

*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) names the process by which interested persons gradually become members of the Catholic Church.*

The R.C.I.A. is primarily a journey of faith:

"From the awareness of stirring of faith and curiosity within one's heart,

- ✚ through all those stages of asking and seeking,
- ✚ through beginning involvement with Catholic people,
- ✚ through hearing the Gospel proclaimed and by faithful reflection and prayer on this Word of God,
- ✚ through study and discussion about the Catholic experience,
- ✚ through doubts and hesitations,
- ✚ through involvement in the works of charity and justice with those already committed to the Catholic way of life,
- ✚ through discernment of God's call for them as individuals, through the steps of commitment,
- ✚ through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)

to a life of faith, love, and justice in communion with Catholics throughout the world."

### Conversion, a gradual process

- The R.C.I.A. as a rite, marks stages along the path to full commitment in the Catholic Church; the R.C.I.A. as a process, describes in broad terms what this gradual commitment means.
- The R.C.I.A. as formation process looks both to the gradual inner transformation of the individual to God's call as given week by week in the Lectionary of Scripture readings at the Sunday Eucharist, and to the gradual transformation of the person into an active member of the local faith community.

The R.C.I.A. is divided into four periods:

- The Period of Inquiry (Also known as the time of Evangelization or Pre-Catechumenate),
- The Period of the Catechumenate,
- The Period of Purification and Enlightenment/Scrutinies, and
- Mystagogical Catechesis.

## **And 3 Steps (which transition each period):**

Rite of Becoming a Catechumen or Welcoming Previously Baptized  
 Rite of Election or Recognition  
 The Paschal Triduum with the Sacraments of Initiation

### The Period of Inquiry (Pre-Catechumenate)

#### **The Period of Inquiry has as its purpose a time**

- to become acquainted with the Catholic Church and
- to hear the good news of salvation from Jesus Christ our Savior;
- it is a time to look within at one's own life story and see connections to, or needs for, the gospel story of good news.

During this period, the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, and **Inquirers** look within their own story to make and mark connections. All discussions are done in small groups of Inquirers and Catechumenate Team members. No commitment is necessary. This reflective process becomes a continuing, on-going **method** used by Inquirer and team member alike.

This period **lasts as long as** the Inquirer needs it to last, from a few months to several years, if necessary. During this period, some may decide that this is not the right time for them to consider membership in the Catholic Church, either because of their own life circumstances or because they feel some other Tradition is better for them.

• ***The R.C.I.A., generically called the Catechumenate, is a responsibility of the whole Church; this responsibility takes particular shape mainly in parishes, the normal locus of Catholic community life. In view of this commitment and obligation of the***

*Church, we provide an outreach person for each person who presents himself or herself as an Inquirer; these church-provided **Sponsors** will serve as spiritual companions as they seek to discover God's call.*

## The Period of The Catechumenate

- The Period of the Catechumenate embodies the first stages of **commitment** leading to full membership. For a person to enter this phase, s/he must already have come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and sincerely desire to become members of the Catholic Church.
- The beginning of this period (the 1<sup>st</sup> step) is marked with a **Rite** of Becoming a Catechumen and/or Welcoming at the Sunday liturgy. During this phase, the **Catechumens** now gather with the Catholic community on Sundays for the first part of the mass, during which, together, we hear the Scriptures, respond to them, and reflect on the meaning of God's Word for us personally and as community through the homily. After the homily, the Catechumens are **Sent Forth** and, with their **Faith Sharer**, continue a process of reflection and application of the Scriptures to their own lives.
- During this period, the initial conversion is deepened and appropriated; the Catechumen comes to know more and more deeply the love of God in his/her own life and in the midst of the church community. This period, too, lasts as long as the person needs it to last, from a few months to several years, if necessary.
- For the unbaptized, this phase must normally last at least 12 months.

## The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

- The Period of Purification and Enlightenment corresponds to that time known in the Catholic Church as Lent. The six-weeks of preparation for Easter are prayerful time for catechumens and candidates, who are now known as **the Elect**, as they prepare to become full members of the Catholic Church and are established as such by the Sacraments of Initiation.

