



R.C.I.A. FAQs

What if I have never been baptized? RCIA is especially designed for adults who wish to be baptized. This process is designed to welcome and prepare people to celebrate baptism through a series of gatherings, rituals, classes and small groups. The purpose is to foster a relationship with God and with the community, to encourage a spirit of faith and charity, to teach or review the basics of the Catholic faith, to prepare for the sacraments, and to help the person feel "at home" in the Catholic Church.

What if I have already been baptized, but want to be Catholic? We normally recognize as valid any baptism performed in any Christian denomination by pouring or immersion with water and the words "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This would include the baptism of most mainline Christian Churches. In this case, a person who journeys through RCIA would not be baptized again. When men and women who are baptized Christians but not Roman Catholics wish to become Catholics, they are coming into "full communion with the Catholic Church" through a process similar to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). These people make a profession of faith once they are ready, but are not baptized again.

Who is involved in the process? Actually, the whole parish is involved in the RCIA process. Besides those seeking initiation into the Church, there are parish sponsors, prayer partners and a team of parishioners who walk the spiritual journey with the candidates. Throughout the process there are rites that are celebrated within the Sunday liturgies with the rest of the parish community. At the Sunday liturgies the parish assembly welcomes and supports the candidates in prayer. Regular parish bulletin articles help the parish to understand the RCIA journey, and become involved in this prayer and support. RCIA participants are asked to attend Mass with the community, and after the Rite of Election (explained below) they are asked to attend a particular weekend Mass together as a group and then study the scripture together, all while being supported by the prayers of the rest of the community.

What topics are covered? The schedule is posted at our website. The formation includes several areas:

- Scripture: the stories of God's people
- Teaching: what Catholics believe

- Prayer: how we communicate with God
- Liturgy: how the community worships
- Mission: how we live out what we

How long does it take? The time required to complete the journey may vary-- depending upon the background and circumstances of the individual. As each human is unique, each RCIA journey may be unique. Normally a person who is not baptized would participate in the RCIA process for a minimum of one year from the time of beginning. For others who are baptized in another Christian denomination, the time frame may vary widely depending on their commitment to Jesus Christ, how active they have been in other Christian communities, and other factors. Prior to beginning the process, a member of the parish team will interview each person, and help them to discern their needs and their own unique situation, and will make recommendations for that person's participation in this journey we call RCIA.

What can I expect of the sessions? An initial period called "Inquiry" is an opportunity for those wishing to become Catholics to ask questions about Catholicism, share their own faith journey, explore the way that their life experience intersects with Catholic perspective, receive an introduction to the process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and an orientation to Catholic teachings. Other periods follow the period of Inquiry, and are described below. The whole process includes elements of learning (catechesis); questioning, reading, discussing, small group sharing, activities, prayer, scripture study, and social activities.

What is expected of me? We hope that you are inspired by the journey! We hope that each person will make a commitment to attend every session, to experience fully every part of this wonderful journey together. The more you put into learning about the Catholic faith, and engaging in the discussions and activities, the more comfortable you will feel a year or two from now. We expect that each person will read the material provided, come to the sessions with questions and comments, and reflections, and participate actively in the RCIA journey.

Will there be pressure on me to join the Church if attend the inquiry classes? Not at all. The purpose of the Inquiry process is to provide information and experiences needed to decide whether God is calling you to the Catholic way of life. Our role as leaders and teachers in RCIA is to help you discern for yourself. Worship with us, explore our beliefs and practices, spend a year among us participating in the community, and then decide if you are called by God to this way of life.

What if I just want to learn about the Catholic Church without joining? We welcome those who just want to understand what being a Catholic really means. It is not unusual for people who are engaged or married to a Catholic to participate so that they will understand their spouse's religion. This is also true of parents whose children are being raised Catholic - they want to know how to answer the questions posed by their children. All are welcome.

