexuality

SESSION 9 -Mar

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CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: Building a Civilization of Love

SESSION 10 – Mar

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: Protecting the Dignity of the Human Person