



## Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

### Handbook



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# Welcome to the RCIA!

Dear Inquirers,

We here at St. Vincent de Paul are very pleased to accompany you on this journey as you begin to explore more deeply into the Catholic faith.

This handbook is designed to guide you along in the RCIA process. It will introduce you to the process overall, answer some common questions, and list the documentation you'll need to provide.

Always feel free to ask any other questions that arise! That's what we're here for.

In Christ,

**Nicholas Senz**

Director of Faith Formation

## COMMON QUESTIONS

### 1. *What does RCIA stand for?*

RCIA stands for “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.” It might better be called the “**Rites [plural]** of Christian Initiation of Adults,” because the steps in the process is marked by different rites, or liturgical ceremonies.

### 2. *What does the RCIA consist of?*

The RCIA consists of four phases or periods: Inquiry, Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy. We’ll discuss each of these more later in the handbook. Each period has its own purpose and focus, but in each, you are studying and experiencing different aspects of the Catholic faith, its beliefs and practices.

### 3. *Who enters RCIA?*

People entering the RCIA program fall into three categories:

- a) Unbaptized – people who have never been baptized as Christians.
- b) Baptized non-Catholics – people baptized in another Christian denomination
- c) Catholics completing sacraments – people baptized as Catholics who are looking to completing their Sacraments of Initiation

### 4. *How long does the process take?*

The RCIA is overall a spiritual journey. It varies from person to person. Everyone enters into this process with varying backgrounds, different levels of familiarity with Christian doctrine and practice, their own unique questions and challenges and obstacles to overcome. Because of that, there’s no exact length of time that the process takes (though there are certain requirements for each period).

### 5. *What factors affect how long the process takes?*

The main factors that affect how long the process will take:

- a) **Whether the person is already baptized:** for the unbaptized, the process typically takes *at least* a year and a half to two years
- b) **Whether there is a marriage issue to resolve:** this by itself can sometimes take two years or more
- c) **How familiar the person is with Christian belief and practice:** for people who are already practicing Christians, the path to becoming ready to enter the Church is shorter. For others to whom this is all new, the process will take longer.

**St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church  
RCIA Registration Form**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Maiden name \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Name of spouse/fiancé \_\_\_\_\_ Religion \_\_\_\_\_

Family Members:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Relationship</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Religion</u>

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<p><b>Have you been baptized?</b> Yes__ No__</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>Denomination _____</p> <p>Name of Church _____</p> <p>City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____</p>
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Do you now hold membership in a church? Yes\_\_ No\_\_

Your reason for attending this series:

- I definitely want to become a Catholic.
- I think I might want to become a Catholic.
- I'm just looking and not sure at this time if I want to become a Catholic.
- I do not wish to join but want to learn what Catholics believe.

I'm Catholic but need Eucharist and Confirmation.

I'm Catholic but need Confirmation.

I'm Catholic and here for an update

Is there anyone you know at St Vincent's who you would like to be your sponsor? Yes\_\_ No\_\_

**RCIA**

**Marriage Information**

*Please be assured this information will be kept confidential and referred to only for purposes of information to better assist you in any future decision you may make to join the Catholic Church.*

**Marital Status:**

Single\_\_\_ Engaged\_\_\_ Married\_\_\_ Separated\_\_\_ Divorced/Not remarried\_\_\_

Divorced?remarried\_\_\_ Widowed\_\_\_

**If you are married:**

Is this the first marriage for each spouse? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

If yes, skip the following.

**If remarried, please answer the following:**

Which spouse was previously married? Self\_\_\_ Spouse\_\_\_

Were you previously widowed? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Was your spouse previously widowed? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

<p>My previous marriage took place in:</p> <p>Catholic Church___ Protestant Church___</p> <p>Jewish Synagogue___ Justice of the Peace___</p> <p>Mormon Temple___ Moslem Temple___</p> <p>Common Law___</p>	<p>My spouse's previous marriage took place in:</p> <p>Catholic Church___ Protestant Church___</p> <p>Jewish Synagogue___ Justice of the Peace___</p> <p>Mormon Temple___ Moslem Temple___</p> <p>Common Law___</p>
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My current marriage took place in:

Catholic Church\_\_\_ Protestant Church\_\_\_ Jewish Synagogue\_\_\_

Justice of the Peace\_\_\_ Mormon Temple\_\_\_ Moslem Temple\_\_\_ Common Law\_\_\_

## Periods of the RCIA

(adapted from the USCCB website)

### **Period of Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate (Inquiry)**

Prior to beginning the RCIA process, an individual comes to some knowledge of Jesus Christ, considers his or her relationship with Jesus Christ and is usually attracted in some way to the Catholic Church. This period is known as the Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate. For some, this process involves a long period of searching; for others, a shorter time.

