

The Rite of Christian Initiation – an overview

Not a program, but a sacramental process. Single Rite divided into 4 periods marked by 3 Steps:

Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate

Also known as the Period of Inquiry. During this period, information sessions are held that cover basic information regarding the Catholic faith. These sessions are intended to help you decide whether or not the Catholic faith is a good fit. It ends with the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens.

Step 1: Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

All of the rites are celebrated with the assembly or congregation during a liturgy. The Rite of Acceptance is a celebration where the unbaptized inquirers publicly declare to the church their intentions to continue their faith journey. The church welcomes and accepts them as persons who intend to become its members. This Rite may be adapted to accommodate baptized Inquirers who seek to become fully initiated into the Catholic Faith (Rite of Welcoming). After the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance, the Catechumens enter into the Catechumenate period.

Period of the Catechumenate

The faith journey becomes more in-depth after the initial commitment has been made. This period lasts till the first Sunday of Lent (In some cases it could last years). A relationship with the Catholic community begins. A deeper understanding of the Catholic faith and ones' relationship with Christ begins to emerge. The period is characterized by:

- Catechesis based on Liturgy of the Word - Studying Sacred Scripture.
- Living in the life of the Catholic community - participating in church activities.
- Prayer and worship.
- Introduction to the apostolic life.

There are two different names given to the participants in the Catechumenate. Unbaptized members are called "Catechumens" and baptized members are called "Candidates". During the period of the Catechumenate, minor rites can be celebrated. These include: celebrations of the Word, anointings, blessings, exorcisms, and the rite of Sending Forth to Election. The next step in the process of conversion is The Rite of Election for the unbaptized, and the call to continuing conversion for the baptized. This may be celebrated with the Bishop presiding.

Step 2: The Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion

Based on testimony of godparents and catechists, and the Catechumens' reaffirmation, the Church declares their state of readiness to enter the final period in their faith journey. The Catechumens now called the "Elect" are strengthened to take part in the sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. This rite marks the close of the Catechumenate. The celebration may be presided over by the Bishop. The primary time for the Rite to be celebrated is on the first Sunday in Lent.

The Bishop, in the name of the community, declares approval of the Candidates. During the celebration, each candidate publicly signs their name in the Book of the Elect, signifying their readiness to complete their faith journey of conversion. The "Elect" and Candidates now enter into the Period of Purification and Enlightenment to intensify their preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation.

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The faith journey now intensifies as the initial commitment becomes a deeper commitment to conversion to the Catholic faith. The period of Purification and Enlightenment is during the Lenten and Triduum period (Ash Wednesday to the Easter Vigil Mass). The relationship with the Catholic community deepens as preparation for the sacraments of initiation are anticipated. The aim of this period is to eliminate what is weak and sinful; and affirm what is holy. This period is also intended to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior.

Rites that are celebrated: the Scrutinies, presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and preparation rites on Holy Saturday. As the Period of Purification and Enlightenment comes to a close, the Elect and the Candidates are ready to take the final step in the process of conversion, the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation during the Easter Vigil Mass.

Step 3: The Paschal Triduum with the Sacraments of Initiation

The greatest celebration of the Church year is Easter, and the Easter Vigil Mass is the greatest of the Easter celebrations. It is at this celebration where the Elect and Candidates are initiated into the Church. The Paschal Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil Mass, and Easter Sunday) sets the stage for the initiation rites. As part of the Easter Vigil Mass, the Sacraments of Initiation are celebrated with the assembly. The Sacraments of Initiation are:

- **Baptism** - by the waters of baptism, a person passes into the new life of grace and becomes a member of the Body of Christ.
- **Confirmation** - anointing with special holy oil called chrism is the act which seals the baptism promise through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Holy Eucharist** - participation at the Table of the Lord - receiving Eucharist completes full membership in the Church.

Though the reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist signifies the conclusion of the third step of the process of Initiation; it is just the beginning. As with any relationship, it must continue to grow. The newly initiated continue their growth through post baptismal catechesis in the next period called Mystagogy - deepening their relationship with Christ and His Catholic Church.

Period of Post-Baptismal Catechesis / Mystagogy

You have just begun your life-long journey of faith as a Catholic in the Mystical Body of Christ. To assist the newly initiated, the RCIA process continues in a period called Mystagogy or Post-baptismal Catechesis. It is a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community.

During Mystagogy, the newly initiated Elect are called "Neophytes". The formal period is through the Pascal Time (Easter Sunday through Pentecost Sunday). The rites celebrated during Mystagogy are Sunday Eucharist with the Assembly, and gathering with the Bishop.