

THE R.C.I.A.

(The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults)

WHAT IS RCIA?

1. The initials R.C.I.A. stands for the "*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.*" (RCIA) The RCIA, a program of the Catholic Church, is oriented towards those who are searching and inquiring about the Catholic way of life. While this program is oriented for adults, it accepts teenagers who are mature enough to participate in the RCIA.

2. There is also a program for children of age seven and up. This program is called the "*Rite of Christian Initiation of Children,*" or RCIC.

WORD DEFINITIONS

3. Throughout this text, the word "rite" will be used. It should be noted that the word has two different meanings.

4. (A) When referring to the Latin, Roman or Eastern Rite of the Catholic Church, the word "*rite*" relates to the specific way that the Catholic liturgy is carried out. It represents the words and ceremonies that are prescribed for the liturgy and the Sacraments of each particular rite. Within the Catholic Church, there are a number of rites such as the Ambrosian rite, the Byzantine, the Alexandrian or Coptic, the Syriac, the Armenian, the Maronite, and Chaldeans rites. (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1203)

5. (b) When referring to the RCIA process of the Latin or Roman "*rite,*" the word "rite" represents the liturgical ceremonies that are celebrated in the presence of the worshipping assembly, these rites marking the beginning of each stage of the RCIA process.

6. "*Catechesis*" means "instruction in the Catholic Faith."

7. "*Catechist*" mean "a person, either from the clergy, religious or a lay person, who instructs others in the Catholic Faith."

8. "*Catechumen*" means "a person who has never been baptized and who wishes to become a Catholic." During the "*catechumenate*" process, such a person is called a "*catechumen.*"

9. Catechumen (Gr. *katechoumenos*, one instructed), is the name applied to one undergoing instruction preparatory to the reception of Baptism and admission into the Church. Historically, there were three distinct classes of catechumens; *audientes*, or hearers; catechumens proper, sometimes called *genuflectentes*, or kneelers; and *competentes*, or those ready for Baptism. (The New Catholic Dictionary, Copyright 1929)

10. The word "*catechumenate*" means "the entire RCIA process." More specifically, it involves "the second phases of RCIA, the period of formal instruction."

THE HISTORY OF THE RCIA

11. Since the days of the Apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey could be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements always had to be present: (1) the proclamation of the Word, (2) acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, (3) a profession of faith, (4) the Sacrament of Baptism itself, (5) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and (6) admission to Eucharistic communion. (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1229)

12. This initiation of believers into the Catholic Faith has varied greatly through the centuries according to circumstances. In the first centuries of the Church, Christian initiation saw considerable development. The entire RCIA process covered a long period of time. It included a series of "rites", these being liturgical landmarks along the path of preparing those who were never baptized and who wished to become Catholics. The process was completed when the Sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated. (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1230)

13. The second Vatican Council's involvement consisted of restoring within the Latin Church the "catechumenate for adults" (the several distinct steps of the entire RCIA process). The rites for these stages are to be found in the manual, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1232)

THE RCIA OF TODAY

14. Today in all of the Rites, Latin and Eastern, the Christian initiation of adults begins with their entry into the RCIA process and reaches its completion in a single celebration of the three Sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. [CF. AG 14; CIC, cann. 851; 865; 866] (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1233)

15. Christian initiation is accomplished by three Sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ. (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1275)

16. In the Eastern rites the Christian initiation of infants also begins with Baptism followed immediately by Confirmation and the Eucharist, while in the Roman rite it is followed by years of "catechesis" (instruction in the Catholic Faith) before being completed later by Confirmation and the Eucharist, the summit of their Christian initiation. [Cf. CIC, cann. 851, 2§; 868] (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1233)

THE THREEFOLD PURPOSE OF THE RCIA

17. Through the RCIA, the Catholic Church extends an invitation to:

18. (A) Those who are not associated with a community of faith and who wish to become Catholics;

19. (B) Those who want to convert to Catholicism from another faith. For them, the RCIA is the process through which they will become full fledged Catholics; and

20. (C) Those who want to learn about the Catholic faith. These individuals may be involved in interfaith marriages or simply are actively involved in a Church of a different denomination and they want to learn more about the Catholic faith in the spirit of ecumenism.

