

Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office for Divine Worship

Christian Initiation

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the Rite of Christian Initiation?

A. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.) is a **process** through which non-baptized adults are formally welcomed into the Catholic Church, through the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist), during the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night. This process follows the ancient practice of the Church and was restored by the Second Vatican Council as the normal way adults prepare for Baptism.

Q. What is a catechumen?

A. A catechumen is an unbaptized individual who has never been officially initiated into a church community. Going through a process of conversion marked by study, prayer and rites at Mass. Catechumens then receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist at the *Easter Vigil*.

Q. What is a candidate?

A. A candidate is a previously baptized person, either in the Catholic faith or in another Christian faith, and over the age of 18, who desires to come into full communion with the Catholic Church. Their formation helps them understand and experience the specific teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Their formation, in some cases, may be with catechumens preparing for baptism, but their preparation is very different since they already have been baptized. Candidates receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist at a time other than the Easter Vigil.

Q. What is meant when people refer to individuals coming into “full communion with the Church?”

A. Full communion describes the process for a previously baptized person to enter the Catholic Church. that once it is discerned the candidate has been properly formed, he/she then receives the Sacrament of Penance, and then Confirmation and, if need be, Holy Eucharist, thus completing the initiation process.

Individuals who are baptized Christians, but not Roman Catholics. ~ They receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and make a profession of faith, bringing them into full communion with the Catholic Church. (They are not baptized again.)

Individuals who are Catholic but have not received the sacrament of Confirmation ~ They receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, which completes their initiation process.

Q. What are the steps of the R.C.I.A.?

A. Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate

This is a time, prior to formally beginning the R.C.I.A. process that an individual comes to some knowledge of Jesus Christ, considers his or her relationship with Jesus Christ and usually is attracted in some way to the Catholic Church. This process may involve a long period of searching, while for others it is a shorter time. Often, some contact with people of faith and a personal faith experience lead people to inquire about entering the Catholic Church.

After meeting with the pastor or member of the parish R.C.I.A. team, the person, known as the **inquirer**, may continue the process. This is done by:

First Step: Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

The Rite of Acceptance is the liturgical rite which marks the beginning of the catechumenate, as the individuals express, and the Church accepts, their intention to God’s call to follow the way of Christ.

Period of the Catechumenate

This is the time, the duration depending on the progress of the individual, for the nurturing and growth of the catechumens’ faith and conversion to God. The catechumens consider what God is saying to them in the Scriptures, what changes they want to make in their life to respond to God’s inspiration and what membership in the Catholic Church involves.

Second Step: Election or Enrollment of names

When catechumens and the parish team working with them, believe the person is ready to make a faith commitment to Jesus and the Catholic Church, the next step is the request for Baptism with the celebration of the **Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names**.

This rite includes the official enrollment of all the names of those seeking baptism (catechumens) at the coming Easter Vigil. On the First Sunday of Lent, the catechumens, their godparents and families and members of the parish gather at the cathedral church and the catechumens publicly request baptism. Their names are then recorded in a special book – **Book of the Elect** – and they are no longer called catechumens, but **“the elect”**.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

This is the period during the days of Lent which lead up to the celebration of initiation at the Easter Vigil. This Lenten season is a time of reflection, intensely centered on conversion, marked by scrutinies, prayer, presentations, spiritual direction for the elect, and Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday.

Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

Through this final step, the elect, receiving pardon for their sins, are admitted into the people of God. They receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. The celebration takes place during the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night.

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

After the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil, another period of formation and education continues in this period. It continues at least until Pentecost and often longer and is a time when the newly baptized, or **“neophytes”**, reflect on their experiences at the Easter Vigil and continue to learn more about the Scriptures, the sacraments and teachings of the Catholic Church. In addition, they reflect on how they will serve Christ and help in the Church’s mission and outreach activities.

