

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

The RCIA is the process by which new members are brought into the Church. This process is divided into four segments, to permit the inquirer to ask questions, listen to the teachings of the Church, reflect on their decision to join the Church, and a time to familiarize themselves with the parish.

The RCIA Process

There are four continuous periods:

1. The Precatechumenate - This first period consists of evangelization of the precatechumenate (those who are inquiring about the Catholic faith) by the Church. If after hearing the preaching of the Gospel and the Traditions of the Church handed down to us through apostolic succession they want to continue, they are then accepted into the Order of Catechumens through the rite of acceptance.
2. The period of the Catechumenate - This period may last up to several years and includes catechesis and the rites connected with catechesis. It comes to an end with the rite of election.
3. The period of Purification and Enlightenment (Lenten preparation) - This period is a time of purification and enlightenment and is designed for a more intense spiritual preparation, which is assisted by the celebration of the scrutinies and presentations. It ordinarily coincides with the Lenten preparation for the Easter celebration and the sacraments of initiation.
4. Mystagogy or the period of postbaptismal catechesis - This final period is marked by the new experience of the sacraments and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the worshipping community. It extends through the whole Easter season and is a time for deepening the Christian experience.

Sponsors

A sponsor accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates' moral character, faith, and intention. It may happen that it is not the sponsor for the rite of acceptance and the period of the catechumenate but another person who serves as godparent for the periods of purification and enlightenment and of mystagogy.

Godparents

Godparents (for each a godmother or godfather, or both) accompany the candidates on the day of election, at the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, and during the period of mystagogy. Godparents are persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest. It is the responsibility of godparents to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates' progress in the baptismal life. Chosen before the candidates' election, godparents fulfill this office publicly from the day of the rite of election, when they give testimony to the community about the candidates. They continue to be important during the time after reception of the sacraments when the neophytes need to be assisted so that they remain true to their baptismal promises.