21. The RCIA fills all these needs of those who are searching and inquiring about the Catholic faith.

SETTING UP THE RCIA

22. To implement the RCIA program, a parish has to set up a welcoming committee. The members of the committee should shine in the fruit of the Holy Spirit, namely in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. [Gal. 5:22-3] Other desirable qualities that the members should possess consist of being practicing Catholics, being mature in their faith, being team oriented, being loyal to the teachings of the Church, being humble, respectful, prayerful and knowledgeable.

23. To ensure the proper functioning of the committee, its members must execute certain roles. The Committee should have an RCIA director who manages the program. It should have a spiritual director who can be contacted when in need. It should have a number of catechists to instruct others in the Catholic way of life. It should have sponsors or godparents. Hospitality members are required to welcome the newcomers. One member can attend to public relations while another plans the liturgy. Fruitful committee normally have praying partners as part of the team. These and other roles can be executed by any number of members, the size of the committee depending entirely on the need and the size of the parish.

EVANGELIZING

24. The members of the committee are called to evangelize in response to the great commission of Jesus to all the faithful. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." [Mt. 28:19-20]

25. To evangelize as a Catholic means more than witnessing to others! It means to be a living "example" by "sharing" and "witnessing" to others regarding one's faith in Jesus.

26. (A) BY EXAMPLE: Many converts have expressed that their reason for having become Catholics was because they were attracted to the Catholic way of life by the example of Catholics. Therefore, at home, at work, during leisure, at all times, it is important for the members of the Church to always live their faith in a personal daily relationship with the Lord Jesus.

27. (B) BY WITNESSING: Members must be prepared to witness by sharing with others their faith experience. This means explaining how the Catholic way of life has permitted them to experience spiritual growth in their personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

28. God's gifts are to be shared with the world. As a light in the world, every member of the Catholic Faith are obligated by the promise that they have made during the Sacrament of Confirmation to spread and defend their faith in Christ. Jesus said, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand?" [Mk. 4:21; Mt. 5:15-6; Lk. 8:16, 11:33; 1 Pet. 2:12]

29. (C) BY SHARING: Members must be practicing Catholics. This means that they worship on Sunday and holy days with others by participating in the celebration of the Holy Mass that is the focal point of the Catholic faith.

30. Evangelizing also requires that one knows the Catholic faith. This qualifies the members who need to answer the questions of those who are inquiring. Catholics are encouraged to become knowledgeable in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in the Canon Laws, in the Church Councils and even in Papal Encyclicals.

THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

31. There are three Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist are the Sacraments of Christian initiation. They ground the common vocation of all Christ's disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world. They confer the graces needed for the life according to the Spirit during this life as pilgrims on the march towards the homeland. (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1533)

32. The focus of the RCIA committee, when it concerns conversion into the Catholic Faith, is to prepare the newcomers so they can receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. These Sacraments are normally celebrated in a single service during the Easter Vigil.

THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR

33. As a general rule, the RCIA process, usually of a one year duration or less, follows the flow of the Liturgical Calendar in the Lectionary cycle. The program of initiation normally starts in May or June around Trinity Sunday. The catechumen (new converts) receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist on Easter Vigil. The program ends on Pentecost Sunday.

34. The following represents the complete cycle of a Liturgical Calendar.

**Trinity,
Corpus Christi,
Ordinary Time,
Christ the King,
Advent,
Christmas,
Holy Family,
Mary, Mother of God,
Epiphany of the Lord,
Baptism of the Lord,
Ordinary Time,
Ash Wednesday,
Lent,
Holy Week,
Mass of the Lord's Supper,
Good Friday,
Easter Vigil,
Easter Sunday,
Easter Season,
Ascension,
Pentecost.**

THE RCIA PROCESS

35. The "RCIA process" (the catechumenate) is divided into four distinct phases. The progress, from one phase to another, of the "catechumens" (unbaptized inquirers) and the "candidates" (inquirers coming from another Christian denomination) is measured by the appropriate liturgical rites.

PHASE ONE

36. Those who are considering whether or not they have a calling to join the Catholic Faith are called "inquirers." They are called "inquirers" because in this phase, they will have the opportunity to get acquainted with some Catholics, including the members of the RCIA committee and the other inquirers. This is a time that is set aside to provide the inquirers with the opportunity to obtain answers to questions that they may have regarding the Catholic Faith. As some would put it, it is a time to "break the ice" so that everyone can become comfortable with each others, both, the Catholics and the seekers.