What are the Different Periods of the Process like? The RCIA is a journey, marked by rites (ceremonies) that lead to the reception of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist on the night before Easter (the Easter Vigil). These are called the sacraments of initiation. For those who are already baptized, the journey may be different. In reality, we can speak generally about different "periods" of the journey, but each person is also on their own individual journey. The process consists of:

- Inquiry (Pre-Catechumenate). Stories are shared, questions are asked and the basics of Christianity are explored. The inquirer is invited to get to know the community and hopefully to see in that community an example of the Christian life. Each inquirer has a sponsor, a person who serves as a companion, a guide, an advocate.
- Rite of Welcoming (Initiation). Participants ask to be formally enrolled into the Catechumenate. The word comes from the Greek term meaning to teach by word of mouth and suggests instruction in the faith. The Rite of Welcoming is scheduled for the Cathedral in November of each year, before Advent begins. That way, if you are still discerning your own journey, you know that this Rite comes around every year, and so you can participate in the Rite of Welcoming whenever you are ready.
- Catechumenate. The longest part of the process, the Catechumenate is a time of learning and formation in the traditions and doctrine of the Catholic Church. This is a time for sharing stories, reading scripture, and studying the Church customs, traditions and doctrine. Participants also participate in worship services and various Church rituals. This period can last for a variable period of time depending on how much the catechumen has learned and how ready the catechumen feels to take the step of becoming a Christian.
- Rite of Election. Catechumens and Candidates are chosen to be received by the bishop and the community and to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter. , the catechumen again expresses the desire and intention to become a Christian, and the Church judges that the catechumen is ready to take this step. Normally, the Rite of Election occurs right after the first Sunday of Lent during the forty day period of preparation for Easter. Participants are now called the Elect, and are led into a deeper prayer life and understanding of what it means to be followers of Christ. On the second, third and fourth Sundays of Lent, the Elect participate in rites called "Scrutinies." This is not a public examination of worthiness; instead the community prays for the and with the Elect, reminding us that we all still need God's saving power in the process of ongoing conversion.
- Sacraments of Initiation. At the Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday), all newly elected members of the community who have been journeying through the RCIA process are welcomed formally into the community of believers through receiving the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. Usually the Bishop oversees the Easter Vigil service.
- Mystagogy. Your journey as a Catholic never ends! But there is a final stage of Christian initiation. The final state of Christian initiation is known as mystagogy in which the new Christians are strengthened in the faith by further instruction and become more deeply rooted in the local Catholic community. The period of mystagogy normally lasts throughout the Easter season (the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost Sunday). For the first year of their life as

Christians, those who have been received are known as “neophytes” or “new Christians.” Post-Easter gatherings are held to reflect on the sacramental experience and to discern ministry in the community. Christian initiation through RCIA is now complete but the road remains for a lifelong Christian journey of growing the Faith.

Why does it have to be so long and so public with all the rites and ceremonies at Mass? Although the decision to embrace the Catholic faith is deeply personal, it also has a community dimension. Catholics believe that we encounter the Risen Christ in the community of believers, in the Word of God and in the sacraments, especially so in the Breaking of Bread (Luke 24: 13-35). Faith is lived out within the context of community. Baptism invests us with bringing the mission of Christ to the world. Those standing before us during these rites are evidence that the Church is doing its work. The presence of those in RCIA is an occasion of celebration and gratitude. As for the length, this is an important decision, not to be rushed. It is not at all unusual for former participants who had this concern to gratefully acknowledge that they would not have missed this experience for the world.

What do we call ourselves? A person being sponsored in the RCIA is either a catechumen—an unbaptized individual who seeks full initiation into the church to receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist—or a previously baptized candidate—who wishes to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church and be Confirmed and receive Holy Communion. The term candidate also is used to refer generically to both unbaptized and previously baptized persons in the initiation process.

What about my sponsor? A sponsor is a baptized, confirmed adult Catholic, one who regularly participates in Mass and lives a moral life who serves as a mentor and guide to the candidate during the RCIA process. Normally the sponsor is a member of the parish or lives close by so that they can participate in sessions and rituals with the candidate, and journey alongside them. If the candidate does not know of anyone to be a sponsor, then the team will find someone to serve in this role.

Each catechumen and candidate has a sponsor. A sponsor is an adult, sixteen or older, who has received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, and Eucharist. The sponsor acts as a partner who will guide and support a catechumen or candidate. Among the sponsor's responsibilities are:

- __The Sponsor attends and participates in all designated sessions
- __Sponsors introduce their candidate/catechumenate to the parish community,
- __Sponsors encourage their candidate/catechumenate to become an active member of the parish community,
- __Sponsors support and encourage their candidate/catechumenate partner's growth in faith.

