

RCIA Planning

Four Periods in RCIA

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is comprised of *one rite*, which is divided into *four periods*. Each period designates a section of the pathway along each individual's journey of faith. At the end of each period, there is a community celebration (ritual), marking the transition from one period to the next.

1. Period of the Pre-Catechumenate / Inquiry

- This is a period of informal catechesis/evangelization. Inquirers will be encouraged to share why they decided to inquire – and each will share her/his personal story. Team members will also share their stories, as well as relate Jesus' story: the Good News of Salvation
- This period is also a time for inquirers to become more acquainted with the Roman Catholic Church. To begin, a church tour is a good idea. Another idea is to provide presentations: the RCIA team can introduce participants to the liturgical calendar of the Church, and they can also introduce them to various types of prayer. During this period of acquaintance, there should also be opportunities for social gatherings with members of the parish community.
- The period of inquiry may last from a few months to several years, if necessary, as the RCIA team members look for signs of the participant's initial conversion. It is the team's hope that the inquirer is looking within, searching for connections between her/his own life story and Jesus' story. It is also hoped that each inquirer will feel a need to hear Jesus' Good News.
- This reflection continues throughout the RCIA process, and it is ongoing.

Rite of Acceptance

The Rite of Acceptance (and/or Welcome) is a liturgical rite, marking the beginning of the catechumenate. The candidates express-- and the Church accepts-- their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ.

- This rite may be celebrated several times during the liturgical year (as cohorts in the pre-catechumenate become ready to make this transition).

2. Period of the Catechumenate

- The period of the catechumenate embodies the first stages of commitment, which lead to full membership. It is the longer period of the initiation process. Typically, this period lasts for at least one year (which incorporates the liturgical year).
- There are four ways to bring to maturity the initial faith manifested in the Rite of Acceptance: (1) catechesis, (2) liturgical rites, (3) community life, and (4) apostolic works (RCIA no.75).
- During this phase, the catechumens and candidates gather with the Catholic community on Sundays during the first part of the Mass. They hear and reflect upon the meaning of God's Word, along with the parish community. After the homily, they are dismissed, leaving the Mass to meet with their catechist and continue this process of reflection on, and application of, the Word of God.

- Over the course of a liturgical year, participants in the catechumenate period will reflect on the various Sunday scriptures, which share the important Catholic Christian mysteries: the Holy Trinity: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the Church; the sacraments; grace; personal and Original Sin; repentance and conversion; morality; the Beatitudes; Mary and the Communion of Saints; death, judgment and eternity. The RCIA team will use weekly scriptural readings as opportunities to promote the participants' individual reflections .
- Sponsors and RCIA team members will introduce the catechumens and candidates to members of the parish community and encourage them to participate in parish and apostolic activities.
- The goal for this period is that the catechumens' faith is enlivened and that there is a maturing of their initial conversion. (RCIA no. 120)

Rite of Election

The Rite of Election is a liturgical rite which is celebrated at the Cathedral on the First Sunday of Lent. The presiding celebrant of this rite is the Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton. During the Rite of Election the catechumens, now called *the elect*, express their will to receive the sacraments of initiation, and the Church ratifies their readiness.

3.Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment is concurrent with Lent. While the parish community enters its Lenten retreat--a period of prayer and reflection--the elect and candidates enter their own Lenten retreat. For the elect and candidates, this is a time of interior reflection meant to intensify their desire for God's gifts (i.e., the Sacraments of Initiation, which they will receive at the Easter Vigil).

- Throughout this period, the elect and the candidates are invited to join with the entire Church, fasting as well as engaging in a deeper practice of works of charity.
- The centerpiece of this period of prayerful preparation is the celebration of the Scrutinies. Although the candidates will not be the subject of the Scrutinies, catechesis for both the elect and the candidates centers on this important celebration.
- The Scrutinies are celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of the Lenten season. During Masses at which the Scrutinies are celebrated, the cycle A readings must be used (RCIA no.146).
- The presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer to the elect are also celebrated during this period.
- On Holy Saturday, the elect as well as the candidates should refrain from their usual activities. If possible, they should fast and spend time in prayer and reflection (RCIA no.185). The preparation rites (RCIA no. 185ff) assist this process of prayer and reflection.

Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation comprise a liturgical rite. This rite is integrated into the Easter Vigil, as the elect are initiated into the Church through the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, and baptized Christians (candidates) are initiated into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

- By the waters of Baptism, the elect pass into the new life of grace and become members of the Body of Christ.
- The newly baptized, through the sacrament of Confirmation are anointed with special holy oil called chrism, thus sealing their initiation by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Lastly, the newly baptized and confirmed are invited to the Table of the Lord when they receive the Eucharist.
- Reception of baptized Christians may also be celebrated within Mass at another time of the church year that is outside of the Easter Vigil.

4.Period of Mystagogy

The Period of Mystagogy lasts throughout the entire Easter season--from Easter Sunday until Pentecost Sunday, fifty days later—and it represents a formal completion of the initiation process. Those who have recently shared in the Sacraments of Initiation are then called *neophytes*. The neophytes are asked to reflect on what they have just experienced, and they are also asked to more fully embrace their role in Jesus' mission of bringing salvation to the world. As the other Church members witness the neophytes' initiation, it is hoped that they, too, will recall and renew their commitment to continue to grow in the life of grace.

- Although not as intense as the initial stages of the RCIA process, ongoing Mystagogy is equally important. Ongoing Mystagogy takes place during the first year following the neophytes' full initiation into the Church. At this time, the focus is to help the neophytes develop and continue to exercise healthy patterns of everyday Catholic life. This focus is also mentioned in point no. 24 Appendix (III) of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, entitled, "The National Statues for The Catechumenate," Additional resources which provide helpful suggestions on how to structure ongoing Mystagogy include the following books: Thomas H. Morris' *The RCIA: Transforming the Church* (pp. 222 – 223), and Resources for Christian Living in the Foundations' *Faith Resource Book for Mystagogia Year A,B,C* (pp.127–135).