



Discernment: Are Participants Ready for the Next Rite?

What do we think we are doing when we are ministering on an RCIA team?

What does the Rite say is happening?

RCIA no. 1 The rite of Christian initiation presented here is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God's help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully.

RCIA no. 4 The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.

RCIA no. 6 The journey includes not only the periods for making inquiry and for maturing (see no. 7), but also the steps marking the catechumens' progress, as they pass, so to speak, through another doorway or ascend to the next level.

1. The first step: reaching the point of initial conversion and wishing to become Christians, they are accepted as catechumens by the Church.
2. The second step: having progressed in faith and nearly completed the catechumenate, they are accepted into a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation.
3. The third step: having completed their spiritual preparation, they receive the sacraments of Christian initiation.

**But how do
we know if
they are
READY?**

RCIA no. 10 A sponsor accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates' moral character, faith and intention. . . .

RCIA no. 36 Although the rite of initiation begins with admission to the catechumenate, the preceding period or pre-catechumenate is of great importance and as a rule should not be omitted. It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all. Thus those who are not yet Christians, their hearts opened by the Holy Spirit, may believe and be freely converted to the Lord and

commit themselves sincerely to him. For he who is the way, the truth, and the life fulfills all their spiritual expectations, indeed infinitely surpasses them.

RCIA no. 37 From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love. The whole period of the pre-catechumenate is set aside for this evangelization, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek baptism may mature.

Notice from reading the above paragraphs that

RCIA is NOT mostly about teaching doctrine.

RCIA is about **grace** and **conversion**.

It is about God's **call** and a person's **response**.



- The Holy Spirit provides the grace, the impetus, to change, to draw nearer to God.
- We can't "program" when the Holy Spirit will call or when a person will respond!
- We need to be ready whenever a person comes to us!

So, are you honoring and respecting the work of the Holy Spirit – whenever the Spirit moves someone? Do you have an "RCIA program" or do you have an initiation process that is always going on, year-round, whenever the Holy Spirit moves someone?



Do you "start in September" and "put people through" the RCIA?

RCIA is NOT a car wash!

People come when the Spirit prompts them.

People are ready for the “next step” when they are ready!

It takes as long as it takes!



We are not “judging” people.

We are helping them discern where they are on the journey of faith.

How do we know? How do we help them discern?

Discernment: the process of evaluating, looking for “evidence,” that a change of heart, of mind, of attitudes, of behavior has taken place.

Definition of *discern*

transitive verb

1a: to detect with the eyes

b: to detect with senses other than vision

2: to recognize or identify as separate and distinct : **DISCRIMINATE** *discern* right from wrong

3: to come to know or recognize mentally

intransitive verb

to see or understand the difference

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discern#learn-more>

Synonyms for *discern*

behold, catch, descry, distinguish,
espy, eye, look (at), note, notice,
observe, perceive, regard, remark,
see, sight, spot, spy, view,
witness



RCIA is for unbaptized adults.

Un-catechized baptized Christians can benefit from the RCIA catechetical process but must be treated differently in the liturgy.

RCIA National Statutes no. 6. The period of the catechumenate, beginning at acceptance into the order of catechumens and including both the catechumenate proper and the period of purification and enlightenment after election or enrollment of names, should extend for at least **one year** of formation, instruction, and probation. . . .

Baptized Christians:

RCIA no. 473

. . . The rite is so arranged that **no greater burden** than necessary (see ACTS 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity.

RCIA no. 477 The baptized Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to **individual pastoral requirements**, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church. . . .

RCIA no. 478 . . . In all cases, however, **discernment should be made regarding the length of catechetical formation required** for each individual candidate for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Catechized Protestants don't belong in the RCIA!

Catholics who need Confirmation don't belong in the RCIA!

RCIA is not marriage preparation!



In some parishes:

Oh no! We've been doing it wrong!

Not only have we NOT given the unbaptized enough time for formation, we have made the catechized Protestants take too long for formation!