Being a sponsor in the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is like being a good friend. The sponsor is a companion to a prospective member of the church as he or she takes a personal faith journey to becoming Catholic. A sponsor extends our parish's and the universal Church community's welcome and

support in a personal way. As companion or guide, the sponsor's job is to be a good friend whom the candidate can trust and with whom she or he can talk things over.

While family members may be able to serve as sponsors, often it is more fruitful for a non-family member to serve as a sponsor, to give the catechumen, candidate a different perspective on life within the parish, as a Catholic Christian. The RCIA teaches us that the entire community is responsible for the formation and the welcome of new members. It's obviously difficult, however, for an entire community to engage an individual in a personal relationship that can effectively support, guide, and challenge. It is through the sponsor's companionship that the spirit of the community is passed on informally. That is why the role of sponsor is so important.

Here are some things to keep in mind about the qualities of a good sponsor if you are choosing your own:

__Sponsors are asked to be patient, sensitive, and understanding.

__Sponsors should be willing to accept the possibility of being challenged in their own faith. The candidates' personal stories, struggles, and insights have a way of stirring up within the sponsor a renewed sense of belonging to the church. But a sponsor's Catholic faith is nourished, and they may find a transforming stirring within. After all, being Catholic means dying to self and being born again, and again, and again, in a conversion of heart to Jesus. It's an ongoing formation of faith. This is the very central and unifying principle of the initiation Rite: conversion.

__Sponsors experience first-hand the challenge new members face. They share with them some of their own life and faith as an active member of the church, and in doing so probably will uncover new personal dimensions of being a Catholic Christian.

__Sponsors also are witnesses. They may be asked to assist the RCIA pastoral team in assessing a candidate's progress, of course taking great care to keep confidential anything the individual may request.

__Sponsors will be asked to attend a few rites and participate. For example, if they are sponsoring a catechumen, at the beginning of Lent they will be asked to participate in the Rite of Election. In this rite, catechumens are solemnly invited to celebrate the sacraments of initiation at Easter, and they are expected to reflect a conversion and sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching and a sense of faith and charity. When the catechumens come before the bishop or his delegate in this rite, the sponsors are asked to witness to the catechumens' worthiness to receive the sacraments of the Church. The bishop says, "As God is your witness, do you consider these catechumens worthy to be admitted to the sacraments of Christian initiation?"

__A sponsor prays. S/he humbly recognizes that he is an instrument whom God uses to support the candidate. In prayer the sponsor learns to be open to the Lord's will and to rely upon the Spirit for guidance. As a sponsor you may be asked to introduce a catechumen or previously baptized candidate to some of the many forms of prayer in the church.

__A sponsor listens. S/he knows how to listen well to the stories of others. Every person comes with a unique story, a life story that is like the gospel stories that reveal the living Christ. We must learn to listen well to the stories of others, or we will fail to recognize Christ working in them.

__A sponsor respects the candidate as a person and reverences what he hears. He learns and values a candidate's religious background through genuine interest and openness.

NOTE: The RCIA team will provide orientation and materials for sponsors.

Sponsor rules and qualifications. Because of the importance of this critical role in our Church, we have defined some basic qualifications for those who seek to serve as sponsors. If there is a concern or question about any of these qualifications, the sponsor or catechumen/candidate should discuss it individually with the RCIA Sponsor Coordinator. The basic criteria requires the sponsor to be:

