



Immaculate Conception/
Our Lady of Perpetual Help

R.C.I.A. Handbook

WELCOME to Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parishes! We are a Catholic Christian Parish Community who invites you to encounter Christ and discover and share the love and goodness of God through prayer, education, fellowship, worship, and service.

On behalf of the Catholic Church, and our Parish Community, we look forward to the opportunity of sharing your faith journey with you. We realize that you bring with you your own life experiences and we value and welcome these experiences. We look forward to sharing these with each other in the weeks to come.

You may have a strong relationship with God, or you may be seeking such a relationship. You may have had some connection with the Catholic Church or another faith tradition. Whatever your background or experiences, we meet you where you are, and we look forward to journeying with you during R.C.I.A.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call the parish office at 425-349-7014.

Welcome and God Bless!



Your Faith Journey

A journey is a movement from one place to another that includes various encounters, changes, and experiences that take place along the way. Our journey of faith is not a journey from one town or country to another. Rather, it's a journey of revelation; a journey leading to a fuller understanding of both the loving God who created you and of yourself.

Learning about the Catholic faith is much more than gathering information. It also involves **entering into a relationship with Christ**: listening to Him in the quiet of prayer, learning about him through the community of faith. Our hope is that as you learn more about the Church, participate in mass and parish life, hear other men and women share their faith journey with you, as you share yours with them, you will begin to develop a deeper, personal relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ.

If you haven't started already, talk to God. Prayer takes on many different forms and styles, and should take place whenever the need arises, in addition to specific times and places that you set aside. God is ready to listen no matter what time it is, or where you are. Be comfortable in your prayer, look at God as your friend, with whom you want to visit, that's prayer in its simplest and purest form.

Take time to listen to God. Set aside some time each day to be quiet—in a quiet place—perhaps with scripture or some other spiritual reading, and focus on hearing the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Come to mass. The mass is where we encounter God in the Word and in the Eucharist. Until such time as you are able to receive the Eucharist, please come to mass and participate as much as you can. We will provide a prayer card with an "Act of Spiritual Communion" for you to pray at Communion time. You may fully participate in the rest of mass.

You're not alone on this journey; our faith community stands committed and faithful in our ministry to support you along the way!

Again, welcome!

What is R.C.I.A.?

In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council (often referred to as Vatican II), a council whose intent and purpose was to highlight the Catholic Church's apostolic and pastoral mission. In 1965, this Council called for a reinstatement of the ancient Catechumenate process (a period of instruction for the purpose of accepting new members into the faith community). In the late 1970's, "The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" (R.C.I.A.) was adopted and put into place. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults draws extensively on the past, simply by opening up the treasures that the Church has long possessed.

R.C.I.A. is a faith formation process designed primarily for adults who have not been baptized in any faith and are intentionally seeking God in their lives. Additionally, it is valuable to those who have been baptized in other Christian faith traditions, as well as those baptized Catholics who never completed their Sacraments of Initiation.

R.C.I.A. is a two-year program. It is our hope that each participant will have the benefit of instruction, faith sharing, and participating in parish life for a full liturgical year, and then will move toward serious discernment of their call to become Catholic. Each year begins with an Inquiry Period in late August, which lasts for 6 weeks. R.C.I.A. then meets October through May. If a participant desires to postpone entering into the Church, but wishes to remain in the R.C.I.A. process for additional months, in order to have more time to discern his/her call further, that is just fine. **At no time during the R.C.I.A. process is any participant obligated to join the Church.** It is a free-will decision the participant makes through prayer and discernment.

The R.C.I.A. program guides the participant through four periods or stages of development.

The First Stage: Pre-Catechumenate (or Inquiry Period)

Catecheis: from the Greek "Katekheis," meaning "instruction by word of mouth."

This stage allows those interested in becoming members of the Catholic Church a time to learn about the Church, the parish community, and attend mass and parish functions in order to find out if the Catholic Faith is the faith they are seeking. During this period, participants are referred to simply as Inquirers, Inquiry sessions are informal, and driven by the questions of the participants. This stage concludes with the Rite of Welcome and Acceptance.

The Second Stage - Catechumenate

This stage is a time of learning more in depth about what the Church teaches through exploration of Scripture, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Church doctrine is

presented and discussed at weekly catechetical sessions, and faith sharing continues.

There are three groupings of participants in the Catechumenate stage:

1. Those who have not been baptized in a Christian faith tradition and are entering the Catechumenate stage are referred to as "Catechumens."
2. Those who have been baptized and are entering the Catechumenate are referred to as "Candidates."
3. Those who have a Catholic baptism, but little or no religious education, are also a welcome part of our program. By virtue of their Catholic baptism, they are considered Catholics and are referred to as such.

