

"What are you looking for?"

"What do you want me to do for you?"

"Do you wish to be healed?"

"Who do you say that I am?"

*"The most important element of
initiatory formation is conversion..."*

~ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 8

ABOUT THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

Each year during the Easter Vigil, thousands are baptized into the Catholic Church in the United States. Parishes welcome these new Catholics through the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**. Below are common questions about RCIA.

What are the steps of RCIA?

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 and Precatechumenate**. 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 will lead people to inquire about the Catholic Church. After conversation with a priest or RCIA director, the person, known as an "Inquirer," may seek acceptance into the Order of Catechumens through the **Rite of Acceptance**. During this Rite, the Inquirer stands before the parish community to express desire to become a baptized member of the Catholic Church to which the parish assembly affirms this desire. The Inquirer then becomes known as a Catechumen and enters a period of formal catechesis (study) called the Catechumenate.

The Period of the Catechumenate can last for as long as several years or for a shorter time; depending upon how the person is growing in faith, what questions they encounter along the way, and how God leads them on their journey. During this time, the Catechumens consider what God is saying to them in 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, the priest, and the RCIA 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 developed a special relationship to the Church (**one reason Blessed Sacrament's RCIA program begins with participation in Sunday morning mass is to experience Catholic liturgy and worship as well as to meet the assembled community they wish to join.*)

The Rite of Election marks the (*typical*) end of the period of the Catechumenate. This Rite includes the enrollment of names of all Catechumens seeking baptism at the Easter Vigil. Usually celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent, the Catechumens, their sponsors, and families gather at the cathedral church (*for the Archdiocese of Washington, the celebration is held at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*).

Here, the Catechumens publicly express their desire for baptism to the (Arch) diocesan (Arch) bishop and their names are recorded in the Book of the Elect. After this rite, these catechumens are then called the Elect.

The Season of Lent, the forty days prior to the Easter Vigil, are called the **Period of Purification and Enlightenment**. This period is marked by a time of deep prayer, reflection, and personal self-examination as the Elect prepare to enter the Church at the Easter Vigil. The **celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation** occurs during the Easter Vigil Liturgy when the Elect receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. The Elect are then fully initiated into the Catholic Church and are called **Neophytes**.

As a newly initiated Catholic, Neophytes continue their formation and education in the **Period of Post Baptismal Catechesis, or Mystagogy**. This period continues at least until Pentecost. During this period, the newly baptized members reflect on their experiences of the Easter Vigil and continue to learn about 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.

What is meant by “coming into full communion with the Church”?

“Coming into full communion with the Catholic Church” (also called “reception”) describes the process for entrance into the Catholic Church for other Christians who are already baptized. These participants are called “Candidates.” In most cases, these individuals make a profession of faith but their baptism is typically not repeated. To prepare for this reception, Candidates usually participate in a formation program to help them understand and experience the teachings and practices specific to the Catholic Church. Although some preparation may be with Catechumens preparing for baptism, the preparation for Candidates is different since they have already been baptized and are thus already committed to Jesus Christ. Many have also been active members of other Christian communities. These Candidates may be received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil or another Sunday during the year, depending upon pastoral circumstances and the readiness of the Candidate.

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

Catholics who were baptized but never celebrated Confirmation and/or received Holy Eucharist, also participate in a period of formation. This formation is completed with the reception of the remainder of their Sacraments of Initiation often at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter Season. Finally, for fully-initiated Catholics (those who have celebrated all three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist) who later drifted from the practice of their faith, their return to the Church is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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 them in their journey, especially during the celebration of the Rites and the Sacraments of Initiation, as well as during the Period of Mystagogy. The godparent is called be a positive role model for the Catechumen in the practice of the Christian life, to sustain them in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness to the Catholic faith, and to guide their progress in the baptismal life. For someone already baptized, this individual is called a “Sponsor.”

Excerpt from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). From the web: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/rite-of-christian-initiation-of-adults/index.cfm>. Accessed 29 September 2018.