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## What is RCIA?

The Second Vatican Council recommended that the Church renew its way of receiving Adult Candidates. A revised rite called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was approved by Pope Paul VI in 1972 and has become the norm for the Church.

RCIA is a process of conversion that emphasizes formation in doctrine, liturgy, Church life, and service. RCIA is divided into four continuous phases that correspond to the candidate's progress in Christian formation.

The Church community is involved in welcoming, instructing, helping and praying for Candidates. RCIA is a learning and loving process in which conversion of the heart brings you to Jesus Christ.

## The Muscatine Catholic Community RCIA program may be something for you to consider...

- † *Are you interested in learning more about the Catholic Church?*
- † *Are you unbaptized but recognize a need for spirituality in your life?*
- † *Are you baptized Catholic or baptized into another religion but never received any formal religious education?*
- † *Are you married to a Catholic and attend Mass but just don't know what the next step is to become one of the Catholic faithful?*
- † *Are you yearning for something more in your life?*

### Muscatine Catholic Community Religious Education Program

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# Muscatine Catholic Community

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## *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

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# Are you being called to learn more about RCIA?

Perhaps you or someone you know is considering becoming Catholic, but is unsure how to get started. Or, perhaps you feel God is calling you to help someone else consider Catholicism by being a sponsor. The Muscatine Catholic Community invites you to consider the journey of faith provided to you by joining the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). Please contact Sister Cheryl at Bishop Hayes Catholic School for more information.

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## Four Phases of RCIA

**Phase 1:** The first is the Period of Inquiry that may last from several weeks to many months. During this stage candidates are invited to ask questions about the Church, share their own faith stories, and decide whether they wish to continue. When the inquirers are ready to proceed to the next phase, the catechumenate, a ritual called the "Rite of Entrance to the Catechumenate" takes place, during the Sunday Mass, so that the community can welcome the inquirers to the second step of their journey of faith.

**Phase 2:** The Rite of Becoming Catechumenate phase follows and is a more intense period of instruction and introduction to liturgy, faith-life and service. Sponsors from the parish community join the process to serve as guides, companions and models of faith for them. Sponsors commit themselves to being a vital link between the catechumens and the community. Sponsors present the candidates to the Church and also represent the Church to the candidate throughout the RCIA process. This step is often the longest period in the RCIA, lasting from a few months to a few years, determined by the needs of the catechumen, and by the community. The catechumens are invited to worship with the community they are dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word with their catechists to ponder the Scripture readings they have just heard. When the catechumens are ready to respond totally to God's call to faith through the Sacraments of Initiation, the RCIA provides a ritual, the Rite of Election, to mark this step in the conversion process. This Rite takes place on the first Sunday of Lent. The ritual provides an opportunity for the catechumens to officially request entrance to the Church through the Easter Sacraments of Initiation, and for the community to respond to that request by saying, "We confirm God's call to faith in your life, and will welcome you into the Church this Easter."

**Phase 3:** Enlightenment and Purification is the third stage. Beginning with the first Sunday of Lent, the catechumens enter into their "40-day retreat" to focus on deepening their awareness of God's grace through prayer. During this time the Church also celebrates other rituals with the catechumens, called "Scrutinies." These are prayers of healing prayed by the community (on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent) that the catechumens will have the strength to withstand evil, and remain pure and free from sin as they journey toward initiation and growth in faith. While we minister to the catechumens, they provide a visible reminder to each of us of the meaning and purpose of Lent, and minister to us through their presence. Finally the night of the Easter Vigil arrives — at which the Sacraments of Initiation are celebrated and the catechumens are made one with the Body of Christ called Church. The community says, "Now you belong, for you have been born again of water and spirit. Come, you are welcome at the Table of the Lord."

**Phase 4:** The concluding part of the journey to faith is called the "Mystagogia", which comes from the word, mystery. In the early Church it was the time when the community explained the mystery of the sacraments the catechumens had experienced. Today, this step is seen more as time for the newly initiated and the community to move forward together toward a closer relationship with each other and toward a deeper understanding of God's Word, of the sacraments, and of everyday Christian life. The RCIA place this step during the Easter Season (the 50 days between Easter and Pentecost) and focus on the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection. In reality, this step in the journey continues for the rest of the Christian's life along with the entire community of the faithful as we strive to live the Gospel our daily lives and perform works of service for others.

*"I have called you by name, you are mine." Isaiah 43:1*

