

What is the RCIA and Who is it for?

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Session #1

What is this process and what is it called?

- ▶ Order of Christian Initiation of Adults
- ▶ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
- ▶ RCIA
- ▶ Catechumenate
- ▶ Catechumenal Process
- ▶ Christian Initiation

The RCIA is the official rite of the Roman Catholic Church that includes the norms, directives, and ritual celebrations for initiating adults and children of catechetical age into Christ and incorporating them into the Church. It prescribes a sequence of periods and rites by which participants transition from one stage to another - though not necessarily as a group - culminating in the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and the neophyte year.

The Great Commission - MT 28:19-20



“Go therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” MT 28:19-20

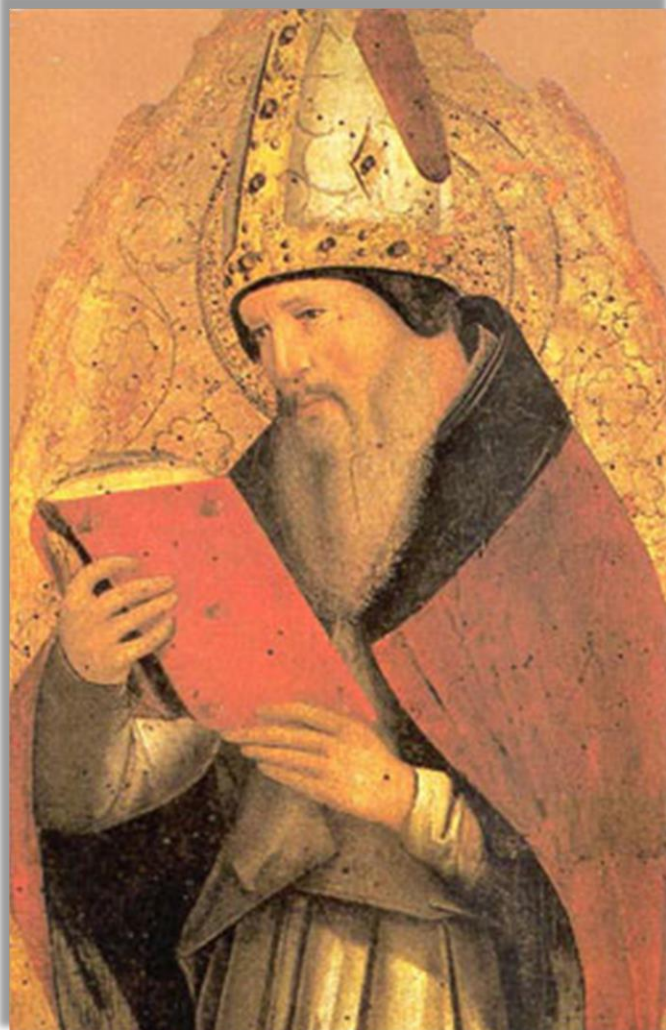
The First Christian Communities

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

Acts 2:42



The Ancient Catechumenate



- ▶ The Ancient catechumenate was practiced in the catacombs and was well developed by the end of 4th Century, known especially through writings of St. Augustine.

It declined & fell into disuse by 14th century when most baptisms were for infants rather than adults. Eventually, an informal instruction/preparation for baptism of adults was practiced in mission territories & as needed.

Restoration of the Catechumenate - Vatican II, 1963

- ▶ The catechumenate for adults is to be restored and brought into use ... [bishops] are to take steps to reestablish ... the adult catechumenate [in their dioceses].
Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 64 & 66, 1963
- ▶ Updated guidelines & liturgies for restored catechumenate completed - **1972**; Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults - English - **1988**;
Normative for all US dioceses - 1990



Fundamental characteristics of Christian Initiation

“As it is formation for the Christian life [the RCIA] comprises but surpasses mere instruction. Being essential, it looks to what is [indispensable] ... without entering into disputed questions nor transforming itself into a form of theological investigation. Finally, being initiatory, it incorporates [individuals] into the community, which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith.” GDC 68

The restored catechumenate is effective because:

1. Assists the participants in establishing a solid relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.
2. Forms and supports participants in the Christian life.

“[The catechumenate] is not, therefore, an optional activity, but basic and fundamental for building up the personality of the individual disciple, as it is for the whole Christian community.” (GDC 64)

Fundamental characteristics of Christian Initiation

In the Catechumenate, “catechesis, together with the liturgical rites, works of charity, and experience of community, initiates [participants] in knowledge of faith and apprenticeship in the Christian life, promoting a spiritual journey bringing about a progressive change in outlook and morals ... The disciple of Jesus Christ is, then ready for the profession of faith, when, through the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, they are grafted onto Christ.

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Fundamental characteristics of Christian Initiation

In other words, the RCIA is about

CONVERSION

Conversion to Christ through an apprenticeship in the Christian Life

This apprenticeship includes: the first proclamation, an evangelizing catechesis, inspiring liturgies, and generous participation in the life of the Christian community.

