

## **Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)**

The *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* ) is the Church's way to bring 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: 1) Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate, 2) the Catechumenate, 3) Purification and Enlightenment, and 4) Mystagoga.

**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. We will celebrate this Rite on the week-end of Feb.2/3. This rite marks the beginning of the next step, the Catechumenate, from the Greek word for learning by hearing (the Word of God.) The celebration consists of:

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

**The period of 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:

- ◇ The focus on the Sunday Gospel;
- ◇ The sharing of our experiences and beliefs;
- ◇ discussion of topics springing from the Sunday Gospel. Thus, if the Gospel is about the Baptism of Our Lord, 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 if the Catholic Church can be their spiritual home, and if so, at which 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.

The Rite of Election allows the newly- named Elect to go on to the next step:

**The period of Purification and Enlightenment** which occurs simultaneously with Lent. It is the intensive time to prepare for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil Mass.

The Elect will participate in three ceremonies at mass during Lent, called "Scrutinies" . These are rites for self -- searching and repentance. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is a weak, or sinful in the heart of the elect; 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 them against temptation, and to give them 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.

**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 these 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, 932-2944, Tuesdays to Thursdays 9 am to 4 pm, or email: [khagel@stmaryscochrane.ca](mailto: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.

*"Job Descriptions"* for RCIA

**RCIA Catechist:**

The catechist gives presentations to Inquirers and Catechumens about topics related to our 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 stimulating of 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:** A Ph. D in theology is NOT needed! We have tried to streamline the work, so that information is easily available to the catechist.

To be in full communion with the Church;

A willingness to share your faith journey;

A sensitivity to those having no religious background, or were raised in a different faith.

**Costs:** To attend the Thursday night meetings from 7:30 to 9 as often as possible

2 hours, once every 6 weeks, to put together a presentation

To attend approx. 4 separate team meetings over the year

**Benefits:** Opportunity to meet some pretty nice people of differing backgrounds  
Opportunity to "be broken in gently" to making presentations to a group of adults

Opportunity to grow in your own faith

Opportunity to learn more about our faith

**Terms of Office:** suggest 3 years

**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 a person who has taken an initial step to joining the Church, but the person still needs to discern if this is right spiritual home. This 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.

**Qualifications:** No Ph. D in theology needed!

To be in full communion with the Church.

A willingness to share your faith journey

A sensitivity to those having no religious background, or were raised in a different faith

**Costs:** To maintain regular weekly contact with your spiritual friend.

To attend the Thursday night meetings from 7:30 to 9 as you can

If the person makes the decision to join the Church, to journey with them at least to the Easter they are initiated into the Church.

**Terms of Office:** 1 to 1 ½ years

**Benefits:** Opportunity to meet some pretty nice people of differing backgrounds

Opportunity to grow in your own faith, and learn more about our faith

If would like to know more about volunteering in the RCIA, please call Ken Hagel at St. Mary's Church, 932-2944, Tuesdays to Thursdays 9 am to 4 pm, or Email: [khagel@stmaryscochrane.ca](mailto:khagel@stmaryscochrane.ca)