

## **Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish**

### **R.C.I.A.**

#### **(Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults)**



*The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For as man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator. (Catechism of the Catholic Church n.27)*

#### **What is the Catechumenate and RCIA?**

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is the process of formation offered to those who seek to become members of the Catholic Church. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) refers to the liturgical rites belonging to the Catechumenate, and includes an adaptation for children. The Catechumenate, also known simply as RCIA, is offered to those who have never been baptised, as well as to those who have been baptised.

This initiation process also involves a parish community experiencing a renewal in faith as it prepares and welcomes new members into the Church. The Rite speaks of conversation as a "spiritual journey". Centred on fostering a deep relationship with Jesus and the Church he founded, this journey takes place through distinct stages over a period of time suitable to bring thorough catechesis, significant experience of a parish community and commitment to liturgical and moral life of the Catholic faithful. The RCIA process is a restoration of the ancient Catechumenate, arising within the first three centuries. The Second Vatican Council called for the restoration and use of this powerful method of initiation for the worldwide Church.

## Introduction

Through the ministry of the Church, adults are called to the Gospel by the Holy Spirit.

*“The Rite of Christian Initiation is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts.” (RCIA #1)*

It is a call to conversion from one particular way of life to a particular way of faith; the ultimate goal of baptism into the life, mission and Body Of Christ.

*“Go make disciples of all nations, baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the holy Spirit.” (Mt. 28:19)*

## The Periods and Rites of the Catechumenate (RCIA) Process

### First Stage: The Pre-Catechumenate



The pre-Catechumenate has no fixed duration and is the least formal and structured of all the phases. The main purpose is to give the inquirer an opportunity to question and explore many different aspects of the Catholic faith, while introducing some of the Gospel values. Within this phase, the beginnings of Christian faith start to become evident.

### First Ritual Step:

Once initial conversion is experienced, and the unbaptised inquirer is interested in making a more formal commitment to systematically learning about the Catholic faith, then the inquirer is accepted in to the Church as a catechumen. This is done through a public rite called *Acceptance into the Order of*

**Catechumens.** The inquirer expresses the interest and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ

## **Second Stage: The Catechumenate**

This is by far the longest and most formal part of the process. During this phase the catechumen is expected to participate with the whole Catholic community in their Sunday celebrations. The catechumen participates by sharing in the Liturgy of the Word. Through prayer, learning and coming to know other Catholic Christians, catechumens discover the love and power of God in their lives and in the church. This phase is meant to be one not only of intellectual and faith formation, but also one of great delight and opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the parish community. The focus clearly is on a conversion of heart, through prayer and good works, but also of conversion of the mind, in which we start to see through the eyes of God, to think, perceive and act as Christ desires. During this time, catechumens receive anointings, participate in prayers of exorcism and blessings, which assists this conversion.

### **Second Ritual Step:**

The ***Rite of Election*** is an acknowledgment on behalf of the priest, the RCIA team, and the sponsors, that the catechumen is adequately formed and ready to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. It is a formal acceptance on behalf of the Church. The catechumen too, formally declares that he / she has believed and accepted all that was presented to them during the Catechumenate. This is a formal declaration that it is their desire to become a fully active participant within the Catholic faith community. This Rite takes place during the first Sunday of Lent and from this time, until they are baptised, the catechumens are called the elect.

## **Third Stage: The Period of Purification & Enlightenment**



This phase takes place during Lent, and is marked by 3 community celebrations known as *Scrutinies*. During this period, the elect and the parish community together focus on conversion, scrutinize their lives in light of the gospel and celebrate the presentations of the Creed and Lord's Prayer. These scrutinies coincide with the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sunday's of Lent, and they ask God for healing and forgiveness of the elect.

### **Third Ritual Step:**

This is the most important of all transitional Rites because it is when the elect are fully incorporated into Christ and the Church by Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. The elect become full members of the Body of Christ, the Church. From this time until the end of the period of mystagogy, they are known as neophytes, "new sprouts."

### **Fourth Stage: Period of Mystagogy**



This is an important period of reflection by the newly initiated with their parish community. The formation and teaching continues during this time, in order to help the neophytes become incorporated into the full life of the Christian community.

It is important to note that the fourth stage may be the end or final stage of the RCIA process, but it is only the first stage of the rest of their lives as a fully active and participating member of the Catholic Church.

### **Who will accompany you on the Journey?**

The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised (RCIA 9)

The whole parish has a responsibility for the gathering and nurturing of new members. The entire community welcomes them and delegates some from among its members to accompany them on their journey of faith.

The bishop as part of his overall pastoral care of the diocese, personally and actively promotes the Catechumenate and normally welcomes the new members himself by presiding at the Rite of Election and at a Mass of Thanksgiving after Easter.

The priest plays a special role in ministering to the pastoral and spiritual care of those on the journey and those accompanying them.

Sponsors are delegated by the parish family to take an active and supportive role as companions, witnesses and guides for those seeking to join the Catholic Church.

A team of catechists is responsible for guiding the formation process of the members of the group. As those in formation share their experience of God in their own lives, catechists guide them to a deeper reflection on the Word of God and greater understanding of the faith of the Church.

### **Supporting Ministers for the Journey to the Catechumenate**

**Catechists** – lead catechetical sessions

**Sponsors/Companions** – join the Candidates for rituals and sessions

**Dismissal Ministers** – facilitate Scripture and Faith Sharing

**Hospitality** – provide refreshments and welcome

**Pray-ers** – select a candidate to keep in prayer

**Director/Team Leader** – provides instructional and pastoral care of the candidates and team

**Pastor/clergy** – have the overall responsibility for the initiation process

**Parish Community** – is the primary model, support, and teacher through their active Christian lives.

