

## Overview of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is designed for *previously unbaptized* adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God's help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist) fruitfully.

*Baptized Christians* desiring to join the Catholic Church may also participate in components of RCIA that are appropriate to their needs in preparation for the Rite of Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.

In addition, *Catholics who have not completed the Sacraments of Initiation* may also participate in components of RCIA that are appropriate to their needs in preparation for the completion of the Sacraments of Initiation.

### **Structure of the RCIA**

Initiation of adults is a gradual process that takes place within the parish community. This journey includes periods for making inquiry and maturing in the faith and steps marking progress.

Overall, there are **4 Periods**; between the periods are **3 Steps** which are liturgical rites formalizing the individual's progress. These three steps are the major, more intense moments of initiation marked by liturgical rites: (1) the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens; (2) the rite of election or enrollment of names; (3) the celebration of the sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist). These Periods and Steps are outlined below:

#### ***First Period: Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate - Inquiry***

This is an informal time for asking questions about faith in Jesus Christ and is an introduction to Gospel values and the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith.

#### ***First Step: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens***

This is a liturgical rite, celebrated within a parish Sunday Mass, marking the beginning of the period of the catechumenate, as the candidates express and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ. Henceforth, the candidates become catechumens. From this time on the Church embraces the catechumens as its own with a mother's love and concern; the catechumens are now part of the household of Christ.

### ***Second Period: Period of the Catechumenate***

This is the time for nurturing and growth of the catechumens' faith and conversion to God and is a period of more formal and intense study of the faith and teachings of the Church.

### ***Second Step: Election or Enrollment of Names***

This is the liturgical rite, usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent, by which the Church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness for the sacraments of initiation and the catechumens, now the elect, express the will to receive these sacraments. This rite is generally celebrated by the bishop at the Cathedral.

### ***Third Period: Period of Purification and Enlightenment***

This is the time immediately preceding the elects' initiation (the Lenten Season); it is a time of reflection, intensely centered on conversion, marked by celebration of the Scrutinies on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays of Lent.

### ***Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation***

This is the liturgical rite, in which the elect are initiated through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. The celebration of this rite occurs during the Easter Vigil, the most solemn Mass of the liturgical year.

### ***Fourth Period: Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy***

This is the time (Easter season) following the celebration of initiation, during which the newly initiated (neophytes) experience being fully a part of the Christian community by means of pertinent catechesis and particularly by participation with all the faithful in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration.