

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF CHELTENHAM



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July 2021

Dear Enquirer,

The RCIA Journey in Faith is the process by which adults who are not Catholics are welcomed into the Christian family in the Catholic Church. Becoming a Catholic is not just a matter of learning and accepting a number of beliefs. It is a process of growth or conversion. This is why it is sometimes called 'Journey in Faith'. It involves personal growth, as well as growing into a particular Catholic community or parish.

You are very welcome to join the deanery Journey in Faith course that this year 2021/2, takes place at Sacred Hearts. Many ordinary parishioners find the sessions helpful to develop their knowledge of their faith. Perhaps you are married to a Catholic and wish to find out more about his/her faith. Perhaps you are already a Catholic and wish to grow more into your faith, or perhaps you are just thinking about becoming a Catholic. If so, then the RCIA Journey in Faith is for you.

After an initial period of enquiry, some people may feel they wish to become a Catholic, although they may not feel ready or able to be a full member of the Catholic Church just yet. They will have accepted the way of Jesus Christ, but are not necessarily ready or willing to believe all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches. There is a special service (or rite) which takes place in the Church to mark this, called the Rite of Acceptance. The Rite of Acceptance is usually celebrated on a Sunday shortly before Christmas.

Together with their sponsors, the candidates join in the parish's liturgy as well as continuing to meet with other enquirers for the scheduled sessions. We will spend this period discovering the power of God in our lives and learning more about the basic beliefs of the Catholic Church. Sometimes people may spend a year or more before taking a further step, but more often this period lasts only a few months. The RCIA is not a programme into which people are straight-jacketed, so you can take as long as you need for your particular journey. All sessions are compulsory

Lent is a time of special preparation and reflection on baptism not only for our candidates but also for all Catholics throughout the world. On the First Sunday of Lent, people throughout our diocese who wish to be baptised at Easter gather at Clifton Cathedral in Bristol to be called (or elected) to Baptism by our Bishop.

Three special rites, called Scrutinies, are celebrated in the run up to Easter, during which the elect are called to experience the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in their own lives, and to scrutinize their lives in light of the Gospel. It is a joyful season of growth.

After sunset on the eve of Easter Sunday, your parish gathers at the Church for the Easter Vigil. We celebrate Christ's giving light to the world through his resurrection from death, we hear proclaimed the story of our salvation through several scripture readings. Those who are ready are baptised and confirmed and receive the Eucharist for the first time. It is the most important and most joyous celebration in the whole Church year.

If you would like to know more about the RCIA, or if you are interested in knowing more about the Catholic Church, I would be delighted to talk it through with you.

Yours sincerely

Frs David Mills, Mark Moran & Tony Pazhayakalam, CST



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A Strong Start in the Faith: The Catholic RCIA Stages

Thinking of joining the Roman Catholic Church? The Catholic RCIA stages are a good model of basic faith development. This article provides some detailed guidance for that process.

So, you're developing your faith. Great! Is it a little **overwhelming**?

- Where to start?
- Why so many "stages" of initiation?
- What should I be doing in each stage?
- How will I know when I'm ready to move forward?

This article is your best starting point to answer these questions, and more. I'll provide you with some fundamentals – centred in Christ – for beginning and developing your life of faith in the Roman Catholic Church.

Everything else builds on these fundamentals!

But...

Where do you begin?

Well, you just begin from where you are **now**!

Many adults entering the Catholic Church, or those just thinking about it, follow a process known as the **RCIA** – the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

The RCIA process has several distinct stages. These Catholic RCIA stages are a **good model** of faith development itself, so this article will fit you whether or not you're actually in the RCIA process.

- **Inquiry:** the initial period before you decide to enter the Catholic Church. You're asking questions and checking it out, but aren't yet ready to commit.
- **Catechumenate:** those who decide to enter the Church and are being trained for a life in Christ are called *catechumens*, an ancient name from the early Church. In this stage, you're developing your faith and are being "catechized" – learning catechism, or the basic points about Catholic faith and life.
- **Purification and preparation:** The Church will help you focus and intensify your faith as you prepare you to commit your life to Christ and be received into the Church at Easter. If you're following the RCIA process, you'll go through a beautiful series of Gospel-based meditations during Lent, which is the time frame of this period.
- **Initiation** itself, the culmination of the whole process! You're received into the Church during the Easter Vigil Mass, where you'll receive the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. (If you've already been baptized, you won't be baptized again.)
- **Mystagogy:** after reception into the Church at Easter, this period lets you reflect and learn more about the mysteries of the Mass and the Sacraments that you now participate in fully.

