

Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults is the Church's way of bringing new adult members into the Church. The Rite is a reflection of the practices the Church developed in its beginning years. The Rite sets out four periods to initiation:

- A. Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate,
- B. Catechumenate,
- C. Purification and Enlightenment
- D. Mystagoga.

A. The period of Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate

is a time for people to learn about our faith in Jesus and about our faith community. This is seen as a period of Inquiry.

The RCIA team's focus is to answer the inquirer's questions- to address the agenda of the inquirer- rather than having a pre-packaged, unvarying "lesson plan". The length of the Inquiry period, is now more a decision of the inquirer to take the next step, which is the **Rite of Acceptance to the Catechumenate**.

The Rite of Acceptance is now celebrated more than once per year. As well, people can begin the Inquiry at any time. The Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming is a celebration where these "Inquirers" publicly declare to the church their intentions to continue their faith journey. The church welcomes and accepts them as persons who have intentions towards becoming members. People who have not been baptized are "accepted"; those already baptized in a Christian faith are "welcomed" into our faith community.

These new people then learn the Catholic Christian way of life from being in the midst of the parish community. The entire community helps form them in the Christian way of life. This rite marks the beginning of the next step—the **Catechumenate**—from the Greek word for learning by hearing (the Word of God.)

B. The period of the Catechumenate is a celebration in three parts:

- 1) Reception of the candidates.
- 2) Celebration of the Word of God.
- 3) Sending Forth of the Catechumens after the Homily to further reflect on the word of God.

The **Catechumenate** is the heart of the initiation journey. The Greek word



“catechumen” is defined as “one who learns by hearing” (God’s word). It is a time of spiritual growth and development through: focus on the Sunday Gospel; sharing of our experiences and beliefs; and discussion of topics springing from the Sunday Gospel. Thus, if the Gospel is about the Baptism of Our Lord, then the sacrament of Baptism, or a closely related topic, is discussed.

The length of the **Catechumenate** is also seen as needing to be fitted to the individual. All the parties- priest, catechumen, team and sponsor- should be involved in discerning whether the Catholic Church can be their spiritual home, and if so, then at Easter ***the Sacraments of Initiation*** should be received by the catechumen. The sacraments of Initiation are: Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist.

The Catechumen will celebrate the **Rite of Election** with Bishop Henry at the Cathedral in Calgary on the first Sunday of Lent. "Election" refers to the idea of "the chosen people." In Israel's early history, God chose a people and established a covenant with them. Christians believe that God continues to choose people, now through the covenant of baptism. The rite of election thus establishes the names of those who will enter the new covenant through the **sacraments of initiation**.

A key moment of the rite is when the sponsor testifies that the catechumen is worthy to be initiated. The sponsor's testimony reveals the church's positive judgment about the catechumen's desire and behavior. Then the bishop declares that the catechumen is a member of the Elect, to be initiated at the next Easter Vigil.

C. The period of Purification and Enlightenment follows the Rite of Election, **Purification and Enlightenment** occur simultaneously with Lent. It is the time to prepare intensively for the reception of the **Sacraments of Initiation** at the Easter Vigil Mass.

The Elect will participate in three ceremonies—called "Scrutinies"—at Masses during Lent. These scrutinies are rites for self-searching and repentance. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak or sinful in the heart of the Elect; and finally to bring out, then strengthen all that is strong and good. The scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the Elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect against temptation, and to provide strength in Jesus.

These rites should complete the conversion of the Elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Jesus and to carry out the decision to love God above all.

The Elect are fully initiated at the Easter Vigil held on the evening of Holy Saturday.

D. The period of Mystagogia is the time from Easter to Pentecost for the newly initiated to reflect on the experience of receiving the sacraments of Initiation. The Greek word “mystagogia” means “to savour”. As well, it is in this period that the new Catholics begin putting their faith into practice both inside and outside of the Church.

If you are not Catholic and would like to know more, please call Ken Hagel at St. Mary’s Church, 403-932-2944, Tuesdays to Thursdays 10 am to 4 pm, or email: khagel@stmaryscochrane.ca . We hold regular meetings to answer your questions, or we can meet with you individually. Your interest is welcome at any time.

For Catholics Wishing to Serve as Volunteers with RCIA, the following are the “*Job Descriptions*”

A. RCIA Catechist:

The catechist gives presentations to Inquirers and Catechumens about topics related to the Catholic faith and practices. As noted, topics in the Inquiry first come from the Inquirer, secondly, from the *Living Our Faith* series. This latter is used as a means of further education and for stimulating questions from the Inquirer.

Topics in the Catechumenate are more structured and related to the Sunday Gospel. Basic information for the topics is used from the *Foundations in Faith* Program, which in turn is based on the Sunday Gospels. The Presenter in either group is asked to share their own experiences about the topics and to lead discussions about the topics.

Qualifications:

- 1) A Ph. D in theology is NOT needed! We have tried to streamline the work, so that information is easily available to the catechist;
- 2) Be in full communion with the Church;
- 3) Possess a willingness to share your faith journey;
- 4) Have a sensitivity to those having no religious background, or who were raised in a different faith.

Costs: Just your time.

- 1) attend the Thursday night meetings from 7:30 to 9 as often as possible
- 2) commit 2 hours, once every 6 weeks, to putting together a presentation
- 3) attend approx. 4 separate team meetings over the year

Benefits: Lots of opportunities:

- 1) to meet some pretty nice people of differing backgrounds
- 2) to “be broken in gently” to the skills of making presentations to a group of adults
- 3) to grow in your own faith
- 4) to learn more about your own Catholic faith

Terms of Office: suggested 3 years

B. RCIA Sponsor:

A sponsor is really a spiritual friend, willing to share in the faith journey of a person in the Catechumenate. Thus you are involved with someone who has taken an initial step to join the Church, but he or she still needs to discern if this is the right spiritual home. It is an opportunity to share your faith with support from the RCIA team, and be a friend and model to another person. Attending the Thursday night meetings from 7:30 to 9 pm is desirable, but weekly contact, in person or by telephone, is essential to a good spiritual friendship with your initiate.

Qualifications:

- 1) No Ph. D in theology needed!
- 2) Be in full communion with the Church.
- 3) Possess a willingness to share your faith journey
- 4) Have a sensitivity to those having no religious background, or who were raised in a different faith

Costs: Just your time.

- 1) To maintain regular weekly contact with your spiritual friend.
- 2) To attend the Thursday night meetings from 7:30 to 9 as you can
- 3) If the person makes the decision to join the Church, to journey with him/her at least until Easter when they are initiated into the Church.

Terms of Office: 1 to 1 1/2 years

Benefits: Many, many opportunities!

- 1) to meet some pretty nice people of differing backgrounds
- 2) to grow in your own Catholic faith, and

3) to learn more about the Catholic faith

If you would like to know more about volunteering in the RCIA experience, please call Ken Hagel at St. Mary's Church, 403-932-2944, Tuesdays to Thursdays 10 am to 4 pm, or email: khagel@stmaryscochrane.ca