

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2017 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

Liguori Publications • © 2017 All rights reserved.

Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

C1706A

JUNE 2017

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

THE CATHOLIC FAITH IS ALIVE IN THE RCIA

A REDEMPTORIST PASTORAL PUBLICATION



© CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

Welcome to the RCIA. There are many people searching for a way to meet their spiritual needs and identify with a community of faith. People who feel the desire to know more about the Catholic Church and to explore its life may simply need a friendly invitation. Perhaps your spouse or a close friend is Catholic, or you saw or read something that prompted questions and inspired interest. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is the Church's way of extending an invitation to join a living community of faith.

Before we explain what the RCIA means and the RCIA process, it may be helpful to understand the way God directs us in our quest for meaning. A sense of inquiry and the urge to burrow deeper into one's knowledge of God and what it means to adopt an active life of faith is a reflection of God's grace at work. The length of this period of searching—known as a period of evangelization and precatechumenate—varies based on the individual. It's important to understand that there's no need to rush; it makes sense to go at your own pace and move thoughtfully through what will be one of the biggest decisions in your life. People rarely get married, buy a house, change careers, or move cities without giving such significant decisions appropriate time and consideration. Our initial interest leads to further exploration, which helps us to get to know our options and ourselves better.

The journey toward full discernment depends on our openness to God's grace and maintaining humility before the initiatives of God's Spirit among us. Each individual's journey of faith is unique. Consider your own pilgrimage....How did you first find out about God? What factors have helped you shape your image of God? You may have previously felt a tug at your soul but are now choosing to act upon it. Our Catholic faith is about more than just a set of beliefs. It's about a relationship that starts with our Lord and develops as we observe and encounter him in our lives. Feelings can be powerful, but you wouldn't want a relationship founded only on feelings. Relationships are stronger and healthier when they're built on solid ground. We trust and respect decisions that are well-considered, shared, and entered into freely. How have you come to express your faith?

*"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and your joy may be complete."*

JOHN 15:11



What Does the RCIA Mean?

The RCIA stands for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. It's the process through which unbaptized adults and older children are formed in the teachings and practices of Catholicism and are *initiated* into the Catholic Church. The RCIA is marked by various rites or rituals, which usually occur at Sunday Mass. Sometimes the process includes baptized adult Christians or Catholics who are preparing to receive the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist.

Why Do Catholics Initiate Others Into Their Faith?

Jesus told his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Christians—not just Catholics—welcome and invite others to join us. This is because we believe that:

- The body of the Church is a coalescence of divine and human elements in the life of the Church whereby God acts through the visible organs of the Church, especially the sacraments. Catholics, therefore, speak of the Church analogously as a sacrament, in that the "Church, then, both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 774).
- The Church is a community created and called by God toward evangelization and salvation. Extending an invitation to others emulates Jesus Christ's life of loving service. "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).
- We believe the Catholic Church has the fullest and most authentic understanding of Jesus. Following Jesus makes people happier and more at peace, both here and in the life to come. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).
- The Christian community is strengthened by the conversion of all people, who are created in God's likeness and called to discipleship. In Christ the Church is "a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 1).

What Happens in the RCIA?

Most processes are a series of weekly sessions with a team of catechists (religion teachers), sponsors, and fellow participants. Each session is a safe place to discuss the faith and explore questions about Catholicism or religion and spirituality in general. All questions are welcome and honored. God invited Mary to be the Mother of Jesus; Jesus didn't want to be born without her free and informed consent. Before giving her consent, Mary asked, "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34). Like Mary, we all have free will to accept Jesus into our lives and to ask questions. That's how much God respects—and even expects—your honest questions.

You may question if the RCIA process is new. It actually began in the earliest years of the Church. In those first centuries, it was a challenge to convert to Christianity because the Roman Empire often persecuted those who didn't follow its pagan religion. The Church wanted to make sure that candidates really knew what they were doing and were willing to stand up for their faith in a hostile environment.