

Overview of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which the bishops at the Second Vatican Council called to be reinstated as the normative means of initiating adults, includes four periods, three major rites, and other rituals to mark a person's journey of faith and full initiation into the Catholic Church.

The goal of the initiation process is to form disciples who live the mission of Jesus Christ and "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). The good news is proclaimed in word and deed in homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, towns, and cities—to every part of the world.

The heart of the initiation process is conversion—conversion to Jesus Christ. This conversion involves sharing in the Paschal Mystery, the dying and rising in Christ, and challenges us to conform our lives to the Gospel. It involves one's head, heart, and feet. It means to know Jesus Christ, to believe the good news, and to put it into practice. Conversion is a life-long journey. The initiation process leads those being initiated to embrace such a conversion, which nurtures their life-long journey of faith.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* provides a vision of the community walking with a candidate as God awakens in that candidate a desire for a faith relationship as the Holy Spirit opens the candidate's mind and heart. The candidate is drawn into the mystery of God's love. Such an invitation calls the candidate to turn away from sin and to lead a life worthy of a disciple of Christ.

The Church describes the spiritual journey of adults (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 4 and 5) as:

- gradual;
- flexible;
- systematic and comprehensive.

The Spiritual Journey of Adults Unfolds Gradually

The four main periods of the initiation process are: Precatechumenate (Inquiry), Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy. As a person progresses through these four periods, the formation offered to them becomes progressively more detailed, focused, and challenging.

The Precatechumenate (Inquiry) is a time of evangelization. After hearing the good news, the inquirer begins to interpret their life events through the lens of the basic Christian message found in Sacred Scripture given to us by God's Revelation.

The Catechumenate period (from the Rite of Acceptance to the Rite of Election) is a time of pastoral formation; an apprenticeship in the Catholic way of life. The formation of this period occurs through a focus on the liturgical year and the Sunday Lectionary.

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment coincides with the annual Lenten season. It is, at its core, a time of retreat. Through the rich liturgies of Lent, the elect are led gradually to uncover "all that is weak, defective, or sinful . . . and bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good" (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 141.)

The final period, Mystagogy, is a time for post-baptismal catechesis. It is a time of integration and incorporation into life as a fully initiated Catholic.

The Spiritual Journey of Adults Requires Flexibility

Some adults grow and mature through dialogue with other adults as they compare and contrast their experiences. Other adults take steps forward spiritually through listening and introspection.

Yet others grow by combining these approaches. A flexible format through all periods and stages is necessary to assist in adult conversion. Various types of questions are offered for reflection and discernment. In each stage of the initiation process, candidates are challenged to actively and concretely put into practice the faith.

The Spiritual Journey of Adults Should Be Systematic and Comprehensive

Those who come to the adult initiation process deserve the best that can be offered. It is, therefore, important to rely on the vast treasury of teachings and practices in catechesis so that the person of Jesus they are meeting truly is the life-changing Savior and Lord whom the Church proclaims. Jesus is the object of catechesis, clarified and given substance through the great, dynamic source of the Word of God transmitted through the means of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

The Spiritual Journey of Adults Bears a Markedly Paschal Character

Conversion comes at a cost, for all Christians are called to embrace the Cross of Christ. At a minimum, the cost involves inner change as the participant's heart and mind are more aligned with the values contained in the good news of Jesus Christ. More often, however, conversion also involves an outer change. Ways of speaking and behaving are impacted by inspiration and by the grace of

God. Love of one's neighbor comes into clearer focus as a person is challenged to live the Great Commandment of Jesus each day.

At the heart of each RCIA session, no matter which period or type of material being utilized, is the Paschal Mystery of Christ who suffered, died, rose and ascended for our sakes, so that we might be saved and, in turn, offer our lives for the sake of his kingdom and for the transformation of this world.

The Spiritual Journey of Adults Features Ecclesial and Communal Dimensions

We are given to each other, in the Church, to encourage, support, and challenge one another to live the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus called disciples and sent those disciples to participate in his saving mission in pairs. He gathered individuals who became more than just individual believers. Christ established a people, a Church, to act as a guide, to be the vehicle of God's grace among men and women, and to be his Body on earth.

The supreme virtues of faith, hope, and love are theological in that they come from God to each individual. But we all experience the interplay of those virtues within the community of the faithful as we attempt to live them. Catechesis in the adult initiation process attempts to bring to maturity one's initial conversion and make of it a "living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith" (*General Directory for Catechesis* 82).