Below is a discussion of each of these Catholic RCIA stages.

But first, some basics...

Laying a strong foundation

Faith will be the foundation of your life.

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Make that foundation solid!

Go slowly, make sure you've developed the basics well. That will help you avoid discouragement and frustration, two big enemies of faith development.

Also be aware of the [importance of orthodoxy](#) in the information you receive. ("Orthodoxy" here means "accurate and faithful" teaching.)

Make sure that you're satisfied with your own faith development in each of the Catholic RCIA stages before moving on to the next. Don't let pressure from anyone else make you move on. Also watch out for calendar-based pressure – don't say things like, "If I don't start catechesis now, I won't be done this Easter!" That's the wrong basis for making a decision about your faith and your life!

I know, sometimes it seems like it takes a long time to work through all of the Catholic RCIA stages. But...Don't try to rush it!

RCIA stage 1: Just Looking

In the **inquiry** stage, you're just finding out about Jesus, Christianity, and the Catholic Church.

Your main task here is to explore and develop your faith enough so you can make an informed *initial* decision about entering the Catholic Church. The final decision won't come for a long time, when you actually enter the Church at Easter and receive the sacraments of initiation.

The [RCIA inquiry stage](#) page has lots of detailed guidance for you during this stage.

Even if you're past the inquirer stage, you should **still read** that section to make sure you've covered the right ground. You'll need to rely on that foundation later!

RCIA stage 2: Learning about the Faith

In the catechumenate, your faith has begun to develop. Now you need to learn and grow more.

You focus on **catechesis** in this stage: learning about the faith, how to live as a Christian, and developing your interior life.

Your job now is to come into closer contact with the Living God and learn more about the Catholic Faith.

RCIA stage 3: Getting ready for rebirth!

This period of **purification and enlightenment** is the final stage before receiving the Easter sacraments of initiation into the Church: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. (Those already baptized with a valid baptism in another Christian church aren't baptized again.)

This stage of intense **reflection** calls you to deeper **conversion** in preparation for your renewal at Easter.

This is what the season of Lent is for, but it has a special intensity for you this year as you're entering the Church and receiving the sacraments of initiation.

The Church uses three profound and beautiful passages from the Gospel of John to focus this preparation effort.

RCIA stage 4: Reflecting on the mysteries of the Mass

This stage of **mystagogy** during Easter is for continued reflection on the sacraments you have received at Easter, especially the Eucharist.

Specific catechesis on the Mass, the Sacraments, and especially the Eucharist are the focus of this stage.

The Mass and the Eucharist are the "source and summit" of the Christian life in the Catholic Church, and this period is designed to help you understand, appreciate, and live more deeply this center of Catholicism.

Journey in Faith – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) Programme of meetings 2021/22

6.45pm on Thursdays at Sacred Hearts Hall Charlton Kings	
9 th September	Introduction to the Course & Who needs the Catholic Church (CAFÉ resources)
23 rd September	Amazed and Afraid: The Revelation of God Become Man
7 th October	Happy Are We: The Teachings of Jesus
21 st October	"The Ineffable Mystery of God: That Than Which Nothing Greater can be Thought"
4 th November	"Our Tainted Nature's Solitary Boast: Mary, the Mother of God"
18 th November	What is the Mass (CAFÉ resources)
2 nd December	"A Body Both Suffering and Glorious: The Mystical Union of Christ and the Church",
16 th December	Word Made Flesh, True Bread of Heaven: The Mystery of the Liturgy and the Eucharist,
13 th January	A Vast Company of Witnesses: The Communion of Saints,
27 th January	Keeping a Pure Heart (CAFÉ resources)
10 th February	"The Fire of His Love: Prayer and the Life of the Spirit"
2 nd March	ASH WEDNESDAY (attendance at mass)
3 rd March	"World Without End: The Last Things,"
5 th March (Saturday)	Rite of Election at Clifton Cathedral
24 th March	Sacraments (1): Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Eucharist
7 th April	Sacraments (2): Holy Orders, Marriage and Anointing of the Sick
Saturday 16 th April	Easter Vigil <i>[in the parish which you are registered]</i>

**Please return your completed form to Father Mark Moran at Sacred Hearts presbytery,
on or before Thursday 9th September 2021.**

ANY & ALL application after that date will be deferred until September 2022.