

RCIA INFORMATION SHEET

Catechetical Office, Archdiocese of New York

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the official ritual text of the Church which directs, supports and sustains the way of faith and conversion by which adults (and children who have reached the age of reason) are initiated into the Catholic Church. Although many Catholics are not familiar with it, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was restored to the Church in 1972 at the request of the Second Vatican Council as the normative way by which adults (and children who have reached the age of reason) are to be initiated into the Catholic Church. In 1988, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published the ritual text we now use.

From the RCIA BOOK: “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults”:

“The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.” (RCIA # 4)

“As a general rule, parish priests (pastors) should make use of the rite of initiation in such a way that the sacraments themselves are celebrated at the Easter Vigil and the rite of election takes place on the First Sunday of Lent.” (RCIA #17)

“At the conclusion of the period of the catechumenate, a rite of sending the catechumens to their rite of election by the bishop may be celebrated in parishes...” (RCIA #106)

“Before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity.” (RCIA #120)

“The election, marked with a rite of such solemnity, is the focal point of the Church’s concern for the catechumens. Admission to election there belongs to the bishop, and the presiding celebrant for the rite of election is the bishop himself..” (RCIA #121)

“The period of purification and enlightenment, which the rite of election begins, customarily coincides with Lent.” (RCIA #138) This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance.” (RCIA #139)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR CHRISTIAN INITIATION

CATECHUMEN: One who is not baptized and is preparing for full initiation at the Easter Vigil through baptism, confirmation and eucharist.

CANDIDATE: One who is already baptized either in the Catholic Church or another Christian faith and who is preparing to complete his/her Christian initiation through confirmation and eucharist.

CATECHUMENATE: Second period of the order of Christian initiation of adults which involves intense preparation in word, worship, community life and apostolic works.

ELECT: The name given to the catechumens who celebrate the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent with the bishop, signifying their being chosen for the initiation sacraments at Easter.

SPONSOR: A sponsor accompanies any catechumen or candidate through the catechumenate period.

Sponsors are persons who get to know their catechumens or candidates and can stand as witnesses to the catechumens’ or candidates’ moral character, faith and intention.

GODPARENT: The Godparent serves as companion for the Christian life for the elect. The Godparent helps the elect integrate into the Catholic community by offering ongoing support, care and the sharing of faith.

RITE OF ELECTION: This is the rite that is celebrated by the bishop, which proclaims the catechumens ready for their celebration of the sacraments of initiation at Easter. This is celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent.

RITE OF CALLING THE CANDIDATES TO CONTINUING CONVERSION: This is the rite that proclaims the candidates ready for their completion of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

Order of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Period	Title for Person	Aim	Content	Time	Begins with this RITE
Inquiry	Inquirers	Awakening faith	Time to build trust, to share personal stories, questions, time to proclaim the message of salvation, foster initial conversion.	Unlimited	No specific rites suggested.
Catechumenate	Catechumens (unbaptized) Candidates (baptized)	Deepening initial conversion and passing on Catholic tradition	Time to deepen faith / conversion within the living community through: - Liturgy of the Word - Catechesis - Prayer and Worship - the Life of the Community - introduction to apostolic life.	One to a few years	Rite of Acceptance (Catechumen) Rite of Welcome (Candidate)
Purification And Enlightenment	Elect (unbaptized) Candidates (baptized)	Eliminate what is weak and sinful; Affirm what is holy.	Time for recollection, Lenten retreat experience, Final preparation for the sacraments of initiation.	Lent	Rite of Election (Catechumen) Rite of Call To Continuing Conversion (Candidate)
Mystagogy	Neophytes	Celebration of faith, Ministries and missioning	Deepening of sacramental life with ongoing formation with emphasis on Gospel, Eucharist and Mission	Paschal Time	Celebration of Sacraments of Initiation (Easter Vigil)