

Want to become a Catholic?

For those interested in baptism the first step is to:

- Contact the Parish Priest, who will direct you to the appropriate process. This will also include a meeting with the RCIA Director

Please keep in mind that one making enquiry is not committed to become a Catholic. They are considered inquirers, and can leave the process at any time.

The steps toward Baptism are as follows:

- Inquiry
- Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate
- Rite of Election—in one's second Lent
- Scrutinies and minor rites
- Reception of the Easter Sacraments

Those not ever baptized and over the age of 7 must follow the RCIA process for adults or children.

The steps toward reception of the already baptized non-Catholic are:

- Contact the Parish Priest
- Individualized or group Catechesis and formation
- Readiness for reception into the church is discerned
- Rite of reception at a Eucharistic Liturgy.

For a 'convert' to the Catholic Church, the requirements are different because they may be already well-formed as Christians, but only need to understand and be able to make assent and acceptance of the truth of the Teachings of the Catholic Church. These are evaluated on a case by case basis.

turns or sets of readings, psalms and prayers. The Gloria, unsung through Lent is chanted, and the Alleluia rings out as the Gospel Book is brought forward. After the homily, the Rites of Initiation begin, the Saints are called upon, the water is blessed in the font, and the Elect are examined in the Baptismal Promises. The Elect stand in the water and are Baptized. Following the water-bath, they change their robes for white ones, and proceed to Confirmation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then the Neophytes (the newly initiated) exercise their baptismal priesthood for the first time in the general intercessions. Finally, the community prepares for Eucharist and they are now included for the first time at the Altar of the Lord and receive His Body and Blood.

The Period of Mystagogy

Although the Neophytes are now full members of the Catholic Church, they need time to reflect theologically on the cluster of rites they have received, on their experiences of the initiation rites, and to understand more fully what they have become. This is done in the Period of Mystagogy (the breaking open of the mysteries) which lasts ideally for a period of a few months to a year. During this period, the neophytes settle into their new found status in Christ and His Church.



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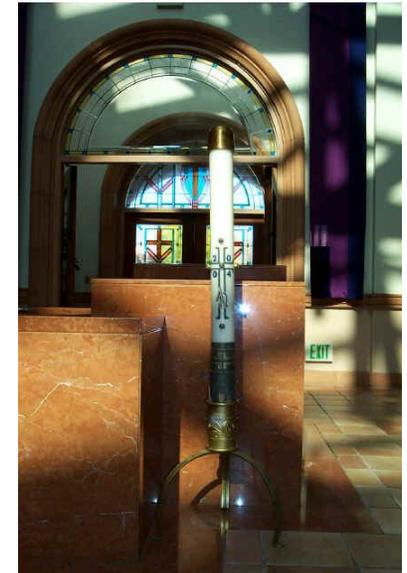
Also St Peter's Ordway
and Mary Queen of Heaven, Fowler
1209 Swink Avenue
Rocky Ford, CO 81067

Phone: 719 245 3565
Fax: 719 254 3921
E-mail: sprockyford@centurytel.net
wwwarkvalleyparishes.org



Serving the People
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Becoming A Catholic: An Introduction to the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults



St. Peter's Catholic Church and
Missions

Tel: 719-254 3565

How does one become a Catholic?

The Catholic Church has over 1.31 billion members world wide and is growing by about 11 million every year world wide. How does the Church add so many new faces each year? Many of these are born to Catholic families, but still millions join as adults through a process called the RCIA (Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults).

The RCIA is patterned on the process of initiating people that was used in the 4th Century. But the cluster of rituals and the process for becoming Catholic was developed in Africa by missionaries in the 20th Century. As such it is primarily aimed at those who have never been baptized. Other rites were assembled from other sources to meet the needs of people who are already baptized in another church and who were baptized with "water flowing" according to the Trinitarian Formula ("I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit).

Reception of those already Baptized

Those already baptized, at the discretion of the Parish Priest, may need only minimal instruction and formation, or they may need considerable information and formation to be received into the Catholic Church. What one of these "candidates for reception" must be able to say, without force or fear or coercion, and with moral certitude, is that they "believe and profess that everything the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims is revealed by God."

What of those not yet baptized?

Those who have never been baptized have a more lengthy process of conversion, since they may have no knowledge of Jesus Christ whatsoever, or some knowledge and some erroneous beliefs that they have gleaned from the culture at large. Nonetheless, because of the action of the Holy Spirit, they have come to our doors to discover

whether Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and if He is "Truly...the Son of God."

What is the process of the RCIA?

I. Inquiry

The first thing that usually happens is a person, knowing another Catholic becomes curious as to what we really believe and whether or not it would be a good thing to become a Catholic. This stage is called "Inquiry" The inquirer usually calls the office and talks to the Parish Priest or Deacon and asks about how to become a Catholic. The Priest will ask some questions about the inquirer's faith background to determine how to proceed with this person. Upon making the determination, the priest will put the inquirer in touch with the RCIA director, and the process will begin.

Acceptance

When the inquirer is ready to make their first commitment to follow through with deeper study and formation, the Church will accept them in to the order of Catechumens—a Greek word that means "seekers." These seekers have seen the reasonableness of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Faith for themselves, and want to try it on with a deeper level of interest and personal involvement. Their status within the Church changes with this ritual and they have certain rights within the Catholic Church that they didn't have before. They have a right to a Christian Burial if they should die, and they are considered quasi-members of the community and so are given a Sponsor. The Sponsor is a guide, a resource and a designated prayer partner for the Catechumen who accompanies them through the various steps and rituals of the process of becoming a Catholic They can still back out if they want, but the relationship is deepened.

The RCIA is the normative manner in which those not baptized enter the Catholic Church. Other Processes may share its philosophy.

The Catechumenate

This period, begun with the Rite of Acceptance will last for two Lents at a minimum, and hopefully will culminate in the Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist of the Catechumen. During this time, the person is formed in Catholic Values, Catholic practices, Catholic beliefs, and the Catholic mindset by means of weekly classes and Sunday scripture reflections called "Breaking Open of the Word." The texts of scripture assigned to the Sunday Eucharist forms the material for opening up topics for discussion, teachings and prayer.

Rite of Election and the Period of Enlightenment

As the second Lent approaches, it is often apparent that the catechumen "is ready" to make a firm commitment to become a Catholic. If the Church also has discerned that it is time to move forward, then on the first Sunday of Lent the catechumen will be formally sent from the parish to the Cathedral to be received by the Bishop of the Diocese as one of the "Elect".

This commences the period of Enlightenment, in which the catechumens are deeply scrutinized and examine themselves as to their vocation from God to be Baptized and Catholic at the Easter Vigil. There is also a cluster of rites, both major and minor, which mark this period. The major rites, the Scrutinies and Exorcisms, are held on the three last Sundays of Lent. The minor rites, the giving of the Creed, and of the Our Father, and opening of the ears and mouth or *ephphetha* are celebrated within the last two weeks before Easter to prepare the Elect for baptism.

Christian Initiation

On Holy Saturday, an hour after darkness falls, the Elect meet near the paschal fire outside the church or at the church door, dressed in brown robes. The Fire is blessed, the Paschal Candle is made and the Light of Christ enters the darkened Church. Thus begins the celebration of the Easter Vigil. During the Liturgy of the Word, Salvation History is recounted in a series of noc-