

The **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)** is not only a series of liturgical rites for those preparing to be initiated into the Catholic Church, it is a process of evangelization and spiritual formation as well. The first stage is one of **inquiry** and hearing the Gospel—of learning what the Catholic faith is and beginning to respond to it. At the conclusion of this period, inquirers are asked to decide if they wish to go further. If they do and the catechists and clergy agree they are ready, they choose a sponsor and receive the Rite of Welcoming during which they are signed with the sign of the cross and become, if they have never been baptized, catechumens (“those who are being taught”). Those who have already been baptized (but outside the Catholic Church) become candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church.

The next stage is the **catechumenate**, when the catechumens and candidates are taught more about the Catholic faith and continue to pray with each other and the parish.

Then, if they, their sponsors, the catechists, and the clergy agree that they are ready, they will celebrate the Rite of Sending at the parish Mass and go, on the First Sunday of Lent, to the Rite of Election at which the Bishop or his representative chooses them to receive the Easter sacraments and they become known as the elect.

For the remainder of the season of Lent, they enter a time of further **enlightenment** and also pray and fast in preparation for receiving the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

At the Easter Vigil, the elect reach their immediate goal and become Catholic Christians through receiving Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. The candidates make a profession of faith, are confirmed, and receive the Holy Eucharist for the first time.

Now the newly baptized reach a new stage in the RCIA process and become known as neophytes (ones who have newly received the light of Christ) and enter the final period of **mystagogy** in which they reflect on the sacraments they have received and consider ways in which they can live the meaning of their baptism in the communion of the Church. The candidates—now simply new Catholics—continue to meet with the neophytes as they too consider what they have received and look for new ways to serve the Lord.

This is the RCIA. As you can see, it is a journey into the new life in Christ through communion with his holy Church. If you are unbaptized or if you are already baptized (but outside the Catholic Church) and want to become Catholic, the RCIA is for you. For more information, please contact Mr. Bill Burkey at (919) 810-4096.

August 2011