37. Because of the nature of the first phase, it is known under different names. Some call it the "Inquiry Phase" because it is "before the catechumenate or evangelization phase." Some call it the "Pre-Catechumenate Phase" because it is "before the period of formal training during the RCIA process." And others call it the "Pre-Evangelization Phase" because it is "before the members of the RCIA Committee begin to evangelize to the newcomers." In summary, phase one is a preparatory phase for all those who are involved.

THE FIRST LITURGICAL RITE

38. The transition from the first phase to the second phase is called the "Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate." This involves a celebration that marks the intention of the inquirers to continue their journey towards full membership in the Catholic Faith through the reception of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Communion.

PHASE TWO

39. The second phase of the RCIA process is called the "Catechumenate." This phase involves the period of formal training in the Catholic way of life. It is the phase during which the "catechumens" (those never baptized) and the "candidates" (those baptized in another denomination) study the Catholic Faith.

40. During this phase, studies are focused on the Lord Jesus, His teachings, the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Sacraments. These studies normally touch on the subjects of the writings of the early Church Fathers, Catholic dogmas, the infallibility of the Pope, the Virgin Mary, Purgatory, etc...

41. At this stage, the catechumens and candidates are assigned a sponsor, a member of the RCIA Committee, who will walk the faith journey with them on a one-to-one basis.

42. During this period, the catechumens and candidates partly participate in the Sunday celebration of the Holy Mass. They participate in the Liturgy of the Word, but are excluded from participating in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. After the homily, the priest dismisses them with a blessing. Then they leave the gathering to further study the meaning of the Scripture readings. The study of the deeper meaning of the Word of God is called the "breaking open the Word."

THE SECOND LITURGICAL RITE

43. At the end of the second phase, two liturgical rites take place. The first is the "Rite of Sending." This rite consists of a celebration during which time, with a blessing, the parish priest sends forth the candidates and the catechumens to the Bishop for the "Rite of Election" that will take place on the First Sunday of Lent.

44. On the First Sunday of Lent, at the Cathedral, the Bishop (or his representative) officially calls the catechumens and candidates to the Sacraments in the "Rite of Election." The catechumens who accept this invitation into the Catholic Faith are now called "The Elect."

45. "The Elect" are those who, after the "Rite of Election" during Lent, are preparing themselves for full initiation into the Catholic Church.

PHASE THREE

46. The third phase of the catechumenate (RCIA process) is called the "Purification and Enlightenment" phase. This phase usually takes place during the forty days of the Lenten Season.

47. During the Lenten Season, in preparation for the joy of Easter that approaches, the faithful are called to express their sincere repentance through their hearts rather than through outward expressions that may not reflect the true nature of their inner beings. Their repentance may be expressed in forms of fasting, prayer, sacrifices, charity towards others, etc...

48. During this time of personal reconciliation and renewal in the Body of Christ, the elects are introduced to a number of prayers that may benefit their spiritual growth.

49. During the Lenten Season, the focus of the RCIA process changes. Instruction into the Catholic Faith is replaced with an emphasis on conversion. Those who are already baptized take this opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Confession.

50. During the celebration of the Holy Mass on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, the Church assembly celebrates the scrutinies with the elect. These rituals mark the final preparation of the "catechumens" (those not baptized) to receive the Sacraments of initiation. These scrutinies include exorcism prayers for deliverance from sin, evil and evil influences in order to strengthen the faithful to the Word of God. During the exorcisms, the elect kneel in humility as the community prays for them.

PREPARATION FOR THE EASTER VIGIL

51. On Holy Saturday morning or at another convenient time before the initiation ceremony, a time is set aside for the catechumens to spiritually prepare themselves for the Easter Vigil. This time is set aside as a retreat, for spiritual reflection and for the celebration of the preparatory rites that is called the "ephphatha." [Mk. 7:34-5]

52. "Ephphatha" means "be opened," this being a symbol of opening the senses. During the ephphatha, the ears and mouths of the elect are blessed so they may hear the Word of God and profess it. This is the moment when the catechumens declare their baptismal names.

53. As for the ceremonies of Baptism and Marriage, it is the custom in many parishes to set aside a time to practice for the Easter Vigil initiation.

54. In large parishes, especially where there are many catechumens who are coming into the Church, the preparatory rites can greatly decrease the amount of time that will be required at the Easter Vigil. As a general rule, the liturgy during the celebration of the Easter Vigil can take up a minimum of two to three hours.

