

STEPS IN THE RCIA

Catechumens

- **Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate**
 - Inquirers who are accepted as candidates for Baptism are expected to manifest fruits of a preliminary faith during this time, become acquainted with the Gospels, and experience “stirrings of repentance” and turning away from sin
 - Once this is sufficiently demonstrated (there is no fixed length of time), they can proceed to entry into the catechumenate

- **Rite of Acceptance (RCIA 41)**
 - Enter catechumenate via the Rite of Acceptance, which is actually entry into a canonical state.
 - CCC 1259 – “For catechumens who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.”
 - Can. 206 §1. “Catechumens are linked with the Church in a special way since, moved by the Holy Spirit, they are expressing an explicit desire to be incorporated in the Church. By this very desire, as well as by the life of faith, hope and charity which they lead, they are joined to the Church which already cherishes them as its own.”
 - Can. 206 §2. “While it invites them to lead an evangelical life, and introduces them to the celebration of the sacred rites, it already accords them various prerogatives which are proper to Christians.” (e.g., a Christian funeral)
 - Rite of Acceptance is only for catechumens, and may take place multiple times in the year at a parish. Must be done by a priest (who can do so at Mass) or deacon (in a Liturgy of the Word)
 - Meant to be a public event, as are all the subsequent rites
 - Ideally occurs within a parish Mass, during which the candidates’ intentions are proclaimed aloud

- Structure of the Rite of Acceptance:
 - Candidates received outside the main nave of the church at the beginning of Mass
 - Candidates speak their names and profess their hope for a faith that will offer them eternal life
 - They promise to accept the Gospel life
 - Then their sponsors (who may be their godparents at Baptism) attest to their readiness; then the entire assembly
 - Sign of the Cross traced on forehead, with option to do so for other senses (ears, eyes, lips, chest, shoulders, hands, feet)
 - Now called “catechumens”
 - Then enter into church for Liturgy of the Word
 - Catechumens may be dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word, but not obligatory
 - Optional Rites in Rite of Acceptance: Exorcism (breath on face), Renunciation of False Worship, Giving of New Name
 - These are done primarily in cultures where pagan worship very strong
 - Information regarding the catechumens should then be officially recorded in the parish’s register of catechumens (RCIA 46).
- **Period of the Catechumenate**
 - The catechumenate should ideally last at least one year from the Rite of Acceptance (National Statutes for the Catechumenate #6 – “Ordinarily this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year.”).
 - At a minimum, the catechumenate should begin no later than September if a catechumen is to be initiated the following spring.
 - The catechumenate can take longer if an individual requires more time
 - Only the Bishop can approve a significantly abbreviated version of the RCIA for individuals (see RCIA 331).
 - Prayer, fasting, catechesis, and exhibition of Christian charity characterized the early Church catechumenate
 - In many parishes the catechumens study the Scripture readings after dismissal from Mass, though again this practice is not obligatory

- **Minor Rites during the Catechumenate** – before Lent (RCIA 75)
 - Celebrations of the Word of God (RCIA 81)
 - Can be done separately from Mass or can be fulfilled by participation at Liturgy of the Word in Mass
 - Minor Exorcisms (RCIA 90)
 - Done within a liturgy of the word outside Mass, or even at a catechetical meeting
 - Normally led by a priest or deacon
 - More a prayer or petition that catechumens will be safeguarded, rather than an exorcism like in the movies. Such exorcistic prayers were common in the Early Church, emphasizing the need for God’s strength to resist the devil
 - These minor exorcisms may be repeated
 - Blessing of Catechumens (RCIA 95)
 - Counterpart to exorcisms, but more “positive”
 - Can be done at the end of a meeting or end of celebrations of the Word
 - May be repeated
 - Anointing with Oil of Catechumens (RCIA 98)
 - This is an optional rite, done by priest or deacon
 - (Also done at infant baptism)
 - Can be anointed on chest or both hands, or other parts of body
 - Has an exorcistic significance
 - The option exists to do the presentations of the Creed and Our Father (RCIA 105) during the catechumenate, but they are typically done during Lent
 - Rite of Sending for Election (RCIA 106)
 - This is an optional rite that can be employed prior to the diocesan Rite of Election

- **Rite of Election** (celebrated around the First Sunday of Lent)
 - The Bishop presides at this rite, in which the names of the catechumens are presented in the “Books of the Elect” (ONLY Catechumens’ names are included in these books – not candidates)
 - After receiving the names, the Bishop declares the catechumens to be members of the elect, “to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil.”
 - “Elect” is a Scriptural terms, indicating persons chosen by God
 - This ends the period of spiritual formation, and next is a period of intense preparation and instruction, coinciding with Lent.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment (During Lent)

- **The Scrutinies** (RCIA 138)
 - Done on Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent – using Ritual Mass for the Scrutinies from the Roman Missal
 - Oriented towards repentance and spiritual self-examination
 - Rite says Scrutinies meant to “uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen, all that is upright, strong, and good.”
 - Consists of Intercessions, Exorcism, Dismissal

