

The R.C.I.A. contains five main stages or phases:

- *The Period of Inquiry
(aka as the time of Evangelization or Pre-Catechumenate),
- *Catechumenate
- *Period of Purification and Enlightenment
- *The Paschal Triduum with the Sacraments of Initiation and
- *Mystagogical Catechesis.

The Period of Inquiry

Period of Inquiry has as its purpose a time to become acquainted with the Roman Catholic Church and to hear the good news of salvation from Jesus Christ our Savior; it is a time to look within at one's own life story and see connections to or needs for the gospel story of good news.

During this period, the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, and inquirers look within their own story to make and mark connections. This reflective process becomes a continuing, on-going method used by inquirer and team member alike.

This period lasts as long as the person needs it to last, from a few months to several years, if necessary.

The Rite of Acceptance (and Welcome)

The Rite of Acceptance (and Welcome) is a liturgical rite, marking the beginning of the catechumenate proper, as the candidates express and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ. (RCIA, Part 1)

This rite may be celebrated at any time of the year, and more than once during the liturgical year, as groups of candidates in the precatechumenate become ready to celebrate it.

Period of the Catechumenate

Period of catechumenate embodies the first stages of commitment leading to full membership. It is the lengthiest period of the initiation process.

The four ways in which the catechumenate period brings to maturity the initial faith that is manifested in the Rite of Acceptance and Welcome are: (1) catechesis, (2) liturgical rites, (3) community life, and (4) apostolic works (RCIA no.75)

During this phase, the catechumens now gather with the Catholic community on Sundays for the first part of the mass, during which, together, we hear the Scriptures, respond to them, and reflect on the meaning of God's Word for us personally and as community through the homily.

With the help of the sponsor, the catechumen or candidate should be introduced to other members of the parish community, and take part in parish activities to the extent that they are able.

The Rite of Election (and Call to Continuing Conversion)

The Rite of Election (and Call to Continuing Conversion) is the liturgical rite, celebrated at the our Deanery, St Paul Catholic Church in New Bern, on the First Sunday of Lent, by which the Church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness for the sacraments of initiation and recognizes the candidates preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist or reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church and the catechumens, now the elect, and the candidates express the will to receive these sacraments. (RCIA, Part 1) The presiding celebrant of the rite is the Bishop of Raleigh or his appointee.

Before the rite is celebrated, the catechumens and candidates are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. (RCIA no.120)

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment corresponds to that time known in the Roman Catholic Church as Lent and has the character of a time of retreat for the elect who are preparing for Baptism, for the candidates who will complete their initiation or enter the full communion of the Catholic Church, and for the faithful who will commemorate their own Baptism at Easter.

The centerpiece of this period of prayerful preparation is the celebration of the Scrutinies. Although the candidates will not be the subject of the Scrutinies, catechesis for both the elect and the candidates during this period is related to the celebration of the Scrutinies. Throughout this period, the elect and the candidates are invited to join with the whole Church in a deeper practice of works of charity and in the practice of fasting.

The Scrutinies are celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of the Lenten season. At the Masses at which the Scrutinies are celebrated, the cycle A readings must be used (RCIA no.146).

The presentations, to the elect, of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are also celebrated during this period.

The elect and the candidates are advised that on Holy Saturday they should refrain from their usual activities, spend time in prayer and reflection, and as far as they can, to observe a fast (RCIA no.185). The preparation rites (RCIA no. 185ff) assist this process of prayer and reflection.

Celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation is the liturgical rite, integrated into the Easter Vigil, by which the elect are initiated through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. (RCIA Part 1).

By the waters of Baptism, a person passes into the new life of grace and becomes a member of the Body of Christ.

Anointing with special holy oil called chrism seals the initiation by the power of the Holy Spirit and participation at the Table of the Lord in the Eucharist marks full membership in the church.

Reception of baptized Christians (candidates) into the full communion of the Catholic Church is celebrated at the Easter Vigil, except in exceptional situations.

Period of Mystagogy

The Period of Mystagogy lasts from Easter Sunday until the completion of the Easter season, fifty days later on Pentecost Sunday and completes the initiation process. Those who have just shared in the sacraments of initiation are now called Neophytes and during this period of Easter joy they reflect on what they have just gone through and look to the future as to how they can now share in the mission of Christ who came to bring salvation and life to the whole world. This period of time reminds the whole church that life in Christ constantly calls us to grow and to look for new ways to live the life of grace, personally and together.