

Welcoming Adults into the Church

Traditionally, infants are baptized in the Church. But, what happens when an adult wants to be initiated into the Church?

RCIA Steps

For adults who have not yet been baptized, the RCIA has three major liturgical rites: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens; Election or Enrollment of Names, and Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation. The celebration of initiation is followed by a postbaptismal catechesis, or Mystagogy. (For those already baptized, there are rites appropriate for their journey into full communion in the Catholic Church. These are sometimes celebrated separately from the catechumens, and sometimes in a combined rite with the catechumens.)

The process begins with the Precatechumenate, in which the person shows initial faith in Jesus Christ and the Church. This is a time for inquiry and the exploration of the beginnings of faith. After the person has been given a fundamental understanding of the Gospel and has decided to take the first step to become a member of the Church, the person is brought into the Catechumenate at the Rite of Acceptance.

The period of the Catechumenate is a time for exploring the teachings of the faith in a deeper and

more systematic manner within the context of worship and prayer. At Sunday Mass, the catechumens with their catechists are often dismissed after the homily for further, prayerful study of the Scripture readings for the day.

This period concludes with the Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names, which takes place on the First Sunday of Lent. This rite is celebrated by the bishop or his delegate, usually at the cathedral of the diocese. The catechumens' suitability and resolve to be initiated into the sacramental life of the Church is supported by the testimony of their sponsors and catechists. After this, the catechumens become known as the Elect.

The Elect enter the stage of Purification and Enlightenment that occurs during the season of Lent. They prepare themselves for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation by prayerful reflection. On the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent, the Scrutinies are celebrated. These rites, which take place during Mass, offer opportunities for the Elect to reflect on the full meaning of the step they are preparing to take. They are meant to bring God's

illuminating Word to the Elect so that whatever is weak or sinful in their hearts can be healed and so that whatever is good in them can be strengthened. The parish community joins them by examining their own lives and interceding with God for the Elect. This period concludes at the Easter Vigil, when the Elect receive the Sacraments of Initiation and become full members of the Church and are called neophytes.

From Easter to Pentecost, there is a period of postbaptismal catechesis, or Mystagogy. This is a time for the neophytes, or newly initiated, along with the members of the parish to come closer together as a faith community to examine more deeply the Gospel, to share in the Eucharist, and to do works of charity.

During this joyful time, the neophytes' enthusiasm can inspire the faithful of the parish, who in turn can share their experiences of the faith with them.