

## HOW DO I BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

The process of joining the Roman Catholic Church is known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults – RCIA.

The Catechumenate, as it is often called, is a late 20<sup>th</sup> century restoration of a 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century process which prepared people for acceptance into the Christian faith. The **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults** is a faith journey which consists of four distinct stages.

### Stage One Inquiry

This is the time when someone who feels drawn to the expression of Christian values begins to formally ask questions of the faith community: What do Catholics believe? Why? Who is God? How is God active in my life? What are the sacraments?

This period may only last only a few months or a number of years. Sometimes inquirers realize that they are not ready or willing to belong to the Christian community. Others find that they are attracted to our way of life and are drawn to the person of Christ. Like the disciples of old, they wish to follow Jesus and move to the next stage of the journey, which is known as the **Catechumenate**.

### Stage Two CATECHUMENATE

This stage begins with the Rite of Acceptance. Those who enter this stage are claimed for Christ and marked with the sign of the cross. Those not baptized are called **catechumens**. Those who are already baptized are called **candidates**.

This period of the RCIA is a time to deepen in faith and in commitment to Christ. Although they are not yet able to share at the table of the Eucharist, they participate in the Liturgy each Sunday.

Formal sessions on Catholic teaching and practice provide an opportunity for the individual to grow in prayer and to mature in faith. With the support of community members, companions, godparents, and catechists, the catechumens and candidates steadily conform their lives to Gospel values. They continue to deepen their relationship with Christ, and when they, with the guidance of their catechists, discern that they are ready, enter into the next stage of the catechumenate, **Purification and Enlightenment**.

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### Stage Three PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

This stage begins with the first Sunday of Lent with the **Rite of Election** and the **Call to Continuing Conversion**.

In St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, catechumens inscribe their name in a book which is presented to Bishop Dewane in a ceremony at Epiphany Cathedral in Venice, Florida.

At the Rite of Election, Bishop Dewane will elects (choose) the catechumens in the name of Christ to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter vigil.

Bishop Dewane will also call (exhort) the candidates to continue growing in their faith and they prepare for Confirmation and Eucharist. The next 40 days are intensive days of preparation to receive the sacraments at Easter.

The local St. Francis parish community accompanies the **Elect** (unbaptized) and **Candidates** (already baptized) by participating in the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Special rites of interior searching, known as **scrutinies**, are celebrated. These take place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> Sundays of Lent.

This period of the RCIA culminates at the Easter Vigil with baptism, confirmation and Eucharist.

## **Stage Four MYSTAGOGIA**

This final stage of the RCIA is a period of rejoicing in the awareness of God's presence by praying and eating at the banquet of the Eucharist.

This stage concludes with the Feast of Pentecost where, through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are sent into the world to do the work of the Lord.

There is also an opportunity to share prayer and community with others in the parish by participating in ministries of service both within and outside of St. Francis Xavier Church.

## **HOW DO I KNOW IF THE RCIA PROCESS IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR ME?**

The RCIA process is designed for adults who are unbaptized or those who were baptized as infants but had little experience with regular church attendance. Individuals baptized in another Christian tradition often find this process to be helpful in their determination of becoming Roman Catholic.

If you are an adult who was baptized and active in another Christian tradition, and have more than a year of experience within the Roman Catholic tradition, you may want to discuss this process with the RCIA director.

## **HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE RCIA PROCESS?**

The best way is to simply begin. Inquiry sessions for adults are held periodically at St. Francis Xavier. These are informal sessions that provide opportunities for the inquirer to ask questions about the Catholic faith.

A team of staff and volunteers are prepared to explore these questions with you. For those who so desire, the Director of the RCIA is available to answer questions by telephone and will schedule individual appointments.



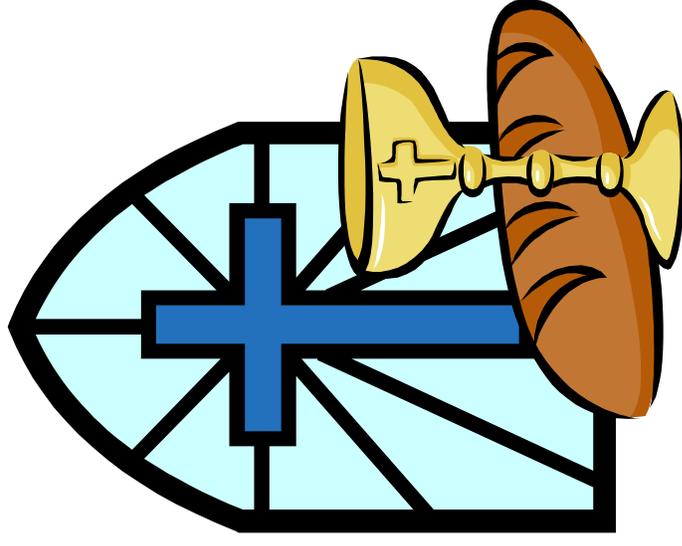
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# *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*



# *A Path to Membership in The Catholic Church*