

## **A Look at the Christian Initiation Process**

In the earliest days of the Christian Church, those who desired to be followers of Jesus engaged in a lengthy period of preparation and instruction that would eventually lead to their baptism. This period lasted as long as three years wherein these “catechumens” were formed in the way of discipleship. The term “catechumen” means one who is a learner. Through this process of preparation, these early catechumens became immersed in the teachings of Jesus and in the community of faith. This period of immersion ended with the reception of the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and holy Communion.

In recent years, the Catholic Church has returned to this earlier formation process, now called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). It is also referred to as a process rather than an educational program as it involves much more than textbook type of formation. This process is at its best when it takes place within an involved and active community of the faithful – the local parish.

The process of RCIA consists of four periods, each with its own focus. Each of the four periods ends with a celebration of a ritual that marks the end of one step and the beginning of the next step.

### **First Period: Inquiry or Pre-Catechumenate**

This opening step is a “Come and See” stage wherein the “inquirer” has time to:

- hear the faith stories of Catholics
- ask initial questions
- learn about the parish
- foster initial conversion

Celebration of the Rite of Acceptance into the order of Catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming Baptized Adults

### **Second Period: Catechumenate**

This step in the process provides time to deepen faith and knowledge of the faith within the Catholic Christian Community through:

- reflection on the Word of God
- exploration of the richness of Catholic tradition
- experiences of prayer and worship
- introduction to the apostolic life

Celebration of the Rite of Election and of the Call to Continuing Conversion of Candidates who are preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist

### **Third Period: Purification and Enlightenment**

The Elect (unbaptized) and Candidates (baptized) join with the Christian Community during the season of Lent to:

- experience a Lenten Day of Retreat
- enter more deeply into prayer and reflection with the community
- journey with Jesus on his path of suffering and death
- prepare for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

### **Fourth period: Post Baptismal Instruction, Mystagogy**

This last step in the RCIA lasts a lifetime. Catholics of all ages continue to pursue formation in the faith. For the ‘neophytes,’ the “newly planted” Catholics, several experiences aid in the deepening of their expression of faith:

- participation in the Eucharist
- immersion into the missionary spirit of the church
- appreciation of the Gospel message