

## **RCIA OVERVIEW**

For adults and children who have reached the age of reason (age seven), entrance into the Church is governed by the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). RCIA is a process of gradual stages along the path to full initiation in the Catholic Church. It is a process of both internal and external transformation and conversion helping us to grow in holiness.

RCIA contains 5 main stages or phases:

- The period of Inquiry
- The period of the Catechumenate
- The period of Purification or Illumination
- The Paschal Triduum—Celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation
- The period of Mystagogy

### **Period of Inquiry**

Preparation for reception into the Church begins with the inquiry stage, in which the non-baptized and baptized non-Catholic person begins to learn about the Catholic faith and begins to decide whether to embrace it. It is here where our hearts stir with curiosity and faith. We begin here asking questions, seeking answers, and discerning the call of God in our lives. In the inquiry phase we also work through doubts, hesitations, and misconceptions one may have. This is a time to become acquainted with the Catholic Church and her beliefs.

### **Period of Catechumenate**

The first formal step to Catholicism begins with the rite of reception into the order of Catechumens, in which the non-baptized express their desire and intention to become Christians. "Catechumen" is a term the early Christians used to refer to those preparing to be baptized and become Christians. The period of the Catechumenate embodies the first stages of commitment leading to full membership. The purpose of the period of the Catechumenate is to provide the Catechumens with a thorough background in Christian teaching. A thoroughly comprehensive catechesis on the truths of Catholic doctrine and moral life, aided by approved catechetical texts, is provided during the period of the Catechumenate. The Catechumen becomes a full member of the Catholic Church by means of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, which are referred to as the Sacraments of Initiation. The period of the Catechumenate begins with the Rite of Acceptance and Welcome. This is a decision point for the inquirer, "Do I want to

continue on in the journey and see what God has in store for me?” Additionally, one who is already baptized in the tradition of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and who is preparing for reception into full communion in the Roman Catholic Church is referred to not as a Catechumen but as a Candidate. The Candidate will receive Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. Additionally, the Candidate will participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation through their First Confession prior to the Easter Vigil (CCC 1310).

### **Period of Purification or Illumination**

The period of Purification corresponds to that time known in the Catholic Church as Lent, the six weeks of preparation for Easter. It is a time for prayer and reflection for Catechumens and Candidates, as they prepare for the moment of welcome as full members, established as such by the Sacraments of Initiation. This second formal step is taken with the Rite of Election, in which the Catechumens' names are written in a book of those who will receive the sacraments of initiation and a record of the Candidates baptism is accepted by the Bishop. At the Rite of Election, the Catechumen again expresses the desire and intention to become a Christian, and the Church judges that the Catechumen is ready to take this step. The Candidate again expresses the desire to continue preparing for reception into full communion in the Roman Catholic Church. The Rite of Election takes place normally the first Sunday of Lent with the Bishop of Columbus presiding. At this rite one is accepted as a Candidate for the Sacraments by the Bishop, representing the fact that this decision is not theirs alone. Both Catechumens and Candidates are now known as the Elect. After the Rite of Election, the Elect undergo a period of more intense reflection, purification, and enlightenment, in which they deepen their commitment to repentance and conversion. Throughout Lent, special prayers are offered at the Sunday Eucharist for the Elect called scrutinies. These prayers are for strengthening in grace and virtue and for purification from all past evil and from any bonds which hinder them from experiencing the love of God. They are meant to bring out the qualities of the Elect's soul, to heal those qualities which are weak or sinful, and to strengthen those that are positive and good. Through this period, the Elect are invited to join with the Church in a deeper practice of works of charity and in the practice of fasting and abstinence. During this period, reflections on Scripture will occur; the readings of Lent were chosen with the themes of continuing conversion in mind. Towards the end of the period, the Church continues the custom of "handing over" to the Elect the Creed (the summary of our faith) and the Lord's Prayer (which represents its practice of continuing prayer after the command of Jesus who taught us to pray).

## **Sacraments of Initiation**

The Sacraments of Initiation are celebrated at the Easter Vigil, an extended night watch of prayer, singing and hearing the Word of God. It is on this night that the Sacraments of Initiation take place and you become full members in the Catholic Church.

## **Period of Mystagogy**

The Period of Mystagogy lasts from Easter Sunday until the completion of the Easter season, fifty days later, on Pentecost Sunday and completes the initiation process. Those who have just shared in the Sacraments of Initiation are now called Neophytes and during this period of Easter joy they reflect on what they have just gone through and look to the future as to how they can now share in the mission of Christ who came to bring salvation and life to the whole world. This period of time reminds the whole church that life in Christ constantly calls us to grow and to look for new ways to live the life of grace, personally and together.

## **God Parents / Sponsors**

For those who have not been baptized, they need a God Parent. For those who have been baptized “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Tridentine Formula) and want to be Confirmed they need a Sponsor (CCC 1311). The requirements are that your godparent / sponsor be at least 16 years old, and that this person be a “practicing” Catholic in good standing with the Church. The qualities this person should possess are that this is someone you admire because of their unquestionable faith, someone who walks closely with God, and lives their life as closely to the Gospel teachings as possible. According to the Catholic Catechism of the Church (#1255) “this person must also be able and ready to help the newly baptized adult on the road to Christian life”. Also remember that you may NOT choose a parent to be a sponsor or godparent. Ideally a sponsor or godparent should be someone who lives nearby and that this person be a member of your parish. The sponsor is a person who represents the worshipping community in your parish; your sponsor speaks on the behalf of those assembled at each Rite we celebrate. However the most important aspect of this relationship between you and your sponsor is that you can see it developing into a long-term commitment with each other. This is a person with whom you can share your faith, and other personal aspects of your life. If you do decide to have a sponsor outside of St. Mary’s a letter needs to be sent from the Sponsor’s parish stating that they are an active member in that parish. The time commitment for a sponsor or godparent in the RCIA process is a weekly one. Can you see this person as being there for you 100% when you need them? Is this person someone who can celebrate your new life in Christ with you throughout the coming years? Is this a person of prayer, who can help to guide you in the Catholic tradition? If you can answer these

questions in a positive way, then this person will be an excellent sponsor for your continuing life journey through life with the Holy Spirit as your guide.

### **Baptismal Certificates**

For those who have been baptized in another tradition it is important that you get a baptismal certificate from that church. It is preferable for it to be a newly issued certificate; however, if that is not possible then getting a copy of your original certificate will suffice. In those cases where there is no record kept, please discuss this with Deacon Roger.

### **Annulment**

For those who have been married, divorced, and remarried you will need to get an annulment before you are able to enter into the Church. This can be done in parallel to your participation in the RCIA process. Please discuss this with Deacon Roger