

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The RCIA includes multiple rites.
- Rites are different for catechumens and candidates.
- Some rites are required, others optional.



The RCIA Process and Rites

At some point in your life, something or someone affected your outlook on faith. Realizing your need for God may have been a gradual thing. It may have snuck up on you. But no matter how it happened, it left you changed.

Maybe that was the time you started going to your local parish. Or maybe that's where you first met God. Maybe you were invited by friends who made you feel at home. You may have been changed by a youth group that made you feel like you were part of something, that you could help others. Or maybe it was being part of a family reconnecting with the Church that got you thinking about your own beliefs.

Wherever you started, it has brought you here—to the RCIA. Now what?

• Take time to reflect on whatever it was that got you here. What are your expectations as you move forward with the RCIA?

• What do you hope to get out of being a Catholic? To give to your faith?



Joining the Catechumenate

If You're Unbaptized: You may already know this is the route for you. This is how unbaptized adults learn about the Catholic faith and prepare for full initiation. During the **rite of acceptance**, a ritual that makes you part of the catechumenate, you tell the community you want to follow the gospel as a member of the Church. Then your sponsor talks about your ongoing conversion. But this isn't the end. Your faith will continue to evolve through witness, word, and prayer. This path leads to the sacraments of initiation.

If You're Already Baptized: Maybe you were already baptized in another Christian church. If that's the case, you'll enter the process as a **candidate** through the **rite of welcoming**. You'll spend time talking and learning about your faith with others, then come into full communion with the Church by making a profession of faith and receiving the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist.

You may also enjoy some optional rites, such as: celebrations of the word of God, blessings, anointing, and sending. These will be explained in more detail in later lessons.

- Which rite will you be participating in?



After Catechumenate

Purification and Enlightenment

(Lent) Once you've figured out if you're ready for this next step, you'll go through the **rite of election**. Now you are accepted to receive the

sacraments of initiation. If you're already baptized, it's your decision to choose the Catholic Church that's accepted. You're now one of the **elect**. Your journey continues with more conversation and prayer throughout Lent.

- *Who or what is helping you most in your journey? What does that witness mean to you?*



Sacraments of Initiation

A lot of RCIA alums say this is the most overwhelming part of the experience: being baptized, confirmed, and receiving the Eucharist for the first time. At the Easter Vigil, you become a Catholic surrounded by RCIA team members, your sponsor or godparents, family, friends, and all those attending. You're now considered a neophyte. A **neophyte** is someone who is "newly planted" in the faith and has just entered into the life of the Church.

Mystagogy

After receiving the sacraments, you'll continue to talk about your faith for the rest of the Easter season, until Pentecost. This means sharing in the mysteries of the gospel and sacraments with others in your church. Even if you already feel comfortable in this community, these conversations will help you feel even more at home. Attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist are now part of your routine. Seeking to serve also pushes you into an active faith life.

"Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be."

John 12:26

The RCIA Rites, Close Up

These rites happen at the beginning of Mass or after the homily. You'll respond to prayers spoken by the celebrating priest as you stand near the altar with your sponsor and the other RCIA candidates. Your parish may give you more specific instructions about how these rites are celebrated. You might even rehearse ahead of time.

Rite of Acceptance or Welcoming

For this rite, you are accepted into the Order of Catechumens if you are unbaptized, or welcomed into the Catholic Church if you've been previously baptized. You will now have a sponsor, and he or she will stand with you at the doors of the church to show you your movement into the community. Here's what you can expect:

1. The priest introduces each catechumen or candidate by name and asks, "What do you ask of the Church?" You respond, "Faith." You desire to live, learn, and love with the community.
2. The priest marks the sign of the cross on your forehead, a symbol of the love and strength of Jesus Christ that is with you on this journey.
3. You are invited to enter the church and join in the Liturgy of the Word. After hearing readings from the Bible, you may be called forward and given a copy of the *Book of the Gospels* or a cross. The community prays for you and sends you out to pray and think about the readings.