This culminates in the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation - living them out during the neophyte year and throughout the new life of grace

The RCIA (catechumenate) is NOT:

- ▶ NOT a CLASS: Simple instruction denies need for developing a relationship with Christ, the Church and the Christian community.
- ▶ NOT a PROGRAM: Programs have a fixed length of time and a predetermined course of studies and disregards the need to facilitate conversion for individuals.

The authentic catechumenate process is -

- ▶ **Authentically Personal** - *providing pastoral care & flexibility to help lead individuals to conversion to Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit.*

Pastoral Aspect

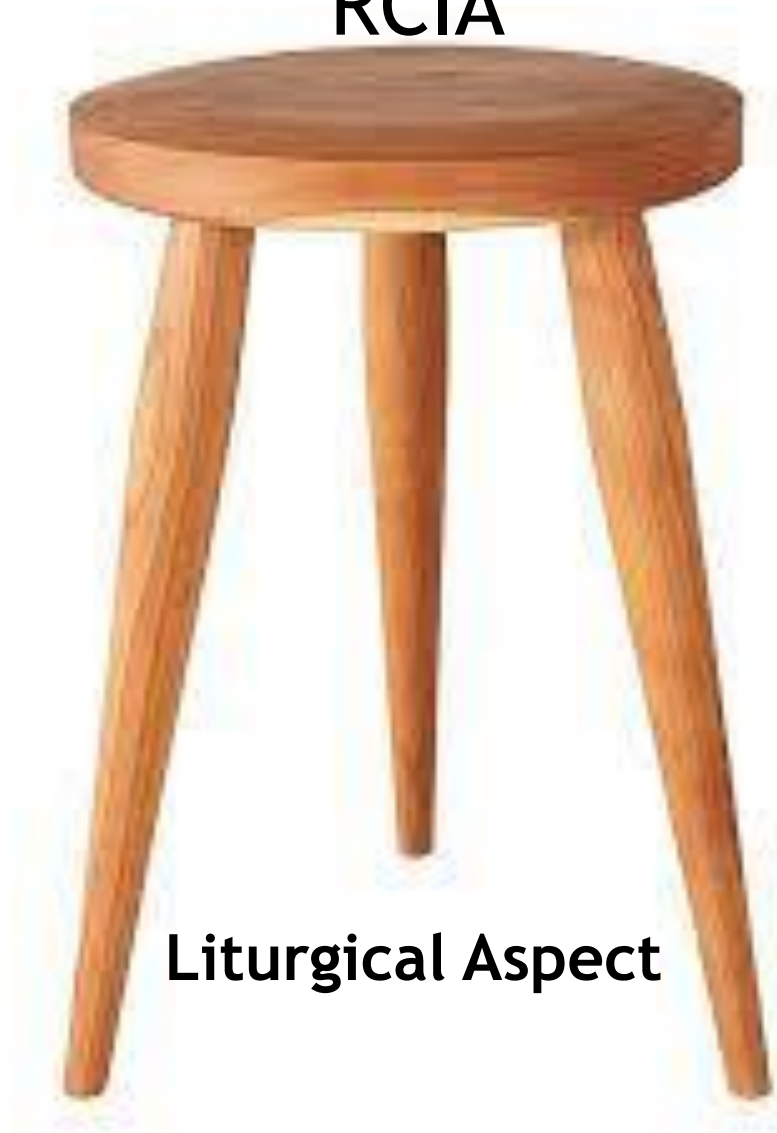
- ▶ **Authentically Unitive** - *providing inspiring liturgical & prayer experiences to help individuals encounter Christ and his body, the Church.*

Liturgical Aspect

- ▶ **Authentically Faithful** - *providing parish community experiences & comprehensive (not exhaustive) catechesis.*

Catechetical Aspect

RCIA



Liturgical Aspect

Pastoral Aspect

Catechetical Aspect

RCIA is Christian Apprenticeship ➡ Conversion ➡ Missionary Discipleship



Initiation ministry is not an academic process, but a conversion process.

We are about fostering conversion and cooperating with the Holy Spirit to form missionary disciples for Christ, not simply welcoming additional Church members.

Our catechetical sessions should be one supporting player in a larger Christian Apprenticeship process, which includes inspiring liturgies & prayer, meaningful parish community experiences, and personalized pastoral care.

Small group processing

- ▶ 1. Place yourself in the shoes of a potential inquirer who comes to your RCIA session. What would you be expecting from the parish RCIA team? What would you want them to learn about you as you consider the possibility of being baptized into the Catholic faith?
- ▶ 2. Does your parish refer to the initiation process as a “program” or a “class”? What might these terms imply to someone baptized in another faith who is thinking about becoming a Catholic?
- ▶ 3. In what specific ways could a parish RCIA be shortchanged if the Pastoral Aspect of the process is overlooked?