

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- The RCIA is a time to ask faith questions.
- The RCIA has four periods.
- The RCIA is rooted in early Christian history.

## Welcome to the RCIA

So today you start the RCIA. Maybe you're here on your own because you feel called to the Catholic Church. Maybe your whole family is going through the RCIA process. Maybe your parents want you to receive the sacraments of Eucharist or confirmation. All of these are good reasons. Or maybe you're having a hard time seeing how any of this is good for you right now. That's OK, too.

- Think about a time when you heard about a great new movie. Maybe friends told you or you heard through social media that this was the must-see movie of the year. You trust the reviews and make plans to go see it. But once the movie starts, you realize it takes a while for that great story to happen. You have to sit through every scene in order to see the really good parts. Great events often take time. Sometimes we have to be patient before we get to the good part!

Jesus knows how much we want to enjoy life, so he offers an authentic path to lasting happiness for people of every age and culture. Making it down that path takes time.

Lasting happiness is what the RCIA is all about, so it's worth planning to attend. Through the RCIA, you will come to understand the way of Jesus

Christ and have a chance to ask any question you have about religion, such as:

- Does God really exist? Why do I exist?
- Who is Jesus? Is he the only way to salvation?
- What is the Catholic Church and why should I join it?

## Take Your Time!

Choosing courses in high school or college are decisions that are best made slowly. Making lasting friendships takes even more time. Spending time with friends means sharing experiences, dreams, fears, and heartbreaks. You begin a kind of journey with friends where you continue to grow, understand, and trust each other. It's the same with Jesus.

Catholics believe that our faith is not so much a set of beliefs (although we certainly have them!) but more a relationship that we start, develop, and continue to grow in with our Lord.

## Thoughtful Reflection Is Good!

Feelings can be powerful and wonderful, but you wouldn't want a friendship that comes *only* from a sudden rush of feeling. Friendships are stronger when they evolve from well-considered, *free* choices from everyone involved. These are the relationships that are solid and lasting.

- How do you normally make really big decisions?
- How did you decide to start the RCIA?



Jesus doesn't just ask us to follow him into the faith blindly. He wants us to make the choice freely and with all the information we need to make a decision. We can see examples of this in Scripture:

*"Come, and you will see!"*

John 1:39

Jesus invites people to observe him closely over time to see if he accomplishes what he says he will. We will observe Jesus closely during these RCIA sessions.

*"Come after me."*

Matthew 4:19

These three words are the simplest definition of our faith. In fact, they are the first words Jesus spoke when he began his ministry. Notice he didn't say, "Understand me" or even, "Believe in me." He simply asked people to observe him closely and then freely choose on their own to follow in his footsteps.

## Why Do We Have an RCIA Program?

Jesus asked those first Christians to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). Christians made disciples because they believed that following Jesus would make others happier and more at peace. We believe the Catholic understanding of Jesus' teachings is the fullest and most authentic understanding of Jesus. Your RCIA classes will be led by a **catechist**, someone who teaches the principles of the Christian religion to others.

*"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."*

John 10:10

*"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."*

John 15:11

- Who are some Catholics you admire? What do you admire about them?
- What do you think about the early Christians' mission to make disciples?



## What Does the RCIA Mean?

The letters stand for **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**. It is the learning program for people to become *initiated* or *enter* the Catholic Church. It also includes *rites*, or rituals, usually done at Sunday Mass (see lesson C1).

Its main purpose is to help those who are interested in becoming Catholic do so or to help those who want to receive **sacraments** like Communion or confirmation that they missed earlier in life but would like to receive now. (More on the sacraments in later lessons.)

## Is This a New Process?

This learning program began in the earliest years of the Church. Christians then knew it was hard to convert to Christianity because the Roman Empire persecuted Christians. The Church wanted to make sure that candidates really knew what they were getting into and that they were willing to stand up for their faith in a sometimes hostile pagan environment. In the mid-twentieth century, the Church decided to return to this process by offering solid Christian education in the same gradual manner that people enter any lasting and loving relationship.

## What Happens in the RCIA?

Most RCIA programs involve a series of weekly sessions with a team of teachers, sponsors, and fellow candidates.

Each session is a safe place for you to hear about our faith and to ask questions about Catholicism or faith in general. If the team leaders do not know the answer to a question, they will research it and get back to you with a response. All questions are welcomed and honored.

**Go Ahead and Ask:** Mary questions God when she's told she's going to be the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:34). God answers because Jesus could not be born without her free and informed consent. That is how much God respects and even expects your honest questions.

## Why Does Jesus Ask Me to Join a Church Community?

Jesus knows we are deeply affected by the behavior of others and wants our behavior to positively affect others' behavior as well. That happens in the community we call the Church.

Faith and love are both private *and* public behaviors. When others see you visibly express your friendship, it can inspire them to become better friends. Friendship is powerful! So is our faith. At those Sundays when the rest of the parish sees you at the RCIA rites, it can inspire them to live their faith better as well.

### Wouldn't you rather know?

It is hard to see ourselves clearly. We need someone else to see what we cannot see ourselves, like a friend telling us we still have food stuck in our teeth, or a coach showing us how to make free throws, or a wise mentor on how to improve our work. We don't mind someone coaching us if it helps us improve!

- Describe a time when you received helpful correction from a friend.
- What qualities of this person did you find most helpful?



## Periods of the RCIA

### Inquiry

This title simply describes the attitude and behavior of people like you right now. You are just inquiring or testing the waters and asking questions. You're not asked to make any commitments or promises. This stage may last for a few months.

### Catechumenate

This word is from ancient Greek and means "student." It begins with a rite of acceptance in which you simply promise to be a good student. During this stage you will study and discuss most of the main beliefs of our faith and choose a **godparent** or **sponsor** to join you on your journey. A sponsor can be a wise friend or relative or someone suggested by the team. They join you each week and even between sessions for more discussion.

### Purification and Enlightenment (Lent)

This stage is in the final weeks before Easter and is more prayerful than instructional. It is a time of deeper spiritual preparation for the sacraments you will receive at Easter. The name affirms that God has *elected* or *chosen* you to follow him. It includes the *rite of sending*, where your parish church prayerfully sends you as a group to attend Mass with the local bishop for a special blessing. There are also three additional rites called **scrutinies** that ask God to help your self-examination or self-scrutiny where you seek to increase what is good and decrease what does not belong in your spiritual life. You receive the **sacraments of initiation** at Holy Saturday Mass, the Easter Vigil. Those who have been preparing all this time finally enter the Church and receive the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

### Mystagogy

This is the final stage and lasts a few more weeks. It's a time to reflect on how you can practically put the sacraments you have just received into effect. *Mystagogia* is a Greek word meaning "to learn the mysteries we have received."

- What are your thoughts and feelings about the rites of the RCIA?



## How Should I Attend Meetings?

**Show up**—*Really* show up!

**Be openhearted:** Come with an eagerness to learn.

**Ask questions:** Help resolve whatever your concerns or questions are.

**Talk to wise mentors:** Understanding grows when you discuss ideas with trusted friends.

**Pray for wisdom:** Ask Jesus himself for what you need to follow him.

**Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*:** A **catechism** is a summary of religious teachings for the purpose of instruction.

This book will be a great asset for your journey!



Take time to get to know the other people in your class.

Write three facts about yourself on separate sheets of paper. Place the sheets in a pile. Your leader will mix them up. Take turns drawing one at random and guess who it belongs to.



While most are eager to begin the RCIA, they might still have many questions and even some reservations.

What questions do you have as you start the RCIA?

What concerns, reservations, or hesitations do you have?



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