

What is the RCIA?

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the Church's guide for forming and welcoming those who wish to be initiated into the Catholic Church. The process, called the "catechumenate," is modeled on that practiced in the early Church. It's "an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life" (General Directory for Catechesis, # 67), a journey that involves conversion, reflection on Scripture, formation in the gospel way of life and integration into the community-its prayer, relationships and outreach.

What are the steps and stages of this Journey?

Notice that the first word in RCIA is “Rite.” That’s because the Church focuses on the rites or rituals that mark the progress an individual makes on the journey of Christian initiation. Each rite is preceded by a “period” during which the person receives the formation needed to fully celebrate the coming rite.

PERIOD: INQUIRY

Candidates approach the Church for help in their search for Christ. The Church responds with evangelization and pre-catechumenate, “a time, of no fixed duration or structure, for inquiry and introduction to Gospel values” (RCIA, p14).

RITE: ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS

Candidates express their intention to follow the way of Christ. The Church, in turn, accepts the candidates who, from that point, are called “catechumens” (Greek for “those being instructed”). They begin to join the parish for Sunday mass. After the Liturgy of the Word, they are dismissed to “share their joy and spiritual experiences” with each other (RCIA, # 67)

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PERIOD: CATECHUMENATE

The catechumens' faith and conversion to God are nurtured through "pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life" (RCIA, #75)

RITE: ELECTION OR ENROLLMENT OF NAMES

This rite, usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent, affirms the catechumens' readiness for the sacraments of initiation. They write their names in the Book of the Elect, expressing their desire and intent to celebrate baptism, confirmation and Eucharist at Easter. They are called "the elect" from that point, indicating they have been chosen-elected-by God and the Church.

PERIOD: PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Usually coinciding with the season of Lent, this time of reflection focuses on conversion as the elect prepare to celebrate baptism, confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. Minor rites-such as Scrutinies and Presentations of the Creed and Lord's Prayer- occur during this time, often at Sunday Mass.

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RITE: CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

The elect celebrate baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, usually at the Easter Vigil Mass. From this point, they are called “neophytes” (Greek for “newly planted”).

PERIOD: POST BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS OR MYSTAGOGY

During the Easter season neophytes experience being a full part of the Christian community. They participate in the Sunday Eucharist and reflect on the meaning of the Easter sacraments.