



The **Rite of Election** is the next step in the process and marks the beginning of the period of **Purification & Enlightenment**. This period coincides with the season of Lent (early spring). It is a time for deepening one's commitment through prayer and serious reflection on what it means to follow Christ in the Catholic Church. This period culminates at the Easter Vigil* with the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion.



Once a person has received the sacraments of initiation he or she becomes a "neophyte," which means "beginner" or "novice" in the faith. The fourth and final period is called **Mystagogia**, which lasts seven weeks, concluding at Pentecost (around June 1). During this period one acquires a deeper understanding of the sacramental life, synthesizing everything one has learned over the previous year.

* Easter: April 24, 2011



Our Lady of Guadalupe
Patroness of the Americas



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HOW DO I BECOME CATHOLIC?

Understanding RCIA



*"Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."
- John 8:12*

How do I become Catholic?

Understanding the RCIA process

Welcome to the Catholic Church!



St. Peter's Basilica, Rome

RCIA stands for the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**. At the beginning of the Christian era, the normal way that adults became Christian was through a process called the 'catechumenate.' This method of Christian formation dates back to the early days of the Church when the Roman Empire was dominated by polytheistic, pagan religious practices. When Christianity was given legal protection in the 4th century the catechumenate flourished as people began to be baptized in large numbers. For the next 500 years or so, Christianity spread throughout Europe and the Middle East so that by 1000 A.D. the entire Western world was Christian.

After Europe became Christian the need for the catechumenate largely disappeared because virtually everyone was baptized at infancy. **The catechumenate was restored by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)** after much of the Western world, Europe especially, had abandoned the Christian faith. The Church recognized the urgent need to reach out to an increasingly secularized population that held few definite beliefs about anything and was desperately in need of faith and hope.



RCIA is not a program, but a process in which one who, after hearing about the mystery of Christ proclaimed, freely chooses to follow him by entering a life of faith in the Catholic Church.

RCIA consists of four periods: the period of Inquiry, or pre-catechumenate; the *Catechumenate*; Purification & Enlightenment, and *Mystagogy*. The first period, the period of **Inquiry**, usually starts in early September although it can begin anytime. During this time individuals are introduced to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.

The period of inquiry, or pre-catechumenate, focuses on the person of Christ as revealed in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Together, these books reveal the true face of Christ. While the period of inquiry can last any length of time, it normally lasts about three months. There is *absolutely no commitment expected* at this time. It's simply a time to listen and to ask questions.



After this introductory period comes the first important step in becoming Catholic which is called the **Rite of Acceptance**. This marks the formal beginning of the **catechumenate** proper. During this period you will learn about Catholic beliefs and practices with a view toward making a firm commitment to Christ and his Church.

Like the period of Inquiry, the catechumenate can last any length of time, but usually lasts about three or four months.