After this period of preparation, the individual goes through the **Rite of Welcome and Acceptance**. The unbaptized are welcomed as catechumens (“learners”), while the baptized are accepted as candidates for full communion with the Church.

### **Period of Catechumenate**

The Period of the Catechumenate can last for as long as several years or for a shorter time. (For the unbaptized, this period and the one following must together last at least one year.) It depends on how the person is growing in faith, what questions they encounter along the way, and how God leads them on this journey. During this time, the Catechumens consider what God is saying to them in the Scriptures, what changes in their life they need to make to respond to God's inspiration, and what Baptism in the Catholic Church means.

At the end of this period, catechumens participate in the **Rite of Election**, which includes the enrollment of names of all the Catechumens seeking baptism at the coming Easter Vigil. Typically, on the first Sunday of Lent, the Catechumens, their sponsors and families gather at the cathedral church. The Catechumens publicly express their desire for baptism to the diocesan bishop. Their names are recorded in a book and they are called the Elect. Candidates participate in the **Rite of Call to Continuing Conversion**, in which the celebrant and congregation pray for them as they continue toward receiving the sacraments. Candidates may be received into the Church at any point during the year, whenever they are determined to be ready. Catechumens must enter the next period.

### **Period of Purification and Enlightenment**

The days of Lent are the final Period of Purification and Enlightenment leading up to the Easter Vigil. Lent is a period of preparation marked by prayer, study, and spiritual direction for the Elect, and prayers for them by the parish communities. The **Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation** takes place during the Easter Vigil Liturgy on Holy Saturday when the Elect receives the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. Now the person is fully initiated into the Catholic Church.

### **Period of Mystagogy**

As a newly initiated Catholic, they continue their formation and education continue in the Period of the Post Baptismal Catechesis, which is also called Mystagogy. This period continues at least until Pentecost. During the period the newly baptized members reflect on their experiences at the Easter Vigil and continue to learn more about the Scriptures, the Sacraments, and the teachings of the Catholic Church. In addition they reflect on how they will serve Christ and help in the Church's mission and outreach activities.

## Requirements

### Documents Needed from Candidates

1. Your completed Inquirer Information Sheet
2. A copy of your birth certificate
3. Completed Godparent Information Sheet
4. Copy of your Godparent's sacramental certificates showing they have been Confirmed in the Catholic Church
5. A Letter of Good Standing from your godparent's parish

### *Why do you need a copy of my birth certificate?*

In the state of Texas, sacramental certificates can be used as a legal form of identification, so it's vital that we 1) spell everything correctly, and 2) can verify key information. Parishes have been sued for issuing documents with incorrect info!

Additionally, in special circumstances:

\*IF you are **already baptized**: a copy of your baptismal certificate OR an affidavit from someone who witnessed your baptism

\*IF you are **divorced and remarried**: copies of the marriage license, divorce decree, and decree of nullity (see attached sheets on divorce and remarriage in the Catholic Church)

\*\*If your previous marriage has not been declared null, please contact:

Bernice Crocker  
Tribunal Advocate  
817-478-8206 Ext 221  
tribunaladvocate@svdpcc.org



## Attendance Policies

### *Schedule*

During the Inquiry Period:

Sundays, 9:00am, JAC Room 1  
(see schedule for holidays and off days)

During the Periods of Catechumenate and Purification and Enlightenment:

Sundays:  
Attend the 10:45am Mass, participate in Rite of Dismissal  
Catechesis session – 11:15am-12:15pm

### *Attendance*

Because the RCIA process is a spiritual journey as opposed to a class taken for credits, there are no attendance requirements or assignments required to “graduate.” Attending class is how one prepares to enter into the Church, so missing a significant number of classes will hinder your preparation, and it will likely then be longer before you are able to receive the sacraments.

