



RCIA FAQs

I think I want to become a Catholic. How do I go about it?

If you are ready to seriously pursue this possibility, you will want to contact Jim Baxter, Director of RCIA, at (409) 866-5088, Extension 226, or jbaxter@stjudebmt.org. RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), is the process by which adults who are thinking about becoming Catholic discern and prepare to enter the Church. He would love to answer any questions you have about the process.

What if I'm not ready to talk to someone quite yet?

Whether or not you are ready to send that first email, you are always welcome to begin experiencing the life of the parish.

What is RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults?

RCIA is a process of conversion to faith in Jesus Christ and his Church. Based on the practice of the early Church, RCIA consists of various stages by which adults and, here at St. Jude Parish, children (RCIC) are prepared to receive the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. In the case of children, receiving certain sacraments is *age specific*, so please check with the Parish Office for more information.

What do we do in the RCIA process at St. Jude?

The RCIA process is one of learning what it is to believe and live as a Catholic through prayer and study within the context of the Catholic community. This process begins annually around the beginning of September.

The two main components of RCIA are 1) regularly participating in Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and 2) weekly Tuesday evening gatherings centered around prayer, teaching, and small group discussion. In addition, there are several special meetings in the course of the RCIA process, which usually occur on Sundays starting in December.

Who can participate in RCIA?

The RCIA process is open to all people who are unbaptized and who express a desire to study Catholic Christian beliefs and practices. Unbaptized persons who are in this process are called "catechumens."

RCIA is also open to those persons who have been baptized in another Christian denomination and who wish to explore membership in the Catholic Church. These participants in the process are called "candidates (for admission to full communion with the Catholic Church)."

Finally, the RCIA process is open to Catholics who have been baptized but who have not received the Sacraments of Confirmation and/or Holy Eucharist. These are "candidates for Confirmation."

In many places, "candidates" is used generically to refer to all catechumens and candidates for admission to full Communion with the Catholic Church.

What difference does it make whether someone has already been baptized in another Christian denomination?

Catholics believe that the Sacrament of Baptism joins the person baptized to Jesus Christ in a unique and irrevocable way. Once a person has been validly baptized, that person has a Christian identity that can never be taken away. Baptism need not be and cannot be received more than once.

The Catholic Church recognizes the validity of many Baptisms that take place in other Christian denominations. If one has been baptized with water (by immersion or pouring), with the Trinitarian formula ("in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"), by someone intending to confer the Sacrament (believing in the effects of the sacramental action), then that person is validly baptized and is never re-baptized.

Those who have been previously baptized are asked to provide us with an official record of the Baptism – it may be a document given at the time, or may be in the form of a letter from the congregation where it took place. The Catholic Church respects your Christian upbringing and the faith experiences that are part of your life. Becoming Catholic does not mean rejecting your previous experiences in the Christian life. All those experiences are part of the process by which God in His providence has brought you to this point.

What if I cannot find a record of my Baptism?

In cases where we cannot be certain whether someone was previously baptized (or where the validity of a Baptism is in doubt), a person may be baptized conditionally – “If you are not baptized, I baptize you...” (This is technically not re-baptism: if the person was not previously baptized, it is Baptism; if the person is already baptized, the original baptism remains valid.)

Once I begin this process, am I obligated to become Catholic?

There is no obligation that those who enter the RCIA process become members of the Catholic Church. The RCIA process allows you to clarify your intentions and to continue discerning God's call. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and dialogue with the material. Everything shared during the sessions will be treated with confidentiality and respect.

Is there any cost to participate in RCIA?

No, none at all.

What is expected of me?

What is needed most of all is a sincere desire to grow, learn, and listen to God's call. As noted in an earlier question, the two main expectations are weekly Mass attendance and participation in the weekly Tuesday gatherings. There are also two special meetings (retreats) that offer a longer period for prayer, reflection and discussion.

In addition, there are three special liturgical events RCIA members attend: the Rite of Acceptance & Welcoming, Rite of Election & Call to Continuing Conversion, and the Easter Vigil, which is when the Sacraments of Initiation are received (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion).

The Rite of Election brings all the catechumens and candidates from around the diocese together with Bishop Guillory, and is held at St. Anthony Cathedral Basilica. The Rite of Acceptance and Easter Vigil take place at St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic Church.

I understand that I need a sponsor, is this true?

Yes, each RCIA candidate needs a sponsor. As Jesus taught his disciples the importance of community, it is significant that we walk this faith journey with companions, who participate in the process and help you find the resources and answers that you may have on your journey.

What is a sponsor?

A sponsor is a practicing Catholic who has received the three Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation), who is a spiritual companion and support on the journey, and serves as a mentor in the Christian life.

What do sponsors do?

Ideally, a sponsor helps the RCIA candidate to become familiar with the Mass as they attend together. The sponsor converses regularly with the RCIA participant about his or her ongoing process of faith development. The sponsor should be a good listener and should help a candidate to know where God is leading without being a salesman.

At the Easter Vigil where the Sacraments of Initiation are celebrated, the sponsor has a particular role in the liturgy. A sponsor likewise takes part in the preparatory ceremonies that occur in the course of the RCIA process.

How do I get a sponsor?

Some people who come to enter the Church have done so because of the example and influence of a Catholic relative or friend. It would be very appropriate to ask such a person to be your sponsor.

You are free to ask any confirmed and practicing Catholic to be your sponsor.

If you don't have a Catholic friend who can serve as your sponsor, we supply one for you by matching you with a member of the parish.

What materials do I need to participate in the RCIA?

St. Jude RCIA will provide you with a *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as a *Catholic Bible*. Through the course of the RCIA process, you will be provided with materials used as tools for reflection.

How much will I be expected to learn in the RCIA process?

Your faith journey is a time of formation that is much more than education. Faith formation is a time for you to grow in the awareness of your relationship with Christ, with God, and with the Catholic Church. There are no tests; there are no grades. Certainly even "cradle Catholics" don't know everything about the Catholic faith. Learning is a lifelong process, and people are encouraged to make the journey at their own pace.

The RCIA process is a time of exploration, where people can ask questions and learn about the Church. People coming from a different Christian tradition may have many specific questions about Catholic faith and practice, and this is a place where they can feel free to ask them. Those who come with little religious background will feel they have even more to learn. All participants will find the opportunity to question, to contemplate, and to take all the time they need to make a decision about joining the Church.

How long does it take to become a Catholic?

There is no single answer for everyone. Here at our parish, the process is designed so that someone in touch with us by September would normally be ready to receive the Sacraments at the following Easter. But there is no need to rush your faith journey.

If you have very little background whatsoever in Christianity, you may feel you need more time to learn. There may be personal or family considerations that make you hesitate to take the final step even if you have sufficient information.

It would generally be your own decision that you need more than the approximate eight months allowed for the RCIA process as it is organized in our parish.

Why does the RCIA process take such a long time?

Faith is something that takes time to grow, like a flower takes time to grow from a seed and bloom. RCIA is a process by which the seed of faith is nurtured, and it takes different amounts of time for different people. Someone wanting to become Catholic must learn about the faith before they can make a decision, and that learning takes time.

Like any relationship, a person's relationship with God develops, and it can't be rushed. Everyone has their own pace, and their own particular needs and questions. Most people end up truly appreciating the time they had to learn, pray, and get to know other people through the RCIA process. People often wish it could have lasted longer!