

# Becoming a Catholic

Interested In Learning More About The Catholic Church?

Welcome! This page explains the process by which one can - through their local Catholic church - learn more about the faith. We hope this information is helpful to you!

The process by which adults come into the Church has come to be known as "the RCIA", which is short for "The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults."

## Who is the process for?

1 The unbaptized. The primary focus of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is on those who are not already Christian and have not been catechized.

2 Baptized but uncatechized. Those who have been baptized either as Roman Catholics or as members of another Christian community but did not receive further catechetical formation or instruction. These typically have also not celebrated confirmation nor Eucharist.

3 Those seeking full Catholic Communion. These are baptized, practicing Christians from other denominations who seek entry into the Catholic Church.

In the case of children who have reached the age of reason, the proper pastor should be consulted for information about Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is not for adult candidates for confirmation who have already received their First Eucharist in the Catholic Church. They should have their own formation process and be confirmed at a celebration other than the Easter Vigil.

## **What does the process look like?**

The Rite of Christian Initiation is based on the principle that the process of conversion proceeds gradually, in stages. Progress from one stage to the next is marked by a liturgical celebration in the midst of the parish community. The experience and needs of those in each category described above differ, and so the length of time may vary for each person. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities among all the groups and the process they will experience, and these can be listed as follows:

### **Precatechumenate**

The first stage is called the period of inquiry (or the precatechumenate). This is when the individual first expresses an interest in becoming a Christian or a Catholic, and begins to explore, with the help of the parish community, what his or her relationship with Christ might be and how that might be enriched and deepened by joining this Christian community. There is no liturgical rite to mark the beginning of this stage. This period of inquiry may last several months or several years and ends either when the inquirer decides against continuing in this direction or when the inquirer feels ready to move on and the community is prepared to welcome him or her.

### **Catechumenate**

The second stage is called the catechumenate and, for the unbaptized listed above, who are now called catechumens, should last no less than one full year. For the baptized but uncatechized the period should be a similar length. For the candidates for full communion, this stage could well be much shorter. The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming mark the

beginning of this stage. Catechesis for this period is rooted in the Lectionary and the Word as it is proclaimed in the midst of the community. This is also a time for the catechumen or candidate to learn how to live as a Catholic Christian. This period ends when the catechumens and candidates express their desire to receive the sacraments of initiation and the community acknowledges their readiness.

### **Purification and Enlightenment**

The third stage is the period of purification and enlightenment and coincides with Lent. During this time the elect (formerly the catechumens) and the candidates enter into a period of intense preparation and prayer which includes the three public celebrations of the scrutinies and is marked by the presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion are celebrated at the beginning of this stage. This period ends with the celebration of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. (Note: only the elect are baptized. All the groups are confirmed and welcomed to the table.)

### **Mystagogy**

The fourth stage is the period of post baptismal catechesis or mystagogy. At this time, the newly initiated explore their experience of being fully initiated through participation with all the faithful at Sunday Eucharist and through appropriate catechesis. The period formally lasts through the Easter season and may be marked by a parish celebration on or near Pentecost. On a more informal level, mystagogy is a lifelong process, one that all Christians are engaged in, as we all work to deepen our sense of what it means to live the Christian life.

It is important to note that those who fall into the third category above (candidates for full communion) do not always need to take part in the full process. Especially if they have been actively living the Christian life in another denomination, they are likely in need of very little catechesis and may be welcomed into the Church on any Sunday after a short period of preparation. According to the National Statutes for the Catechumenate, "Those baptized persons who have lived as Christians and need only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation within the Catholic community should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the catechumenate."

### **I'm interested. What should my first step be?**

Contact your nearest Catholic parish . Your Catholic priest can discuss with you the specifics of the initiation process at your local parish. Know that the prayers of a 65 million Catholics in the United States and the 1.2 Billion Catholics around the world are with you as you complete your journey. Best wishes!