Journey of Conversion

Threshold of Conversion ¹	Description	RCIA Stage	Key concepts in the Rite	How do we minister to/with at this stage?
Trust	A person is able to trust or has a positive association with Jesus Christ, the Church, a Christian believer, or something identifiably Christian. Trust is not the same as active personal faith. Without some kind of bridge of trust in place, people will not move closer to God.	Pre-catechumenate or Inquiry		
Spiritual Curiosity	A person finds him/herself intrigued by a desiring to know more about Jesus, his life, and his teachings or some aspect of the Christian faith. It involves a passive, receptive stance.	Pre-catechumenate or Inquiry	36. ...[T]he pre-catechumenate is of great importance and should not be omitted. It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all.	
Spiritual openness	A person acknowledges to him/herself and to God that he or she is open to the possibility of personal and spiritual change. Openness is not commitment to change. They resonate with the possibility.	Pre-catechumenate or Inquiry	36. ...Thus those who are not yet Christians, their hearts opened by the Holy Spirit, may believe and be freely converted to the Lord [and commit themselves to him.] See par. 42.	
Spiritual seeking	The person moves from being essentially passive to actively seeking to know God who is calling him or her. The seeker is engaged in an urgent spiritual quest, seeking to know whether he or she can commit to Christ in his Church.	Catechumenate	1. The rite of Christian initiation ...is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. See par. 75.	
Intentional Discipleship	The person makes the decision to “drop his/her nets,” to make a conscious commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of his Church as an obedient disciple and to reorder his/her life accordingly.	Election & Full initiation	120. Before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. With deliberate will and enlightened faith they must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church.... 244. ...[M]ystagogy... a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing works of charity.	

¹ Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012, p.129-130.

What does that look like in “real life”?

For inquirers journeying toward the Rite of Acceptance or Welcoming:

- Have faith companions/sponsors who are present for inquiry sessions and who engage in conversation with participants. They observe all the “good stuff” that a person does that shows he/she is growing on the faith journey.



What are you looking for?

RCIA No. 42 The prerequisite for making this first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates.

Thus there must be evidence of the first faith. . . initial conversion and intention to change their lives . . . to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. . . the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community. . . .

- When the time seems right for a particular person, engage in a conversation that reflects the key points of paragraph no. 42. (See the discernment handouts.)

For catechumens and candidates journeying toward the Rite of Election:

- Have faith companions, sponsors, team members, catechists, Breaking Open the Word leaders, listen carefully to participants’ stories and questions. Help them come to lots of parish events and activities. As the person progresses in the catechumenate, make notes of the “good stuff” in their lives that indicate “evidence” of conversion and growth in faith. (See RCIA no. 119.)

RCIA No. 75.2 . . . the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbor. . . . a progressive change of outlook and conduct. . . .

RCIA No. 75.4 . . . catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their loves and by professing their faith.

RCIA No. 120 Before the rite of election is celebrated the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. With deliberate will and an enlightened faith they must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church. . . .

- When a catechumen or candidate has been coming to RCIA sessions for about 10-12 months, or more, and the time for the Rite of Election (and the Call to Continuing Conversion) is about 4-6 weeks away, engage in a conversation that reflects the key points of paragraphs no. 75 and 120. (See the discernment handouts.)

RCIA Program

Starts in September.

Has 5 or 6 inquiry lessons. Begin to teach them the basics.

Everyone goes through the Rite of Acceptance/ Welcoming on the scheduled date.

The catechumenate starts around November.

Take time off for Christmas.

January- Feb. / March for the rest of the catechumenate. (A 5 month catechumenate?)

All catechumens (who have been in the program since Sept.) go through the Rite of Election / Call to Continuing Conversion.

There are more lessons during Lent.

All receive sacraments at Easter Vigil.

RCIA classes continue for 4-6 weeks.

Take the summer off.

RCIA Process

It is always happening in the parish.

The inquiry group is open for people to come at any time. This is a different group from the catechumens.

Begin with hearing their faith stories and answering their questions. They move on after **discernment**. (Inquiry = weeks, months, or years.)

The catechumenate for each person is about 12 months long, or more.

The catechumenate includes involving people in many parish activities.

Each catechumen is helped to **discern** his/her readiness for the Rite of Election / Call to Continuing Conversion.

Some people stay in the catechumenate for a while longer and do not celebrate sacraments at the Easter Vigil.

Lent is not for “lessons” but for spiritual preparation.

Mystagogia goes on all the time – for one year for the newly initiated.