The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the process by which those who wish to join the Catholic faith community are welcomed and introduced to the beliefs and practices of the Church. For those not yet baptized, this process leads to the Easter Vigil where they receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Those who have been previously baptized in another Christian tradition are invited to participate fully in the Church through the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

The full RCIA process consists of four stages or periods of formation marked by the celebrations of three major rites or ceremonies with the parish community. The four stages are: Pre-Catechumenate (or Period of Inquiry), Catechumenate, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogia.

PRE-CATECHUMENATE

During this period, inquirers can receive answers to some of their most pressing questions about the Catholic faith and discern how this faith might connect with their personal story and their desire for a closer relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community. Inquirers are invited (but never pressured) to continue the journey through participation in the ritual called the Rite of Acceptance.

CATECHUMENATE

In this second stage of preparation, Catechumens (those preparing for Baptism) and Candidates (those already baptized who are preparing for entry into the Catholic Church), will spend time learning about the beliefs of Catholics and be introduced to the Catholic way of life. The Scriptures and Catholic teachings will guide their study, while participation in various forms of worship, prayer and parish activities will acquaint and help integrate them into the Catholic lifestyle. Their priests and catechists will guide them in this journey. A sponsor will be chosen to provide individual support, and the parish community will continue to welcome them and pray for them. This stage culminates in the celebration of the Rite of Election where they are officially accepted for the Easter Sacraments.
PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

This stage, which coincides with the season of Lent, is a time of final preparation for initiation. The “Elect” engage in prayer and reflection about their growing relationship with Christ and the Church. They discern how they will live out that relationship in their everyday lives. Some additional rituals called “Scrutinies” will help them in this process. This period climaxes with their sacramental initiation at the parish Easter Vigil liturgy on the night before Easter.

MYSTAGOGIA

Mystagogia means “leading into the mysteries”. This last period can be compared to a “honeymoon” – a time when the newly initiated are helped to adapt to their new status in the Catholic community. They begin their lifelong pilgrimage of growth as the mysteries of their faith unfold.