

Our Lady and St. Dominic's RCIA Program



RCIA is the Church's way of forming new Christians and welcoming them into the Catholic Church. Some people who participate in the RCIA are Christians by virtue of their Baptism in another Christian denomination. The RCIA process at Our Lady and St Dominic's caters for both the unbaptized and the baptized and even those who are already members of the Catholic Church who just want to brush up on their understanding of the Catholic faith.

RCIA is an acronym of **R**ite of **C**hristian **I**nitiation in **A**dults

- R** is for Rite: A `rite' can be thought of as the right way of doing something. The method used by the Catholic Church has a long history and people come to an understanding of the Christian way of life through a gradual step-by-step process.
- C** is for Christian: There are many definitions of the word `Christian'; it has even been defined as someone who could leave their pet parrot with the town gossip when they go on holiday! The simplest definition, however, is that a Christian is someone who is a disciple of Christ. One objective of the RCIA process is to investigate what being a disciple means.
- I** is for Initiation: Initiation is the process of getting to the start rather than arriving at the end. The RCIA process is a journey where we spend short stops at Catholic landmarks; afterwards, you may want to come back and visit these landmarks either on your own or with friends as part of ongoing formation.
- A** is Adults: A is also for "Ask Anything" - the RCIA is time to explore the Catholic faith and ask all the things you wanted to know but were afraid to ask. Was Jesus just a man? Why did Jesus have to die? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Participating in the RCIA is much more than going to classes on Catholicism. It's undergoing a conversion to a new way of life in Christ. The best way to learn this is to be in the midst of parish community and you will gain much more out of the process if you can regularly attend services and events taking place in the parish. This will allow you to learn about the prayer and worship life of the Church and to develop a relationship with the Catholic Christian community.

The RCIA process is as old as the Church itself. For example, around the year 386AD, St Augustine went through the process as part of becoming a Catholic at the age of 33, around two hundred years before the birth of Mohammed and the start of the Muslim religion.

After a period of degeneration starting in the fifth century when almost all Christians were baptized at birth, the RCIA was reinstated by the Second Vatican council (1963-1965) thereby restoring this ancient custom of the Church.

In the early Church, formation would take many years and due to the fact that the Church was under persecution, formation could not start unless an existing member of the community would testify on behalf of the candidate. After years of formation, the candidate would be examined to see if they were ready to be chosen for baptism, which took place at Easter in the same way as it does today.

The process today is much shorter although it still comprises the same stages that have been in place since the earliest times in the Church:

Pre-catechumenate

This stage represents the period when something has drawn you to Christ and you want to find out more. During this period the aim of the parish is to help the enquirer discover just what it is that he or she is seeking.

This stage ends with the Rite of Acceptance which takes place during mass on the first Sunday of Advent. Those who wish to grow closer to Christ and take the next step by declaring this intention to the Church community, which in turn accepts them as persons who intend to become its members. Following the ancient tradition of the Church, each person is presented by a "sponsor" to the community.

Catechumenate

This is the second stage of the initiation process and is a period where more formal training in the Christian way of life is given. There are two groups:

- Catechumens those who have not been baptized.
- Candidates those who have been baptized in a Catholic or other Christian Church but who are not fully initiated.

In the early Church, the catechumens were dismissed after the homily, and required to leave the main body of the Church before the liturgy of the Eucharist. This would be a time where they could meet and discuss the scriptures they heard proclaimed at Mass, in preparation for the day when they will receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The program at Our Lady and St Dominic's does not require you to do this; however, we do spend time discussing scripture in our weekly meetings.

This stage ends with the Rite of Election which takes place on the first Saturday of Lent at Portsmouth Cathedral for those who wish to join the Catholic Church. The rite celebrates that the catechumens have been chosen by God to receive the sacraments of initiation. The Church gives voice to God's calling and to signify this, the names of the catechumens are written in the Book of the Elect. At this point the catechumens become known as "The Elect".

Period of purification

This final stage of preparation is a period of spiritual recollection which coincides with Lent. It is a time for reflection and prayer more than teaching and the elect are called to purify their minds and hearts by celebrating several rituals. The three purifying rituals, (known as the Scrutinies), strengthen the elect and help to complete their conversion. These take place in the parish on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent.

This is a period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation, which will be celebrated at the Easter Vigil on the Saturday evening before Easter Sunday.

Sacraments of Initiation

The Easter Vigil is a time for renewal in the whole Church; Priests and Deacons renew their vows, Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist renew their commitment, the congregation renews their baptismal promises and the elect celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism (for the unbaptized), Confirmation and Eucharist. Finally, the culmination of initiation happens when the elect taste the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

Period of mystagogy

The process of initiation continues even after the Easter celebration, during the Eastertide period of mystagogia. The word comes from an ancient Greek word signifying a deepening understanding of the mysteries of our faith. During the Easter season, the neophytes (newly initiated) gather each week to deepen their grasp of the great paschal mystery into which they have just been incorporated.

The RCI A course at Our Lady and St Dominic's is structured as a series of meetings where a variety of topics are discussed. Meetings typically take place weekly; however, there are some gaps over Christmas and Easter. The meetings are typically arranged around the following schedule:

- 7:55pm – 8:00pm Gathering
- 8:00pm – 8:10pm Scripture Reading
- 8:10pm – 8:40pm The weekly topic
- 8:40pm – 9:25pm Group discussion
- 9:25pm – 9:30pm Closing prayer

In order to get the most out of the process, enquirers are encouraged to attend as many of the meetings as possible, however, it is recognized that this may not always be practical, and there is no requirement to attend all the meetings. Initiation into the Catholic Church is based on God calling you in this direction, rather than being a reward for good attendance!

If meeting times become difficult for you, or if you want to discuss a particular problem, then it is also possible to make individual arrangements with the course leaders at other times outside of the planned schedule.

I am quite confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the Day of Jesus Christ comes. It is only right that I should feel like this towards you all, because you have a place in my heart, since you have all shared together in the grace that has been mine, both my chains and my work defending and establishing the gospel. For God will testify for me how much I long for you all with the warm longing of Christ Jesus; it is my prayer that your love for one another may grow more and more with the knowledge and complete understanding that will help you to come to true discernment, so that you will be innocent and free of any trace of guilt when the Day of Christ comes, entirely filled with the fruits of uprightness through Jesus Christ, for the glory and praise of God.

- Philippians 1:6-11