- **The Presentations**
 - Presentation of the Creed (3rd Week of Lent) – RCIA 157
 - The elect are presented, or entrusted, with the Creed after the First Scrutiny
 - Done during the week, preferably at Mass (not Sunday Mass)
 - Elect listen as celebrant and assembly recite either Apostles’ or Nicene Creed
 - The Creed, in recalling “the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race, suffuses the vision of the elect with the sure light of faith”
 - Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer (5th Week of Lent) – RCIA 178
 - The elect are entrusted with the Our Father after the Third Scrutiny
 - Done during the week, preferably at Mass (not Sunday Mass)
 - Gospel reading from Saint Matthew read, containing Our Father
 - “Fills them with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father.”
 - In the early Church, the solemn giving of these texts was called the *traditio*, and the elect were expected to be able to recite them back (called the *redditio*) during the initiatory rites of the Easter Vigil

- **Holy Saturday**
 - Gather in morning or during the day
 - Giving back/*redditio* of the Creed
 - Then comes the *ephphetha* (eff-a-thah) rite, which is Aramaic for “be opened.” It is based on the Mark 7:31-37 account of Jesus restoring the deaf man’s hearing and speech by touching his ears and mouth. (St. Ambrose of Milan wrote of this rite in the 4th century)

- Celebrant touches ears and closed lips of elect, that they may be opened to God's grace and word
- Option of choosing a baptismal name (this mainly applies just to those elect who come from cultures/countries in which it is the practice of non-Christians religions to give a new name. Calling to mind the new names given to Abraham and Peter, the selection of a more traditional Christian name arms the elect for the new mission they will undertake at the Vigil)
- These rites could also optionally be done earlier in the process, during the minor rites

Initiation at the Easter Vigil

- The preparation of the elect will culminate in receiving Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, where the rites take place as outline in the Roman Missal and RCIA 206-243
- It is not appropriate to withhold or delay Confirmation for any members of the elect (including children) who have gone through RCIA at the Easter Vigil. By Church law, the priest who baptizes a person at the Easter Vigil also confirms him or her.
- (The optional combined rite for the initiation of the elect and the reception of candidates in full communion can be found in RCIA 562)

Mystagogy / Post-Baptismal Catechesis

- Catechesis in the form of mystagogy continues after initiation.
- The primary vehicle for mystagogy is participation in the Sunday Mass (RCIA 247)

Candidates

- There are multiple categories of “candidates”
 - Baptized non-Catholics entering into full communion
 - these individuals have different levels of catechetical readiness, and some may be ready to enter the Church more quickly
 - “Candidates” who were baptized Catholic but never catechized nor received Confirmation or First Communion
 - * For specific notes on how certain elements of the procedure for baptized Catholic candidates should be approached differently (including how they make the profession of faith and who should confirm them), please see “Those who were baptized Catholic but never catechized” in the separate document entitled “Detailed Review of RCIA Rites and Norms.”

- Rite of Welcoming (optional – RCIA 411)
 - May be celebrated within our outside of Mass
 - Can be combined with the Rite of Acceptance (RCIA 505)

- Period of Catechesis
 - Time for deepening conversions and growing in knowledge of the Catholic faith
 - No fixed duration
 - Candidates are not dismissed during parish Masses like catechumens (RCIA 545 & 560)

- Call to Continuing Conversion
 - This is a diocesan rite that is combined with the Rite of Election in Fort Wayne-South Bend.
 - Candidates’ names are NOT included in the parish Book of Elect

- Penitential Rite (RCIA 459)
 - Optional rite that may be celebrated during Lent – typically 2nd Sunday of Lent or that week (loosely called a “scrutiny” for candidates – it should not be combined with the Scrutinies that are proper to the unbaptized elect)

- Sacrament of Reconciliation
 - Candidates must receive the Sacrament of Confession before completing initiation (National Statutes for the Catechumenate #27)

- Reception into Full Communion / Completion of the Sacraments of Initiation (RCIA 487)
 - Done within Mass; candidates make the prescribed Profession of Faith (RCIA 491) and then receive Confirmation and the Eucharist
 - A candidate for full communion who has been properly catechized may be brought into the Catholic Church by a priest anytime during the year via this rite
 - It *can* be done as part of a combined rite with the initiation of the elect at the Easter Vigil (see RCIA 562), but the National Statutes for the Catechumenate #33 says “it is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil lest there be any confusion of such baptized Christians with the candidates for baptism.” It may therefore be appropriate to select another suitable time, such as at Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. It should not be done during the Triduum prior to the Vigil.
 - ** See aforementioned differences for baptized/uncatechized Catholic candidates (top of page 6). For example, these individuals approach their profession of faith differently and must be confirmed by a bishop.