

THE RCIA PROCESS

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The various steps on the way to full initiation within the Roman Catholic Church is marked by four specific periods. While there are time frames set forth for each period, the actual time required is determined more by the needs and desires of each person.

- **FIRST PERIOD (the Pre-Catechumenate).** During this initial period, the “*Inquirer*” will become acquainted with the Roman Catholic Church, hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and reflect on the direction that God is leading them. The conclusion of this period is marked by the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate (*first stage of commitment*). It is at this point that the “*Inquirer*” becomes a “*Catechumen*” or “*Candidate*.”
Catechumens are those people who are seeking full initiation into the Catholic Church through all of the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.
Candidates are people who have been baptized in a Christian tradition but are seeking initiation into the Catholic Church through Eucharist and Confirmation.
- **SECOND PERIOD (the Catechumenate).** In the second period, the “*Catechumen*” or “*Candidate*” studies the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church, and continues to pray for guidance from God. When ready, the “*Catechumen*” requests baptism and participates in the Rite of Election (*second stage of commitment*). At the Rite of Election liturgy, usually conducted by the bishop, the “*Catechumen’s*” name is recorded in a book, and they are now referred to as the “*Elect*.” During the second period, the “*Candidate*” prepares to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and will make a first confession in the third period.
- **THIRD PERIOD** The third and much shorter period coincides with the Lenten preparation for the Easter celebration. It marks a period of more intense spiritual preparation intended to purify the mind and heart of the catechumens and candidates and to deepen their knowledge of and relationship with Christ. The conclusion of this period is marked by the Rite of Initiation at the Easter Vigil Mass. Joining with the Church community in the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ in the Paschal Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday/Easter Vigil), the “*Catechumens*” and the “*Candidates*” are fully initiated into the Church through the reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion (*third stage of commitment*).
- **FOURTH PERIOD (the Mystagogy).** After the completion of their Christian initiation the “*Neophyte*” (recent converts) enter a period of a deepening of their understanding and experience in their new faith. The focus during this period is the development of a personal spiritual life and an introduction into full involvement in the Mission of the Church through ministries and outreach (*final stage of commitment*).