Rite of Election

Usually, this rite is celebrated by the bishop on the first Sunday of Lent. Here's what you can expect:

1. Your godparents will go with you to the cathedral and testify that you are ready to be initiated. If you're already baptized, it's your decision to join the Church that is accepted. The assembly voices its approval.
2. The bishop asks if you're ready for election. You say "yes" and give your name, which is written in the Book of the Elect presented at this rite.
3. You are proclaimed "members of the elect, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil." Intercessory prayers and a blessing follow.

The Scrutinies (for the Unbaptized Only)

These rites deepen your faith as you think and talk over the meaning of stories from the Gospel of John, read at Mass on three Sundays in Lent.

- The first scrutiny gives us the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–26).
- The second scrutiny focuses on the story of the man born blind (John 9).

- The third scrutiny is the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–44).

Each Sunday, after the intercessory prayers, the priest prays that you may be freed from the powers of sin.

"Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst."

John 4:14

- Your relationship with the Lord is changing as you seek him more fully. How is the RCIA helping you in this ongoing conversion?



Rites of Preparation

Rites of preparation literally prepare you for the core part of your faith journey: receiving the sacraments of initiation. In some RCIA programs, the elect come together to share their thoughts and pray on Holy Saturday before the Easter Vigil. This is another chance to experience the **presentation of the Creed** or the **presentation of the Lord's Prayer**, if you haven't before.

Rites of Initiation

This can be the most emotional part of your faith journey; so much has changed inside you and your parish, all leading up to you receiving baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist during the Easter Vigil celebration.

The vigil of the early Church was once an all-night experience, but today it only lasts a few hours. You have given yourself over to belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and now you come fully into the Church. It's intense! Here's what you can expect:

1. The celebration starts in darkness (and sometimes outdoors), where a fire is blessed, and then the Easter candle is blessed and ignited with this fire.
2. The priest—with a deacon, if the parish has one—leads the procession into the church as the "Light of Christ" is proclaimed. Tapers held by the people are lit from the Easter candle, illuminating the scene of filling pews.
3. We hear the "Exsultet," a powerful hymn of praise reflecting on all that God has done for us. Now his Son, "breaking the prison bars of death," is gloriously resurrected, and we are redeemed from sin. For the first time since before Lent, we hear the "Gloria."
4. Several Old Testament readings take us through salvation history, alternating with psalms.
5. We listen to a passage from Romans.
6. The "Alleluia" is sung, and we hear the Gospel—Jesus is risen—and the homily.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Ephesians 4:5

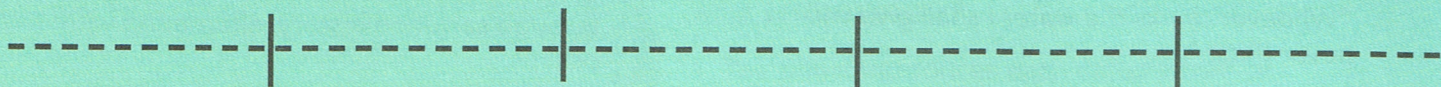
Now it's time to be baptized!

7. You are called forward. In the ancient Litany of the Saints, you hear the names of many saints called on to pray for you.
8. The baptismal water is blessed by the priest, and you are baptized.
9. Next, you are clothed in a white garment, a sign of your sinless new beginning.
10. The rest of the congregation renews their baptismal vows and are sprinkled by the celebrant with the newly blessed waters of baptism.

Now it's your turn:

11. Aloud, you state your belief in the holy catholic Church, joining those just baptized.
12. All of you receive the sacrament of confirmation, including the laying on of hands and the anointing with chrism oil.
13. Finally, you, a new Catholic, help lead the congregation to the Eucharist. You come to the table of the Lord and receive the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time.
14. The priest sends the church out to keep walking the road with the Lord and to bring his message to the community.

Use the timeline below to represent your journey of faith. Mark and list three to five important moments or "stages" along your way.



In his address for the thirtieth World Youth Day in 2015, Pope Francis discussed the sixth Beatitude, quoting Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew: *"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God"* (5:8). The pope talked about achieving this through the way we live, especially helping others: *"A pure heart is necessarily one which has been stripped bare, a heart that knows how to bend down and share its life with those most in need."*

As you seek new life in the Catholic faith, how will you share it with those who need it most, both friends and strangers?



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