Regular attendance is expected. We understand that circumstances arise (vacations, illnesses, etc.), and we are happy to accommodate those. If a continuing circumstance prevents you from regularly attending class (e.g. a change in work schedule), you can speak with the Director of Faith Formation and arrange to meet one-on-one at a more convenient time. Your godparent/sponsor is encouraged but not required to attend classes with you.

## Godparents/Sponsors

Basic Requirements for Godparents/Sponsors (see Code of Canon Law 874):

1. At least 16 years old
2. Is a fully initiated Catholic (i.e. has received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)
3. Is a Catholic in good standing (e.g. in a valid marriage if married, not under any penalty such as excommunication, etc.)
4. Cannot be the father or mother of the one receiving the sacrament

Please have your godparent or sponsor fill out and return the following documents.

- Godparent Information Sheet
- Letter of Good Standing
- Recent copy of Baptism certificate OR older copies of Baptism and Confirmation certificates

Events Godparents/Sponsors must be present for:

- Sponsor Formation Sessions (as scheduled)
- Rite of Welcome and Acceptance
- Rite of Sending/Rite of Election
- The Scrutinies (for the unbaptized only)
- Easter Vigil/Mass of Initiation



# Godparent/Sponsor Information

Name (First and Last): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Please initial after reading the following paragraph:

I understand that as a godparent or sponsor I am to live a life in harmony with the nature of this responsibility, meaning, for example, that I regularly attend Mass; I receive the Eucharist regularly; I make use of the sacrament of Reconciliation; I am not in an irregular marriage; I am not an active homosexual; and I seek to the best of my understanding of my Catholic faith to be faithful to the teachings of the Church. I attest that I have received the sacrament of Confirmation and that I am at least 16 years old. I also understand that being a godparent or sponsor is a commitment of time. I will attend weekly sessions for catechesis, the celebrations of liturgical rites, and other initiation-related events to the best of my ability. I further understand that being chosen as a godparent or sponsor is a lifetime commitment to be, as I am able, a faithful witness of the Catholic way of life to the individual I am called to serve. If I am not a member of the same parish as the person who I am serving, then I will obtain a Letter of Good Standing from my own parish, attesting to the fact that I attend Mass regularly on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, follow the precepts of the Church, and possess no impediments for serving as a godparent or sponsor.

## I. CONTACT INFORMATION

Full Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (Daytime) \_\_\_\_\_ (Evening/Weekend) \_\_\_\_\_

Cell/Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Other) \_\_\_\_\_

## II. SACRAMENTAL HISTORY

1. Place Where You Were Baptized: \_\_\_\_\_

(include **church name** (or hospital, etc.), **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), region (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

2. Parish Where You Are Currently Registered: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### For Office Use

Godparent/Sponsor for: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed Initial Sponsor Formation by Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If from Another Parish, Letter of Good Standing Received by Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

# Certificate to Serve as a Godparent or Sponsor for

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Catechumen or Candidate

I RECOGNIZE that a godparent/sponsor has a special relationship to the person who is to be baptized or confirmed. A godparent/sponsor serves as a model of Christian living for the individual he/she is serving, as that person is renewed and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

WITH THAT UNDERSTANDING, I recognize that in order to serve as a godparent/sponsor, a person must:

- ✘ Be a Catholic who has been baptized, received the Eucharist and been confirmed, and who is currently living a sacramental life (e.g., attending Mass regularly, making use of the sacrament of Reconciliation) and is not in an irregular marriage, or living a life of habitual sin;
- ✘ Be at least sixteen years of age;
- ✘ Lead a life of faith in harmony with the ministry they are undertaking, and have the intention of undertaking the ministry of a godparent or sponsor;
- ✘ Not be a parent of the individual to be confirmed.

**I HEREBY ACCEPT these responsibilities and testify that I fulfill the requirements to serve in the ministry of godparent/sponsor.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Godparent/Sponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**I HEREBY TESTIFY that** \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of godparent/sponsor)

**is a registered member of** \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of parish)

**and affirm that he/she fulfills all the requirements to serve in the ministry of godparent/sponsor.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*[Parish Seal on this page is ordinarily required]*