



# How do I become a Catholic?

**PLEASE CONTACT Marie Kinney at 336 996-5109, Extension 21 or [mkinney6@triad.rr.com](mailto:mkinney6@triad.rr.com) FOR MORE INFORMATION**

The Church provides the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults ("RCIA")**, a journey in the Catholic Christian way of life, which is also called the "Christian initiation" or "Catechumenate." This process is for unbaptized adults and children of school age.

Christian Initiation is a gradual process and begins with INQUIRY, exploring the possibility of becoming Catholic. During the time people have the opportunity to ask questions about the church and hear the message and how Catholic live out that message.

If the person inquiring decides to pursue becoming catholic he/she enters the *Catechumenate*. This time allows for the person to hear the proclamation of the gospel, experience *catechesis* (the passing on of the teachings of the church), prayer, spiritual direction, observing the **liturgical year**, and meeting members of the parish. During this period various rites with the person reflect his or her spiritual growth and the love and concern of the parish community.

Celebration of the sacraments of **Baptism, Confirmation** and **Eucharist** take place at the Easter Vigil.

Adults who were baptized Catholic but never catechized, never celebrated Confirmation or First Holy Communion are included in this process.

Adults seeking to become Catholic who are active Christians, baptized in another Christian denomination, do need an understanding of Catholic beliefs, an acquaintance with the liturgical life of church and the Catholic community before making a commitment to the Catholic Church. Each person's situation is evaluated and his/her needs are met in an appropriate way.

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## Individual Stories

**Are you still unsure if the RCIA is for you? Perhaps you will identify with one of these stories:**

Joan was never baptized. Although raised in a home with the golden rule, her family never went to church not even Christmas or Easter. During college, she had friends who were Catholic and in her early 20's she married a Catholic in the Catholic Church. After four years, the marriage ended with divorce but Joan continued to think about becoming Catholic. In the winter of 2004 she approached her local parish asking, "How do I become Catholic?" As an unbaptized person with little or no Christian background, Joan is offered a process of formation in the Christian faith and way of life

called Catechumenate, usually taking at least one year to allow the catechumen to experience the church's feasts and seasons. The church marks a person's journey to full membership. Last Spring, Joan celebrated Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, the usual time for people with her background.

Stephen was baptized as an infant at Christ the King Lutheran Church. He attended Lutheran Schools and during high school was most active in the Youth Group. As a young adult, he continued worship at the church where he was baptized. Since becoming engaged to a Catholic, he has come to Mass each week. During marriage preparation, he talked about becoming Catholic. When Stephen approached the RCIA Director about becoming Catholic, the director hearing his story realized Stephen is an active Christian, attempting to live the teachings of Jesus, who prays and does not need the full process of Christian Initiation.

Ursula, a non-denominational Christian, married a Catholic 45 years ago. They raised six children and she saw to it that they went to Catechism classes and received the sacraments. Each week, she went to Mass with Bill and when he died 2 years ago, she kept on coming. Recently, someone asked her if she would like to become Catholic (a question she had never been asked before). She approached the pastor who sent her to the RCIA Director. After some preparation and discernment, Ursula, like Stephen, was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church during a Sunday morning Mass in the presence of her 6 children, sons and daughter-in-laws, 26 grandchildren and friends and fellow parishioners. What a joyous occasion.

At an adult faith formation presentation, Tom's wife, Cecelia, heard about the RCIA not necessarily taking a full year for the already baptized. Tom has been coming to Mass with the family for 15 years. He had tried becoming Catholic through another parish but with sessions on Tuesday evening and his travel schedule, he just gave up. Cecelia talked to the RCIA Director about Tom and before long he was part of the Catechumenate. Even though Tom was sure he wanted to be Catholic, he wanted to learn specifics on some church teachings and to experience the Rites of RCIA. However, it wasn't too long, when on a Sunday morning, Tom was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Paul was baptized Catholic as an infant. His parents moved around the USA a lot. The practice of weekly church going never existed. While growing up, Paul would visit his grandparents during vacations and go to Mass with them.

As he grew older, he began to get an inkling of what being Catholic meant, especially to his grandmother. Now in his early thirties, Paul recently participated in the funeral liturgies for his grandmother. He mentioned to the priest that he was baptized Catholic but never educated or catechized and was put in contact with the RCIA Director. Baptized Catholics who were never formed as Catholics also participate in the RCIA. Great care is taken to respect their baptism, as they are given training in the Christian way of life, which allows baptismal faith to grow and take deep root. Most often the baptized, uncatechized person needs to experience a full church year before celebrating Confirmation and Eucharist.

Mark, Paul's friend, was baptized Methodist as an infant but his family provided little more for his religious growth. He is challenged by what he hears from Paul and decides to become part of the RCIA with Paul. As an uncatechized person, he, too, will likely spend time in the Catechumenate as a candidate.

Patrick and Leslie were raised Catholic and married Catholic. Slowly, they drifted away from the active practice of their faith. Their children, Beth and Angela, are now 10 and 12 and have never been baptized. The girls are asking why they don't go to church on Sundays. After returning to Mass for a few Sundays and finding the parish warm and welcoming. They contact priest or the faith formation coordinator to learn how their children can become part of the formation sessions for the children. Beth and Angela are now catechumens who are experiencing one full cycle of the church year with its feasts and seasons. They look forward to coming into the Church at the Easter Vigil.

Joan, Stephen, Ursula, Tom, Paul, Mark, Leslie, Patrick, Beth and Angela are names used with others' true stories to describe the various ways people become Catholic. Perhaps you yourself are like Stephen, Paul or Mark. As a baptized person, you may be worshipping regularly. Like Ursula, have you been coming to Mass for many years and no one has asked you to become Catholic. Consider this an invitation. Some of you parents (and grandparents) will identify with Patrick and Leslie's story. Blessed Trinity has a Catechumenate with children, call Mary Lou or Marianne for details. Have you, like Tom, tried to become Catholic and found set and rigid programs in your way. Please give us a call.

RCIA is intended primarily for unbaptized adults who, like Joan, seek to enter the Church through the three sacraments of initiation (catechumens). In the United

States, the RCIA also includes liturgical rites and provides guidelines for the formation of baptized but uncatechized Catholics.

**Similar rites and guidelines are also provided for adults baptized in other Christian Churches who seek to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church (candidates).**

The RCIA is the concern not only of the catechumens and candidates themselves, but of the whole Christian community, which is itself renewed in the celebration of initiation: “By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of 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 4).

So, the RCIA is for:

- Catechumens -- individuals who have never been baptized.
- Candidates -- individuals who have been baptized into other Christian religions.
- Uncatechized Catholics -- individuals who were baptized Catholic but were never “fully initiated,” never educated in the faith, never confirmed and/or never received First Holy Communion.

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## Do you still have questions?

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