The Catechumenate stage is concluded in year two with the Rite of Election for the Catechumen, and a formal presentation of the Candidates. At this time, the Catechumen or Candidate is called forward to continue the journey toward full communion with the Catholic Church. Catechumens who complete the Rite of Election are then referred to as the Elect. Candidates continue to be referred to as Candidates. Those with Catholic baptism do not participate in the Rite of Election, as they are already members of the Catholic Church.

Third Stage: Purification and Enlightenment

This is a time for prayer, reflection and deeper discernment as to whether God is calling them to full communion with the Catholic Church. This stage happens each year, coinciding with the 40 days of Lent, which is a time of prayer, reflection and discernment for the Church world-wide. Participants will go deeper into discernment in year two, during this stage of Purification and Enlightenment, and will prepare for reception into the Church in the coming spring.

When a member of the Elect has discerned to continue on the faith journey as a Catholic Christian, this stage is concluded at the Easter Vigil mass, where they will receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist). Once these sacraments are received, the Catechumen is a full member of the Roman Catholic Church.

When a Candidate has discerned to continue on the faith journey as a Catholic Christian, they will go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) and will receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist at a mass of their choice. As with the Catechumen, once these sacraments are received, the Candidate is no longer a Candidate, but a full member of the Church.

Catechumens and Candidates who have entered into full communion with the Church are referred to as Neophytes and move on to the fourth stage.

After appropriate catechesis, those with Catholic baptism will go to the Sacrament of

Reconciliation (Confession) and will receive the Eucharist at any mass after that. They will receive Confirmation at a special "Confirmation Mass" in the spring, at which the Archbishop will be present.

Fourth Stage -Mystagogy

(A period of prayer and post-baptismal catechesis)

This is a time in which the Neophytes pray and reflect on the mysteries of the Faith and the sacraments, and continue to explore their faith journey. We will gather together a few times during this stage, as is dictated by the interest in the group.

A Word about Prior Marriages

Because Jesus makes clear in the gospels that the Sacrament of Matrimony is a permanent union before God, the Catholic Church takes the marital vow very seriously. The Church understands that there are circumstances under which people may have entered into the vow of marriage without full understanding, and has a process in place for determining such.

The Church does not prohibit divorce, nor is a divorced person prohibited from full participation in the Church, including receiving communion. But, should a divorced person remarry, or consider remarrying, the Church wishes to protect that new marriage from being considered invalid. The process can be lengthy, so if you are considering becoming Catholic, and are:

- 1) divorced and may consider remarriage some day, or
- 2) currently married and either yourself or your spouse has had a prior marriage that ended in divorce,

please contact our pastor, Fr. Bryan Hersey. Fr. Hersey is a kind and gifted priest and is here to help you with the annulment process. You can make an appointment by calling the parish office at (425) 349-7014. We are here to help you on this journey!

Sponsors and Sponsorship

During the Catechumenate stage, a sponsor is paired with the Catechumen and/or Candidate. The sponsor's role is one of friend, mentor, witness and guide. Participants may already have a sponsor, or they may wish to have the parish provide a sponsor for them.

A sponsor needs to be in good standing with the Church, attending mass regularly, and ideally, involved in parish life. The duties of a sponsor include: engaging in faith-based discussion, sharing faith experiences, as well as inviting and accompanying the Catechumen or Candidate to parish activities, R.C.I.A. class, and mass whenever possible.

A sponsor is a witness to the Catechumen or Candidate's character, faith, and intentions, at the mass in which they enter into the fullness of the Catholic Church (Easter Vigil or special Confirmation mass).

Choosing a Saint's Name

There is a long-standing tradition of those preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation to choose a saint's name as a kind of "additional" middle name, because of a personal connection with that saint. For instance, if you feel a connection with St. Francis of Assisi because you also enjoy animals, living a simple, humble life, or have great concern for the poor, then you might choose "Francis" as your confirmation name. So, as we begin the R.C.I.A. journey, you might take time to start reading about various saints, and see if one emerges as a great inspiration for your faith journey. **Taking a saint's name at confirmation is completely optional!** If you do not wish to do so, that is just fine.

The tradition of taking on a saint's name is stemmed in the scriptures, where God changes a person's name to recognize that they are taking on a deeper role of commitment/leadership. God changed the name of Abram to Abraham, and his wife, Sarai to Sarah, when Abraham agreed to enter into covenant with God. Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, meaning "rock," giving Peter a new position of authority among the apostles.

In order to learn more about the saints, you can read about them in books, at credible websites online, and we will have materials for you in the parish library as well.

Here is a easy-to-use, credible website to get you started:
www.catholic.org/saints/patron.php

Resources

One of the most vital resources to you will be the faith community itself and its members. Meet people in the parish by attending parish functions; attending mass and other Liturgies, asking questions, and observing.

We who are Christians are so because we believe in Jesus Christ, his teachings, his works, his life, death, and resurrection. *The Holy Bible* is the primary source for the Word of God and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We have Bibles in the classroom that you may borrow. If you cannot afford to purchase one, you may keep one of ours.

