

Becoming Catholic

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

*ST. MARY MAGDALENE
CATHOLIC CHURCH*

NEWMAN, GEORGIA

770-253-1888

**THE PARISH OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE IS HONORED THAT YOU
HAVE COME TO OUR COMMUNITY
TO MOVE DEEPER INTO YOUR FAITH JOURNEY.**

**WE ARE ALL ON A JOURNEY
OF DISCOVERY
OF OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH OUR GOD, OUR CHURCH AND EACH OTHER.**

HOW DOES A PERSON BECOME CATHOLIC?

The Church offers un-baptized and baptized adults a process of formation in the Catholic Christian faith and way of life called "**The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)**". This is a gradual process. After the interested person contacts the Church, he or she is invited to meet with other people who are exploring the possibility of becoming Catholic. These people have the opportunity to ask questions about the Church and to hear the message of Jesus Christ and how it is lived out in the Catholic Church.

If an un-baptized person decides to pursue the process of becoming Catholic or learning more, he or she enters the "**catechumenate**" – un-baptized persons are called catechumens. The catechumenate provides a structure for the proclamation of the Gospel, passing on of the teachings of the Church, public and private prayer, spiritual direction, the observance of feasts, fasts, Sunday worship and seasons of the Church calendar, direct contact with members of the parish community and participation in the work of the Church. During this time each catechumen is paired with a sponsor who can serve as a spiritual companion and offer support and encouragement.

Baptized adults also participate in the catechumenate process. They are known as "candidates" rather than catechumens. Even though the process is similar, the Catholic Church takes care to respect the fact that these people truly are baptized. We believe that it is Christ who baptizes through the Minister of any Christian Church. Baptized adults are received through the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist only. Baptism is not repeated.

WHAT IS INVOLVED AND WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG?

- **RCIA is a process:** RCIA is for and about people: people on the move, people being re-made in the image of Christ, people being reborn into the Spirit, people on a journey of faith. This is on-going; it cannot be programmed or set on a schedule because the hope of the journey is conversion and only God brings about conversion.
- **RCIA is a community event:** The initiation of adults is about the Christian community initiating new members into itself and must therefore take place in the community. We all need time to get to know the community and for members of the community to get to know us. RCIA involves many parishioners as sponsors, catechists, pray-ers, etc. This is as much an opportunity for converts to witness active Catholic lifestyles as it is for Catholics to witness the enthusiasm of newly found faith.
- **RCIA is on-going and multi-dimensional:** Christians are made, not born. There is nothing automatic about the initiation of adults. Conversion simply takes time. Committing oneself to gospel values and perspectives on every level of life requires a change of heart that cannot be accomplished by an educational program alone. Though doctrinal instruction is part of the process, the initiation of adults aims at changing the heart and transforming the spirit, not just supplying knowledge. RCIA includes all aspects of life: worship, pastoral care, counseling, spiritual direction, social justice, discipleship and education.
- **RCIA restores the baptismal focus of Lent and reinstates the Easter Vigil as the honored time of initiation:** Catholics are only initiated at the Easter vigil. The whole process centers on the gradual understanding of and journey into the mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are the sacraments which celebrate in one symbolic action one's initiation into that mystery.
- This year journey allows the catechumen to experience one full cycle of the Church's rhythm of feasts and seasons.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE RCIA PROCESS

We gather as a group on Sunday mornings for Mass attending either the 9am or 12pm mass. Then, we meet from 10:30 am – 12:00pm for our formation session. A mass schedule will be provided upon registration. Mass is THE essential part of or formation. During this time we will pray, share in small groups, receive instruction and answer personal reflection questions.

- ◆ During this time of learning and discovery it is also expected that participants will **participate in regular Sunday worship and Breaking Open of the Word each Sunday.** By attending regular worship one begins to learn the prayers, hear the gospel and reflect on its message, and begin to bond with the community.
- ◆ **Breaking Open of the Word** is a time for participants to reflect more fully on God's Word and discern its meaning in one's life. It is here that participants form strong friendships and bond as fellow pilgrims. Through the study of God's Word conversion takes place - this is not optional. (You will attend the first half of the

Mass - through the Gospel - then you will be sent to Breaking Open of the Word with your catechist. It ends when the Mass does.)

