

Information on RCIA - How to become Catholic

What is RCIA?

RCIA stands for “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.” It is the process by which adults and older children are introduced to beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. It is an ancient rite of the Church and the manner in which individuals are initiated into the Church.

Who should attend RCIA?

RCIA is for anyone who is interested in learning more about the Catholic faith, regardless of whether or not they are certain they would like to join the Church. It is not a commitment to join the Church.

RCIA is for those who: 1) have no religious background at all; 2) have been a part of a different faith background (such as Protestant) or 3) were baptized Catholic as infants but never practiced nor learned about the faith and are now coming back to the Church. These are just a few examples. RCIA is for anyone who wishes to learn more about the Catholic faith and *possibly* join our Church family. RCIA includes people from all walks of life - young and old with different backgrounds and jobs.

How does RCIA work at St. Peter Cathedral?

Our sessions run from mid-September to a few weeks after Easter. We meet on Thursday evenings in the Media Room (in the basement of the Cathedral) from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

There is no charge for RCIA.

Sessions are led by our two parish priests and at times, a lay leader. (“Lay” means someone who is not a priest, deacon nor a religious-sister/nun.) Each session will focus on a particular topic which is followed by a time for questions and discussion regarding how to apply this to our lives. As followers of Christ, we are a prayerful people and thus, will also pray together.

What does it mean to be “fully initiated” into the Catholic Church?

There are seven Sacraments in the Catholic Church. Three of these are known as the Sacraments of Initiation: 1) Baptism, 2) Eucharist (Communion), and 3) Confirmation. If, after completing RCIA, you elect to become a member of the Catholic Church, you will receive 2 or 3 of these sacraments, depending on whether or not you have already been validly baptized.

If you were previously baptized with water, “In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, the Catholic Church recognizes this as a valid baptism, even if you were baptized in a non-Catholic Christian church.

Those who were already validly baptized (Catholic or otherwise) and wish to become fully initiated into the Catholic Church are called candidates. Candidates who complete RCIA will receive the Sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation at the Easter Vigil Mass which is the night before Easter Sunday.

Those who are not baptized and wish to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church are called catechumens. Catechumens who complete RCIA will receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation all at the Easter Vigil Mass (the night before Easter Sunday).

What are the steps?

RCIA is divided into 4 periods:

- 1) Period of Inquiry/The Pre-Catechumenate

This is the period of initial interest and inquiry into the faith. It ends with the Rite of Acceptance, in which the candidates are publicly welcomed for the first time. This rite occurs during a Sunday Mass.

2) Period of the Catechumenate

This is a period of more intensive study, in which those to be initiated learn more about Sacred Scripture, the doctrines of the Church, and the prayer and worship practices of the Church. They attend weekly Sunday Mass. This period ends with a second rite, known as the Rite of Election. This takes place at the Cathedral, usually on First Sunday of Lent (the Sunday after Ash Wednesday).

3) Period of Purification and Enlightenment

This is the final period of preparation for reception of the Sacraments and coincides with the season of Lent. It is a time for reflection, prayer, and continued study. This period ends with the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil is the Mass held after sunset the night before Easter Sunday.

4) Period of Mystagogy

This word comes from an ancient Greek word signifying a deeper understanding of the mysteries of our faith or “living the mysteries.” The Church uses this period to help the neophytes (newly received) understand and live out their new lives as part of the Body of Christ.

What if I am uncomfortable with some Catholic beliefs?

To be Catholic is to believe and profess as true all that the Church teaches. Some Catholic teachings, however, may be not more difficult than others. First, it is important to realize that there are many misconceptions about Catholic beliefs. For example, many believe that Catholics “worship” Mary and the saints, which is not true despite what you may have heard or read elsewhere. There are other teachings which are in the media often and are difficult for some because they go against the grain of the current political and cultural climate. Examples of this include contraception and abortion.