An additional valuable resource is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is the ultimate source book explaining what the Catholic Church practices, teaches, and why. It is the culmination of 2000+ years of living out the faith that the Apostles handed down. There are Catechisms in the classroom for you to use, as well.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have produced a shorter version of the Catechism that is very easy to read and understand, it's called the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, which gives in-depth history and definition to all things Catholic, is available online at www.NewAdvent.org

Here are some other helpful Catholic websites:

www.Catholic.com

www.EWTN.com

www.CatholicExchange.com

www.Vatican.va

Getting Involved in the Parish Life

Your faith journey is a journey with a faith community, as well as a personal journey with Jesus. There are many ways to get involved with the faith community here at Immaculate Conception/Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parishes. One of the central expressions of our communal faith is attending Sunday mass. Even before you are in full communion with the Church, you are welcome and invited at mass!

Parish bulletins are available online at our parish website, www.ic-olph.org, and are also distributed after mass. The bulletin lists upcoming liturgies and parish activities: it is a great resource to find out what's going on in the parish. Coffee and donuts are available after some of the masses in the parish halls; this is a great time to meet other members of the parish and socialize.

Participate in parish activities! Throughout the year, the parish and the school offer many fun activities including Bible Studies, dinners, and the like. Our parish communities often participate in outreach ministries as well. Attend, observe, participate, and ask questions. That's the best way to get involved, get closer to Christ, make new friends, and learn at the same time.

Why Do Catholics Do That?

... dip their hand in the water cup as they enter the church and put the water on their head?

The water cups, which are usually located at the entrances and exits to the church, are referred to as Holy Water Fonts. They hold water that has been blessed by the priest, usually at the Easter Vigil. Traditionally, Catholics dip their fingers in the holy water upon entering or exiting the church and make the sign of the cross. This is a constant reminder of our baptism through water, and that we are entering God's house as his child, through the grace of our baptism.

... bend on one knee before entering or exiting a pew, or when passing in front of the altar?

This is a form of reverence referred to as "genuflexion." It has been to a great extent superseded by a profound bow. When someone genuflects or bows prior to entering a pew or when crossing the altar, they are acknowledging and showing reverence to the presence of the Eucharist (the REAL body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ).

... repeat the cycle of stand, sit, kneel throughout the mass?

Traditionally, during various parts of the mass, or other Catholic liturgies, kneeling, standing, and sitting have symbolized different levels of reverence based on early Church tradition. Kneeling is reserved for that portion of the mass when the Eucharist is exposed and being consecrated. Standing symbolizes the period when we express prayer as a community and listen to the Gospel proclaimed. When Christ taught, he sat and the listening community stood, it symbolized that he was a teacher according to Jewish tradition. It would be impractical today for the priest reading the Gospel to sit. However we stand to show respect for the Gospel. In the early Church, there were no pews and everyone stood and kneeled. Sitting was introduced as an alternative to standing, given the length of the mass, and the various ages and possible infirmities of the community. It has now been accepted and is a common practice in most of the Catholic churches worldwide.

... pray to Mary ?

It often appears that Catholics are praying directly to Mary and other saints as if they were gods, kneeling before statues and pictures. There is a special reverence set aside for the Mother of Jesus, and justifiably so. We pray to Jesus and God, sometimes directly, and sometimes through Mary, asking her to present our concerns (petitions) and thanksgivings to her son. Why? She was specially chosen to deliver God's son and, in a unique way, contribute to the salvation of all mankind. She is closer to Jesus than anyone. Wouldn't any son want his mother to be revered and honored? What son would not listen to the petitions his beloved mother brought to him? However more does the son of God wish to grant the petitions his holy mother brings to him. We pray to Mary to ask her to pray for us.

The same is true of Saints. Whom better to pray for us than those who've already "made it" to heaven? Often we will pick a particular saint to pray through based on that saint's life experiences, and how pertinent they are to our current situation and needs.

... use beads to pray ?

The beads are referred to as the "rosary." It is another form of devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The rosary is comprised of five distinct sets of ten beads, separated by a larger bead (this grouping is called a decade). Three smaller beads and a crucifix are affixed to the circle of beads, which is used to begin the devotion and recitation of prayers. There are various prayers and types of devotions that can be said using the rosary. The prayers associated with the rosary can be recited in silence anywhere, and may be recited in a community setting aloud. In class we will pray the rosary, so that you can learn how to do it. There is no requirement that Catholics pray the rosary. We do this as a personal form of prayer and devotion to Mary.

... seem to have all the words to the prayers at mass memorized ?

The truth of the matter is that not all Catholics do. But for most, it is through years of attendance at mass and at one time or another reading along in a Missal. Missals are available in the vestibules (entryway at the back of the church) for you to use during mass. They can take some getting used to, because some prayers change, and some are the same at every mass, but give it a chance and you'll catch on. You can also purchase the Missals online or at Catholic bookstores.