55. At the Easter Vigil, there is the "Service of Light," the "Liturgy of the Word," the "Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and the Rite of Reception," the "Celebration of Confirmation," and finally the "Liturgy of the Eucharist."

TRANSITION TO PHASE FOUR

56. In the Catholic liturgy, the celebration of the glorious Resurrection of the Lord Jesus at the Easter Vigil is the climax of the liturgical year. During this celebration, the Church welcomes the elect and the candidates into full sacramental life with the Catholic faithful. This is when the catechumen receive the Sacrament of Baptism. This is when the candidates and the catechumen receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.

57. From this time on, the elect who have been initiated into the Catholic Church are called neophytes. "Neophyte" means "newly planted." It means that the elects are now in full communion with the Church.

58. Now, the "neophytes" will continue their formation in the fourth phase of the RCIA process until the celebration of the Solemnity of Pentecost.

PHASE FOUR

59. The final phase of the RCIA process is the "mystagogy." In Greek, "mystagogy" means "entering more deeply into the mysteries." During this phase, members of the Committee familiarize the "neophytes" to the different parish ministries. This process allows the neophytes to choose how they want to become actively involved in parish life.

SAFEGUARDING THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

60. "Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the 'Sacraments of Christian initiation,' whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. [Cf. Roman Ritual, Rite of Confirmation (OC), Introduction 1] For 'by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.'" [LG 11; Cf. OC, Introduction 2.] (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1285)

61. "Since the beginning of the Church, adult Baptism has been the common practice where the proclamation of the Gospel is still new. The catechumenate (preparation for Baptism) therefore occupies an important place. This initiation into Christian faith and life should dispose the catechumen to receive the gift of God in Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist." (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1247)

62. "The catechumenate, or formation of catechumens, aims at bringing their conversion and faith to maturity, in response to the divine initiative and in union with an ecclesial community. The catechumenate is to be 'a formation in the whole Christian life... during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher. The catechumens should be properly initiated into the mystery of salvation and the practice of the evangelical virtues, and they should be introduced into the life of faith, liturgy, and charity of the People of God by successive sacred rites.'" [AG 14; cf. RCIA 19; 98.] (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1248)

63. "Catechumens "are already joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ, and are quite frequently already living a life of faith, hope, and charity." [AG 14 # 5.] "With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own.'" [LG 14 # 3; cf. CIC, cann. 206; 788 # 3.] (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1249)

64. "The holy Eucharist completes the Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist." (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1322)

RELATED CANON LAWS

65. "To be admitted to baptism, an adult must have manifested the intention to receive baptism, must be adequately instructed in the truths of the faith and in the duties of a christian, and tested in the christian life over the course of the catechumenate. The person must moreover be urged to have sorrow for personal sins." (Canon 865 §1)

66. "An adult in danger of death may be baptised if, with some knowledge of the principal truths of the faith, he or she has in some manner manifested the intention to receive baptism and promises to observe the requirements of the christian religion." (Canon 865 §2)

67. "Unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, immediately after receiving baptism an adult is to be confirmed, to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and to receive holy communion." (Canon Law # 866)

PARISH INVOLVEMENT

68. The future and success of the RCIA Committees depends on the active involvement of the faithful. For the grace of God to work according to the Divine Plan, it must be manifested through human beings who are ready to become instruments of light for others. If you would like to volunteer on the RCIA Committee, contact your parish office and ask for the name of the RCIA coordinator.

69. If you would like to inquire about the Catholic Faith or you would like to convert to Catholicism, contact a local parish office and ask when the next RCIA session will take place. If you wish to talk to someone beforehand, ask for the name of the RCIA coordinator and how he/she may be contacted.

RCIA FLEXIBILITY

70. The Rite of Christian Initiation is not written in solid rock. It can be amended as needed in cases of emergencies. For example, a dying person may not be able to wait until Easter Vigil to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. As such, the Christian initiation may take place at the person's death bed, either at home or in the hospital.

71. The RCIA program was created for the benefit of the inquirers. As such, the program may need to be adjusted according to the special needs of the individual. This flexibility is a marvellous example of how the grace of God fluctuates according to the needs of the individuals. No one, if incapacitated, should be denied access to the gift of the Sacraments. If some cannot go to the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, then the Sacraments should be brought to them!

Ref.: <http://www.catholicdoors.com/courses/rcia.htm>