

RCIA – Frequently Asked Questions

What is RCIA?

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a restoration of an ancient process for incorporating unbaptized persons into Jesus Christ through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The process was restored after the Second Vatican Council, but did not become widely available in the United States until late in the 1980s. The local Catholic bishop determines how RCIA will be administered in the parishes under his care. For more information, check out the page entitled “What is RCIA?”

Who needs to attend RCIA?

People who have not received the sacrament of Baptism must attend RCIA for an extended period — ideally, a year, sometimes longer. The length of the process depends greatly on your readiness for the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

I’m already baptized in another denomination. Do I need to attend RCIA?

That depends. The Catholic Church doesn’t rebaptize people who are already baptized. If you are baptized but never received any instruction in the faith, you should receive instruction now and finish any sacraments you didn’t complete. We strongly recommend RCIA, even if you have been well instructed in another faith tradition, since you will need to learn how the beliefs and practices you grew up with differ from the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. If you are a baptized and confirmed Catholic returning to the practice of the faith, you should talk to the pastor of the parish about how to proceed. We recommend that Catholics who have been away from the Church for many years (say, 10 or more) go through RCIA for the instruction.

I think I was baptized but am not sure. What kind of information do I need to join RCIA?

If your church or congregation kept records, you’ll need to obtain a copy of your baptismal record — a certificate or a letter from the pastor there. Because locating records can be difficult or time-consuming, you should try to obtain these records as early in the process as possible. We must see these records to confirm your baptismal status before you’re received into the Church. If your church or congregation did not keep records or no longer exists, we can make other arrangements. Please contact a member of the RCIA team at the parish.

I’ve been divorced but am not remarried. Can I become Catholic?

Certainly. Unless you plan to marry, you do not need to obtain an annulment.

I’ve been divorced and am remarried, and my spouse is divorced and remarried. Can I become Catholic?

You and your current spouse need to begin the annulment process, and you should begin it as soon as possible even if your spouse is not considering entry into the Church. Please contact the parish staff for information on how to proceed. Of course, you can attend RCIA instructions while the annulment process is ongoing. But reception into the Church has to wait until the annulment process has been completed.

What’s the cutoff date for joining RCIA?

Currently, RCIA starts around the second Sunday in September for Adults and October for Youth and runs through the beginning of Easter. Unbaptized persons who have had no previous religious instruction should join as early as possible and are encouraged to participate fully. If such people join late, they may be asked to wait until another year begins.

For other people, the “cutoff date” depends on your faith level and readiness to receive the sacraments. Please talk to the RCIA director.

When do you meet?

RCIA meets Sunday mornings. As a general practice during the first part of the fall called the “inquiry period” we meet at 10:30am for the Adults and 9:00am for the youth. After the first Rite in December, we attend the 9:00am Mass and then are dismissed immediately after the homily.

How long do sessions last?

Sessions for adults generally end between 11:30am and noon.

Youth Session end at 10:15am.

How long does RCIA last?

We begin in the fall and the year culminates at the Easter Vigil each year followed by mystagogia.

What is mystagogia ?

Mystagogia is the seeping in period, in which all believers are able to take time and more deeply contemplate the Church's life and sacraments, which we so joyously celebrated in the past weeks. When I think of this period it is similar to a retreat, a time in which we can take a break and understand the events that have happened in our liturgical celebrations. It is also a great time to renew our spiritual goals that frequently take a back seat to our other domestic activities.

My schedule doesn't permit me to attend your sessions. What should I do?

There are a couple of options. We may be able to arrange catechesis in a private setting with a qualified parishioner. Also, other parishes meet at different times, and you may prefer to attend one of them. We can provide information on when and where other parishes in the area offer instruction.

I heard I need a sponsor in order to become Catholic. What is that, and how do I get one?

A sponsor is a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church who accompanies you on your journey through RCIA. The sponsor has the job of helping you through the process, and of verifying at the main rites that you are ready to take the next step. For baptism, the sponsor is called a "godparent," with more serious responsibilities toward the catechumen being sponsored.

I know who I want my sponsor to be, but that person doesn't live locally and can't attend sessions. Can that person still be my sponsor?

Yes. However, we will provide someone locally to represent that sponsor, accompany you on an ongoing basis and instructions and the rites with you. At the Easter Vigil, the sponsor you prefer will then stand in the local person's place as your official sponsor.

I have children. Do you provide child care?

We have a childcare program from 9-noon on Sundays. We work with children 6mo-4 years of age.

How old should a person be to attend RCIA?

Technically, old enough to understand what is being taught. For children of catechetical age at St. Gabriel's we work with children 6-12th grade. There are other parishes that work with children as early as second grade in RCIA adapted for children.