- ◆ As one begins to feel a part of this community, it is expected that one will look beyond the walls of this Church to the world we are called to minister in and **volunteer in at least one outreach ministry of the Church.** This not only provides an opportunity for direct contact with other members of the parish but also shapes and forms participants in the mission of the Church in the world.
- ◆ **Each stage of the journey is marked by a very special Rite** which is celebrated within the context of a worship service. These Rites are important turning points in which one takes one more step in the commitment toward a Christ-centered life. Obviously participation is expected. These rites are:

- ✠ **Rite of Acceptance** **Generally September and January**
- ✠ **Rite of Sending** **February**
- ✠ **Rite of Election** **February or March depending upon the Liturgical Calendar**

Each stage of growth is also speckled with special prayer opportunities and time to reflect, question and grow ever closer to God. These are:

- ✠ **The Scrutinies** **3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent**
- ✠ **Lenten Retreat everyone-** **A Saturday in February or March**

- ◆ It is expected that as a participant on this journey of conversion that you will be **present on a regular basis.** We begin promptly end on time.

Child care can be provided – but you must register. Phone 770-253.1888.
Sundays Nursery available for 12 month – 3-year-old children.

MYSTAGOGY SESSIONS GATHERING FROM EASTER UNTIL PENTECOST

- **We do have several sessions after Easter called Mystagogy - these are not optional for Neophytes.** This is a time to establish roots in the community and continue to allow conversion to develop. We meet every Sunday until Pentecost. The difference is now you will stay with the community to fully share in the Table of the Eucharist.
- **For those continuing with RCIA, we will continue gathering and will continue breaking open the Word on Sundays... the journey continues for everyone.**

CHRISTIAN INITIATION

First Stage: Period of Inquiry: This is a time of introduction to the Gospel and a time of reflection on one's own life in light of these values. It provides a forum for questions and fellowship and the opportunity for the beginnings of Christian faith to form.

First Step: Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens: In this liturgical rite, those who wish to become catechumens and candidates express their desire to follow the way of Jesus. The Church accepts their intention and welcomes them into the household of faith. (Early November)

Second Stage: Period of Catechumenate: Catechumens celebrate the liturgy of the word at Mass each Sunday. After the homily the catechumens, candidates and their catechist (teacher) continue to study and ponder the scriptures and the teachings of the Church. During this time, catechumens receive anointing, participate in blessings and take part in the mission of the Church to the world. Through prayer, learning, and coming to know other Catholic Christians, catechumens and candidates discover the love and power of God in their lives and in the Church. (October - March)

Second Steps: Rite of Sending: The catechumens and candidates are acknowledged by the community as having prepared sufficiently in mind and spirit. They are then sent with the community's prayers and blessing to the bishop. (February)

and Rite of Election: At this liturgical rite the bishop formally acknowledges the readiness of the catechumens and candidates and calls them to the sacraments of initiation. The catechumens respond by expressing their desire for these sacraments. From this time - until they are baptized - they are called elect. (1st Saturday of Lent)

Third Stage: Period of Purification and Enlightenment: This time of intense preparation for initiation usually coincides with Lent. 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. (February - March)

Third Step: Sacraments of Initiation: The elect become full members of the Body of Christ through the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. From this time they are called "neophytes" (new sprouts). (Easter)

Fourth Stage: Period of Mystagogy: During the 50 day season of Easter, neophytes ponder the experience and meaning of the sacraments and participate with the faithful in the Eucharistic life of the Church and its mission for justice and peace.

TERMS

 **Candidate:** Anyone preparing to become Catholic who has been baptized in another Christian tradition.

 **Catechesis:** The instruction and spiritual formation of catechumens, neophytes and candidates.

 **Catechist:** One who leads instruction and spiritual formation.

 **Catechumen:** An unbaptized person who is seeking initiation into the Catholic Church and has been accepted into the order of catechumens.

 **Catechumenate:** The process by which the Catholic Church brings unbaptized children and adults to Christian initiation. Also, the period of time during which an unbaptized person prepares for Christian initiation.

 **Chrism:** A combination of oil and sweet balsam or perfume that is mixed and consecrated by the bishop and used to anoint newly baptized people and newly ordained priests and bishops.

 **Doctrine:** The formal teachings of the Church.

 **Dogma:** A system of doctrine considered to be absolute truth.

 **Elect:** Catechumens who have been found ready by the community of faith to take part in the next celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

 **Election:** The process of selecting those catechumens who are ready to take part in the next celebration of the sacraments of initiation. The celebration of the Rite of Election ordinarily takes place the first Sunday of Lent. In this rite the bishop declares in the name of the Church that particular catechumens are ready and chosen for the sacraments at Easter. During this celebration the names of the elect are written in the Book of the Elect.

 **Enlightenment:** The period of Lent during which the Elect are involved in the final stage of preparation for celebrating the rites of initiation.

 **Enrollment:** The rite of inscribing in the Book of the Elect the names of those catechumens elected to take part in the next celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

 **Exorcisms:** Prayers for the deliverance from the powers of evil and falsehood and for the reception of the gifts of the Lord, especially the Spirit. Exorcisms are part of the rites of scrutiny.

