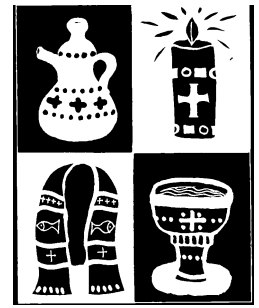


THE STEPS OF RCIA



The RCIA (or **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**) is the process by which a person can explore the Catholic faith in a non-judgmental setting, and become Catholic should he/she decide to do so. This journey of faith involves a few stages along the way...

The 1st Step in the process is called *Inquiry*. The minute you start even wondering about the Catholic Faith, you are in this step. As a result, this stage can last months to even years! You might read books about the Catholic Faith, or ask questions to friends or co-workers about the Faith. During your research you might decide that you would like to check things out more formally in order to know whether you are called to be a Catholic or not, so you take the step to meet with the RCIA director and register for RCIA classes. At St. Gerard, formal classes begin in September on Sundays at 9am where people who are interested come to the sessions to learn some basic information about the Catholic Faith, hear others share their faith, have their questions answered, and share an experience of Christian Community. *All are welcome.*

The 2nd Step in the process begins with the “**Rite of Acceptance and Welcome**” (at St. Gerard Parish this usually begins during Advent - in Late November or early December). At this time, participants enter into more formal study in what is called the *Period of the Catechumenate*. Individuals decide if they are ready to take this step. At this point in the process, scripture and the Sunday Gospel readings become an even more part of their formation. Classes continue on Sunday morning and participants begin attending the first part of Mass and then are dismissed to another room to continue discussion and prayer with the Sunday Scripture readings. (Note: if a person does not feel ready to take this step, he or she is free to continue to come to classes to learn more about the Catholic Faith. If at some point he or she decides to continue forward and join the Catechumenate, there are other opportunities available for this Rite.)

The 3rd Step in the process begins with the “**Rite of Sending**” and the “**Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion**”. This occurs at the beginning of the Lenten Season (40 days before Easter). At St. Gerard Parish, if a person decides that they indeed want to embrace the Catholic Faith, and their instructors, sponsors and fellow parishioners affirm their readiness, they will be sent to meet the Bishop for his blessing. The 40 days of Lent, called the *Period of Purification and Enlightenment* for them, is a time to continue learning, soul-searching, and praying as they prepare for Baptism or the renewal of Baptismal Promises.

The 4th Step in the process takes place at the **Easter Vigil** on Holy Saturday evening (the night before Easter). It is held at sundown and focuses on the Easter Candle (which represents Jesus, the light of the world). Those who have never been baptized will receive Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. If a person has been previously baptized in another Christian denomination, they will make a Profession of the Catholic Faith, and receive Confirmation and Eucharist. Baptized Catholics who have not received Eucharist or Confirmation will receive these other two Sacraments of Initiation.

The 5th Step in the process is called *Mystagogy* (a Greek term). During this time, the newly-Baptized and Confirmed persons will continue to meet Sunday morning to share their new faith and participate in the entire Sunday Liturgy. Although the period of Mystagogy can continue for an entire year, at St. Gerard Parish our sessions usually end around Pentecost Sunday (50 days after Easter).

Note that the goal of RCIA is not for a person to complete each step quickly and ‘win the prize’. Rather, the goal is to enter into a period of formation that will enhance and deepen the faith journey that one has already begun. Some will begin and end the process in an eight month time period, while others might take a year or more. While one will learn essential information about the Catholic faith in the RCIA process, remembering that this is a journey of mind and heart with Jesus and His community is the most important focus. Becoming Catholic is a *life-long* commitment of mind and heart. Welcome to the journey!

Questions? Interested in finding out more?

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