

BECOMING A CATHOLIC

Welcome! Are you interested in learning more about the Catholic Church? This page explains the process by which one can learn more about the faith of Christian Catholics. We hope this information is helpful to you!

The process by which adults come into the Church has come to be known as "the RCIA", which is short for "The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults." It is the process by which adults and children are invited to learn about the Catholic faith.

This process encourages living a life of faith following Jesus' teaching in the Scriptures, as well as gaining an understanding and knowledge about the Catholic Church. An important aspect of the Christian initiation process is that the entire parish community welcomes and supports those who are seeking to become Catholics. The process also involves a team of parishioners who sponsor, instruct, lead prayer, and discuss Scripture with those who are actively studying the Catholic faith. Catechetical sessions meet one evening a week beginning in September and continue through May.

Who is the process for?

Among those who approach the Church seeking life in its communion, there are various types of individuals, each of whom approaches with different needs and backgrounds. The individuals can be categorized as follows:

- Group 1. Unbaptized - persons (age of discretion and older) who need a process to help them grow in awareness to God's call to conversion as well as ways to respond to that call.
- Group 2. Baptized in another Christian denomination – those catechized and uncatechized persons who are seeking full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.
- Group 3. Baptized but uncatechized Catholic adults – persons who have been baptized but have not been given any religious upbringing within the Catholic tradition. These people are prepared to celebrate the sacraments of Penance, Confirmation, and Eucharist.
- Group 4. Partially catechized adult Catholics – those adults who have been baptized, received Eucharist and only basic catechesis, needing to continue conversion, catechesis and celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- Group 5. Children – persons who have reached the age of reason, i.e. who are older than infants and not yet adults (roughly between the ages of seven and fourteen). Some may be unbaptized, others baptized but uncatechized as Catholics. In the case of these the Pastor should be consulted for information about Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation.

What does the process look like?

The Rite of Christian Initiation is a process that proceeds gradually, in stages. Progress from one stage to the next is marked by a liturgical celebration in the midst of the parish community. The experience and needs of those in each category described above differ, and so the length of time may vary for each person. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities among all the groups and the process they will experience, and these can be listed as follows:

Precatechumenate

The first stage is called the period of inquiry (or the precatechumenate). This is when the individual first expresses an interest in becoming a Christian or a Catholic, and begins to explore, with the help of the parish community, what his or her relationship with Christ might be and how that might be enriched and deepened by joining this Christian community. There is no liturgical rite to mark the beginning of this stage. This period of inquiry may last several months or several years and ends either when the inquirer decides against continuing in this direction or when the inquirer feels ready to move on and the community is prepared to welcome him or her.

Catechumenate

The second stage is called the catechumenate and, for the unbaptized listed above, who are now called catechumens, lasts approximately a year. For the baptized but uncatechized the period should be a similar length. For the candidates for full communion, this stage can be shorter. The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming mark the beginning of this stage. Catechesis for this period is rooted in the Lectionary and the Word as it is proclaimed in the midst of the community. This is also a time for the catechumen or candidate to learn how to live as a Catholic Christian. This period ends when the catechumens and candidates express their desire to receive the sacraments of initiation and the community acknowledges their readiness.

Purification and Enlightenment

The third stage is the period of purification and enlightenment and coincides with Lent. During this time the elect (formerly the catechumens) and the candidates enter into a period of intense preparation and prayer which includes the three public celebrations of the scrutinies. The Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion are celebrated at the beginning of this stage. This period ends with the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. (Note: only the elect are baptized. All the groups are confirmed and welcomed to the table.)

Mystagogy

The fourth stage is the period of post baptismal catechesis or mystagogy. At this time, the newly initiated explore their experience of being fully initiated through participation with

all the faithful at Sunday Eucharist and through appropriate catechesis. The period formally lasts through the Easter season and may be marked by a parish celebration on or near Pentecost. On a more informal level, mystagogy is a lifelong process, one that all Christians are engaged in, as we all work to deepen our sense of what it means to live the Christian life.

It is important to note that those who fall into the second group above (candidates for full communion with the Roman Catholic Church) do not always need to take part in the full process. Especially if they have been actively living the Christian life in another denomination, they are likely in need of very little catechesis and may be welcomed into the Church on any Sunday after a short period of preparation. According to the National Statutes for the Catechumenate, "Those baptized persons who have lived as Christians and need only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation within the Catholic community should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the catechumenate."

I am interested. What should my first step be?

Contact our Director of Religious Education Pat Cella at [\(570\) 748-4594](tel:5707484594) to discuss with you the specifics of the initiation process. Know that the prayers of the people of St. Agnes parish are with you. Best wishes!