Just because something is countercultural or difficult to understand or accept, however, doesn’t mean the Church is wrong or “out of touch.” We believe that the Catholic Church is truly the Church founded by Christ, which means in part that the Church doesn’t lead us down the wrong path. The teachings of the Church are the product of Sacred Scripture (the Bible), two-thousand years of Sacred Tradition, and teaching authority handed down by Jesus to the Apostles, and from them to a succession of popes and bishops which has been unbroken for two millennia.

During the RCIA process you can learn first, about what the Church really teaches and second, why. You will find that the Church has very good reasons for what it teaches. Also if you still feel unsure, please ask questions.

What is expected of me?

1) We require regular attendance at sessions every week. Joining the Catholic Church is an enormous, life-changing decision not to be taken lightly. We ask that you take an honest look at your schedule and whether you are able to truly commit to this process. *(If you are unable to change your schedule to attend every Thursday night, we can work together to make other options work. Please talk with a member of the RCIA team.)*

2) We also require that you attend Sunday Mass (Saturday 4pm Mass counts for this obligation), even if you are out of town. Mass options regardless of your location can be found at www.masstimes.org. The Mass is the center of Catholic life and as such, weekly Sunday Mass attendance is prescribed for all Catholics. It is a sin for a Catholic to miss Mass unless there is very good reason (Illness is a valid reason to miss Mass. Going on vacation is NOT a serious reason.) If you are unable to attend Sunday (or Saturday 4pm) Mass, please discuss this with the coordinator. If you are unsure of what is happening and what to do during Mass, the leaders of the RCIA group are happy to help.

3) We may offer a few short readings for you to complete for the following session.

4) We ask that you spend time in prayer every week on your own. We can help you with this if you don’t know where to start.

5) Lastly, your lifestyle will show a sincere desire to live a Christian life, or at least be moving toward that. We are all sinners, but we are also all called to holiness, and there is a BIG difference between working constantly to overcome sin, and blatantly and unapologetically embracing a certain sin by living in a way that is contrary to Christian life. We also know that Christ's love and mercy is endless, infinite. The priests are here to help counsel you if there is anything you would like to discuss.

May I receive communion if I am not yet Catholic?

Unfortunately no. This is due to the historical divisions which have separated Christians for many centuries. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is Jesus truly present in the Eucharist- Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. It is NOT "just a symbol." Because of the centrality of the belief of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of unity of faith, life, and worship, non-Catholics are not admitted to Communion.

Furthermore, even Catholics who are too young to understand, have eaten within an hour of Mass, or have committed serious (mortal) sin are not to receive our Lord in Communion. Those who should not receive Him may choose to remain in their seats or come forward to receive a blessing. To receive a blessing, cross your arms over your chest and get in the line for a priest or deacon (the men wearing vestments.) If you watch you will see many people doing this. You will receive Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time at the Easter Vigil Mass.

What other things do I need to do?

- **Early on you will want to consider who can make this journey with you as a sponsor.**
 - Do I need a sponsor? Yes. A sponsor participates in the process with you and provides support throughout the process and afterwards. If you do not have one, we will find a good sponsor for you.
 - Who can serve as a sponsor? A sponsor must be a confirmed, practicing Catholic who is at least 16 years old and in good standing with the Church. "Practicing" means s/he abides by the tenets of the faith, including attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Those who are solid in their own practice of the faith are best able to encourage and help you in your journey.
 - What are the obligations of a sponsor? Sponsors: serve as a solid example of the Christian life, sustain the candidates in moments of difficulty or hesitancy, and guide the candidate's progress in the baptismal life. We encourage sponsors to attend sessions with you as much as possible, to better support you in this journey of faith. Their attendance is not strictly required, but the more they are able to come, the more they are able to support you.
- **What if I am married outside the Church or divorced? Do I need an annulment?**

Every situation is different, however, most of the time it will be possible for you to receive the Sacraments at Easter. We will ask you for details about your marriage situation early in the year to see if there would be a need for either a marriage validation or an annulment. It is important to deal with these issues EARLY in the year, since an annulment can take 6-12 months. Also, please let us know if you are planning on getting married. We can help you with any required paperwork. Information is confidential.

Ready?

For more information or to sign up, please contact the parish office at (906) 226-6548.