Q. What is the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens?

A. The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens assembles publicly, for the first time, those persons who have completed the period of the precatechumenate, have evidenced the beginnings of the spiritual life and of the first faith and an initial conversion and intention to change their lives, so to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. These persons are hereafter called **Catechumens**.

- Q. What is the Rite of Welcoming of Candidates?**
- A.** The Rite of Welcoming the Candidates is celebrated only with **Candidates** (those already baptized, either in another Christian denomination or the Catholic Church) who are uncatechized and seeking reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church. This rite is celebrated separately from the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens to maintain a better distinction between Candidates and Catechumens.
- Q. Where do we record the names of catechumens after the “Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens” is celebrated?**
- A.** Catechumens’ names should be recorded in a parish register of catechumens along with the names of the sponsors, the minister and the date and place of the celebration.
- Q. What is the Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion?**
- A.** This rite is celebrated with baptized but previously uncatechized adults who wish to complete their Christian initiation through the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist or who wish to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The rite is celebrated the First Sunday of Lent, either in the parish with the pastor presiding, or often, combined with the Rite of Election of Catechumens, with the bishop/archbishop presiding.
- Q. Who is the proper minister of the Rite of Election?**
- A.** The archbishop is the ordinary minister of the Rite of Election. If, for pastoral reasons, the parish priest is to preside at a celebration of the Rite of Election, he is to obtain specific delegation from the archbishop. (RCIA 12 and 34)
- Q. Do the candidates for full communion sign the Book of the Elect?**
- A.** The Book of the Elect is reserved for the “enrollment” of the names of those who are elected for baptism. The R.C.I.A. does not call for such an enrollment for the candidates for full communion since they have already been baptized. Signing of the Book of the Elect is clearly a “pre-baptismal” gesture, and its intent is weakened if baptized candidates also sign it.
- Q. Is the celebration of the three Lenten Scrutinies an essential part of the R.C.I.A.?**
- A.** Yes. Just as sacramental and non-sacramental penitential celebrations are important for the already baptized, so are the scrutinies important for those preparing for baptism. In fact, only the bishop may dispense from their celebration for serious pastoral reasons. (RCIA 343)
- Q. Do candidates for full communion participate in the scrutinies?**
- A.** No. Since the scrutinies are reserved for the catechumens, RCIA 459-472 has an optional “Penitential Rite” that may be used for the candidates.
- Q. Is the Easter Vigil the only time to complete the initiation of the already baptized?**
- A.** No. The R.C.I.A. provides a combined rite “for pastoral reasons and in view of the Vigil’s being the principal annual celebration of the Church.” (RCIA U.S. Statutes 34) But it also states that “it is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil lest there be any confusion of such baptized Christians with the candidates for baptism, possible misunderstanding of or even reflection upon the sacrament of baptism celebrated in another Church or ecclesial community, or any perceived triumphalism in the liturgical welcome into the Catholic Eucharistic community.” (RCIA U.S. Statute 33)

- Q. Where do we record the names of the neophytes after the sacraments of initiation are celebrated?**
- A.** Their names are recorded in the parish baptismal register along with notation of their Confirmation and Communion.
- Q. Where do we record the names of the baptized Christians who enter into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church?**
- A.** Their names are to be recorded in the parish Register for Full Communion, together with the date and place of their baptism and other information required.
- Q. Where do we record the convalidated marriages of those baptized or received into the church?**
- A.** These names are recorded in the parish marriage register and also in the baptismal register of the parish where the baptism or reception took place.
- Q. May computer databases be substituted for written sacramental records?**
- A.** No. While parishes may use computer databases or indexes to track or duplicate sacramental records, the written registers themselves are the only official records and must be maintained. (Canon 535)
- Q. Are Confirmation candidates allowed to pick names of people who are considered "Blessed" for their Saint names (i.e., Blessed Teresa of Calcutta)? Is the tradition to only choose the name of a canonized Saint?**
- A.** Yes, it is permissible for a Confirmation name to be that of a Blessed.