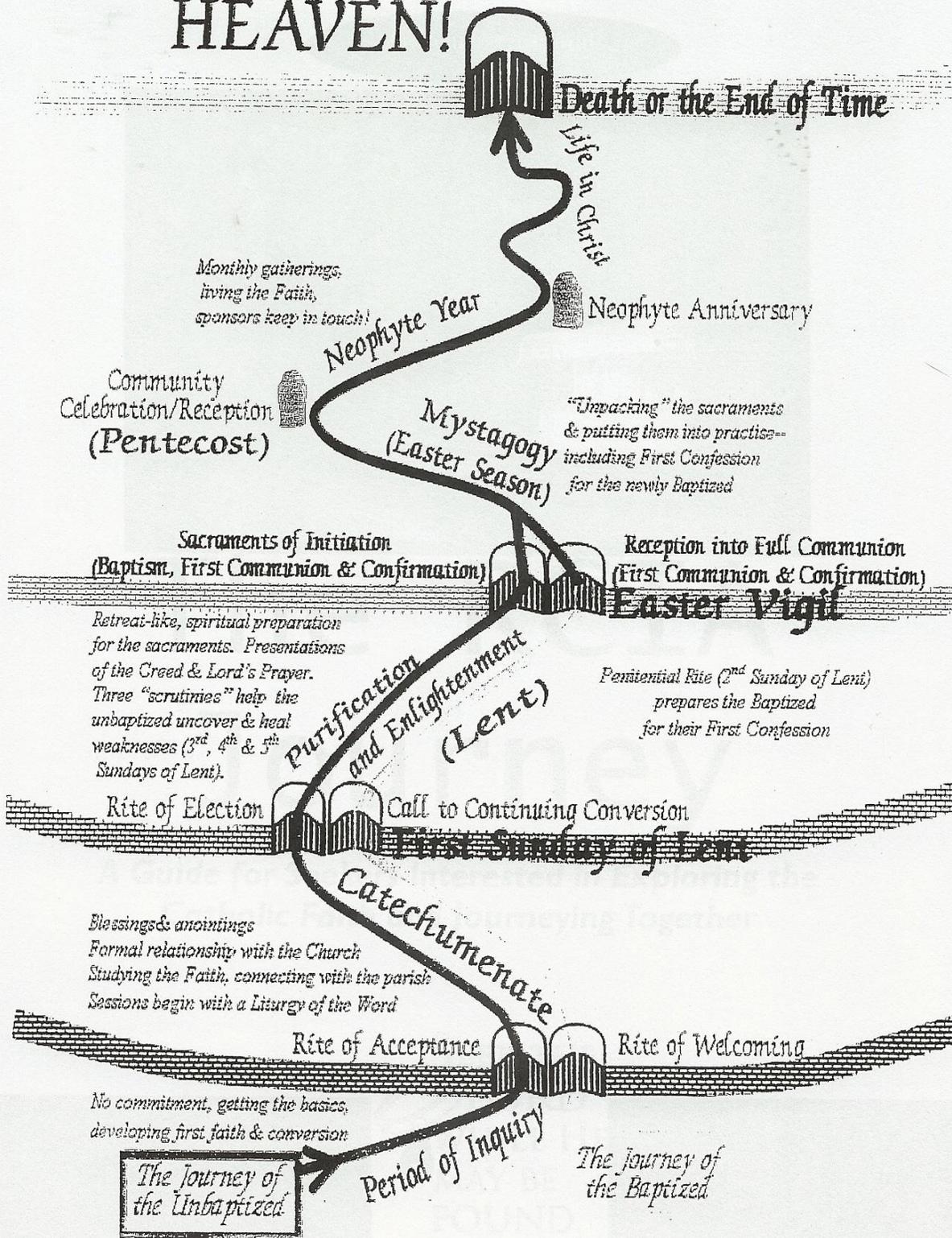
- Be designated by the candidate, parents, guardians, or the pastor/designate. What this means is the preference will be given to the choice of the catechumen/candidate, so long as the chosen sponsor meets the other criteria. If the catechumen/candidate cannot choose a sponsor for any reason, the Sponsor Coordinator can help find a suitable candidate. This concept of choice also means that if one is chosen to be a sponsor, but for any reason the relationship is not working, the catechumen/candidate has the right to ask for a different sponsor.
- Have the qualifications and intention of performing the role of sponsor. This means the sponsor must be capable of performing the role, for example the sponsor must be able to use reason, should be knowledgeable about the Catholic faith, or willing to explore answers to questions that the catechumen/candidate has. The sponsor should be committed to this role and willing to carry it out to the best of his or her ability.
- Be at least 16 years old.
- Be a fully initiated Catholic (received Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist).
- Lead a life in harmony with the faith and role of a sponsor (i.e., be a member of a parish, attend Mass on Sundays and holy days; not be in an irregular marriage, etc).
- Not be bound by a canonical penalty. This does not apply to most people, but if there are circumstances that are questionable, those issues can be discussed privately with the RCIA Sponsor Coordinator.
- Not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized. Spouses or other relatives are not specifically prohibited from serving as sponsors, as long as they meet with other criteria, and the catechumen/candidate would benefit from the spouse serving in this role.

Number of sponsors

__Only one sponsor is required for Baptism/Confirmation.

__If two sponsors are chosen, one must be male and the other female.

HEAVEN!



The Journey of RCIA