- This period (the 2<sup>nd</sup> step) is begun on the First Sunday of Lent by the **Rite of Sending** at the local parish. The Catechumens sign their names in the Book of the Elect and are sent to the Rite of Election. The **Rite of Election** is usually celebrated at the Cathedral Church with the diocesan bishop. By this Rite the Church acknowledges that the Elect have been chosen (elected) by God and that they are accepted as candidates for the Easter Sacraments by the bishop, representing the fact that this decision is not theirs alone.
- Throughout Lent, special prayers are offered at the Sunday Eucharist for the Elect; they are called **Scrutinies**. These are prayers for a strengthening in grace and virtue, for purification from all past evil, and for freedom from any bonds which hinder them from experiencing the love of God. Throughout this period, the Elect are invited to join with the whole Church in a deeper practice of works of charity and in the practice of fasting.
- During this period, the weekly reflection on the Scriptures continues; the readings of Lent were chosen with the themes of continuing conversion in mind. Toward the end of this 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.)

## Celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation

- The Sacraments of Initiation (the 3<sup>rd</sup> step) are celebrated at the Easter Vigil, an extended night-watch of prayer, singing and listening to the Word of God.
- By the waters of **Baptism**, a person passes into the new life of grace and becomes a member of the Body of Christ.
- In **Confirmation**, anointing with special holy oil called **chrism** seals (confirms) the initiation by the power of the Holy Spirit, and participation at the Table of the Lord in the **Eucharist** marks full membership in the Catholic Church.

## Mystagogy

- The Period of Mystagogy officially 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**. During this period of Easter joy, they reflect on what they have just experienced, 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 in community. In reality, Mystagogy lasts for the rest of our lives.

## Catechumen or Candidate?

- By means of the processes described in the document, R.C.I.A., interested non-baptized persons become Catechumens, and Catechumens become full members of the Catholic Church by means of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, which are referred to as the Sacraments of Initiation.
- "However, when one speaks of a baptized person from a Protestant tradition, for example, who is preparing for reception into full communion in the Roman tradition, one is speaking of a different matter. A baptized person should not be led automatically through the full catechumenal process or be called a catechumen. Instead, we call him or her a **Candidate**." By this we mean that this person is a candidate for the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation and a candidate preparing to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church and thus become a full member of the Catholic Church.
- "Frequently candidates for full communion in the Catholic Church find certain elements of the catechumenate process helpful in their preparation. For example, the focus on continuing conversion is appropriate for any Christian, especially at a time of transition. An understanding of Catholic beliefs, the practice of Catholic observances in the church year over an appropriate period of time and the experience of Catholic community are all necessary for an informed commitment that will last." The differences in the process will be worked out by the candidate in conjunction with the Catechumenate Director and the parish provided Sponsor.

- "Since candidates are already baptized, the liturgical rites that mark the steps of the formation process are different from those of catechumens. There are rites of welcoming by the parish community and recognition by the bishop, a celebration of the call to continuing conversion, and a penitential rite. Reception into full communion in the Catholic Church takes place with a profession of faith, Confirmation and Eucharist." By penitential rite we mean that the person examines his or her own life with some scrutiny to things that s/he has done right and things that s/he knows has been wrongfully done; these latter things need to be repented of. Sometimes the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** is the appropriate means for this person to mark the movement from sin to grace, from old life to new life before s/he enters into full communion. Sometimes it is a less formal act of repentance.

## How long does it take?

- "The Rite of Christian Initiation is not a program.
- It is the church's way of ministering sensitively to those who seek membership. For that reason some people will need more time than others to prepare for the lifetime commitment that comes with membership in the Catholic Church. The usual length of preparation is from one to two years. For those already baptized and who seek full communion in the Catholic Church, the time may also vary.
- It seems reasonable that catechumens or candidates experience the yearly calendar of Catholic practice at least one time around in order to make an informed decision.
- The process of spiritual renewal and catechesis should not be hasty, especially for those not accustomed to the fasts and feasts and Sundays and seasons the way Catholics observe them.
- The normal time for the Sacraments of Initiation or the Rite of Reception into full communion is the Easter Vigil. Lent prepares catechumens, candidates and the whole community for Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The celebration of the Easter Vigil dramatically points to the wellspring of the Church's life: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

## What is the first step?

- **Anyone** who is seriously thinking about become a Catholic Christian or who would simply like more information can contact Joan Hanrahan. She is our Catechumenate Coordinator and can be reached at **(916) 452-2611** or at [MarysTower@aol.com](mailto:MarysTower@aol.com).

*Special thanks to Fr. Gerald Chinchar, S.M., D.Min at the University of Dayton for allowing us to use his "Becoming a Catholic" web page, modified for St. Mary's Parish. You can view all of his web pages by going to <http://ministry.udayton.edu/~campmin>.*