 **Fasting:** A form of sacrifice by which faithful Christians join themselves with the suffering and death of Jesus by foregoing food for a specific period of time. On Ash Wednesday and on good Friday, Catholics who are in good health and between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast in a modified way: One full meal and two other small meals may be eaten, and no food is eaten between meals.

 **Immersion:** A way of baptizing in which the person is partially or entirely submerged in the baptismal water.

 **Initiation:** The process by which a person enters the faith life of the Church. The process extends from the person's first inquiry through the completion of mystagogy.

 **Inquirers:** Persons who sincerely seek to learn about the faith of the Church.

 **Lectionary:** A book containing the assigned scripture readings for the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments.

 **Mystagogy:** The period of time following initiation, usually the Easter season, which centers on catechesis in the meaning and experience of the mysteries of baptismal faith.

 **Neophyte:** A newly baptized person who is in the final period of Christian initiation - mystagogy.

 **Oil of Catechumens:** The blessed oil used in anointing catechumens as a sign of their need for and God's offer of strength in overcoming all opposition to the faith they will profess throughout their lives.

 **Paschal Candle:** The large candle lighted each year from the new fire ignited and blessed at the Easter Vigil. From this light, representing the risen Lord who destroys the darkness of sin, the newly baptized light their candles.

 **Scrutinies:** Rites celebrated with the elect, usually at the Sunday liturgy on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, petition for the spirit of repentance, an understanding of sin and the experience of the true freedom of the children of God.

INFORMATION FORM FOR RECEPTION INTO CATHOLIC CHURCH

St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church

Please fill this out as completely as possible and return to Kathy Kelly Huey

Please keep a copy of this registration material for yourself.

First Name _____ Middle _____ Last _____ Date _____

Address _____ email address _____

Phone Home _____ cell _____ work _____

Date of birth _____

Place of birth (city, state, country) _____

Mother's full legal and maiden name _____ Mother's Religion _____

Father's full legal name _____ Father's Religion _____

Have you been baptized? _____

Baptismal information from those already baptized in the Catholic Church or another Christian denomination

Date of baptism _____ Place of baptism (city, state, Church) _____

Denomination of baptism _____

Please attach copy of baptism certificate or letter from your church of baptism or a notarized letter from another person who witnessed the Baptism or a copy out of the family bible noting the date and church of baptism along with a notarized letter.

Baptismal form attached? _____ Forthcoming? _____ Office use - received? _____

Godparent(s) Name(s) _____ Officiating Minister _____

For those seeking baptism

A letter from your prospective Godparents Catholic Church must be sent to the RCIA Coordinator stating they are Catholics in full communion and can serve as Godparents. This is a standard letter that all parish offices are aware of.

Once you have identified who your Godparent for Baptism will be,
they need to send this letter to the RCIA Coordinator no later than January 1st.

**The information below will be filled out in the future. Please DO NOT answer these yet.
We will have the answers to these questions by February 1st.**

Confirmation Sponsors Name _____

Confirmation (saint's) name _____

ANNULMENTS AND MARITAL STATUS INFORMATION FORM

The Catholic Church expects marriages to last forever and thus does not recognize divorce or second marriages.

At the same time, however, the Church realizes that some couples who get married do not actually develop or maintain a lifelong, loving union. If the marriage has ended in divorce it is determined that there was some defect present at the start of the marriage and evident throughout the marriage that rendered it inefficacious. In this case an annulment is granted.

Basically what an annulment says is the a *sacramental marriage never existed* - thus freeing one to marry again. **It is a decree of the Church not a civil decree. It does not deny the legitimacy of children, responsibility to pay alimony or legality of the marriage only the sacramentality of that marriage.**

Everyone must return this form please. Please circle those which apply to you.

I am married, never divorced, and was married in a Catholic Church

I am single, never married

Please check all that apply. In some cases an annulment or convalidation may be necessary. The RCIA coordinator will tell you how to proceed in case you need an annulment or need to have your marriage blessed (convalidation) in the Church. The director will explain the process and why you may need one. It takes at least a year for an annulment to be completed

I am married and was married in a Catholic Church Name of Church_____

Date, City, State _____

I am divorced and single.

I am divorced and engaged to be married. Number of marriages_____

I am divorced and am currently re-married. Number of marriages including this marriage_____

My fiancé is divorced. Number of marriages_____

My spouse has been divorced. Number of marriages including this marriage_____

We are married (neither divorced) – but not married in a church.

We are married (neither divorced) – my spouse is Catholic but we were not married in a Catholic Church.

Questions to Ponder and Share with the RCIA Coordinator at your initial meeting.

What are your images of God?

What has been your experience of Church?

How long have you been considering this?

What obstacles do you think you will face?

What do you seek?

Why now?

