

HOW DO I BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

The process of joining the Roman Catholic Church is known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. [R.C.I.A.] The Catechumenate, as it is often called, is a late 20th century restoration of a 2nd-3rd century process which prepared people for acceptance into the Christian faith. The **Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults** is a faith journey which consists of four distinct stages.

Stage One Inquiry *PRE-CATECHUMENATE*

This is the time when someone who feels drawn to the expression of Christian values begins to formally ask questions of the faith community: *What do Catholics believe? Why? Who is God? How is God active in my life? What are the sacraments?* This period may last only a few months or a number of years. Sometimes inquirers realize that they are not ready or willing to belong to the Christian community. They leave with the blessing of their companions and catechists as they continue to search for spiritual meaning. Others find that they are attracted to our way of life and are drawn to the person of Christ. Like the disciples of old, they wish to follow Jesus and move to the next stage of the journey, which is known as the *Catechumenate*.

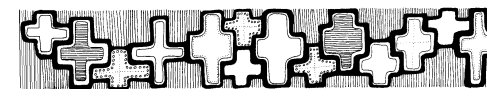


Stage Two *CATECHUMENATE*

This stage begins with the *Rite of Acceptance*. Those who enter this stage are claimed for Christ and marked with the sign of the cross. They are then called *catechumens* if they are unbaptized, or *candidates* if they have already been baptized in another tradition. This period of the R.C.I.A. is a time for the catechumens and candidates to deepen in faith and commitment to Christ. Although they are not yet able to share at the table of the Eucharist, they participate in the Liturgy of the Word each Sunday. When they are dismissed, they take the book of the Gospels with them to a separate meeting place where they continue to reflect with their catechists and each other upon the gospel message and how it pertains to their lives. This stage of the R.C.I.A. usually lasts a year or more. It includes formal sessions on Catholic teaching and practice and is an opportunity for the individual to grow in prayer and to mature in faith. With the support of community members, parish companions, godparents and catechists, the catechumens and candidates steadily conform their lives to Gospel values. They continue to deepen their relationship with Christ, and when they, with the guidance of their catechists, discern that they are ready, enter into the next stage of the catechumenate, *Purification and Enlightenment*.

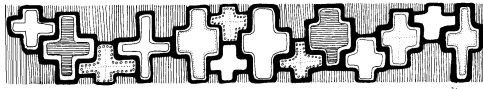
Stage Three *PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT*

This stage begins on the first Sunday of Lent with the *Rite of Election* and the *Call to Continuing Conversion*. In local parishes, catechumens inscribe their name in a book which is presented to the Bishop in a ceremony at the cathedral later that day. At the Rite of Election, the Bishop elects (chooses) the catechumens in the name of Christ to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at Easter. The Bishop also calls (exhorts) the candidates to continue growing in their faith as they prepare for Confirmation and Eucharist. The next 40 days are intensive days of preparation to receive the sacraments at Easter. The local community accompanies the *Elect* (unbaptized) and *Candidates* (already baptized) by participating in the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Special rites of interior searching, known as the *scrutinies*, are celebrated with the elect and candidates. These take place on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent. This period of the R.C.I.A. culminates at the Easter Vigil with baptism by immersion for those who are unbaptized, a profession of faith for those who are baptized, confirmation, and the reception of Eucharist. This completes the third stage of the journey.



Stage Four MYSTAGOGIA

This final phase of the R.C.I.A. finds the *Neophytes* rejoicing in their awareness of God's presence in them and around them. Now, instead of leaving after the homily, they remain with the community to pray and eat at the banquet of the Eucharist. This period concludes with the Feast of Pentecost when the neophytes are sent to share their experience of Christ with others. The neophytes continue to gather periodically throughout the year to share prayer and community with one another as they become more integrated into the faith community of the parish and the larger Church.



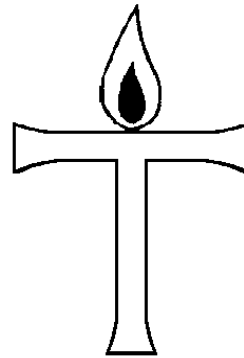
HOW DO I KNOW IF THE R.C.I.A. PROCESS IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR ME?

The R.C.I.A. process is designed for adults who are unbaptized or those who were baptized as infants but had little experience with regular church attendance. Individuals baptized in another Christian tradition who have little experience with the Roman Catholic tradition often find this process to be helpful in their discernment of becoming Roman Catholic.

If you are an adult who was baptized and active in another Christian tradition, and have more than a year of experience within the Roman Catholic tradition, you may want to discuss this process and any other available alternatives with the R.C.I.A. Director.

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE R.C.I.A. PROCESS?

The best way is to simply begin. Inquiry sessions for adults are held the 3rd Thursday of each month from 6:30 – 8:00 PM in St. Clare Chapel (adjoining the church). These are informal sessions that provide opportunities for the inquirer to ask her/his questions about the Catholic faith. A team of staff and volunteers from the parish community, along with other inquirers, are ready and willing to explore these questions with you. Drop-ins are always welcome. For those who so desire, the Director of the R.C.I.A. is available to answer questions by telephone and will schedule individual appointments.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT**

St. Francis of Assisi Parish
1066-26th Street
Sacramento, CA 95816

(916) 443-8084 ext 277

*You Are invited
To Explore*



*Membership In
The Roman Catholic
Church*