

How Does RCIA Work?

Based on the stated principles, the person desiring to join the Catholic community follows a process of journeying through four periods of formation. Each period involves formation into believing with the Church, praying with the Church, serving with the Church, and living with the Church. The periods are linked by three liturgical celebrations that ritualize progress on the journey toward fuller union with others and with the Lord by both the individual and the community. The basic process, which one can discontinue at any time, is as follows:

The Process

Period of Inquiry or Pre-Catechumenate

The intent of this period is to awaken faith by instituting a dialogue between the inquirers' own lives and the message of Christianity. The questions are what is the meaning of life in Christ and how does the Church provide that meaning. It is a time for questions, finding out more about the Church - its traditions, customs, etc. If there is an awakening of faith the inquirer requests entrance into the Church.

Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming

This ritual is the transition between the first two periods. It begins one's formal entrance into the Church. Once one joins the catechumenate that person is a member of the Church, although not a fully initiated member.

The Rite begins with a dialogue between the candidates and the celebrant concerning their intention to pursue faith in the Christian community. The candidates are then signed with the cross. The catechumens then join the community for the Liturgy of the Word.

Period of the Catechumenate

Now a member of the Church, the catechumen continues conversion by deepening his/her understanding and appreciation of the faith.

Through the Word of God and systematic catechesis the catechumen comes to know the presence of God in life, to understand the role of the Church as the place where Jesus continues his act of salvation and where we all continue our journey. This period can last from Advent until Lent or several years until the catechumen is comfortable in electing to receive the initiation sacraments.

Rite of Election or Enrollment

The community gathers in solemn assembly at the beginning of Lent to celebrate its own election by God and the decision by the catechumens to request initiation. It represents a transition from deepening faith to consecration in the faith. First, the catechumens are certified as ready for initiation by the community and place their names in the "Book of the Elect". They are then "Sent Forth" to present the book to the Regional Bishop at a ceremony that formally recognizes God's election of the catechumen.

Period of Enlightenment

The third period corresponds with the liturgical season of Lent and is an opportunity for more intense preparation for the initiation sacraments. The catechumens and, indeed, the community itself reflect upon the quality of their common conversion in order to strengthen what is good and holy and to remove what is evil and sinful. During the period, there are public rites, opportunities for service, and retreat periods for private prayer.

The Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation are normally celebrated at the Easter Vigil. Much as our ancestors gathered around the fires to pass on the traditions, we gather to hear the unfolding of the Christian story from the ancient Jews to the rising of Jesus the Christ. We also make holy the symbols of Christian living: light, water, oil, bread and wine. In this powerful setting the community renews their own baptismal promises and the elect are baptized (if previously unbaptized) or make a public and solemn profession of belief in the Catholic Church and are confirmed and receive Eucharist.

Period of Mystagogia

We continue to unravel the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection and our resulting call to mission. The neophytes are exposed to the several ways they can minister and participate in community life. The Church, including its newest members, is reminded that the initiation process is a not the end of becoming a Christian but only the beginning of becoming one.

If you want to learn more about this process or if you or someone you know wants to join us on this journey please call Santa Catalina directly at 825.9611. You may also contact the RCIA Team Coordinator Greg Nelson at 520.825.5505.



RCIA

What Is RCIA?

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the process by which people become members of the Roman Catholic Church. The process seeks to assist in a total formation that moves the person to be a full member of the Church who believes what the community believes (doctrinal formation), lives within the community (practical formation), prays with the community (liturgical formation), and serves the Church community and the world about us (apostolic formation). This is a gradual process as befits such a change and culminates in the celebration of the initiation sacraments of Baptism (for the previously unbaptized), Confirmation, and the Eucharist at Easter time.

The unifying principle of the Rite is conversion. By starting in RCIA, people become part of the journey we all walk with Jesus Christ and are introduced to Church doctrine, life, liturgy, and apostolic work. It is a much broader practice than the former "Convert Classes" and seeks to include a more complete and continuing formation in faith.

While designed primarily for those not baptized previously, the RCIA can be adapted for those baptized in another Christian denomination who now seek membership in the Roman Catholic Church. Often Catholics who have not completed their initiation also join in the journey. This recognition of conversion as an ongoing process allows RCIA to be flexible and still maintain the ideals and vision of the Catholic community.

Where Did It Come From?

In the early 1900s, the Bishops decided there was a need to better prepare new members of the Church. Scholars found several basic principles used by the early Church to form and welcome new members that seemed relevant to modern life. These provided a basis upon which a "new" initiation process was developed. By rediscovering the motivating force from the early initiation practices, the contemporary Church rediscovered its soul and found these issues are as timely today.

These are the principles deduced from the early Church initiation practice, and therefore they are the basic guidelines from which the RCIA has been created:

1. The core reality of Christian initiation, and therefore Christian identity, is conversion.
2. The gradual movement towards Christian initiation is a process and not a program.
3. A close relationship exists between catechesis and liturgy.
4. The initiation of new members is the concern and responsibility of the entire community.



A JOURNEY OF FAITH



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