

All About RCIA

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)** is the formal process for adults to enter the Catholic Church. This process consists of liturgical rites and catechetical formation through various stages. The Church makes a distinction between those who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination (Candidates) and those who have never been baptized (Catechumens).

***The Church is in the process of changing the name to the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA). At St. Alphonsus we call our program Becoming Catholic because it is easier to understand for those not in the Church.*

Inquiry Phase

The first phase of RCIA is a time of introduction to the Faith. At St. Alphonsus, this begins in the fall and lasts several weeks. During this time those interested in joining the Church have an opportunity to get to know our RCIA Team and each other.

Period of Catechumenate

The Rite of Acceptance is the gateway to the second period of the RCIA, the Catechumenate. From this moment, the enquirer is accepted into the Church as a catechumen, one preparing for Baptism. At St. Alphonsus this rite is celebrated during the Sunday liturgy at the beginning of Advent. Both Catechumens and Candidates continue to meet weekly for ongoing formation.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

This period takes place during the liturgical season of Lent. It begins with the Rite of Election and is marked by three parish celebrations known as Scrutinies. The elect are presented with the Creed and the Lord's Prayer and together with their parish community focus on an ever deeper conversion and examination of their lives in light of the Gospel.

The Rite of Election usually takes place on the First Sunday of Lent at the cathedral with the bishop and all those preparing to enter the Church from across the diocese. This is a time when the parish (pastor, RCIA team, and sponsors) acknowledge that the Catechumens are ready to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. The Catechumens are invited to sign the Book of the Elect as a pledge of their fidelity and intention to enter the Church. They will now be called the Elect rather than Catechumens.

The Scrutinies are three special rites that help prepare the Elect to enter the Church. The purpose of the Scrutinies is "to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful" in the hearts of the Elect and to "strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good." (Quotes from Ritual Text for Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, #141) After the Gospel and Homily, the Elect and their Godparents come forward during each of the three weeks of the Scrutinies. The Celebrant addresses the whole assembly, asking us to pray for a spirit of repentance, an awareness of sin, and strength of will for the Elect. He prays for them as we pray for them. While this is happening, we can recognize the need to seek these same graces in prayer for our own continuous conversions.

The Creed and the Lord's Prayer are the heart of our faith. They embody what we believe and how we are to pray, which is why special liturgies are designed to hand on or to present both in the Rite of

Christian Initiation of Adults. These special rites are celebrated at daily Masses during the Third and Fifth Weeks of Lent.

Easter Vigil: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

At the Easter Vigil the elect are Baptized, Confirmed and make their First Holy Communion, thus becoming full members of the Body of Christ, the Church. From this time, they are known as neophytes, 'new sprouts' for the first year of their new life in Christ.

Period of Mystagogy

The fourth, and final, phase of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is called "mystagogy," from the Greek words meaning "to lead through the mysteries." Even though their catechetical preparation has been completed, they still have much to learn about what it means to live as Catholic Christians. During Mystagogy, new Catholics will reflect on their experience of conversion, learn more about the Church, and consider how they might get involved in ministry and outreach. These new members of our parish family will need the ongoing support of the community so that the faith newly planted in them can take root in good soil and produce good fruit. (Mark 4:1-20)